

UKRAINE

Key contextual data

Compiled by

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Contents

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)3
Historical milestones in ECEC in Ukraine3
ECEC system type and auspices4
General objectives and legislative framework5
ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance5
Main types of provision6
Provider structures7
Participation rates in regulated provision7
Financing and costs for parents8
Staff to child ratios and group size9
Curricular framework.....10
Digital education10
Monitoring – evaluation10
Inclusion agenda11
 Children with special educational needs and disabilities11
 Children with a migration background – children from Roma communities ...12
Parental leave arrangements.....13
Current challenges for the ECEC system in Ukraine (**Natalia Sofii**).....13

Demographic data15
Total population.....15
Total fertility rate15
Children under age 6.....15
Single households with children under age 6.....16
Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age.....16
Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion17

References.....18



Preliminary remarks

As of 24.02.2022, a state of war prevails in Ukraine. This has and will have a strong impact on all areas of society, including the system of early childhood education and care.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of refugees who have fled Ukraine for other European countries because of the war amounted to 5,872,700 in August 2023, and to 358,300 for countries beyond Europe (ODP 2023). In addition, there are more than 5 million internally displaced persons (as of May 2023, UNHCR 2023).

Statistical data used in this report are those that were currently accessible. However, as these possibly do not accurately reflect current conditions, they must be interpreted with caution.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the terms used in this report for the main forms of centre-based ECEC provision are **ECEC centre** (*yasla-sadok*, 0–5/6) and **kindergarten** (*dytyachyy sadok* or *shkola-dytyachyy sadok*, 3–5/6)¹. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

Historical milestones in ECEC in Ukraine

1917	The Central Council of Ukraine forms the General Secretariat of Education, renamed the Ministry of Education on January 9th, 1918, including a Department for Out-of-school Education and Preschool Education.
1918	The Department of Out-of-school Education and Preschool Education raises the issue of universal compulsory preschool education of children. "Regulations of Kindergartens" noted that "all children from the age of 3 years old shall attend kindergartens" – these should be "free everywhere and be established at the expense of the rural and urban self-governments."
1920	The basis of the Ukrainian System of National Education is the social care and education of children aged 3 to 15. Orphanages become the main child care establishment: kindergartens, schools, and out-of-school institutions have to merge into a "single social organism", i.e. an orphanage, even though not all children were parentless.
1930	Establishing local educational authorities which provided management of educational institutions
1955	3,713 regular ECEC settings are registered in Ukraine, providing for 215,700 children.
1959	Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Ukraine "On measures for the Further Development of Childcare Facilities, Improving Education and Health Care for Children of Preschool Age." This and other documents plan the expansion of a network of ECEC settings and the improvement of their financial security.
1960s	During the 1960s a stable growth takes place in the number of ECEC institutions and the number of children enrolled. By the end of 1970, the total number of kindergartens in Ukraine was 16,500.

¹ **Editors' note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for 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. The relevant formats for Ukraine are **0–5/6** years and **3–5/6** years.

1980s	Expansion continues during the 1980s and also qualitative measures are taken. In 1987, there are 23,100 kindergartens in the Ukraine catering for 2.7 million children, representing 60.3% of the total population of preschool-age children (69.3% in urban areas, 40.5% in rural areas).
1992	24,500 kindergartens operate in Ukraine – the highest figure so far. The number of children covered by the system of public ECEC reaches 2.2 million, representing 47% of the total population of preschool-age children. 268,000 teaching staff are involved, 97% of whom are fully qualified.
1990s	During the 1990s considerable progress is made in the conceptual and legal framework of early childhood education and care.
1993	Current views on ECEC are set out in the Concept for Preschool Education in Ukraine – a system of objectives and approaches based on humanism, democracy, national culture and humanistic values.
1991-1993	For the first time in the history of Ukraine, alternative preschool education programmes were started: 'Ukrainian Preschoolers' (1991); 'The child in the preschool years' (1991); 'Baby' (1992); 'Child' (1993).
1994	"The First Steps" Project (Step by Step Project since 1996) was launched by the International Renaissance Foundation with the support of the <i>Open Society Foundation and Children Resource International</i> (USA) – implementer: Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation
1996	Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of 3 November 1993 on the State National Programme 'Education' ('Ukraine of the XXI Century')
1998	Standards of education at all levels of educational institutions are set out, for ECEC institutions in the "Basic components of early childhood education in Ukraine".
2001	The legislation "On Early Education" launches a new stage of development of early childhood education and care in Ukraine.
2001	Legislation "On Child Protection" sets out the system of state and public measures to ensure a full life, comprehensive education and development of children as well as the protection of their rights.
2003	The Early Childhood Pedagogy team at the Dragomanov National Pedagogical University jointly with the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation develops the programme 'Step by Step' in Ukraine based on the Step by Step project.
2008	The policy paper "On additional measures to improve the quality of education in Ukraine" provides the theoretical basis for early childhood education, defining functions, policies, principles, goals and objectives for modernisation up to 2016.
2013	National Strategy of Education Development till 2021 and Plan of its realisation (reopening ECEC institutions, which had been previously closed; plan to cover 100% of children 5–6 year-olds through diversification of ECEC forms)
2017	Amendments to the Education Act are passed.
2021	– Amendment to the Early Education Act – Revision of the early childhood curriculum ("Basic components of early education")
2022	As of 24.02.2022, a state of war prevails in Ukraine, which has and will have a strong impact on all areas, including the system of early childhood education and care.

Sources: Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 1993; Ulyukayeva 2004; Ministry of Education 2017; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021.

ECEC system type and auspices

Early childhood education is an independent but integral part of the education system in Ukraine (Early Education Act 2001, as amended in 2020). At the national level, the Ministry of Education

and Science (*Ministerstvo osvity i nauky Ukrayiny*) is responsible for regular ECEC settings for young children. These are both multi-age facilities (*yasla-sadky*) for children from 2 months to school enrolment at 7 years of age and separate nurseries (*dytyachi yasla*) and kindergartens (*dytyachi sadky*) as well as school kindergartens (*shkola-dytyachyy sadok*) for 3 to 7 year-olds, which are attached to primary/secondary schools.

The Ministry of Health (*Ministerstvo okhorony zdorov'ya Ukrayiny*) is responsible for home-based ECEC settings and also for children's health centres (*budynok dytyny*) for orphans or children with disabilities up to the age of 4.

While the ministries are primarily responsible for legal regulations and the development of standards, the municipalities are responsible for the management and operation of the facilities (Putcha et al. 2018).

General objectives and legislative framework

Within the framework of the *National Economic Strategy 2030*, an education and social reform is underway, the aim of which is, among other things, to promote the quality of early childhood education in Ukraine as well as its accessibility (Government Portal 2021). In particular, this accessibility is to be made as close to home as possible (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021).

Every child, regardless of origin, ethnicity, religion, language or other characteristics, should have free access to early education. Fundamental principles of the pedagogical processes are democratisation and child-centredness as well as equity. Special emphasis is also placed on cooperation with families (Ministry of Education 2019).

Another important aspect is the creation of a safe learning environment in which children with special educational needs and children from areas where there are armed conflicts can feel comfortable (Liapunova 2020).

The general operation of ECEC provision is regulated by the Constitution of Ukraine (1996, as amended in 2019) and by the Education Act of Ukraine (1991, as amended in 2017; Ministry of Education 2017). This states, among other things, that the right to education applies to all persons, disadvantaged groups as well as minority ethnic groups (Right to Education Initiative 2020).

The Early Education Act (*Zakon pro doshkil'nu osvitu*) (2001, as amended in 2021), the Child Protection Act (2001, as amended in 2016) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are the most important legal frameworks for ECEC. The amendments to the Early Education Act (Amendment No. 4604) focus mainly on ensuring accessibility to early childhood education for *all* children (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2021).

According to a decision of the Cabinet of Ministers ("On Approval of Licensing Conditions of Educational Activities of Educational Institutions" 2015), the Ministry of Education issues licences for regular ECEC settings. Children's health centres for children under 3 years of age are regulated by the "Standard Regulations of Children's Centres".

ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

All children from the age of 2 months until they start school have a legal right to a place in a centre-based or home-based ECEC setting (CIS Legislation 2021). For 5–6/7 year-olds, early education is compulsory (Education Act, Art. 11, Ministry of Education and Science 2017), otherwise attendance is voluntary.

Primary schooling usually starts at the age of 6, for children with special needs also later (Ministry of Education and Science 2017).

Main types of provision

According to the Early Education Act (2001, with amendments 2020, Art. 12), there are different kinds of ECEC provision.

For the SEEPRO-3 study we have categorised them into three main types: (1) regular ECEC settings; (2) settings with combined regular and remedial or special education tasks; and (3) residential provision (children's homes for orphans; sanitoriums for children with long-term illnesses).

(1) Regular ECEC settings

These include:

Multi-age ECEC centres (*yasla-sadok* – lit. "nursery-kindergarten") for children between 2 months and 6/7 years are the most common form of provision.

Nurseries (*yasla*) for children from 1 to 3 years are usually part of a multi-age centre or a kindergarten. There are very few self-contained settings.

Kindergartens (*dytyachyy sadok*) for 3–6/7 year-olds are either separate facilities or attached to a primary or secondary school (*shkola-dytyachyy sadok* – lit. "school-kindergarten").

All regular ECEC settings are open from 7:30 to 17:00 (state and municipal facilities) or from 8:00 to 20:00 (private facilities).

(2) Settings with combined regular and remedial or special education tasks

Combined early childhood centres (*yasla-sadok kombinovanoho typu*) and **child development centres** (*tseñtr rozvytky dytyny*) offer both regular and integrative groups for children between 2 months and 6/7 years as well as groups with remedial, special and rehabilitative provision. The pedagogical staff in these facilities work closely with speech therapists, psychologists, music teachers, sports educators and other types of specialist.

Children's health centres (*budynok dytyny*) are ECEC centres for under 3 year-olds (or under 4 year-olds with disabilities), offering medical services for orphans, long-term sick and severely disabled children (Puchta et al. 2018, 8).

Special needs centres provide for children between 2 and 7 years of age with various disabilities. They are only found in the larger cities (Puchta et al. 2018, 8).

(3) Residential provision

Children's homes are full-time residential settings, either for very young orphans or for children aged 3 and older. For these children, there are also **Family groups** (2 months–6/7 years) for them to attend until they start school. These are assigned to the Ministry of Social Policy.

Sanitoriums provide for children who need long-term medical care and rehabilitation measures.

During the summer season – June, July and August – all ECEC settings offer summer camps where children can either stay overnight or spend just one day there. These camps offer various educational and health care activities. They are not compulsory and can be taken up voluntarily depending on the parents' wishes.

In 2022, there were 13,900 ECEC institutions in Ukraine, with 1,047,000 places and 934,000 enrolled children (SSSU 2023a).²

916,144 children attended public institutions and 26,658 private or corporative institutions.

² All data reported below exclude the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and temporarily occupied territories in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.



Provider structures

According to the Early Education Act and the Education Act of Ukraine, the providers of ECEC settings are the state, municipalities and private individuals; almost all are subsidised by the state or municipalities (Ministry of Education and Science 2017).

The private sector is relatively small (in 2015 there were only 177 privately run ECEC facilities); however, parents increasingly tend to enrol their children in private institutions because they are more flexible, use more modern methods and the group size is usually smaller (Putcha et al. 2018). Even in 2022, only 3.6% of the ECEC settings were private (SSSU 2023b).

As of 2016, the Ministry of Health regulations for establishing private provision have been relaxed, making it easier to set up a new private facility. Until then, for example, one and a half times more square metres had to be available per child than in the average international comparison, or each facility was obliged to maintain its own kitchen (OECD 2017). In addition, since 2015, private institutions have been legally exempt from taxation (Law "On Amendments to the Tax Code of Ukraine in Creating Favourable Conditions for the Provision of Educational Services of Early Childhood Education Institutions and Secondary Schools in Private Ownership"). Therefore, there is hope that these measures will increase the number of official registrations – especially in home-based settings.

At the end of 2022, 13,376 public (state and municipal) ECEC institutions provided 1,020,425 places and 499 private or corporative institutions 26,658 places (SSSU 2023b).

Participation rates in regulated provision

Because of the war, many parents (mostly mothers) had to leave the country with their children in the spring of 2022. The data reported here are those that were last accessible.

In 2020, according to national statistics, 1,150,500 children were enrolled in 15,335 ECEC centres with a total of 1,153,000 places. The overall enrolment rate was 63% (SSSU 2021a, 108f). Eurostat data (2023d) report that in 2021, 152,501 children attended ISCED 01 settings and 998,044 were enrolled in ISCED 02 settings.

Between 1990 and 2005, ECEC provision decreased significantly, not least because of a lack of funding, but also because demand was rather low due to high unemployment. Whereas there were 24,500 settings still open in 1990, by 2004, there were only 14,900. From 2010 onwards, the number began to slowly increase again (Putcha et al. 2018). However, according to national statistics, there were also only 13,900 facilities in 2022 (SSSU 2023a).

Enrolment rates and also the number of available places vary greatly from region to region. Across the country, there is a lack of places in most areas – which was and still is one of the reasons for corruption in the education sector. To address this problem, the so-called "electronic queue" was introduced to make the registration of children fairer and more transparent (Ministry of Education 2019). So far, however, this has only been partially successful, as it is up to the municipalities to decide whether or not to use the electronic system of registration (Putcha et al. 2018). Beyond this, technical and security shortcomings in the electronic waiting loop create opportunities to bypass it or to obtain a place through irregular means. In several cities, these 'e-queues' have therefore already been abolished. Since a place in an ECEC setting can also eventually lead to the desired place in primary and secondary school, many parents register their children at birth. Donations are also used to improve the chances of getting a place (OECD 2017). By easing the hurdles for the establishment of new ECEC facilities, 74,675 additional places in preschool facilities could be created from 2017 to mid-2020 (Government Portal 2021).



Especially in rural areas, the low attendance rates are often due to the fact that the facilities are too far away from the homes and parents cannot bring the children there – especially because in rural areas often only short programmes are offered for a few hours a day. An effective strategy to increase attendance rates is still missing (Liapunova 2020).

National data show a drop in the number of ECEC settings between 2010 and 2015, with the subsequent increase by 2020 not yet reaching 2010 levels. The number of children enrolled, on the other hand, increased between 2010 and 2015, only to fall slightly below 2010 levels by 2021 – at the same time, attendance rates rose steadily from 53% to 60% between 2010 and 2021, and dropped again to 53.4% in 2022 (see *Table 1*). However, regional differences are significant: in 2020, the enrolment rate in rural areas was only 42%, while in urban areas it was 75% (SSSU 2021a, 108).

Table 1

Ukraine: Number of ECEC settings, enrolled children (0–6 years) and participation rates from 2010 to 2022

Year	Total number of ECEC settings	Total number of children enrolled	Participation rates across all types of ECEC provision, in %
2010	15,600	1,273,000	53
2015	14,813	1,291,200	55
2021	15,000	1,111,000	60
2022	13,900	934,000	53.4

Source: SSSU 2023a

Table 2

Ukraine: Enrolment rates by age, 2022

Age group	Enrolment rate, in %
0–2 years	12.3
3–4 years	77.2
5 years	65.6
3–5 years	73.0
6 years	7.8
3–6 years	55.2
Total 0 to 6 year-olds	39.4

Source: SSSU 2023b

Financing and costs for parents

In 2019, 5.4% of the gross domestic product was spent on education in Ukraine (The World Bank 2022). It is unclear what share early childhood education has here.

Since 2017, ECEC has been financed from the local budgets. In 2019, consolidated budget expenditure on education was 6% of GDP and 17.4% of the national budget, 15.1% of this being spent on ECEC (Institute of Educational Analytics 2021, 66f).

Starting from 2019, the educational subvention from the central budget to local budgets was introduced to cover additional needs of children with SEN in the inclusive groups.

Ukraine has been going through a decentralisation phase in recent years which entails the merging of regions into territorial communities (*terytorial'na hromada*), with all the necessary adjustments. For ECEC settings, this means that a previously centralised state financing system is changing to decentralised budgeting. As a result of this process of decentralisation of financial



resources, the municipalities have been responsible since 2015 for the financing of ECEC facilities. Attendance at a public setting is free of charge except for meals (Putcha et al 2018). Meals are free for orphans, for children in special needs institutions and for children from families with less than the minimum income set by the government. Church-affiliated early education institutions are not funded through the state or municipal budget. Private (commercial) facilities are self-sustaining, i.e. the costs are borne by the parents and the provider.

Private ECEC provision is very expensive: in 2017, a place in a private setting could cost up to UAH 12,000 (€392) per month, which is about twice the average household income (OECD 2017). The previously mentioned differences between urban and rural areas relate not only to the resources allocated to a facility, but also the budgets allocated per child (Peeters 2019).

Since 2015, municipalities can receive financial state support if their local budget is not sufficient. Such education subsidies are intended mainly for staff and operating costs. The institutions are also allowed to accept donations, which usually come from parents (OECD 2017).

In public ECEC settings parents have to pay for meals, the amount of which is set annually by the local authorities and can vary from city to city: In Kyiv, in 2023, it amounted to between 45–58.8 UAH (1.1–1.46€) per day, depending on the age of the child (Chervonohrad.City 2023) whereas in Kremenchuk in 2022 it amounted to 21–29 UAH (0.52–0.72€) per day (Telegraf 2021). Low income parents, parents with children with special educational needs and parents participating in the war are exempt from payment.

Denominational ECEC settings are not financed through the state budget. Private (commercial) facilities are self-sustaining, i.e. the costs are borne by the parents and the provider. Municipal facilities have so far been partly funded by the local municipal or district budgets.

Staff to child ratios and group size

In most cases there are two professionals in a group, one of whom is responsible for five to ten children. In inclusive groups there may be up to 15 children, including one to three children with special educational needs. In private settings, the provider decides on the group size, which is usually smaller than in public facilities (Putcha et al. 2018). As a rule, the children are organised into four age-groups: 0 to 2 year-olds, 3 to 4 year-olds, 4 to 5 year-olds and 5 to 7 year-olds.

In the most frequently used type of provision (multi-age ECEC centres), the staff to child ratio is 1 : 12, with 24 children in a group (Peeters 2019). *Table 3* shows the estimated staff to child ratio in different kinds of settings in 2015 (no newer data available).

Table 3

Ukraine: Staff to child ratios, 2015

Setting type	Number of staff	Number of children	Staff to child ratio*
Self-contained nursery	15	36	1 : 2.5
Multi-age ECEC centre, 0–6/7 years	236,936	996,823	1 : 4.2
Kindergarten, 3–6/7 years	44,431	177,067	1 : 4.0
Other kinds of ECEC setting (e.g. 'School- Kindergarten')	27,531	117,281	1 : 4.3
Total	308,913	1,291,207	

Source: SSSU 2015, *own calculations

Curricular framework

The "The Basic Component of Early Education" (2012, as amended in 2020 and issued in January 2021) was prepared by experts from research and practice and, as a framework curriculum, represents the state (mandatory) standard for early education in Ukraine. It primarily describes the competences children should have acquired at the end of pre-primary education. Continuity between early education and school is a key feature. The competency-based document emphasises humanistic pedagogy, civic education and the shared educational responsibility of the state, municipalities, families and experts from the education and care sector. Learning areas include: personal development; sensory-cognitive experiences; nature; play; society; language development; the arts (Department of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports of Rakhiv City Council 2021).

Inclusive education is also a focus of the curriculum. A study sponsored by UNICEF found that many aspects of the curriculum are promising, but that more attention needs to be paid to strengthening cooperation between parents, professionals and the local community. The study also found that although there is a tendency towards a child-centred approach, teacher-initiated practices are predominant and room for free play is often neglected. Moreover, professionals may feel overwhelmed by the inclusive approach and exercise too little autonomy (Peeters 2019).

Digital education

The introduction of information technologies into early childhood settings is a very recent pedagogical phenomenon. At the same time, multimedia tools for ECEC settings are increasingly being produced for the early education sector (computer games, electronic lexicons, videos, etc.). In the revision of the "Basic Component of Early Education" of 2021, "the basics of computer literacy" was included as a new learning area with compulsory and optional competence specifications that addresses the acquisition of digital knowledge and skills by younger children. These include children's ability to use digital technologies to meet their individual needs, solve educational tasks and develop a positive attitude towards ICT and digitalisation.

The use of digital media in early education is mainly seen as an opportunity to create creative learning conditions, while ensuring that children also acquire awareness of possible harmful experiences. However, lack of funds and of motivation on the part of ECEC centre leaders to use digital media with the children mean that acquiring digital devices is often associated with difficulties. Moreover, the use of computers by preschool children, for example, is not provided for in the standards for "equipping educational institutions with computer technology" (Nosenko et al. 2016).

Monitoring – evaluation

According to the UNICEF study, there is no coherent system of monitoring and evaluation in the ECEC system in Ukraine. Moreover, a lack of trained staff and relevant evaluation instruments are common hindrances. Private, non-accredited ECEC institutions are not evaluated at all (Peeters 2019).

Child-related assessment

Most municipalities use an instrument developed by researchers to measure children's developmental progress. However, it is often not implemented due to time constraints; the results

are sometimes shared with parents, but the parents are rarely involved themselves (Peeters 2019).

Centre-based internal self-evaluation

There is no tradition of internal, centre-based evaluation in Ukraine. The UNICEF study suggests that ECEC staff need professional support here (Peeters 2019).

External evaluation

A quality management system for education is currently being developed in Ukraine to meet the requirements of ISO standards. The new concept for the further development of early education is to be part of the quality assurance. In addition to the Ministry of Education, representatives of UNICEF and the Ukrainian Step-by-Step organisation are also working on this project. The main referential base is the European Quality Framework (EQF). The pilot project launched in 2019 by the Institute for Educational Analysis to systematise statistics on early education is intended to improve monitoring. This was also linked to a study initiated by the Ministry of Education on the quality of early childhood education institutions, which examined education programmes, staff, number of children, materials and finances (Liapunova 2020).

In some municipalities, expert advisers or counsellors visit ECEC settings on a regular basis. UNICEF is working with the ministry to introduce the revised Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3). However, data storage systems are often lacking (Peeters 2019). Professional counselling services carry out quality audits mainly with regard to pedagogical aspects. The professional supervision of the spatial environment and equipment in ECEC centres poses a number of difficulties, since many things do not directly fall under the responsibility of the settings themselves (e.g. changes regarding safety aspects, fire safety) and therefore there is no budget for improvements. External evaluation is not yet as important as it should be in quality assurance: there is a lack of specialised experts to carry out evaluations, and often a lack of funding in rural areas (Liapunova 2020).

The external evaluation of educational quality and educational standards is provided by the State Agency of Quality of Education (SAQE), which was established in 2017 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The Ministry provides its coordination. One of the main activities of SAQE is conducting institutional audits (State Service of Education Quality of Ukraine 2023).

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In Ukraine, inclusive education has been a priority since the 1990s. However, as the recent UNICEF study found, the definition of inclusive education still tends to focus on children with disabilities rather than, for example, children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, ECEC professionals are often not well-trained in this approach (Peeters 2019). The implications associated with the term were and still are very different: In a first phase (until about 2001), “inclusion” was primarily understood to mean medical models of ‘disabilities’ and was based on a deficit concept. In a second phase (until 2010), attempts were then made to integrate children with special educational needs into a system that remained largely unchanged. It was only in the subsequent third phase (from 2010) that attempts were made to implement the principle of inclusion based on the principles of non-discrimination, consideration of diversity and the inclusion of all participants in educational processes (Martynchuk et al. 2021).

Overall, the main attempt has been to broaden the definition of inclusion. In the 2017 Education Act, children to be supported through inclusive education/care are all children who need additional support, either permanent or temporary – this includes children from disadvantaged groups and children from ethnic minorities. In 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a new regulation on inclusive resource centres (*Inklyusyvno-resursnyi tsentr*), which replaces the abolished system of psychological-medical-educational consultations. The regulation specifically requires local authorities to establish such resource centres for every 7,000 children in rural areas and 12,000 children in urban areas. Their tasks include assessing the special needs of children and developing recommendations as well as providing psycho-educational services and methodological support for professionals. In addition, early intervention services for children from birth to 5 years of age have also been established in ten regions of Ukraine in recent years with the help of donor organisations. In order to support the transition of children from these services to development programmes, the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation conducted a project in which various institutions participated.

In the ECEC settings themselves, as stated in the “Instruction on the organisation of inclusion groups in kindergartens” (*Instruktsiya z organizatsii inklyuzyvnyh grup u doshkil'nyh zakladah osvity*), parents or other persons may act as volunteer childcare workers. These accompany children with special educational needs throughout the day and provide support when needed. The only requirement for the job is a medical doctor's approval (Putcha et al. 2018).

With effect from 29 July 2015, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers issued Decision 530 "On Amendments to the Regulations for Early Childhood Education Institutions", in which it endorsed the establishment of special needs and inclusion groups as part of ECEC centres for children with special needs.

Based on the conclusions of the Psychological, Medical and Pedagogical Commission (PMPC), inclusive early education centres can be opened at the request of parents in cooperation with the centre director. The latter then decides to establish an inclusive education group that takes into account the specific educational needs of the children.

During the past two years (as of 2020), the number of children with special educational needs attending inclusive early education groups doubled to 4,681 children (Government Portal 2021). Initiatives to integrate children from families who have been displaced within Ukraine into ECEC settings have been very successful. Special training is available for professionals working with these children (Liapunova 2020).

Children with a migration background – Children from Roma communities

According to the law, linguistic minorities in Ukraine are divided into three categories: indigenous peoples, such as the Crimean Tatars, who speak indigenous languages; minorities who speak a European Union language; and minorities who speak a non-EU language, such as Russian. With the amendment to the Education Act 2017 coming into force, minority languages are only spoken as second languages in early childhood education institutions, which actually contradicts the Education Act as a whole and also the statement in the Constitution that every person has the right to be educated in their family language (Right to Education Initiative 2020).

In 2020, Ukrainian was spoken in almost all ECEC institutions (97.9%), and Russian in only 1.2% (SSSU 2021a, 111).

Statistics on migrants are not consistently collected in Ukraine – and where they are compiled, they may contradict one other depending on the source and definition of ‘migration status’ (VoxUkraine 2018). According to data from the International Organisation for Migration in Ukraine, only 293,600 foreigners (less than 0.7% of the population) lived permanently in Ukraine (and had an official entry permit) in 2020. In addition, there were 151,300 people who lived in



Ukraine only temporarily (students, seasonal workers) (IOM Development Fund 2021, 18). In 2021, 32,284 children under the age of 4 were of non-Ukrainian origin (SSSU 2022a). According to Eurostat data for the same year, this was 2.5% of the corresponding age group (Eurostat 2023a).

As in many countries, it is difficult to obtain accurate figures on the Roma community in Ukraine. While the 2001 Ukrainian Census reported 47,600 individuals and 20,000 children, estimates from Roma advocacy groups estimate the figure at least at 80,000 children, who generally have little access to early childhood education opportunities (UNICEF 2021, 37).

The implementation of the Roma Strategy up to 2020 did increase ECEC enrolments among by Roma children – which was mainly attributed to projects implemented by NGOs such as "Blago" or "Step-by-Step" (UN Women Ukraine 2019, 36, 59). Starting in 2021, a new Roma strategy is to contribute to the integration of Roma into society. This strategy is to be implemented by 2026; interim results were to be assessed in 2022 and 2024 (Council of Europe 2021) but will now take longer because of the war.

Parental leave arrangements

Fully paid **Maternity leave** covers 70 calendar days before the birth and 56 calendar days afterwards (Replicon 2022).

Parental leave can be taken up to the child's third birthday not only by the mother or father of the child, but also by grandparents or other relatives who care for the child while the parents work. As a rule, Parental leave is unpaid, unless the employer offers its own payments.

In 2021, the **Childcare Leave** Act 1401-IX came into force, which also grants up to 14 paid calendar days of **Paternity leave** to fathers or other relatives caring for the child. As a rule, however, employers do not pay more than the mandatory minimum amounts. If there are two or more children under 15 in the family, the parents are entitled to an additional ten days. Both parents can benefit from part-time arrangements at work during Parental leave (Willis Towers Watson 2021).

At the end of maternity leave, women employees are granted childcare leave until the child reaches 3 years of age. This leave may also be used either fully or partially by the child's father, grandmother, grandfather, or other relatives who are actually caring for the child (Replicon 2022).

The family receives financial support amounting to 41,280 UAH (€1,021)³. This is paid in two stages: 10,320 UAH (€255) just after the delivery followed by 860 UAH (€21) every month over three years. The maximum amount of the monthly child support for single mothers in 2023 was UAH 2,272 (€56). This monthly allowance has not been increased since 2014 and is currently just over half of the official subsistence level (UNICEF 2021, 81).

In addition, each family either receives a so-called "Baby Package" which includes necessary items for a newborn or a lump sum of 6,300 UAH (€155) (Fakty 2023).

Current challenges for the ECEC system in Ukraine

Country expert assessment by Nataliia Sofii

The most urgent challenges for the ECEC system in Ukraine are those caused by the Russian Federation, which started a full-scale war in February 2022.

³ Conversion rate August 2023



As a result, 70 ECEC institutions have been destroyed totally, and 1,031 have been damaged (Trade Union of Pedagogical Workers of Ukraine 2023).

Additional financial investments are required for repairing these and building new ones.

At the same time, more information is required about possible alternative forms of accessing ECEC through exchanges with other countries. Implementing relevant forms in Ukraine will need to be accompanied by the development of appropriate legal and methodological documents.

Another challenge is to provide psychosocial support to young children and families who have had a stressful experience. Some children have lost their parents, had the experience of bombing and getting injured, or have had to move to another regions of Ukraine or to other countries.

They urgently need the support of their parents who are often suffering stress themselves or who do not fully understand their important role in this process. Therefore, more information for parents with examples of activities they can do with their children at home, in shelters or other places is essential.

On April 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the Concept of Safety of Educational Institutions, where such important issues as psychosocial support, knowledge about how to behave in dangerous situations and in the face of cyber threats were included. The Concept can be an effective tool to make all educational institutions, including ECEC Centres, more safe for all participants of educational process.

The lack of sufficient ECEC institutions is one of the problems which breaks one of the main rights of a child – their right to quality care and education, especially for children from vulnerable groups, i.e. those: with special educational needs; from Roma communities and other national minorities; living in internally displaced families; from rural areas; under three years of age.

According to the State Agency of Statistics of Ukraine only 39.4% of young children were enrolled in ECEC institutions in 2022 (SSSU 2023a).

Another challenge concerns the support of private ECEC centres – at the end of 2022, private ECEC centres comprised only 3.6% of the total number of settings (SSSU 2023a).

Yet another challenge relates to the quality of early childhood education. Here the work of the State Agency of Quality Education is invaluable, in particular by providing institutional audits and methodological materials to ECEC institutions. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-3) study was conducted by Ukrainian Institute of Education Development with the support of the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation. Methodological recommendations based on the results of the study can be a good resource for providing higher quality of ECEC (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine 2023).

After the main Law of Ukraine "On Education" was adopted in 2017, many relevant changes were made to Ukrainian legislation, also in the ECEC field. However, the new Law on Preschool Education has not yet been adopted.

There is a need for the further development of legal and methodological recommendations to support the implementation of key documents such as the Concept of Early Childhood Education, Professional standards for ECEC teachers and principals, and ECEC educational standards (Basic Component of Early Childhood Education).

Demographic data

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

Total population

In 2022, the total population in Ukraine was 40,997,698, showing a steady decline over the past 20 years (2000: 49,114,950; 2010: 45,782,592; 2020: 41,732,779) (Eurostat 2023a).

Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27 (from 2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), the lowest in Malta (1,13). At 1.16, Ukraine had the second lowest total fertility rate (Eurostat 2023b)⁴.

Children under age 6

Table 4

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

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	270,884
1 year-olds	292,596
2 year-olds	307,472
3 year-olds	334,231
4 year-olds	361,593
5 year-olds	394,094
Total 0 to under 6 year-olds	1,960,870

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.1% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, 2.7% were children between 3 and 6 years of age. While these shares were mostly slightly higher than the respective EU averages up to 2015, they were significantly lower in 2022, especially for children under 3 years of age.

Table 5

Ukraine: Share of children under 6 years of age in the total population from 2000 until 2022*

Year	Comparison Ukraine/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2010	Ukraine	3.2	2.8	6.1
	∅ EU25 ⁵	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Ukraine	3.3	3.3	6.6
	∅ EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2

⁴ Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>).

⁵ The data for 2010 (EU25) include the EU25-Länder at that time (AT, BE, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK). The 2015 data (EU28) include the EU25 countries and additional BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.

Year	Comparison Ukraine/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2022	Ukraine	2.1	2.7	4.8
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, * Own calculations; differences in totals are due to roundings

Single households with children under age 6

In 2021, 6.1% of all households had children under 3 years of age, and 14.9% had children under 7 years old (SSSU 2021b, 11). Only one adult lived in 7.6% of households with children (without age specification). In a quarter (25.5%) of these lone-parent households there are children under 7 years of age (SSSU 2021b, 16f). The latter households in particular often struggle with a lack of financial resources, which do not allow them, for example, to buy necessary medication (34.2%) or pay for doctor's visits (31.5%) (UNICEF 2021, 58).

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In 2021, 69.9% of men and 60.7% of women of working age (15–70 years) were in employment (SSSU 2022b). The unemployment rate in 2020 was 9.1% for women and 9.8% for men (SSSU 2021a, 55).

There are no available data on the employment status of mothers and fathers with under 6 year-old children in Ukraine. However, the following two tables present information on the situation among EU countries (*Table 6a*) and among non-EU countries other than Ukraine (*Table 6b*) participating in the SEEPRO-3 study.

Table 6a

Employment rates of parents with children under 6 among EU countries, 2010 und 2022

	2010	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries ⁶	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers, in %	Fathers, in %
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries ⁷	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023e

Table 6b

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

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)

⁶ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

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

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023) with dependent children with children under 2 years with children 3–4 years	75.6 72.4 70.7	92.1 93.1 95.0	++72.3 ++72.1 (2023)	++79.2 ++79.4 (2023)

*Eurostat 2023e, 2023f

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

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Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion

In Ukraine, three criteria are used to define poverty: (1) a person's total expenditure is below 75% of the total monthly per capita expenditure (median); (2) a person's per capita equivalent income is below 60% of the median according to the EU scale; and (3) the EU deprivation criterion, according to which a household has four of new deprivation characteristics. Child poverty is defined on the basis of the Living Conditions Survey.

In 2019, the relative poverty rate in a household with one child was 23.7%, with two children 37.7% and with three children 59.7%. Younger children in particular are more clearly affected by poverty: The relative poverty rate of children under 3 years old was 52.6%, that of 3 to 6 year-olds 46%. In addition, children in rural areas are more often affected by poverty than children in cities and more often when parents are not in employment (UNICEF 2021, 20ff). Overall, one third of households with children are in a situation of material deprivation, 19% in severe material deprivation – this situation is particularly aggravated among single parents (52.2% vs. 31.8%) (ibid, p. 28f).

Overall, the proportion of people living in poverty and receiving social assistance was 63% in 2015, rising to 70.9% in 2018 – falling to 57.4% in 2019 (ibid, p. 15).

For 2021, the overall share of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion was reported at 23.4% (Eurostat 2023c).

For the period from 2016 to 2020, the National Poverty Reduction Strategy was approved, which was supposed to alleviate the situation through increased employment opportunities or better access to social services, among other things. However, improvements could only be seen at a very low level, if at all. Since the strategy did not consider children according to age-groups, no statements can be made about a possible improvement in child poverty (UNICEF 2021, 73ff). For some years now, the inequalities between rich and poor families with children (data without age

specification) have been worsening: in 2019, rich families spent 5.1 times as much as poor ones (UNICEF 2021, 48).

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