

PORTUGAL

Early Childhood Education and Care ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

Sara Barros Araújo

Centre for Research and Innovation in Education,
School of Education, Polytechnic University of Porto

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Glossary

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

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

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

ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

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

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

ISCED – International Standard Classification of Education

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

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

About the author:

Sara Barros Araújo is associate Professor at the Polytechnic University of Porto, School of Education and researcher at the Centre for Research and Innovation in Education. She is Vice-President of the Technical-Scientific Council and Coordinator of the Master study programme in Early Childhood Education. Main research interests include early childhood pedagogy, teacher education and professional development.

1. ECEC governance in Portugal

The Portuguese ECEC system comprises two main sectors: provision for children up to the age of 3, encompassing nurseries (*creches*) and childminders/nannies (*amas*)¹, and centre-based pre-school provision for children from 3 years up to primary school age (6 years) (*estabelecimentos de educação pré-escolar* or *jardins de infância*).

Governance is characterised by a split system: the 0–2² sector (both centre-based and home-based) is governed by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security (MLSSS) (*Ministério do Trabalho, Solidariedade e Segurança Social*) and the 3–5 sector is governed by the Ministry of Education (ME) (*Ministério da Educação*). The pre-school sector (3–5) is part of the Portuguese education system as defined by the Education Act (Law 46/86, 14 October). Both sectors are centralised, i.e. responsibilities at the level of ECEC financing, monitoring and curriculum development are set at the national level. However, a partial decentralisation process came into force in 2018 (Law 50/2018, 16 August), establishing the transference of some competences to municipalities, namely the implementation of leisure time activities (*atividades de animação e apoio à família*) and the recruitment of auxiliary staff in the pre-school public sector.

An exception to the split system is the Autonomous Region of Madeira, where an integrated network of public and non-profit ECEC institutions for 0–5 children is under the pedagogical co-ordination of the Regional Secretariat of Education, Science and Technology (Regional Legislative Decree 16/2006/M, 2 May).

The Portuguese split system has been the focus of debate over the last few years and some initiatives are worth mentioning. The first is the publication by the Portuguese National Council on Education³, in 2011, of a set of recommendations on the education of children up to 3 years of age (Vasconcelos 2011). The document stresses the need for the 0–2 sector to be integrated into the education system (requiring an amendment to the Education Act), progressive responsibility of the ME in this sector, and an articulated form of shared governance by the two ministries until full governance through the ME is reached. More recently, a civic movement led by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (*Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância* [APEI]) presented a petition at the Assembly of the Republic in March 2021 with over 14,000 signatures proposing a change to the Education Act in order to integrate the 0–2 sector into a unitary system of early childhood education.

At a more formal level, the publication by the Directorate-General of Education of educational principles for the 0–5 phase is noteworthy, safeguarding the unity and continuity of early childhood pedagogy. These common educational principles were integrated in the updated and revised edition of the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016). Moreover, an inter-ministerial collaboration is taking place between the ME and the MLSSS on establishing a pedagogical framework for children up to 3 years of age which is being developed by a team of invited experts.

¹ Corresponding to family day care ECEC or licensed home-based ECEC (OECD 2017, 60)

² **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 **seeepro3** reports: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years.

³ The National Council on Education (*Conselho Nacional de Educação* – CNE) is an independent advisory body on educational issues that produces statements and recommendations according to its own agenda or as a response to requests from Parliament or the Government (<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/>)



2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Regular contact staff in Portuguese ECEC provision are:

Educador/a de infância (Early Childhood Teacher)

The specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher was legally established in 2001, through the Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August. This document set the legal framework for the organisation of the initial education/training of teachers. Early Childhood Teachers are qualified to work with children from 0–5 years, both in the *estabelecimentos de educação pré-escolar/jardins de infância* for 3 to 5 year-old children and in the *creches* for 0 to 2 year-olds. Their professional qualification includes a three-year Bachelor's degree in Basic Education followed by a three-semester Master's degree in Pre-School Education **or** a four-semester Master's degree in Pre-School and Primary Education (for further information, see section 4). In the latter case, the professional is qualified for working with children up to 10 years of age, both in early childhood education and primary education.

Assistente operacional (Auxiliary Staff)

The Portuguese Education Act establishes that auxiliary staff should have completed compulsory education, corresponding to a minimum of 12 years of schooling. In some cases, municipalities may give priority to staff with a related qualification.

The functions of auxiliary staff are described in Decree-Law 184/2004, 29 July (annexe III) and include the logistical support of the Early Childhood Teacher, hygiene and cleaning of spaces, space security and surveillance/supervision of children indoors and outdoors, and guaranteeing the opening and closing times, including welcoming the children and being present when they are picked up by their parents. Moreover, Portuguese regulations do not prescribe the need for an Early Childhood Teacher in 'rooms for infants' (*berçário*), which means that the direct work with babies up to 12 months is guaranteed by two auxiliary staff members per group.

Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família (Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities)

The Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities is responsible for ensuring the accompaniment of pre-school children before and after the five-hour daily period of pedagogical activities and during the school holidays (Ordinance n. 644-A/2015, 24 August). Providing leisure-time activities in pre-school institutions is mandatory and is implemented by municipalities, including the recruitment of professionals (Law 50/2018, 16 August). The planning of these activities comes under the responsibility of the schools in collaboration with municipalities. The Early Childhood Teachers with group responsibility must ensure pedagogical supervision and accompaniment of the implementation. The general guidelines for leisure-time activities stress their playful, cultural and educational nature, as well as the need to involve families and the community in order to promote their contextualisation, adequacy and diversification (Vilhena and Lopes da Silva 2002). The Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities must have completed compulsory education.

Besides these professional profiles working in centre-based ECEC provision, services for children up to the age of 3 also include the *ama* (childminder/nanny). The *ama* is a person who provides individual care for infants and toddlers in her/his own residence during the family working time. The activity of these professionals is governed by the Ministry of Work, Solidarity and Social Security (MWSSS) and can only be developed through an authorisation issued by this Ministry. Minimum qualifications include upper secondary education (corresponding to compulsory education) and short term units of training from the National Qualifications Catalogue in the domain of support services for children and youth. This new requirement was established by a legal framework for the *amas'* professional activity that came into force in 2015 (Decree-Law 115/2015). This framework also determined the liberalisation of this activity, which was technically and financially under the responsibility of the MWSSS before 2015.

Table 1 presents an overview of the staff in daily direct contact with children in centre-based ECEC provision.

Table 1

Portugal: 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
Early Childhood Teacher <i>Educador/a de infância</i> <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional <i>In some cases:</i> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	Creche Nursery/infant-toddler centre 0–2 years <i>Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância</i> Preschool/kinder-garten 3–5 years	Core practitioner with group responsibility	0–6 years	Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, 3 years university or polytechnic ECTS credits: 180 plus Master's degree in Pre-school Education (3 semesters) ECTS credits: 90 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 7
			0–10 years	Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, 3 years university or polytechnic ECTS credits: 180 plus Master's degree in Pre-school and Primary Education (4 semesters) ECTS credits: 120 EQF: level 7 ISCED 2011: 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
Auxiliary Staff <i>Assistente operacional</i>	<i>Creche</i> Infant-toddler centre 0–2 years <i>Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância</i> Preschool/kinder-garten 3–5 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	n/a ⁴	Compulsory school certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF: level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3
Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities <i>Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família</i>	<i>Estabelecimento de educação pré-escolar/jardim de infância</i> Preschool/kinder-garten 3–5 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	3–5 years	Compulsory school certificate ECTS credits: n/a EQF: Level 3/4 ISCED 2011: 3

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

The characteristics of ECEC leadership vary across sectors. In the public sector, for 3–5 children, ECEC settings are part of school clusters⁵ or non-grouped schools. ECEC services can operate in establishments exclusively dedicated to ECEC or can be grouped into schools jointly with primary education classrooms. Each pre-school establishment or school has a coordinator, who is designated by the director of the school cluster among the teachers working there full-time. In

⁴ n/a = not applicable

⁵ School clusters are organisational units with their own administration and management bodies, integrating pre-school establishments and schools from different teaching levels and cycles (Decree-Law 137/2012, 2 July).

schools that integrate both pre-school and primary school classrooms, the coordinator can either be an Early Childhood Teacher or a Primary School Teacher. The relevant Decree-Law stipulates the coordinators' competences: These are to:

- Coordinate educational activities, in agreement with the director
- Comply with and enforce the decisions of the director and exercise the powers delegated by him/her
- Transmit information to teaching and non-teaching staff, and to students; and
- Promote and encourage the participation of parents and guardians, local and municipal interests in educational activities (Decree-Law 75/2008, 22 April, 2351)

The private sector, both non-profit and for-profit, is regulated by the Decree-Law 152/2013, 4 November, which stipulates the existence of a pedagogical leadership with the following competences:

- Represent the school before the Ministry of Education in all matters of pedagogical nature
- Plan and supervise curricular and cultural activities
- Promote compliance with study plans and programmes
- Ensure the quality of teaching
- Ensure the education and discipline of students (6350).

The qualification required to take up this role is a higher education academic degree and adequate professional qualifications or, in place of the latter, pedagogical experience of at least three years. No additional specific qualification is required.

Nurseries/infant-toddler centres have a specific legal framework set out in Ordinance no. 262/2011, 31 August. The document establishes that each nursery is coordinated by a *director/a técnico/a* (Technical Director) with the following responsibilities:

- Develop a management model that guarantees the operation of the infant-toddler centre
- Supervise the recruitment of new professionals
- Promote the continuous improvement of the services provided (including quality management)
- Manage, coordinate and supervise professionals
- Implement staff education/training programmes
- Encourage the involvement of the technical team and families in the planning and evaluation of activities
- Ensure collaboration with external entities and services.

In many cases, the Centre Head is also a core practitioner with responsibility for a group of children and pedagogical responsibility for the activities carried out in 'baby rooms' (*berçário*) by auxiliary staff. The technical director is, preferably, an Early Childhood Teacher, but can also be a professional with a degree in another domain of the Educational Sciences or the Human and Social Sciences. No additional specific qualification is required.

2.3 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff and centre-based posts of responsibility

Coordinating and supervisory structures also vary according to sector. In the public pre-school sector, the educational coordination and pedagogical supervision is part of the pedagogical organisation of each school cluster or grouped school, and intends to guarantee the coordination,

supervision and accompaniment of educational activities, to promote collaborative work and to carry out the performance evaluation of the teaching staff (Decree-Law 75/2008, 22 April). The role of the coordinator of the department of pre-school education aims to guarantee the articulation and management of curricular activities related to the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016), the organisation, accompaniment and evaluation of the groups'/classes' activities, the pedagogical coordination and the performance evaluation of Early Childhood Teachers.

In nurseries, both non-profit and for-profit, the evaluation and inspection of services are carried out by the Institute of Social Security (ISS), under the superintendence of the MLSSS. The ISS is responsible for evaluating the quality of care and verifying the conformity of services provided, namely in what concerns the conditions of installation and housing, adequacy of equipment, food and sanitary conditions (Decree-Law 64/2007, altered by Decree-Law 99/2011 and Decree-Law 33/2014; Ordinance 196-A/2015). The evaluation is carried out by specialist support staff from the ISS through on-site visits (a minimum of one visit every two years) and analysis of relevant information. The evaluation and inspection activities can encompass the collaboration with other entities (e.g. health authority) with a focus on health, safety and sanitary conditions.

2.4 Specialist support staff

In Portugal, the specialist support for children from birth up to 6 years involves two systems: (a) the National Early Childhood Intervention System (*Sistema Nacional de Intervenção Precoce na Infância*), under the coordinated work of the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with families and professionals working in nurseries and pre-schools; (b) the services governed by the Ministry of Education that provide support for children/students from pre-school to the end of secondary education.

The National Early Childhood Intervention System was established in order to guarantee the necessary support for children up to 6 years of age with physical or functional issues that limit personal growth and participation in typical activities for their age and social context or who are in serious risk of developmental delay, as well as their families. In this system, the role of the local intervention teams (*Equipas Locais de Intervenção – ELI*) is particularly relevant. These are composed by professionals from education (Early Childhood Teachers), health (Nurses, Paediatricians), social services, therapists and Psychologists) working at a municipal level. According to Decree-Law 281/2009, 6 October, these teams are responsible for:

- Identifying children and families immediately eligible for the National Early Intervention System
- Monitoring the situation of children and families who, although not immediately eligible, present risk factors
- Referring ineligible children and families that lack social support
- Elaborating and implementing individual plans of intervention
- Identifying communities' needs and resources, and organising formal and informal social support networks
- Coordinating with services of child protection
- Ensuring adequate transition processes to other programmes, services or educational settings for every child, and
- Coordinating with Early Childhood Teachers from nurseries and pre-schools attended by children involved with early childhood intervention.

In the case of the services under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, legislation on inclusive education was established by Decree-Law 54/2018, 6 July (for further details, see *chapter 8*) proposing a shift towards a more integrated, holistic and continuous vision of the educational approach, based on universal design for learning and a multi-level approach. The professionals working in these services supporting learning and inclusion are Special Education Teachers (*docentes de educação especial*), specialised support staff (such as Occupational and Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists, Psychologists, Interpreters and Teachers of Sign Language, and experts on mobility and orientation training) and auxiliary staff, preferably with specialised training. Specifically, the Special Education Teacher supports the Early Childhood Teacher in the definition of strategies of pedagogical differentiation and in identifying multiple means of motivation, representation and expression, through collaboration and co-responsibility. The Special Education Teachers must possess a higher education degree in teaching (preferably, in early childhood education, but not mandatory) and a specialised training course in special education at a university or polytechnic institute. These courses are accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development and have a minimum of 250 contact hours. In order to gain access to these courses, besides the teaching certification, candidates must have at least five years of teaching practice.

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

The available compiled data on the structural composition of the ECEC workforce is focused on the professionals working in pre-primary settings (public and private) under the governance of the Ministry of Education. This information is reported in documents issued by the Directorate General of Education and Science Statistics (*Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência*). No systematically compiled national data is available for the 0–2 sector.

Table 2

Portugal: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in early childhood settings (3–5) under the Ministry of Education: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce, in %
Early Childhood Teachers with a higher education degree (N=17,065):	2019/20 ¹
– Three-year bachelor degree or equivalent	18.3
– Four-year bachelor degree (<i>licenciatura</i>) or equivalent	77.8
– Master's or Doctoral degree	3.8
Specialist support staff (e.g. Special Needs Teachers)	2017/18 ² (aggregated data, including pre-primary, primary and secondary education) ²
	<i>Special Needs Teachers</i> : 7,518 (with a specialisation in special education: 2,733)
	<i>Other specialist support staff integrated in the Centres of Resources for Inclusion</i> :
	– Occupational Therapists: 463

Staff categories	Year / Proportion of workforce, in %
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Speech Therapists: 629 – Physiotherapists: 277 – Psychologists: 558 <p><i>Specialist support staff from the National Early Childhood Intervention System:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Early Childhood Teachers: 398 (with a specialisation in special education: 313)
Staff with a non-relevant qualification	No data available
Unqualified staff	No data available
Male practitioners	2019/20 ³ : Core practitioners: 0.9 2019/20 ⁴ Non-teaching staff (aggregated data, including pre-primary, primary and secondary education): 12.7
Staff with a background of migration	2019/20: 1.1 ³ (most frequently represented countries of origin: United Kingdom, France and Angola)

¹[DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação, and Divisão de Estatísticas dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário n.d. (2021)

²[DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência n.d. (2018)

³[DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação 2021.

⁴[DGEEC] Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação n.d. (2020)

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Early Childhood Teacher (*educador/a de infância*)

The Early Childhood Teacher's initial professional education is characterised by a sequential model that integrates a Bachelor's degree in Basic Education (*Licenciatura em Educação Básica*) and a professional Master's degree in Pre-school Education (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar*) or Pre-school and Primary Education (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*). This model was established at the national level in 2007 within the changes brought about by the Bologna Process and is currently regulated by Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May, altered by Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November. The access to the 1st cycle of studies, Bachelor in Basic Education, requires successful completion of secondary education and national exams in Portuguese and Mathematics. Entry requirements for the 2nd cycle of studies, corresponding to a Master's degree, are the successful completion of the Bachelor's degree in Basic Education, as well as proficiency in oral and written Portuguese and on the essential rules of logical and critical argumentation. Depending on the higher education institution (HEI), the assessment of the latter may be carried out through written or oral tests, interviews, documentary

evidence, or a combination of these. More recently, Decree-Law 112/2023 allowed access to the Master's degrees to the candidates that have completed 75% of the required ECTS in the respective staff profile.

The Bachelor's degree in Basic Education is common for all candidate teachers, from the early childhood education to the secondary level of education. Course length is six semesters, corresponding to 180 ECTS credits. During the 2nd cycle of studies, two options are available for candidate Early Childhood Teachers: (a) a professional Master in Pre-School Education, lasting three semesters (90 ECTS credits), which qualifies for working with children aged 0–5 years (EQF Level 7); (b) a professional Master in Pre-School and Primary Education, lasting four semesters (120 ECTS credits), which qualifies for working with children aged 0–10 years (EQF Level 7).

Table 3

Portugal: Early Childhood Teacher

<p>Job title in Portuguese: <i>Educador/a de infância</i></p> <p>Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional <i>or</i> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional</p>
<p>Entry requirements: Bachelor's degree in Basic Education</p> <p>Professional studies: For working with children 0–5: 3 semesters at a HEI; for working with children 0–10: 4 semesters at a HEI</p> <p>Award: Master's degree in Pre-School Education (<i>grau de Mestre em Educação Pré-Escolar</i>) or Master's degree in Pre-School and Primary Education (<i>grau de Mestre em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico</i>)</p> <p>ECTS credits: 90 / 120 (depending on the Master's degree)</p> <p>EQF level: 7</p> <p>ISECD 2011: 75</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: nurseries, pre-primary settings (and primary schools, if qualified through the Master in Pre-School and Primary Education)</p>

Auxiliary staff (*assistente operacional*)

Auxiliary staff are required to have completed compulsory education that corresponds, in Portugal, to 12 years of schooling (secondary education). This formal requirement is set at the national level. No specific pedagogical requirements need to be met. In some cases, recruitment through the municipalities privileges additional preparation, such as a specialist course for gaining the title of 'Specialist in Educational Activities' (*técnico de ação educativa*) (EQF Level 4) or a three-year secondary vocational course specifically focused on child support (*técnico de apoio à infância*) (EQF Level 4). Recruitment may also take place through employment centres, as a measure to promote the professional integration of unemployed persons.

Table 4

Portugal: Auxiliary staff

<p>Job title in Portuguese: <i>Assistente operacional</i></p>
<p>Entry requirements: Secondary education leaving certificate (<i>diploma de nível secundário de educação</i>)</p> <p>Professional studies: No specific professional requirements need to be met, although related vocational qualifications may be favourable for recruitment.</p> <p>Award: No specific professional award</p> <p>ECTS credits: n/a</p> <p>EQF level: 3 or 4 (in the case of completion of a vocational course)</p> <p>ISECD 2011: 3</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: nurseries, pre-primary settings</p>

Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities (*dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família*)

The Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities are required to have completed compulsory education. This formal requirement is set at the national level. By law, no specific pedagogical requirements need to be met, although some municipalities privilege additional pedagogical preparation on recruitment. Thus, this professional group is characterised by a wide diversity, ranging from unqualified staff with a secondary education diploma to professionals with a higher education diploma in early childhood education.

Table 5

Portugal: Facilitator of Leisure-time Activities

Job title in Portuguese: <i>Dinamizador/a das atividades de animação e apoio à família</i>
Entry requirements: Secondary education leaving certificate (<i>diploma de nível secundário de educação</i>) Professional studies: No specific professional requirements need to be met, although related vocational qualifications may be favourable for recruitment. Award: No specific professional award ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 ISECD 2011: 3 Main ECEC workplace: pre-primary settings, school clusters or non-grouped schools

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

In this section, the focus is on the IPE programmes for Early Childhood Teachers, since no specific IPE requirements are needed for the auxiliary staff or the Facilitators of Leisure-time Activities. The IPE programmes for Early Childhood Teachers are developed according to a sequential or biphasic model comprising a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, as stipulated in Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May. After completion of the Bachelor's degree, the candidate Early Childhood Teachers can choose between two professional masters (see *Chapter 2.1*). The presentation of competences, curriculum and pedagogic-didactic approaches will take into consideration the basic initial qualification and the two second-stage options.

Competence specifications

The professional preparation of candidate teachers is based on general principles stipulated in the Education Act, the curriculum guidelines for pre-school education and the curriculum matrices for basic and secondary education, the student's profile at the end of compulsory schooling, essential learning defined for each discipline and teaching cycle, and general guidelines of educational policy (Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May, altered by Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November). The **Bachelor in Basic Education** (*Licenciatura em Educação Básica*) constitutes the first stage of professional preparation for teachers working in pre-school and the first, second and third cycles of basic education. It aims to promote generic and transversal competencies that prepare for assuming a professional role in a diversity of educational contexts. Competencies encompass:

- Observing and evaluating educational contexts (formal and non-formal)
- Knowing and understanding the professional profiles of the Early Childhood Teacher and Basic Education Teacher



- Developing educational projects and resources
- Mobilising knowledge for working in early childhood, basic education and non-formal education contexts in an integrated and contextualised way
- Reflexive, investigative and critical competencies.

The **Master in Pre-School Education** (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar*) focuses on the professional specialisation of Early Childhood Teachers working with children from birth up to 6 years. Despite the course descriptor (*educação pré-escolar* corresponds to the 3–5 sector), the entity that formally evaluates and accredits higher education courses in Portugal, the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (*Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior* – A3ES) has been emphasising the need to reinforce the education/training of educators for working in provision for under 3 year-olds. The competencies that the prospective Early Childhood Teacher needs to develop are closely aligned to the general and specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher (Decree-Law 240/2001, 30 August and Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August, annex 1).

For example, the intended general learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) of the Master in Pre-School Education of School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto are to:

- Mobilise scientific, pedagogical and cultural knowledge in the design, development and evaluation of a curricular project
- Organise the educational environment in its various pedagogical dimensions
- Encourage the development of positive and stimulating interactions with children
- Develop systematic participant observation and regulatory reflection (about contexts, processes and learning outcomes)
- Plan and evaluate educational activities that are adequate for the development of integrated learning, considering strategies of pedagogical differentiation
- Develop strategies of collaborative and team work
- Promote actions that facilitate continuity of learning (with families, community and other different levels of education)
- Problematisate the demands of professional practice in a grounded, reflexive and ethical way, considering a lifelong learning approach.

The **Master in Pre-School and Primary Education** (*Mestrado em Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensino do 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico*) is a two-year programme (four semesters) and focuses on the professional specialisation for both early childhood and primary education. The competencies to be developed by the prospective Early Childhood Teacher/ Primary Teacher are aligned to the professional profile (Decree-Law 241/2001, 30 August) of the Early Childhood Teacher (annex 1) and the Primary Teacher (annex 2).

Curriculum

The IPE components are prescribed in Decree-Law 79/2014 and encompass:

- (1) Teaching subject (*área de docência*): this component is focused on the knowledge that is needed for *teaching* in specific content areas or disciplines;
- (2) General education (*área educacional geral*): includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes common to all teachers that are relevant for their work in the classroom, in the educational institutions and in cooperation with families and communities. It includes curricular units in the

- domains of developmental psychology, basic cognitive processes (particularly those involved in reading, writing and mathematics), curriculum and assessment, citizenship education, organisational studies, inclusive education and the use of digital technologies in education;
- (3) Subject-specific didactics (*didáticas específicas*): encompasses the skills (knowledge, abilities and attitudes) related to specific content areas or disciplines;
- (4) Cultural, social and ethical dimension (*área cultural, social e ética*): includes raising awareness of the world's contemporary problems (e.g. freedom of expression, respect for ethnic minorities, values of gender equality), extending knowledge and culture beyond a specific teaching area, learning about data collection methods and the critical analysis of data, hypotheses and theories, and raising awareness for the ethical and civic dimensions of teaching activity. This component does not have formally allocated ECTS credits and should be integrated into the other components of education/training.
- (5) Initiation into professional practice (*iniciação à prática profissional*): includes observation and cooperation in educational institutions and supervised practice in ECEC settings (see Chapter 5).

Minimum ECTS credits are distributed as follows, according to the cycle of studies, as prescribed by law:

Table 6

Portugal: IPE of Early Childhood Teachers, curriculum structure

Education/ training components	Minimum ECTS credits per component		
	Bachelor in Basic Education	Master in Pre-school Education	Master in Pre-School and Primary Education
Teaching subject	125	6	18
General education	15	6	6
Subject-specific didactics	15	24	36
Initiation into professional practice	15	41	54

The particular focus of the Bachelor in Basic Education is on the knowledge needed for *teaching* in certain content areas or disciplines. The distribution of the 125 ECTS credits prescribed by law is as follows: Portuguese (30 ECTS credits); Mathematics (30 ECTS credits); Natural Sciences, and History and Geography of Portugal (30 ECTS credits), Expressive Arts (Music, Visual Arts, Drama) and Physical/Motor Expression (30 ECTS credits). The HEI is free to allocate the remaining 5 ECTS credits to selected content areas.

The components of subject-specific didactics and initiation into professional practice integrate fewer ECTS at the Bachelor's level than at the Master's level (see Table 6). Specifically, the integration of field-based experiences into the Bachelor's programme varies across the HEI, with some institutions offering observation and cooperation experiences throughout the three years and others tending to provide these experiences only in the final year of the course.

At the Master's level, subject-specific didactics and, in particular, the initiation into professional practice constitute the core of the plan of studies. Subject-specific didactics include curricular units in the domains of Mathematics, Spoken Language and Introductory Writing, Natural and Social Sciences, Artistic Education (Music, Visual Arts, Drama/Theatre, Dance) and Physical Education. The component of *initiation into professional practice* includes curricular units of Supervised Educational Practice (*Prática Educativa Supervisionada*) in early childhood settings and, in the case of the Master in Pre-School and Primary Education, also in primary schools.

The plan of studies also integrates a curricular unit on Methods of Research in Education that intends to support the candidate teachers' learning in the contexts of practice. In most cases, a curricular unit of Early Childhood Pedagogy or Early Childhood Education Methodology is also allocated to the plan of studies.

Pedagogic-didactic approaches

The Education Act stipulates guiding principles for (early childhood) teacher education that include: the need for an integrated approach at the level of scientific and pedagogical preparation, and articulation of theory and practice; methodological practices similar to those that the educator will use in pedagogical practice; the encouragement of an attitude that is both critical and active in relation to social reality; education/training that favours or stimulates innovation and research in relation to educational activity; and participation in education/training that leads to a reflective and continuous practice of self-learning (Article 33).

The pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes can vary across HEIs. In a study conducted by Almeida and Lopo (2015) in 17 Portuguese higher education institutions, two tendencies were identified in the Bachelor in Basic Education: (a) a cluster of institutions with a profile characterised by the use of artistic and physical-motor experimentation, problem solving strategies, the use of authentic materials (materials that can be manipulated and worksheets) and the diary as an element of written assessment; (b) a cluster of institutions characterised by the use of experimental activities / laboratory practices and simulation as activities to stimulate the appropriation of knowledge, and by the use of a project approach to assess learning.

At the Master's level, the curricular units of Supervised Educational Practice constitute the core of these programmes, fuelled and supported by other curricular units, namely the subject-specific didactics. The practicum periods aim for the construction of professional knowledge, competences and attitudes, and are sustained by active and heuristic-hermeneutic approaches, intending the integration of the conceptual and experiential components of education/ training. Research processes are valued throughout the professional preparation that encompass several hours at the workplace and theoretical-practical classes and seminars at the HEI. A triadic model of supervision is frequently used, involving the prospective Early Childhood Teacher, the cooperating educator and the supervisor of HEI, aiming at stimulating students' critical and reflexive analysis and the articulation between theory and practice.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

The exclusive entry requirement for a Master's degree in early childhood education is a completed three-year Bachelor's degree in Basic Education (Decree-Law 79/2014). Decree-Law 112/2023 allows access to the Master's degrees to the candidates that have completed 75% of the required ECTS in the respective profile. The professionals that hold a three-year or four-year Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, i.e., all professionals who qualified as Early Childhood Teachers before the Bologna Process, are formally recognised as fully qualified early childhood core practitioners. This has led to a scenario of coexistence of different levels of qualification within the profession, with 18.3% of core professionals holding a three-year Bachelor's degree, 77.8% a four-year Bachelor's degree or equivalent, and 3.8% a Master's or Doctoral degree (see *Table 2*). There is a growing tendency for younger practitioners to hold higher qualifications.

For those with a non-specialist qualification, the options are limited to the completion of the Bachelor in Basic Education followed by a professional Master's degree. This is the case, for example, for auxiliary staff who are motivated to become an Early Childhood Teacher.

Since 2015, it is also possible to obtain a formal authorisation for working as a childminder if the candidate possesses an upper secondary education diploma and completes short term units of training from the National Qualifications Catalogue in the domain of support services for children and youth. Auxiliary staff who worked in a nursery (*creche*) during a minimum period of one year over the previous two years can also become a childminder.

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

The guided workplace experience (practicum) in the IPE of core professionals is regulated at a national level through Decree-Law 79/2014, 14 May. This component is termed *Initiation into Professional Practice* and corresponds, at the Master level, to the Supervised Teaching Practice (*prática de ensino supervisionada*). According to the legal framework, this component is organised around the following principles: It “(a) includes the observation and collaboration in education and teaching situations and the supervised practice in the activity room or classroom, in early childhood education institutions or in schools; (b) provides experiences of planning, teaching and assessment, according to the functions that are attributed to the teacher, inside and outside the classroom; (c) is developed in nurseries or pre-school classrooms, as well as in groups or classes of the different levels and cycles of studies that are covered by the recruitment group for which the cycle of studies prepares; if possible, it should be carried out in more than one educational institution (...); (d) is conceived within an educational perspective that values the articulation between knowledge and the way of transmitting it, with a focus on students’ learning; (e) is conceived in a perspective of professional development of students and in promoting an attitude oriented towards the permanent progress of their students’ learning” (Art. 11, 6).

ECTS credits and duration: As stated previously (see Table 6), the *practicum* is differentially distributed across the Bachelor and the Master programmes, with a visible reinforcement in the plan of studies of the latter. The number of ECTS credits allocated to this curricular component is specified in Decree-Law 79/2014. Thus, HEI must take into account the following specifications:

- Bachelor in Basic Education – a minimum of 15 ECTS credits (divided among different age levels, including formal and non-formal educational settings)
- Master in Pre-School Education – a minimum of 41 ECTS credits (divided between nurseries and preschools/kindergartens depending on the decision of the individual HEI, whereby only the practicum in preschools is mandatory).
- Master in Pre-School and Primary Education – a minimum of 54 ECTS credits (equally divided between the two education levels).

Following these ECTS specifications, each HEI establishes the number of hours and overall organisation of time blocks. Generally, at the level of the Master’s programmes, the students spend three or four days per week (five hours a day, following the hours daily attributed to the teaching component) in ECEC centres and one or two days per week in HEI, attending classes (theoretical-practical, tutorial meetings, seminars).

Cooperation between / complementary roles of IPE institutions and ECEC centres: Decree-Law 79/2014 also establishes the conditions for the cooperation between the IPE institutions and ECEC centres, designated as cooperating schools (*escolas cooperantes*). It states the need for a

formal, multi-annual cooperation protocol between the two institutions. This protocol should include the following (Art. 22):

- Levels and cycles of education and teaching in which Supervised Teaching Practice is carried out;
- Identification of the cooperating supervisors (*orientadores cooperantes*) and any compensatory payments made available to the cooperating ECEC centre
- Number of places available for students
- Roles, responsibilities and competences of all stakeholders, including students
- Conditions for the supervised teaching practice in the activity rooms, accompanied by a cooperating supervisor
- Conditions for the participation of students in other curricular and organisational development activities outside the activity room, provided that they are supported by cooperating supervisors
- Counterparts made available to the cooperating schools by the HEI.

The legal framework stipulates that the HEI should assure that the ECEC centres possess the necessary human and material resources in order to guarantee the quality of the practicum experience. Moreover, the HEI should actively participate in the development of the quality of the cooperating institutions, in collaboration with their management structure.

Students' skills and competences: Decree-Law 79/2014 does not specify the skills and competences students are expected to develop throughout the guided workplace experience. However, the principles inherent to the component of Initiation into Professional Practice emphasize the importance of observation, planning, teaching, assessing and collaboration processes throughout the practicum experiences. Also, these principles stress the focus on children's learning through the articulation between theoretical and practical knowledge, and state the importance of adopting a perspective of continuing professional development. According to the Education Act, this component, like the overall preservice teacher education programmes, should consider the set of professional competences that are needed according to the professional profile defined by law. In the case of the Early Childhood Teacher, the professional profile is defined by Decree-Law 240/2001 (general professional profile of teachers from pre-school to secondary education), and, especially, the Decree-Law 241/2001 that establishes the specific professional profile of the Early Childhood Teacher. The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Lopes da Silva et al. 2016) should also be considered closely, namely its:

- Four core pedagogical principles (a) viewing development and learning as inseparable strands in the child's progress; (b) recognising the child as a subject and an agent of the educational process; (c) addressing inclusion and pedagogical differentiation in order to be responsive to all children; (d) articulating the different domains of the child's learning and development within a holistic approach
- Guidelines for the organisation of the educational environment
- Guidelines for guaranteeing educational intentionality (through processes of observation, planning, action and assessment/evaluation)
- Guidelines for safeguarding educational continuity and transitions.

Student assessment: Students' self-assessment can include a variety of forms such as oral and written reflexion (individually or collaboratively), field-based journals, portfolios, etc. The responsibility for the students' external assessment is attributed to the teacher who is responsible for the curricular unit of Supervised Teaching Practice, integrating information provided by the cooperating supervisor and the pedagogical director/coordinator. The students' assessment

must also encompass a practicum report subjected to public presentation and discussion before a jury.

Mentoring/ supervising staff: Decree-Law 79/2014 establishes the criteria for selecting cooperating supervisors. These should be chosen by the HEI, following the previous acceptance on the part of the cooperating supervisor and the leader of the cooperating institution. Furthermore, the cooperating supervisor should possess appropriate training and experience for the role and its functions; possess a minimum of five years of professional practice in ECEC contexts and, preferably, post-graduate studies in early childhood education, specialised education/ training in pedagogical supervision and professional experience in supervision. The legal framework does not specify a recommended time allocation for supervision/ mentoring activities. In some cases, this specification is included in the cooperation protocol and can vary across institutions.

The cooperating supervisors are not remunerated for their work as practicum supervisors. The HEI is requested to pay the travel expenses of the cooperating supervisor whenever there is the need to participate in education/ training activities and seminars, as well as to collaborate with the cooperating schools in the professional development of its Early Childhood Teachers, especially the cooperating supervisors.

Current debates: As stated previously, the IPE of Early Childhood Teachers is developed through a sequential model in which the guided workplace experience is located predominantly in the final stage of the education programme, i.e., at the Master's level. According to Vieira et al. (2021) this mirrors a theory-to-practice rationale in which the practicum is *conceived as a curricular space devoted to applying theoretical knowledge to teaching* (11-12). Some authors have been arguing that this post-Bologna model may potentially be hindering the candidate teachers' opportunities to be engaged in research processes (Flores 2011, 2015) and to develop recursive dialogues among values and beliefs, practices and theories (Araújo 2022) throughout the first three years of IPE (Bachelor's degree).

The anticipated shortage of teachers in the Portuguese context, including Early Childhood Teachers, in the next ten years (see *Chapter 7.5*), has given rise to discussions around the introduction of alterations to the current legal framework that regulates IPE, including the component of Supervised Educational Practice. A tentative move was made through the publication of Decree-Law 112/2023, 29 November, that was revoked on 19 January 2024 due to massive criticism and pressure from higher education institutions.

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

The Portuguese Education Act recognises continuing professional development as a right for all educators and teachers and emphasises its importance in complementing and updating initial professional education within a perspective of life-long learning. It also states the need for in-service education to be sufficiently diversified in order to ensure this complementary role of deepening and updating professional knowledge and competences, as well as enabling career mobility and progression.

Legislation and regulation: Decree-Law 22/2014, 11 February, establishes the legal framework for the CPD of teachers and defines the system of coordination, management and support. As far as ECEC is concerned, this decree-law regulates the CPD of core practitioners working in the 3–5 sector (with the exception of private institutions not affiliated to school clusters). Decree-

Law 22/2014 establishes the following seven principles for CPD: “(a) Promoting the improvement of teaching quality and the outcomes of the educational system; (b) Contextualising education/ training projects and provision; (c) Relating to the needs and priorities of schools and teachers; (d) Prioritising the scientific and pedagogical dimensions; (e) Maintaining the scientific and pedagogical autonomy of the education/ training entities; (f) Strengthening institutional co-operation between basic and secondary education establishments, higher education institutions and scientific and professional associations; (g) Promoting a culture of monitoring and evaluation oriented towards the improvement of the quality of the education/ training system” (1287). Besides these principles, the decree-law regulates different aspects of CPD: aims; domains; modalities; duration; mandatory activities; education/ training entities; accreditation and qualifications of educators/ trainers; rights and duties of trainees; processes of accreditation and certification; evaluation, recognition, certification and monitoring; competences and composition of the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development (SPCPD); role of the inspection system; and guidance and support for continuing education/ training activities.

In the case of other ECEC professionals, namely those working in the 0–2 sector (both private non-profit and private for-profit) and non-qualified co-workers, the national Labour Law is applied (Law 7/2009, 12 February). The last revision of the Labour Law (Law 93/2019, 4 September) establishes the right to a minimum of 40 hours per year of continuing education/ training for Portuguese workers.

Main forms: Decree-Law 22/2014 stipulates the following forms of CPD for core professionals: education/ training courses (*cursos de formação*), workshops (*oficinas de formação*), study circles (*circulos de estudos*), short-term activities (*ações de curta duração*), professional placements (*estágio*) and projects (*projeto*). Independently of their form, these activities must be accredited by the SPCPD (*Conselho Científico-Pedagógico de Formação Contínua*).

Other CPD activities can include specialised courses in higher education institutions (also accredited by the SPCPD), congresses, seminars, and research activities that confer a higher education degree (academic Master or Doctoral studies).

CPD providers: The main providers of CPD across the country are the education/ training centres from school clusters (*Centros de Formação de Associação de Escolas*, CFAE), higher education institutions, the education/ training centres of non-profit professional or scientific associations, central services of the Ministry of Education, and other accredited non-profit public, private or cooperative entities. According to the last available report of the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development, in December 2020 there were 263 accredited providers: 89 education/ training centres from school clusters, 78 higher education institutions, 55 professional associations and 41 other unspecified entities (*Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua* 2020).

Leave entitlement: The national Labour Law stipulates that CPD activities (40 hours per year, as stated previously) are to be completed during working hours, confer the right to remuneration and count as time of effective service. This also includes hours spent in attending classes and in assessment activities, under the student-worker status, as well as absences within the scope of processes of recognition, validation and certification of professional competences.

For Early Childhood Teachers working in the 3–5 sector (public, and private and social solidarity settings affiliated to a public school cluster), the leaves for CPD activities developed by the central and regional services or by the school clusters are granted during working hours, preferably during non-contact time. For CPD activities initiated by the Early Childhood Teacher, leaves may not exceed five consecutive days or eight intercalated days per school year. A one-year special leave (*licença sabática*) can be authorised in order to participate in continuing education/ train-

ing activities, complete specialised courses or develop applied research. The authorisation is dependent on the following conditions: having a permanent post, having a performance assessment equal or superior to 'Good' and working uninterruptedly as an Early Childhood Teacher for a minimum of eight years.

Obligatory or optional? The 40 hours of CPD for Portuguese workers are mandatory, according to the Labour Law. More specifically, CPD activities are obligatory for Early Childhood Teachers working in 3–5 public sector, influencing performance assessment and career progression. In this case, 50% of CPD activities must focus on the scientific and pedagogic dimension and at least one fifth of those activities must be accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogical Council of Professional Development.

In terms of specific CPD offers for the heads of ECEC provision, HEIs offer specialisation courses accredited by the SPCPD in domains such as School Organisation, Education Organisation, and Pedagogical Supervision and Training of Trainers, that can better prepare professionals for leadership roles. Master's and Doctoral degrees in these areas are also offered in several higher education institutions. Shorter continuing education/ training activities are available in the following areas: School Administration and Educational Administration, and Leadership, Coordination and Pedagogical Supervision.

Funding support: CPD activities mandatory by law are free of charge for the ECEC professionals. The costs for the remaining CPD activities, including Master's and Doctoral studies, are usually covered by practitioners.

Access to CPD: The most regular problem regarding access opportunities to CPD, both for core practitioners and for qualified and non-qualified co-workers, is the lack of specific opportunities for ECEC continuing education/ training. When available, the most common difficulty is associated with the need to ensure a temporary replacement, given the shortage of staff. According to the most recent report from the SPCPD (Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua 2020), the pandemic also led to a decrease in CPD activities.

CPD and career advancement: The participation in specific forms of CPD can benefit the Early Childhood Teacher at the level of career progression: the completion of a Master's degree reduces by one year the time legally demanded of permanence in a given professional position. The completion of doctoral studies reduces that time by two years. In both cases, the degree must be completed in a scientific area directly related to early childhood education, including Educational Sciences. Also, the result of teacher performance assessment must be at least 'Good'.

Key content focus of CPD for core professionals: No nationally compiled data are available on the main topics that are currently in focus in CPD activities offered in the public sector mainly by the CFAE. Information provided by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (*Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância – APEI*), the main private non-profit provider of CPD for core practitioners, shows that over the last five years the three main topics of CPD were: curriculum (organisation, management and assessment/evaluation), literacy, and expressions (arts, drama, motor).

The foreseen creation and publication of the pedagogical guidelines for the education and care for infants and toddlers is likely to have an influence on nationwide CPD initiatives for this particular sector.

Concerning the definition of priorities in CPD and the practitioner's participation in this process, Decree-Law 22/2014 foresees, as core principles, the contextualising of the various levels of education and of the provided offer, as well as linking CPD to the needs and priorities of schools and teachers. However, the lack of studies on CPD hinders the possibility to have a clearer picture on the practitioners' participation on defining the key content focus of CPD.

Research: Research focusing on the CPD activities for ECEC staff and their impact is practically non-existent. No large-scale research projects over the past five years were identified.

Current debates: In the current panorama of teachers' shortages in the short-term, the debates are particularly focused on initial professional education. However, CPD activities of ECEC staff continue to be a focus of attention. Concerning core practitioners, a recommendation from the National Council on Education (Faria et al. 2019) on the qualification and valorisation of Early Childhood Teachers and teachers from primary and secondary education emphasised the need to implement context-based CPD initiatives, with a strong focus on the problems identified by (early childhood) teachers, on collegiality and on research developed by professionals aiming at improving pedagogical practices. It also recommends the implementation of long-term reflection-based modalities, following international evidence on CPD and ECEC quality (e.g. Peleman et al. 2018).

The National Council on Education also published recommendations on the situation of auxiliary staff, calling attention to their important role within the education communities, as well as the relevance of their qualification and professional development, namely in the field of inclusive education (Percheiro, Almeida, and Rodrigues 2020). Indeed, the CPD of all staff in inclusive education has also been a relevant cornerstone in the national agenda, including teachers, leaders, specialist support staff, auxiliary staff, and also families.

Finally, some debate around new forms of CPD is to be highlighted, namely the initiative from the SPCPD to explore the advantages and risks of adopting the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) as a CPD format in teacher CPD (see Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua 2021 for further information in Portuguese).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

In terms of remuneration, there are differences between core practitioners working in public sector pre-primary education (3–5) and in the private sector non-profit or for-profit centre-based services for over and under 3 year-olds. This disparity is due to the split system that characterises ECEC provision in Portugal (see *Chapter 1*). This division leads to differences in the financing systems of each Ministry and in the practitioners' salaries. The salaries of Early Childhood Teachers working in the public sector depend on the professional positions and pathways established in the Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers (Decree-Law 41/2012, 21 February). This statute establishes the same positions, remuneration rates and career progression requirements for all teaching professionals in the public sector (from pre-school to secondary education). When the Framework Law on Pre-School Education, Law no. 5/1997, 10 February (*Lei Quadro da Educação Pré-Escolar*) came into force, the Ministry of Education stated the intention to provide identical professional conditions for early childhood educators working in the private sector. This was realised through a salary supplement provided by the Ministry of Education for these professionals, in order to reduce the disparities between the two sectors. In spite of this initiative, remuneration differences still persist.

In the case of posts of responsibility, Centre Heads in the public sector have a reduction in the number of working hours. In the non-profit private sector, a higher salary is paid to the Technical

Director/ Pedagogical Director (close to 10% more). Student mentors/ supervisors receive no monetary reward.

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

The vast majority of Portuguese Early Childhood Teachers work full-time. In spite of the absence of data on this specific issue, part-time employment is a rare occurrence among ECEC staff. In the pre-school public sector, the revision of the Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers foresees the reduction of the contact time (*componente letiva*) in the following cases: (a) Early Childhood Teachers who have reached the age of 60 may request a five-hour reduction in their respective weekly contact time; (b) those who have completed 25 and 33 years of service can request the granting of total exemption from the contact time component for a period of one school year. The most recent amendment to the General Law on Labour in Public Functions allows for part-time employment (*meia jornada*). The Early Childhood Teachers can benefit in the following cases: (a) if they are 55 years of age or older and have grandchildren under the age of 12; (b) if they have children under 12 years of age or, regardless of age, with a disability or chronic illness.

Working hours may differ between the public and private sectors. In general, most Early Childhood Teachers in both sectors work 35 hours, 25 of them in direct contact with children (*componente letiva*), although the number may vary more in the private sector. The professionals working in private for-profit centres tend to work more hours than the educators working in the other sectors.

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

The Career Statute of Pre-school, Basic and Secondary Teachers stipulates a probationary period, corresponding to one year, mandatory for all Early Childhood Teachers entering a permanent post in the public sector. This probationary period aims at verifying the teacher's competencies regarding the required professional profile; it is carried out in the educational setting in which the (pre-school) teacher is employed. During this period, the Early Childhood Teacher is accompanied and supported by an experienced ECEC core practitioner in the pedagogical, didactical and scientific domains. This senior teacher is designated by the coordinator of the curricular department and should preferably possess specialised training in the fields of educational organisation and curriculum development, pedagogical supervision or the training of trainers. The provided accompaniment should encompass: (a) support in the elaboration and implementation of an individual work plan including scientific, pedagogical and didactic components; (b) support in the planning of pedagogical activities, as well as in reflection about pedagogical practice and its improvement; (c) produce a report on the activities carried out, including classroom observations; (d) participate in the assessment of the teacher throughout the probationary period.

Despite this legal framework, the support measures in the workplace for newly Early Childhood Teachers have received little attention over the years. Some debate has arisen on the induction period of teachers, with the National Council on Education publishing a technical report that brought together national and international perspectives for a deeper reflection on the nature and models of the induction period (Faria et al. 2016) and for a “systemic and global view of the *continuum* of initial teacher education, induction and in-service education” (Flores 2021, 135).

7.4 Non-contact time

Early Childhood Teachers in the public sector – and also most in the private non-profit sector – are granted ten hours of paid non-contact time dedicated, among other activities, to planning, staff meetings, work with parents and the community, research and CPD activities.

7.5 Current staffing issues

A shortage of Early Childhood Teachers in the next few years is currently the most debated challenge relating to the ECEC workforce. In recent years, the accentuated aging of Portuguese teachers, including Early Childhood Teachers, has been identified as a critical issue (DGEEC and Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação 2021; Faria et al. 2019; Rodrigues et al. 2019). The most recent statistics, referring to the school year 2019/2020, show the following panorama regarding the Early Childhood Teachers in the public sector, by age range: <30 years: 3,4%; 30-39 years: 16%; 40-49 years: 26%; 50-59 years: 41,3%; >60: 13,3% (DGEEC, Direção de Serviços de Estatísticas da Educação (DSEE), and Divisão de Estatísticas dos Ensinos Básico e Secundário (DEEBS) n.d.). This circumstance is associated with other critical issues, namely the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession and the decline in the number of candidates to pre-service programmes in HEI (Faria et al. 2019; Rodrigues et al. 2019). In a diagnosis study on the need for teachers from 2021 to 2030 (Catela Nunes et al. 2021), a reduction of 61% of pre-school teachers in the public sector due to retirement was estimated. This is the highest reduction in all teaching levels. The same study concluded that early childhood education is the educational level with a higher need for recruitment (54%) up to 2030/31.

Current debates on ways to ameliorate these circumstances are being conducted, particularly focused on introducing changes to legislation that regulate initial professional education (Decree-Law 79/2014) in order to increase the number of ECEC teachers being prepared in HEI.

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

Over the last five years, no policy reforms and initiatives relating directly to ECEC staffing and professionalisation were identified. However, relevant legislation on inclusive education came into force in 2018, altering the principles and intervention approach to inclusive education, with an impact on ECEC professionals and settings. More recently, important changes to the legal framework that regulates the IPE of Early Childhood Educators were introduced through decree-law 112/2023, 29 November, that was, meanwhile, revoked due to intense criticism from HEI. Changes to this legal framework are expected in the near future.

Decree-Law 54/2018, 6 July

This new legal framework aims at the realisation of the right of children to an inclusive education that responds to their potentialities, expectations and needs, “within the framework of a common and plural educational endeavour that provides everyone with the sense of participation and belonging in authentic conditions of equity” (2918). It entails the following guiding principles: (a) universal educability; (b) equity; (c) inclusion; (d) customisation; (e) flexibility; (f) self-determination; (g) parental involvement; (h) minimum interference. The adopted methodology is based on universal design for learning and on a multi-level approach to access the curriculum. This approach includes: flexible curricular models, systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of

the continuum of implemented interventions, dialogue between teachers and parents/caregivers, and a choice of measures to support learning, organised at different levels of intervention, according to the educational responses necessary for each learner to acquire a common base of competences while valuing their potential and interests (2919). These levels of intervention are: universal measures, corresponding to the responses that the school mobilises for all students, aiming at promoting participation and improved learning (e.g. the promotion of pro-social behaviour); selective measures, aiming at fulfilling the needs for learning supports not provided by universal measures (e.g. differentiated curricular pathways); and additional measures, aiming to respond to intense and persistent communication, interaction, cognitive or learning difficulties that require specialized resources of support to learning and inclusion.

This legislation also recognises the role of the Early Childhood Teacher within a multidisciplinary team to support inclusive education, as well as the right of this professional to support provided by the learning support centres, a support structure that aggregates human and material resources, knowledge, skills, and competencies of the school (Article 13).

In the context of the implementation of Decree-law 54/2018, a monitoring system was created, CPD processes were developed and a practical manual for professionals was produced by a team under the auspices of the Directorate-General of Education (2018). This manual intends to clarify aspects related to the implementation of the decree-law specially at a methodological level, including practical situations and materials to support the professionals' observation, self-reflection and self-assessment.

The recent OECD background country report on Portuguese inclusive education (Ministry of Education 2022) recognises the impressive progress that the country has made on this matter, but also identifies teachers' preparation for inclusive education as an area in which further improvements are needed, both at the level of pre-service and in-service education.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Professionalism of early childhood teachers working in baby rooms

Source: Tadeu, B., and A. Lopes 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: The study examines the professional identities of Early Childhood Teachers who develop their professional activity in baby rooms.

Methods: The methodology was qualitative and interpretative. Seven educators, seven assistants and seven parents participated in focus groups, one for each type of participant. These discussion groups intended to explore perceptions, perspectives and conceptions about the socio-educational role of baby rooms and professionals, were moderated by a researcher and were guided by a script focused on predefined themes. In the case of early childhood teachers, the themes were: (a) socio-professional and training trajectories; (b) perceptions of professionalism and valued aspects in practice; (c) the lived world of work and (d) conceptions of children and childhood.

Selected findings: Concerning the main influences on professional identities, two main categories were identified: socio-professional and training trajectory, and the experience of the world of work. Within the first category, results indicated that three educators attributed importance to the influence of primary socialisation, namely the knowledge acquired within the family con-

text and the choice of their training paths. One of the educators referred to the minimal attention of HEI institutions to training for work with infants and toddlers in comparison with the preparation for pre-school education. Concerning the second category, all participants identified the main distinguishing features of practice in baby rooms as individualised routines and respect for the individual interests, rhythms and needs of babies. Tensions and inequalities were addressed by all participating Early Childhood Teachers, namely a lack of recognition as teachers, the exclusion of their work from service record, and the lack of legislation to place professional educators in baby rooms. The majority of educators referred taking on mainly a supervisory role, following up the work of assistants/auxiliary staff working directly with babies. Also, they identified that the burden of technical management and the multiplicity of tasks, functions and duties created a negative effect at the level of their physical and psychological well-being, resulting in a certain withdrawal from practice. Results also show the commitment of all professionals to their work, including their efforts towards pedagogical intentionality.

Implications: The study reinforces the need for changes in the Portuguese legal framework in order to make the placement of early childhood educators in baby rooms mandatory. It also emphasises the need to pay attention to educators' physical and emotional well-being given its impact in children's well-being. Finally, it reinforces the need to address team work in baby rooms, actively involving assistants and educators.

Assessment of workplace-based learning in the ECEC professional Master

Source: Araújo, S. B., and A. P. Antunes 2021 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: To examine ECEC candidate teachers' pathways of professional learning during a practicum through the use of a reflection-based instrument, in two different phases: interim regulatory assessment and final assessment. The study presents a composite research question: what was the professional Master students' learning progression on core professional competences at the level of: (i) observation; (ii) planning; (iii) action and (iv) reflection?

Methods: Participants were 62 students attending a professional Master course in Pre-school Education at a Portuguese HEI. Data were collected through the use of the Assessment Grid on the Learning Processes in Supervised Pedagogical Practice (AGLP_SPP), a reflection-based instrument used in the interim regulatory assessment and the final assessment of students' professional learning. Its construction took into consideration the Portuguese specific profile of the professional performance of an early childhood educator (Decree-Law 241/2001, Annex No. 1), the guiding principles of Pedagogical Practice of the HEI, and selected theoretical and methodological underpinnings, namely ECEC curricular approaches. The AGLP_SPP was organised in four domains and 25 dimensions: (1) observation (5 dimensions); (2) planning (6 dimensions); (3) action (9 dimensions) and (4) reflection (5 dimensions). The assessment based in the AGLP_SPP aimed at a collaborative and co-participatory analysis of the professional learning processes, both retrospectively and prospectively, with the participation of the student in her/his own assessment being highly valued.

Selected findings: The study shows a positive evolution of the Master students on core professional competences in the domains of observation, planning, action and reflection. However, in the observation domain (observation of the child and group(s), recording practices, and self-observation and observation of others) students showed more difficulty in reaching excellency in their practices. Lower results in the dimension "partnerships with families and community" in the interim regulatory assessment indicated the need to intensify students' learning opportunities on the collaborative work with families and communities during the first phase of the practicum. Once the assessment of workplace-based learning is relevant for the quality evaluation of

pre-service education programmes, the results also indicate the perceived effectiveness of the education processes undertaken within the ECEC Master programme.

The study also reveals that students' participation in their own assessment contributes to their professional learning and to strengthen their perception of the trustworthiness and transparency of the assessment process.

Implications: Results of the study show implications for the IPE of prospective Early Childhood Teachers, calling attention for the need to involve the students in the assessment of their professional learning during and after the field-based practicum. This participation is not stipulated in the legal framework that regulates IPE in Portugal. Also, the formative nature of assessment and evaluation in ECEC contexts creates a challenge for HEI in order to put into place a repertoire of assessment instruments and procedures through which the students can experiment first-hand the values and practices that she/he will develop in the ECEC contexts.

The place of the pedagogical practicum in the post-Bologna initial professional education of ECEC teachers

Source: Figueira, S. 2017 (see *References* for full details)

Aims: This study aimed: (a) to understand how the pedagogical practicum was conceived and developed in four Portuguese higher education institutions; (b) to understand the conceptions of the HEI teachers regarding the pedagogical practicum in the IPE of Early Childhood Teachers; (c) to know and evaluate the component of pedagogical practice according to the students' perspectives.

Methods: This qualitative study was developed in four Portuguese HEI. The participants were teachers, students and coordinators from the Master course in Pre-school Education of each institution. Techniques of data collection included documentary analysis of core documents (e.g. regulation of the pedagogical practicum), questionnaires for students and teachers, and semi-structured interviews for the coordinators of the Master programmes. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis were conducted.

Selected findings: Results indicated that the participants recognised the importance and central place of pedagogical practice in IPE. Students considered that the time allocated to initiation into professional practice in the Bachelor's degree in Basic Education was *insufficient* or *very insufficient*; on the contrary, their assessment of the *practica* in the Master's degree in Pre-school Education was positive, affirming its relevance for learning to become an Early Childhood Teacher. Teachers and coordinators confirmed the central relevance of pedagogical practice and the necessary links between all the course subjects to this component of the Master programmes. Globally, results also show that the organisation of *practica* in an alternating model (between the ECEC centres and HEI) made possible a consistent relationship between 'theory' and 'practice' and encouraged students' reflexivity. Finally, the active role of the student was unanimously recognised, as well as the importance of developing research processes throughout the pedagogical practice.

Implications: The study draws considerations on the need to strengthen the links between the *practica* and the other curricular units of the ECEC study programmes. It also recognises the lack of studies and the fragile body of evidence existing in Portugal and the need to conduct more research on this topic.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

An overview of the previous sections of this report suggests in conclusion that early childhood education has not been a priority in Portuguese public policies over the last five years. One exception is the political decision to legally guarantee free places in public pre-schools for all children from the age of 3 (Legislative Order n. 6/2018, 12 April), as well as the gradual extension of free places for all children attending non-profit nursery provision and home-based ECEC (Law n. 2/2022, 3 January). Critical circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the difficulties faced by different structures and dynamics related to the ECEC workforce. The next step is to identify some trends, tensions and challenges that will be critical for the Portuguese ECEC workforce in the next years.

Towards an integrated ECEC system: As outlined in *chapter 1*, Portugal has an split-sector ECEC system, maintaining a division between the 0–2 sector and the pre-school sector in terms of governance. This core characteristic of the Portuguese system creates disparities between the two sectors, impacting more negatively on the working conditions and socio-professional status of the professionals working with infants and toddlers. In 2021, a civic movement led by the Association of Professionals of Early Childhood Education (APEI) delivered to the Assembly of the Republic (AR) a petition with over 14,000 signatures demanding that the education and care of children under 3 years be fully integrated into the Education Act as part of the education system. However, the discussion of this issue in the AR has not yet created changes in the political panorama. The creation of an integrated ECEC system under the governance of the Ministry of Education remains a priority challenge.

Increase public investment in the 0–2 sector: The problems identified in this sector in the last SEEPRO report persist, i.e. lack of a national pedagogical framework, weak pre-service and in-service education/training of professionals, poor working conditions. The lesser attention that this sector has been receiving is also visible in terms of the scarcity of information available on provision for infants and toddlers, preventing a more comprehensive characterisation of the workforce profiles. Improving the availability and accessibility of data on this sector is strongly recommended. On a positive note, it is worth mentioning that the political programme of the current government included prospective investment in this sector and that an inter-ministerial initiative is being launched, combining the efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, in order to produce pedagogical frameworks for working with infants and toddlers, aligned with the existing frameworks for pre-school education.

Improve IPE and CPD opportunities for ECEC professionals: As for IPE, continuous monitoring of HEI programmes needs to be carried out, in order for pre-service education/training to be consistently responding to the specificities of the professional profile of Early Childhood Teachers. In a time of relevant changes to the legal framework that regulates the professional qualifications for teaching in order to face the anticipated shortage of (early childhood) teachers, efforts should be made to avoid pervasive effects that could undermine HEI programmes quality and the overall quality of pedagogical practices. The attraction of students to the profession is also dependent on the working conditions, public image and prestige of these professionals. Improving these central aspects constitutes a relevant challenge for all stakeholders. As for CPD

opportunities, it is important to underline the much-needed inclusion of Early Childhood Teachers in large-scale national CPD programmes, something that has been somewhat neglected in recent years. Incremental CPD opportunities for the 0–2 sector, for assistants and leaders should also constitute a priority endeavour. Moreover, investing in research initiatives on these issues, as well as on other ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues, remains a challenge in the Portuguese context.

As we extensively know, ECEC can make relevant contributions towards more equitable, inclusive and sustainable societies. In Portugal, as in other countries, this cannot be met without creating the conditions for the rhetorical intentions to be converted into decisions and actions that really make a positive differential in the lives of young children, professionals and families.

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