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seepro3
★★★★★
Systems of early childhood education
and professionalisation in Europe

Cross-national perspectives on ECEC leaders and leadership support structures

Selected findings from the SEEPRO-3 study

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Before we start... two caveats

Questions on the leadership of ECEC settings made up only **one minor part** of our detailed SEEPRO research specification and we did not **measure** leadership effectiveness in terms of quality improvement and staff retention.

What is presented will inevitably be selective and not exhaustive. The goal is to **systematise** reported aspects of centre leadership in a cross-national perspective and highlight some country examples.



- 1** Brief history and design of the SEEPRO studies
- 2** Leadership contexts at the ECEC system level
- 3** ECEC Centre Leaders:
job specifications and responsibilities
- 4** Leadership support structures
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1

Brief history and design of the SEEPRO studies



Publication dates

1997

Working with Young Children in Europe

AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK

15 countries

2010

‘SEEPRO-1’

EU15 plus BG, CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, RO, SI, SK

27 countries

2018

‘SEEPRO-2’

EU27 plus HR - also RU, UA

30 countries

2024

SEEPRO-3

EU27 + 6 non-EU countries including CH, NO, RS

33 countries



33 country-specific ECEC workforce profiles

Commissioned reports prepared by national experts according to a detailed research specification → a comprehensive, in-depth review and mapping exercise

Background data on 33 ECEC systems

Desk research by project team, utilising international and national data banks and reports, either co-authored or validated by country experts and enhanced with supplementary data

Publications in English and German

- Designated website seepro.eu
- 132 documents published online in February 2024
- 1 complete edition online with ISBN number
- Book publication with summary of findings in the making



2

Leadership contexts at the ECEC system level

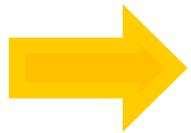


Based on the concept of
cross-national comparisons as a
science of difference
rather than a
science of solution

(Nóvoa 2018; Sousa & Moss 2022)



Acknowledging that conceptualisations of ECEC Leaders, of the knowledge and skills required for leadership and of the support that leaders need and experience...



... are situated and context-specific



... are located in ECEC systems with differing underpinning cultural beliefs and values



... are not only deeply rooted in country-specific histories of ECEC but also linked to socio-political, philosophical and ethical policy stances.

Unitary ECEC systems 2024

For children of all ages up to the beginning of primary schooling

| | ONE lead ministry | ONE legal framework | ONE curricular framework | ONE main setting type | ONE type of core professional |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Croatia | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Denmark | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Estonia | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Finland | √ | √* | √* | √ | YES in principle, but two types in legislation |
| Latvia | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Lithuania | √ | √ | √* | √ | √ |
| Norway | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Slovenia | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Sweden | √ | √ | √* | √ | √ |
| Ukraine | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |



Part-integrated ECEC systems 2024

| | ONE lead ministry | ONE legal framework | ONE curricular framework | ONE main setting type | ONE type of core professional |
|------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Italy | ✓ | ✓ | Three | NO | NO |
| Luxembourg | ✓ | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Malta | ✓ | (National Policy Framework) | (NO) | NO | NO |
| Romania | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | NO | NO |
| Serbia | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | (✓) | NO |
| Spain | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | NO | NO |

Federal and devolved ECEC systems

| | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|----|----|
| Austria | One at fed. level 9 regional governments | Federation- <i>Länder</i> agreements with varying regulations | ✓ | NO | ✓ |
| Germany | One at fed. level 16 at <i>Länder</i> level | One at fed. level 16 at <i>Länder</i> level | One at cross- <i>Länder</i> level 16 at <i>Länder</i> level | NO | ✓ |
| Russia | One at fed. level Many at reg. level | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | NO |
| UK | Four separate top-level auth. | 4 nation-specific frameworks | 4 nation-specific curricula | NO | NO |



Bi-sectoral ECEC systems 2024

| | ONE lead ministry | ONE legal framework | ONE curricular framework | ONE main setting type | ONE type of core professional |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Bulgaria | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Cyprus | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Czechia | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| France | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Greece | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Hungary | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Ireland | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Netherlands | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Poland | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Portugal | NO | NO | NO | NO | √ |
| Slovakia | NO | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Federal and cantonal ECEC systems | | | | | |
| Belgium | 3 top-level authorities | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| Switzerland | Cantonal responsibility | NO | NO | NO | NO |



3

ECEC Centre Leaders: job requirements and responsibilities



There is no core definition of an ECEC Centre Leader

- 🌀 Head of a one-group kindergarten 3–5 e.g. Slovakia
- 🌀 Leader of a mixed-age 0–5 setting e.g. Germany, Norway
- 🌀 Head of an ECEC centre 0–5 with several units in different locations and up to 500 children e.g. Croatia
- 🌀 Head of a primary school with pre-primary provision e.g. Belgium, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Switzerland
- 🌀 Principal /director of more than one ECEC setting, e.g. Denmark, Finland, Sweden

and so on...



Minimum qualification requirement higher than for core practitioners?

UNITARY

PART-INTEGRATED

BI-SECTORAL

- 🌀 **Overall, NO** additional academic or vocational qualifications are required, but tend to be an advantage when applying for a post.
- 🌀 Additional formal requirements in a few cases, **e.g.**
 - Finland 0–6 (from 2030), **Ukraine 0–6 ISCED 7** instead of 6
 - Belgium-nl 0–2 **ISCED 6** instead of 4 in settings with 19 or more full-time places
 - UK 0–4 **PVI ISCED 6 or 5** instead of 4 or 3
 - Malta 0–2 **ISCED 5** instead of 4.
- 🌀 In **Norway 0–5**, 10% of Centre Leaders currently have an MA, with expectations rising in terms of parity with Primary School Teachers.
- 🌀 In **Ireland 0–5**, the Workforce Development Plan 2021 aims to raise min. requirement for Managers in non-primary settings to the equivalent of **ISCED 5** and by 2028 to **ISCED 6** or higher.



Job requirements

Additional leadership-specific qualification?

| UNITARY | PART-INTEGRATED | BI-SECTORAL |
|--|--|--|
| NO | | |
| Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Ukraine | Austria, Germany, Italy (but may differ by region or provider) Luxembourg non-formal Romania UK PVI | In both sectors: Greece, Ireland, Netherlands In childcare sectors: BE-nl, Cyprus, Czech Rep., France, Hungary, Switzerland |
| YES | | |
| Slovenia 0–5 Leadership course and exam before taking up post or within one year Sweden 0–5 Since 2019, a university course comprising 30 ECTS – start within 2 years of appointment, complete within 5 years | Spain 0–5 Selection process plus management course and 60 hours updates Serbia 3–5 Leadership exam UK school-based provision Wales PVI: 60 hours over 5 years | In education sectors: BE-fr: within 2 years BE-de: within 5 years Czechia: 100 hours within 3 years France: Short headship training Hungary: Leadership certificate Slovakia: 220 hours basic module, further modules within 5 years Switzerland: School leadership diploma |



BUT: In most countries with this requirement, the qualifying course is usually for **all** Education specialists and not specifically focused on ECEC.



Work experience?

UNITARY

PART-INTEGRATED

BI-SECTORAL

Most countries and sectors require a certain number of years of **work experience**. The specification may range from 1 year (e.g. [Malta 0–2](#), [Lithuania 0–6](#) to 8 years in [Serbian](#) kindergartens ([3–5](#)) or at least 12 years for the Principals of large kindergartens/pre-primary schools in [Greece 4–5](#).

Work with children alongside leadership and managerial tasks?

In most cases, no

[Sweden 0–5](#): variations among providers. Most Principals in public settings do not, nearly two-thirds of those in private settings do.

Mixed, e.g.

In [Germany 0–5](#), roughly half of leaders do.

In [Spain 0–5](#), mostly yes. Headship tasks included within teaching hours, therefore teaching load reduced (varies according to Auton. Comm.)

Varies according to sector and setting type

In [Greece 4–5](#), management and supervisory tasks have to be coped with alongside full responsibility for a group of children; no kind of administrative support.



In general, the responsibilities of Centre Leaders in all three system types fall under **four** broad categories related to:

-  Pedagogical and programme quality
-  Staff support and staff management
-  Partnerships and collaboration
-  Strategic management and administration



Pedagogical and programme quality

- Developing a centre-specific educational programme, guiding and supervising the pedagogical activities in accordance with national/federal state curricular goals DE, FI, NO, LU n-f, SI, SK
 - Creating appropriate conditions for children's education SK, HR
 - Designing the environment with access to both digital and other learning resources SI
 - Allocating resources according to the children's needs SE and the conditions of the setting SK
 - Ensuring the work methods benefit children's participation SE
 - Initiating innovation and supporting problem solving GR
- Leading the work in planning, documentation and evaluation NO
 - Observing, analysing and monitoring pedagogical activities SK, IT
 - Ensuring that children with special educational needs receive the support and challenges they need with participation of the parents/guardians SE
 - Taking active measures against discrimination and abusive treatment SE
 - Ensuring the health, safety and protection of children while respecting their rights SK
 - Realising the rights of children and the rights and duties of adults SI



Staff support and staff management

- Creating an inspiring working environment **GR**
- Ensuring appropriate working conditions for all staff (pedagogical, support, housekeeping, cleaning) **AT, SK, HR, SI**
- Supervising team development and coordination **AT**
- Supporting staff reflection **IT**
- Guiding, assisting and supervising younger teachers in their work **GR**
- Holding staff appraisal talks **PL**
- Providing and/or facilitating professional development opportunities on a regular basis **MT 0–2** and motivating *all* staff to participate **GR 4–5, SI, SK, SE**
- Coordinating the mentoring, work shadowing and support of students on field practice **AT, SI**
- Recruiting new professionals, preparing job descriptions **RO, PT** for each of the nine posts with pedagogical assignments (including on-site specialist support staff) **UA**
- Proposing the promotion of staff to job titles and pay grades **SI**
- Controlling teachers' compliance with the relevant legislation and regulations **PL**
- Recruiting specialist support staff **SK**
- Supervising on-site specialist support staff and coordinating with regional counselling centres **SK**
- Self-management **DE, EE**



Partnerships and collaboration

- Initiating and leading partnerships between educational institutions and relevant services and organisations **LT**
- Cooperating with the service provider, legal guardians and all other partners in the neighbourhood and region **DE, AT, MT, ES, PT**
- Organising cooperation with parents (meetings, consultation times and other forms) **SI**
- Informing parents about the work of the kindergarten and about changes in the rights and obligations of children, trainees and students **SI**
- Representing the ECEC centre before the Ministry of Education in all pedagogical matters **PT 3-5 priv**
- Developing forms of cooperation with the preschool class, the school and school-age educare provision to support the development and learning of children **SE**
- Encouraging the participation of parents /guardians, local and municipal representatives in the planning and evaluation of educational activities **PT**
- Promoting and supporting relationships between 0–3 educational services, pre-primary schools and the municipal administration **IT**
- Contributing to planning policies for young children and families at the local level **IT**



Strategic management and administration

- Planning, managing, monitoring and developing the entire activities of the ECEC centre (organisation, coordination, supervision/control; education and upbringing; health and safety; social and humanitarian issues; financial matters) **BG, DE, PL**
- Supervising and monitoring the centre's objectives and programme in compliance with decisions of state bodies at the national and local level **AT, HR, MT 0-2, RO, SI, SK**
- Managing the internal organisation of the ECEC centre **SE, SI** and deciding on the expedient use of financial resources **EE**
- Organising and steering systematic quality assurance, improvement and development measures based on internal self-evaluation **AT, LU non-f, PL**, and with the participation of parents **SE**

- Preparing an annual pedagogical supervision plan **PL**, annual work plan, annual kindergarten development plan and annual self-evaluation report **SI**
- Submitting a written report to the local authority and the Board of Trustees once a year – on curricular and financial issues and any regulations required by a supervisory agency **EE, RO**
- Compiling statistical data and transmitting them to the school inspectorate **RO**
- Conducting the administrative work of the setting (correspondence, implementation of circulars, operating regulations...) **GR**
- Contracting works, services and supplies of materials and technical equipment for the administrative and pedagogical activities **ES, GR, SK**
- Organising admission procedures **SK**



UKRAINE 0–5 (2021): Professional standards – ECEC Directors

Organising a healthy, safe and inclusive learning environment

Health protection

Planning and analysing the effectiveness of the educational process

Managing an EC institution

Operational management (financing, nutrition, medical, human resources)

Organisational-methodological (educational programme, psychological-pedagogical support team, methodological support of pedagogical staff)

Communication (with all involved in the educational process and other stakeholders).

Ongoing personal and professional development

Life-long learning (reflect and self-assess, plan professional development)

Informational-communicational (using ICT and e-resources effectively in the educational process, being aware of safety rules in the digital environment).

Leadership and partnership

Leadership (presentation skills, resilience and flexibility, supporting conflict resolution and the prevention of professional burn-out)

Emotional-ethical (self-regulation, tolerance, constructive and sustainable interactions).

Strategic development

Strategic governance (conducting strategic planning, developing a strategy for the kindergarten, developing a system of quality control)

Strategic communication (presenting the kindergarten to different stakeholders)

Normative-legal (complying with legal documents in the professional activities).



4

Leadership support structures



Five main categories of reported leadership support strategies

1

Designated on-site posts with **managerial** (vertical), **pedagogic-thematic** (horizontal) and **special needs** focus, potentially supporting distributed, collaborative, inclusive leadership

2

ECEC **Pedagogical Counsellors** / Consultants / Coordinators

3

Centre-based **advisory groups**

4

Targeted **CPD programmes**

5

Leadership-targeted **policy initiatives**



1a Vertical job structures

Since 2019 in the **Netherlands 0–4**, childcare provider organisations (all private) are required to employ a **Pedagogical Coach** and/or a **Pedagogical Policy Assistant** to the manager of the ECEC setting (both ISCED 3 or 4 plus additional preparation course). The Policy Assistants support the Centre Leader in preparing, implementing and evaluating pedagogical policy issues.

In **Bulgaria 3–6**, Kindergarten Principals are supported by a **Senior Teacher** and a **Head Teacher**, who supports the Senior Teachers in the development of curricular activities and by introducing innovative educational programmes.

In **Russia 0–6**, **Senior Kindergarten Teachers** supervise the implementation of curricular programmes, CPD, work with parents. **Deputy Heads** focus on administrative and management issues such as kindergarten maintenance, monitoring premises, equipment and safety measures.

In **Slovenia 0–5**, a highly structured system of credit point acquisition for CPD and other activities. Four promotion titles are awarded: **Mentor, Adviser, Councillor** and, since September 2023, **Senior Councillor**. Titles gained are permanent and do not have to be reviewed or renewed. Similar promotion titles in **Croatia 0–6** and **Serbia 3–5**.



1b Horizontal, theme-based job structures

One of our research questions focused on posts of responsibility allocated for **pedagogical tasks** across the centre, such as working with migrant families; developing inclusive practices; being a mentor to students on field practice.

The question was based on the assumption that distributed tasks support the Centre Leader in enhancing the pedagogical quality of the ECEC setting and potentially strengthening staff retention by motivating core practitioners to develop specific expertise in a chosen area.

Over a third of the 33 countries reported having **no such posts** or that they are uncommon.

Otherwise, the post of **student mentor** was the most frequently mentioned, modestly remunerated in e.g. [Croatia 0–6](#), [France 2–5](#), [Romania 3–5](#), otherwise variable.

Decisions about such posts or assignments are mostly made at the municipality or provider level.

They were most frequently reported in countries with a unitary system



1b Horizontal, theme-based job structures

In **Slovakia 3–5**, theme-based posts have been established for:

- Induction of newly qualified staff
- Supporting children from socially disadvantaged milieus
- Team support
- Digital education
- Sport

In **Sweden 0–5**, special assignments may be allocated for areas needing better alignment with the curriculum goals, e.g. ● digitalisation ● gender equity ● language and literacy, ● multilingualism. Usually require additional training.

In **Luxembourg n-f**, specialist posts established for **multilingual education** and **inclusive education**

In **Ireland**, non-primary: **Inclusion Coordinator (INCO)**; there are plans to introduce further roles of special responsibility, with the objective of developing a model of **distributed leadership**.

In **Germany 0–5** the idea of creating theme-oriented posts of responsibility is a provider issue and still under discussion. However, the implementation of these ideas requires a **closer and more binding** cooperation between the responsible decision-makers (relevant authorities, employers and collective bargaining partners) as well as the qualifying support systems of initial and continuing professional education.



One of the few **longitudinal research studies** on the work engagement, wellbeing and retention of teachers views **skilled mentors** as an essential leadership support strategy in order to ensure the development and **retention** of new teachers.

Leithwood, Kenneth; Qing Gu, Sofia Eleftheriadou, Lisa Baines. 2024. *Developing and Retaining Talented Mentors. How Leaders Can Make Their School More Attractive for Teachers and Better for Students.* Publication series of the research into the impact of the Early Career Framework (ECF) programme on the work engagement, wellbeing and retention of teachers: a longitudinal study, 2021-2026. UCL Centre for Educational Leadership: London, UK.

Although school-oriented in this case, the strategy could have relevance for ECEC settings. Designated centre-based posts for mentoring newly qualified and newly appointed staff were rarely reported in the SEEPRO-3 study. **Sweden 0–5** and **Slovakia 3–5** are two of the few countries to have introduced such a post.



1c On-site special needs support staff

Specialist support staff in **Lithuania 0–6** include Psychologists, Social Pedagogy Assistants, Public Health Consultants and Language Coaches, most of whom work in ECEC settings on a regular basis or with a designated working space.

In **Estonia 0–6**, a Health Care Professional is employed daily for monitoring the children's health, ensuring compliance with government health and safety regulations, informing parents and the child's GP of any health disorders and advising parents and teachers on children's health-related issues.

In public kindergartens in **Slovenia 0–5** there is an on-site counselling service which cooperates with staff and management in planning, monitoring and evaluating the kindergarten programme for children with special needs. Specialists include Psychologists, Pedagogues, Social Workers, Social Pedagogues and Special Needs specialists

In **Croatia 0–5**, kindergartens with more than 200 children may employ specialist on-site support staff such as a Pedagogue, a Psychologist, a Speech Therapist, Social Pedagogue or a Curative Educator.



2a Pedagogical counsellors

In **Italy 0–5**, **Pedagogical Coordinators** play a strategic role in implementing the emerging unitary ECEC System 0–6. Networks of Coordinators at the regional/district level are responsible for research and innovation and thus for constantly revising the values underlying the overall educational programme. Recent guidelines (2017) specify their role as designing, planning, organising and coordinating educational services from birth to adulthood; managing, monitoring, evaluating and supervising the educational quality of public and private education and training systems; and acting as supervisors, CPD trainers and consultants at all levels of education.

Pedagogical Consultants with an advisory and supervisory role are employed by the municipalities in **Denmark 0–5** to support the centre leader in personnel management, cooperation and conflict resolution. They may lead projects relating to policy and administrative initiatives.

In **Sweden 0–5**, **Pedagogical Leaders** (Development Educator, Development Leader, Process Leader) with a counselling, coaching and support role focusing on the work team are responsible for e.g. quality assurance and staff professional development. They often work across several preschools.



2b Pedagogical counsellors

In **Belgium (Flanders) 0–2**, since 2021, 264 on-site and cross-site Pedagogical Coaches are employed; however, research suggests that their mandate still needs to be fully clarified.

In **Germany 0–5**, **ECEC counsellors**, mostly employed by ECEC providers, have a leadership supporting, coordinating and, to some extent, controlling role. From a field expert view, the importance of their support role for leaders in their tasks of quality, personnel and organisation development is undisputed. However,

specialist counselling is currently structured very differently across the federal states and ECEC service providers in terms of mandate and licence. Moreover, a specified job description at the level of professional policy is rare and the legal frameworks in the federal states vary greatly.

In **Croatia** and **Lithuania**, for example, there are no legal provisions for specialist supervisory or coordinating staff with a counselling, coaching or professional support role.



3 Advisory groups

In **Estonia 0–6**, each ECEC centre has a **Board of Trustees** which meets at least four times a year. Members include a representative of the teaching staff, a parent representative from each group and a local authority representative. The Board has a coordinating and advisory role on key issues regarding the management of the ECEC centre.

In **Ukraine 0–6**, all ECEC centres have a **Pedagogical Board** – a collegiate governance body headed by the Centre Director including all pedagogical staff, medical workers, other specialist staff, representatives of parents' committees and other relevant persons.

In **Slovakia 3–5**, two internal advisory boards support the decision-making of the Kindergarten Head: a **Pedagogical Council** and a **Methodological Circle**.

At the governance level, a **Kindergarten Council** acts as an initiative-taking, advisory and self-governing body, with members including service provider and parent representatives and the kindergarten staff. Neither the Kindergarten Head nor the Deputy Kindergarten Head can be a member. The Council contributes to democratic governance and comments on the setting's conceptual plans. It is also vested with the power of petitioning for the removal of the Kindergarten Head.



4b Targeted CPD programmes

In **Austria 0–5**, Centre Leaders in Vienna employed by KIWI (non-profit provider) are supported **over six years** through various management courses on quality management; personnel management; team development and personal skills; communication, conflict and complaints; legal and business frameworks; work with parents; public relations.

In **Germany 0–5**, the CPD Academy in Rheinland-Palatinate offers four linked qualification modules for **Providers and Centre Leaders** of ECEC facilities on management and quality development, concluding with an optional state-recognised certification.



4a Targeted CPD programmes

In **Denmark 0–5**, initiatives by the national government, municipal authorities and trade unions have funded **diploma study programmes** in Leadership for the whole public sector. Two are particularly relevant for ECEC Leaders and are offered by university colleges and private providers: 2 to 3 years part time or one year full time, 60 ECTS credits.

Completing a **leadership exam** is mandatory in **Slovenia 0–5**, either pre-post or within one year. Six modules include the following: Organisational theory and leadership, change management; Planning and decision-making; Finances; Personnel management; Leadership strategies

for learning, assessment, monitoring, professional development; Legislation in education

In **Sweden 0–5**, a national merit/qualification system for Principals, School Teachers, and Preschool Teachers is to be introduced in 2025: to strengthen and develop competence, enable career advancement and make the teaching profession more attractive.

In **Finland 0–6**, peer group mentoring is organised on a regional network basis and is seen as an effective CPD approach for supporting new Centre Leaders.



Leadership-targeted policy initiatives

‘Strong leadership’ is one of the seven core fields of action prescribed in the KiTa Quality Act which came into force in January 2023 in **Germany 0–5**. This field of action had already been selected as a priority by half of the 16 federal states under the preceding Good Childcare Act. With a further 530 million euros from the federal government specifically for a focus on "Strong leadership", this prioritisation will be continued in 2024.

In **Denmark 0–5**, the government launched an initiative in 2018 to support Centre Leaders and strengthen resources in the ECEC setting through providing posts for leading and inspiring colleagues to act as **‘professional beacons’**. The strategy is based on the idea that some leadership tasks can be delegated to specialist resource persons who act as organisational intermediaries in the sense of distributed leadership. Applicants receive a 3-day training and the post is remunerated with a salary supplement.



Leadership-targeted policy initiatives

In **Estonia 0–6**, one goal of the Estonian Strategy 2021–2030 is promoting the professionalism of ECEC Directors through research projects and CPD so that they can create a learning culture and environment that supports learning and wellbeing and skillfully manage and implement change. In 2023, a **Competency and Career Model for Educational Leaders** was issued which describes what high performing educational leaders need to do and know. The tool can be used by Centre Leaders themselves in planning their own development and career, as well as in the recruitment, development, and future planning for Centre Directors in ECEC institutions. The tool is being further developed by the Ministry of Education to support the design of advanced training courses for ECEC leaders.



5

Reported problematic issues



Reported problems

Croatia 0–6: No suitable criteria for determining the pedagogical and management competences of candidates; no appropriate regulation of the ECEC Principal position; ECEC principals are not adequately-prepared for the post, although a government Strategy for Education, Science and Technology addressed this issue in 2014.

CZ 0–2: No official job description for the position of Centre Leader in Children's Groups, who may have one of 13 specified qualifications ranging from ISCED 3 to ISCED 7.

Italy 3–6: School heads (*scuole dell'infanzia*) rarely have specific pedagogical expertise in early childhood education, also in **France**.

Greece 4–5: Kindergarten Teachers not strongly motivated to take on this position → excessive bureaucracy in parallel with classroom work → no overtime compensation → allowance granted to Kindergarten Principals does not compensate for the wide range of required duties.

BE-Fr 3–5, CZ 3–5: Excessive administrative tasks detract from pedagogical leadership and demotivate potential candidates.



6

Concluding reflections - potential policy implications



Concluding reflections

🌀 Requirements and job specifications for Centre Leaders vary according to ECEC sector, provider and type of setting. In **non-unitary** ECEC systems they tend to be **less regulated** in the childcare sectors (e.g. [Greece](#)) than in the education sectors and the minimum qualification standards for Centre Leaders **lower** (exceptions: [Cyprus](#), [Greece](#), [Portugal](#)).

•

🌀 In some countries qualifications, selection procedures and duties are **defined by law** (e.g. [Lithuania](#), [Serbia](#)), whereas in others, the role of centre management is neither defined uniformly nor in detail (e.g. [Germany](#)).

🌀 In the education sectors of bi-sectoral systems, CPD opportunities for ECEC Centre Leaders often fall under the regulations for School Heads, i.e. are **not specific to ECEC**.



Concluding reflections

- International research defines a number of leadership and management models in ECEC. These include distributed, collaborative, dialogical, participatory, inclusive and team-oriented leadership approaches.
- Overall, contemporary theoretical conceptualisations present an understanding of leadership in ECEC as multi-perspective, complex, socially constructed and transformational, clearly moving away from a hierarchical and linear approach.
- At the core is an understanding that implies shaping the ECEC work environment as a professional learning community for teams – through forms of internal and external assessment, through self, team and management evaluation. Learning to deal with the complexities and contradictions of ECEC leadership and management is a constant challenge for Centre Leaders.



Potential policy implications

- ☯ Clarifying the **conceptual and systemic understanding** of leaders and leadership at the policy, provider and centre level
- ☯ Defining required **core responsibilities** of Centre Leaders
- ☯ Clarifying the **respective responsibilities** of provider and setting leader
- ☯ Strengthening multi-level **leadership support structures**
- ☯ Professionalising centre leadership by providing **required ECEC-focused leadership** courses, both provider-specific and across providers → national regulatory framework with entitlement?
- ☯ Strengthening peer learning through **leadership networks**



Potential policy implications

Supporting **research, analysis and evaluation** of leadership structures and practices

Adopting policy strategies which support a **systemic and transformational view** of ECEC leadership

The **enactment** of leadership concepts and support structures will inevitably differ across countries and ECEC systems. This brings us back to a 'science of difference' rather than a 'science of solution'.

Accordingly, the best ways forward need seeking through a combination of knowledge sharing and reflexive, collaborative and context-specific strategies and practices.

National partners 2021-2024

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Thank you!

