



SECTOR ANALYSIS OF THE ECEC WORKFORCE SITUATION IN AUSTRIA

For the project *“Improving staff working conditions for better quality in early childhood education and care in Austria”*.

2023

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Introduction

The Sector Analysis for Austria is carried out as part of the TSI project “*Improving staff working conditions for better quality in early childhood education and care in Austria*”, as one of the steps in the evidence generation phase, which will feed into the development of a quality framework for improving the framework conditions for staff in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and an implementation strategy.

The TSI project is a multi-phase project that aims to support the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research with technical expertise and guidance towards improving staff conditions, quality, and capacity in order to enhance the quality of education and care for children from 0 to 6 years in Austria. Its first phase is focused on evidence generation, which is then followed by the development of a Quality Framework for improved conditions for ECEC staff and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, an implementation strategy, a national action plan and roadmap.

The Sector Analysis aims to provide a qualitative and participatory exploration of the ECEC system, in particular with regard to the needs, gaps and bottlenecks of the sector related to the workforce. The study draws from the experiences, opinions, and insights of a cross-section of ECEC stakeholders who are members of the project working group. It is intended to reflect their consolidated inputs but not to be a representative study. It is a dynamic, participatory, and development-orientated exploration, aided by the different lenses of a variety of stakeholders. The Sector Analysis is embedded in the first phase of the project and serves, along with a Desk Review and an Report on European Good Practice, to supply the subsequent phases of the project with a common vision and evidence to inform all stakeholders about the current policies and practices in the sector. The nuanced understanding of the functioning of the system provided by this analysis, including the highlighting of perceived bottlenecks, complements and enriches the other two reports.

Figure 1 outlines the dynamics of TSI project implementation.

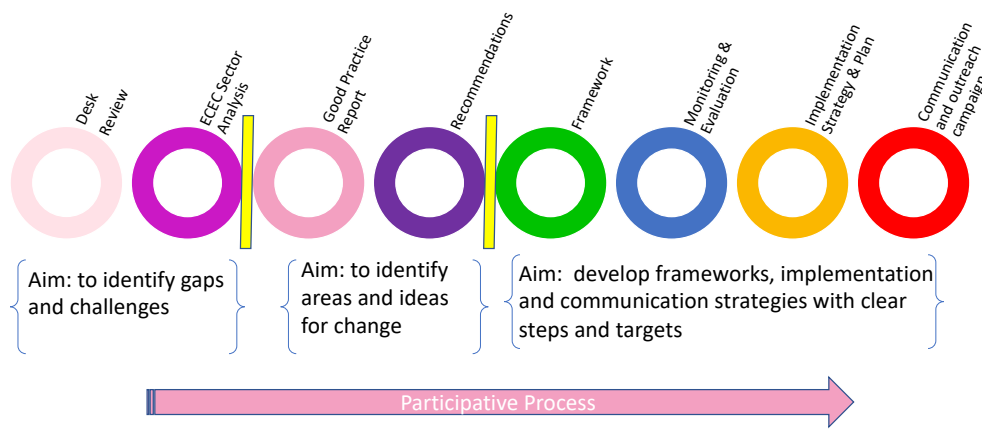


Figure 1: Phases of the TSI project

The fact that the Sector Analysis is embedded in a wider development process and coupled with other evidence-generation activities and reports created a unique opportunity to flesh out the full potential of this process for developing a shared understanding and possibly synchronised views of a very diverse group of stakeholders. The Sector Analysis report will therefore also not present all sources providing a situational analysis of the ECEC sector and workforce, but will rather highlight the views of the participants, noting that a Desk Review was conducted as part of the same project, which also provided insights into the wider ECEC sector.

Description of the Sector Analysis methodology

This section describes the tools, structure of the participants and recapitulates the process of organising, conducting and reporting on the workshops.

Diagnostic Tool

This Sector Analysis is relying on the "[UNICEF Sector Diagnostic Tool for ECEC](#)". The tool is based on UNICEF's 'Build to Last' framework¹ and is also in synergy with the EU ECEC Quality Framework². This tool is an instrument well suited for collecting, organizing and presenting qualitative data about the ECEC sector. The tool is adapted from the original sub-Sector Analysis diagnostic tool, which was originally designed for the pre-primary phase. It has been adapted by UNICEF to be used for the ECEC 0-6 age phase and to be used in a split system and has been tested in EU member states and advanced ECEC systems. It has also been translated into German.

Its functions are designed in such a way to:

- invite participatory discussion on important aspects of ECEC;
- allow deep dive into exploring those aspects of the ECEC system that may pose pertinent challenges;
- complement other methods of data collection.

In addition to these benefits, the use of the Diagnostic Tool has three outstanding characteristics:

1. *Conceptual underpinning*: The tool provides a comprehensive, well-organised mapping of all relevant aspects of the ECEC system and delineates the interconnection between the diverse phenomena encountered in the system. This way, it also serves as an educational tool that promotes a deep understanding of the complexity of the entire system and helps to develop a clear conceptual map of interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions.
2. *Strategic underpinning*: The tool describes a well-developed, ideal ECEC system and spotlights all the measures that contribute to the development of such a system. This way, the tool scaffolds the developmental steps for the participants and paves the way to

¹ UNICEF (2020). *Build to last*. United Nations Children's Fund

<https://www.unicef.org/media/67191/file/Build-to-last-framework-universal-quality-pre-primary-education.pdf>

² Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on high quality early childhood education and care systems. Official Journal of the European Union, 5. 6. 2019.

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&from=ES](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=ES)

overcome known challenges. The analytical application of the Diagnostic Tool is also educating the users about all the building blocks of an ideal system and possible criteria to assess the status of each aspect of the system.

3. *Procedural underpinning*: Finally, the tool is a self-evaluative instrument, fostering collaborative reflection and analysis from different perspectives. This feature is also educational, as, if used in a participatory way, it models a process of collaborative problem solving that is essential to all successful decision-making endeavours.

The tool comprises several areas: 5 components that describe the core functions of ECEC and 4 areas that describe the characteristics of an enabling environment (Figure 2). These core functions largely correspond to the five dimensions addressed in the EU ECEC Quality Framework³. Both frameworks, the UNICEF’s 'Build to Last' framework and the EU ECEC Quality Framework (and therefore the tool as well), put the spotlight on high quality early childhood education in a holistic way, complementing the more traditional view that primarily focused on childcare.

In the current analysis, as said, the focus is on exploring in detail only Module 3 'Workforce development' (Figure 3).



Figure 2: The components of the UNICEF 'Build to Last' Framework

³ This includes improving access to high-quality, affordable and inclusive education and care systems, professionalizing staff, improving curricula to support holistic learning, promoting transparent and coherent monitoring and evaluation systems, and ensuring adequate governance and funding.



Figure 1: Structure of the diagnostic instrument

The module on workforce development is structured around 4 objectives and measures that pave the way for achieving these goals. These are as follows:

- *Goal 1:* Establish a strategy for recruiting ECEC staff across the whole sector, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles
- *Goal 2:* Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training
- *Goal 3:* Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development (CPD), including setting up career pathways for the ECEC sector
- *Goal 4:* Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention

The workforce development module comprises a total of 14 measures of progress (3-4 measures per goal - see list and description in Annex 1).

Like the whole Diagnostic Tool, this module is designed to be used in a participatory setting and to guide focused group discussions. The measures are structured to encourage group reflection and situation assessment and to support the monitoring of the ECEC system. The discussion about each measure is supported by a series of questions that are formulated to spotlight critical aspects of policies and practices enacted in the everyday realities in the ECEC system, elicit discussion and reflection, and contribute to deeper understanding and system analysis. The Diagnostic Tool is designed to be used in flexible ways, that is suited to the country context and the purpose of the use. The list of questions can be shortened, extended, and modified. Measures can be discussed in detail or skipped altogether and the selection of goals to focus on and modules to elaborate will depend on the context.

In this project, all 4 goals of the workforce development module were discussed, including all underlying measures, although some in more detail and others in less detail.

In addition to the core function of the Diagnostic Tool, the workforce development, a subset of measures was discussed from Module 4 (Family and Community Engagement) and Module 5 (Quality Assurance). These were identified in the Desk Review or during the first workshop as potentially missing or weak links. From Module 4, Goal 1, *Include families and communities as strategic partners in ECEC*, was discussed based on the overarching objectives for ECEC (see Annex 2).

In addition, several questions spotlighting some aspects of the *Ministerial Leadership and Public Demand* area of the *Enabling Environment* segment of the Diagnostic Tool (see Figure 2), were also briefly discussed in the process (Annex 4 and 5). Participants were asked to reflect on the complexities of leadership in the context of governance of ECEC by the federal provinces, early childhood education and care and to address issues related to family involvement in the governance of ECEC institutions.

Participant structure

As part of the TSI project, a Working Group was set up, which was entrusted by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research to serve as the main advisory body for the Sector Analysis and the subsequent development of the Quality Framework and the associated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and strategy building processes. Such procedure ensured increased acceptance of the process by the participants, low turnover and continuous presence and support from the experts of the Federal Ministry.

The Working Group involved participants according to the importance of their role in ECEC and their capacity to influence policymaking.

The structure of the working group is as follows:

- Representatives of each federal province's departments for ECEC, at the technical level
- Representatives of higher education and research institutions:
 - Representatives of each development association of the universities of education (West, Central, North-East, South-East) at professor or assistant professor level
 - Professors from two universities who are involved in ECEC research
 - Representatives of a university of applied sciences involved in the training of ECEC staff
 - Representatives of three relevant research institutions (Austrian Institute for Vocational Education Research (ÖIBF), Austrian Institute for Family Studies (ÖIF), Austrian Society for Research and Development in Education (ÖFEB))
- Representatives of the Association of Cities and Towns and the Association of Municipalities

- Representatives of the Economic Chamber (WKÖ), the Chamber of Agriculture (LKÖ), the Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK) and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)⁴ (social partners)
- Representatives of the Federation of Austrian Industries (IV)
- Representatives of interest groups, ECEC teachers and assistants (e.g. NEBÖ, EduCare, Teach for Austria)
- Representatives of the Federal Chancellery, Child and Youth Services
- Representatives of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)

As part of the partnership for project implementation, representatives from UNICEF, the European Commission, and the Charlotte Bühler Institute (CBI) also took part in the working groups. Prof. Dr. Tünde Kovacs Cerovic participated in the work of the working group as project advisor.

Each organisation from the above list nominated two representatives, one of whom served as a deputy in case the main representative was unable to attend the meeting. Each member of the working group was asked to maintain constant communication with their federal province, institute, or relevant official network and to seek the views of the management level on those issues that were announced as discussion points.

Workshop process

The Sector Analysis process served two main purposes: to identify critical aspects of working conditions that need to be prioritised for improvement and to create a synergetic group that can drive strategy development in the next phases of the TSI project. These two objectives were balanced throughout the process.

The analysis was carried out using a staged participatory methodology that included three workshops of different formats with the working group and detailed materials to inform participants before and after the workshop. The analysis relies on these three workshops, which took place approximately one month apart from each other, rather than on a single event. This ensured that participants were not absent from their other duties for more than one day and that representatives were able to coordinate sufficiently internally. However, this contributed to a certain turnover of representatives from some stakeholder groups.

In addition to the working group, and in order to strengthen the voice of ECEC teachers as key stakeholders with insights into the day-to-day functioning of the system, the Sector Analysis also included a Focus Group with ECEC teachers and staff selected from a network of ECEC professionals. The results of this Focus Group session were integrated into the analysis and the report on the workshop results.

⁴ The representatives of the Chamber of Labour and the Austrian Trade Union Federation took part in the kick-off meeting in December 2022, but withdrew from the process at the end of January 2023.

The workshops were not recorded in order to preserve anonymity and to allow the different views to be expressed freely. However, detailed anonymised transcripts were taken, which were helpful in writing this report. As data collection was not the sole and primary focus of the analysis, there is a possibility that not all available information was collected and utilised in the process.

The three workshops were organised differently depending on the objective and conditions. The working group meetings and their logistics were supported by the Charlotte Bühler Institute (CBI). The project began with a kick-off meeting on December 1st 2022, where the project was introduced and the upcoming activities outlined. The meeting created great interest and was characterised by lively participation from the invited representatives.

The 1st workshop took place as a full-day meeting in Vienna on February 1st 2023. In this first session, Goal 1 *Establish a strategy for recruiting ECEC staff across the whole sector, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles*, and Goal 2, *Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training*, of Module 3 of the Diagnostic Tool, and the measures to achieve these objectives were discussed. The discussion was organised into four breakout groups, followed by a plenary presentation of each group's findings. Participants were deliberately mixed to represent all stakeholder groups in each breakout group, so that participants had the opportunity to get to know each other, hear each other's views first-hand and understand the complex situation of the ECEC workforce. The overall moderation of the session was carried out by Tünde Kovacs Cerovic as lead consultant and Veronika Michitsch from the University of Klagenfurt as working group participant and moderator. The moderators of the breakout groups were Verena Grünstäudl and Ulrike Zug from the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Veronika Michitsch from the University of Klagenfurt and Katrin Zell from MA 10 Vienna Children's Daycare Centres. The minutes were taken by one member of each breakout group.

The 2nd workshop took the form of three 4-5 hours long online meetings on March 2nd, 6th, and 7th, each attended by a different and relatively homogeneous sub-group of stakeholders - representatives of the federal provinces were included in the first session, academia and research institutions formed the majority of participants in the second session, and social partners and interest groups formed the majority in the third session. The grouping of participants for the online workshop into similar stakeholder groups allowed for a more detailed and in-depth exploration of the measures with a particular focus on areas about which the stakeholder group had extensive knowledge or direct experience. In all meetings the situation in Austria regarding the Sector Analysis Tool's measures required to achieve Goals 3 and 4 of the Workforce Development Module were discussed, together with the questions related to Quality Assurance and Family and Community Involvement from Modules 4 and 5 of the Diagnostic Tool⁵. The

⁵ In the online sessions, these core functions were discussed in an abbreviated form, as many of the objectives and measures that are part of a developed quality assurance system and comprehensive parent and family involvement were identified as missing by the working group participants. The results of these abbreviated discussions are therefore only presented in the annex.

setting allowed for a deeper dive into the challenges from the perspective of the different stakeholder groups. Two facilitators co-led the online meetings, while representatives of the CBI took the minutes. After the 2nd workshop, an online Focus Group meeting was held with practising ECEC teachers, assistants, and principals to amplify the voices of those directly affected by this work. During the Focus Group discussion, all objectives and measures included in Module 3 were discussed.

The 3rd workshop was again held as a full day in person meeting. It was held on April 13th 2023, in Linz and was organised as a validation and prioritisation meeting. The scenario for this workshop was therefore different, as it was not aimed at fact finding, but at consolidating the findings and prioritising the sector-specific challenges. The summary of the results of the Sector Analysis process, enriched with data from the Desk Review, were presented by the lead consultant (2 objectives in the morning session, 2 in the afternoon session), each followed by small group discussions on:

- areas that need to be further clarified either in the Sector Analysis or in the subsequent processes,
- prioritization of the existing challenges/bottlenecks that need to be addressed as part of the upcoming strategy development process,
- areas of best practice that should be recognised and promoted.

The results of the group discussions were divided into categories, whereupon the participants prioritised the challenges individually by adding two possible priority points to any of the challenges listed on the board.

The final session of the workshop provided an opportunity to explore two further themes from Module 6 of the Diagnostic Tool (*Enabling Environment*), to shed light on the broader social and political context that can influence the development of the ECEC system. Key factor 1, *Ministerial leadership*, was analysed in one breakout group and Key Factor 4, *Public demand*, in another. The list of measures with a description can be found in Annex 1.

Results of the Sector Analysis

In this section, the summaries of the discussions and findings according to each topic will be presented as well as the prioritized challenges. It must be noted that during the workshops sometimes differences emerged both between the participants but also between the participants' statements and the official regulations of ECEC in Austria. The summary is aiming to capture the main lines of discussion including main dilemmas participants were airing, therefore it cannot fully represent all views. In the context of the project, the purpose of the analysis was to spotlight all possible areas where improvements would be beneficial and thus provide useful inputs to the further steps in the project development, such as the framework, strategy, and action plan. This orientation contributes to a slightly skewed picture of the ECEC system presented in the report, and to highlighting more the challenges and gaps than the accomplishments and successes.

Summary of the workshop discussions⁶ on Module 3

Goal 1: Establish a strategy for recruiting ECEC staff across the whole sector, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles

The discussions of the working group and the focus group of practitioners on this goal, as well as on the other goals, reflected a strong commitment to improving the quality of ECEC in Austria and a recognition of the vital role that ECEC plays in promoting children's development and well-being. However, the discussions also highlighted the challenges and complexities of achieving this goal, given the complex and decentralized nature of the ECEC system in Austria, the preexisting problems with staff shortages, unfavourable working conditions, requests for change and the diverse needs and interests of different stakeholders. Nonetheless, the participants expressed a willingness to work together to overcome these challenges and to create a more cohesive and effective system of ECEC in Austria.

Measures
1. A robust, well-justified strategy for recruiting appropriate staff for the ECEC sector is in place.
<i>Summary assessment: This measure is not fully in place, there are significant staff shortages, and many areas of work, including salaries, are burdened by challenges that need to be overcome in order to reach a well-functioning ECEC with well qualified and committed staff.</i>
The discussions centred around recruitment strategies, working conditions, professional development, and diversity, highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach to improve the sector. Although participants shared many similar concerns, their views on specific solutions and strategies differed, reflecting the diverse perspectives and experiences of those involved in the sector. There was a consensus on the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges faced by ECEC professionals, including the establishment of clear minimum qualifications and the improvement of working conditions. However, opinions on the specific strategies and approaches needed to achieve this varied among participants.
Given that this is a core area for development and the Sector Analysis collected much information, for this report the measure is broken down into 3 sub-measures: A - Staff shortages and strategies to overcome them; B – Working conditions of ECEC staff; C – Salaries and career development.
A. Staff shortages and strategies to overcome them
The existing staff shortages may render working conditions even more unfavourable, and unfavourable working conditions in turn might contribute to ECEC staff leaving or not entering

⁶ In order to avoid repetition, the results of the Focus Group discussion with practitioners are integrated into those summaries to which they thematically fit. In cases where the Focus Group participants assessed the situation differently or emphasised some aspects that were not covered by the working group, this is made clear in the summary.

the sector at all, thus a vicious circle can be created. Demands on ECEC teachers have increased while working conditions have remained unchanged. The greater the challenges in working conditions, the larger the gaps in personnel.

Particularly challenging is the situation due to staff shortages in remote areas, at off-peak times (start and end of day) in facilities with longer opening hours, adjusted to the parents'/guardians'/families' needs (ECEC teachers are then often alone without an assistant) and in groups for children under 3 years. New professionals must often take on full staff responsibilities without on-boarding or mentoring, due to staff shortages, and there is often a lack of resources for replacements when needed due to sick leave or participating in Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Differences exist between providers, creating competition among them.

There was a consensus that highlighted the need for a comprehensive recruitment strategy, although opinions on specific approaches varied. Some participants argued that researching data gathering methods used in fields like nursing could provide valuable insights for improving recruitment in ECEC. Others focused on the need for better collaboration between institutions and facilitating information exchange to improve recruitment efforts. Participants noted that the recruitment strategies vary regionally and are generally lacking in clarity regarding job profiles and competences. Regulations at the level of the federal provinces provide guidelines on how to mitigate staffshortages – and solutions vary from providing possibilities to temporarily hire unqualified personnel, to increasing the maximum group size.

The underrepresentation of ethnic and linguistic minorities was identified as an issue, with societal prejudices and language barriers posing challenges for recruitment. Participants suggested that strategies to address this could include offering financial incentives, such as travel allowances in remote areas, and implementing more inclusive recruitment processes. The underrepresentation of men was mentioned also.

B. Working conditions of ECEC staff

A key focus of the discussions - both in the working group and in the Focus Group - were the working conditions. These are determined at the federal province level. However, despite the many differences between them, the main problems highlighted in the discussions were similar. Working conditions are perceived as challenging by both the working group and the Focus Group participants and include long working hours, large group sizes and a high staff-child ratio. Some participants stated that group sizes are often between 20 and 25 for children over the age of 3 and between 11 and 15 for younger children, although the legal limits are lower, while staff-child ratios are often much higher than would be conducive to developmentally supportive interactions.

The limited time for preparation and all other non-contact work, such as communication with parents/guardians/families, teamwork, professional development, professional exchange (e.g. between inclusive early childhood educators and ECEC teachers) and administrative activities, was addressed, as well as a lack of coaching, mentoring and advisory services.

Major differences exist also between providers and institutions. “Much depends on the good will of the provider, the relationship between the principal of the ECEC centre and the provider and the understanding of the principal” was stated by a Focus Group participant. Practicing ECEC staff stated a lot of dissatisfaction with the working conditions, as well as the workforce status and recognition. It was reported that the work performed is often seen as care work and not as educational work. Staff have the feeling that they are not taken seriously and are not appreciated.

C. Salaries and career development

A significant focus of the discussion was also about salaries, with participants emphasizing the need for better incentives to attract and retain professionals. Participants of the working group highlighted the importance of offering competitive salaries, comparable to those in primary education, and improving also non-monetary incentives by e.g. increasing preparation time or offering better continuing and advanced education opportunities.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that there is a multiplicity of salary schemes with significant differences between the federal provinces and among different providers, which makes general assessment difficult⁷.

Furthermore, salary scales do not recognise higher qualifications than the required level (e.g. a Bachelor's degree) or any career progression. Salaries increase with length of service or by moving to other employers, but in some cases previous years of work in ECEC are not recognised if they were not spent working for the same employer. The lack of salary increases due to academic qualifications and the lack of career advancement opportunities could have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of staff.

Several practicing ECEC teachers in the Focus Group were reflecting about the need for improved representation, as currently their positions are seen as weak with scattered representation and lack of negotiating power which is an obstacle for achieving higher salaries for ECEC staff.

2. A core set of professional competences and standards for ECEC professionals is clearly defined.

Summary assessment: An overarching national framework of professional competences for ECEC staff, defined as knowledge, skills and attitudes required for the successful practice in ECEC institutions would be welcomed along with accompanying standards for ECEC staff. There are many consequences of this gap and there was strong support for introducing a competency framework, but also somewhat reserved opinions.

A prominent issue discussed by the working group was the lack of a unified ECEC teacher competency framework. The participants acknowledged that there is no competency

⁷ An additional difficulty in assessing the appropriateness of salary levels was the high rate of inflation in Austria at the time the workshops were conducted, which could partially offset the effects of recent salary increases.

framework in Austria that defines the required knowledge, attitudes, and skills for ECEC teachers. While the curricula of universities and higher education institutions, as well as the BAfEP⁸ curriculum are competence-oriented, there is no higher-level, agreed upon Competency Framework. Such a competency framework could bring clarity in the prerequisites for ECEC teachers in terms of required knowledge, attitudes, and skills and provide good orientation for training programmes (both pre-service and in-service) to focus on how to best teach them. Participants also noted that this absence could lead to inconsistencies in the provision of initial, continuing and advanced education for the ECEC professionals. The group noted that teacher competency frameworks are more common in the Anglo-American context, where knowledge, skills, and attitudes are emphasized, but the majority of participants found that it would be useful to define a set of overarching competences as a strategic guidance for further development of the sector.

Given the current lack of such a framework, there was not a need to cover the questions relating to such a framework's quality and compatibility to other similar professions as laid out in the Sector Analysis tool.

3. Initial qualification requirements define the level of education and training needed to enter the profession. These requirements are achievable in the current environment, while also aiming towards higher requirements over time.

Summary assessment: The initial qualification requirements for ECEC professional staff are set at the level of the federal government, while for assistants regulations are at the level of the federal provinces and either not or weakly regulated. There were different opinions in the working group about whether higher qualification requirements for ECEC staff should be introduced, and whether the time for acquiring the needed competences is appropriate.

Participants noted the unified qualification requirement for ECEC teachers and identified the need for clearer definitions of occupational profiles for other ECEC staff and minimum qualifications. They noted that current regulations and qualifications for assistants differ across regions and institutions, leading to confusion and inconsistency in the sector.

As already mentioned, in some federal provinces there are no standards for ECEC assistants. The participants recognized the importance of a competency framework, particularly for professionals working with children under three years old. These professionals often feel overwhelmed and underprepared, highlighting the need for better training and support. The group also identified disparities in the quality of training provided to assistants, with some regions offering more comprehensive programmes than others.

Participants acknowledged as positive the role of inclusive early childhood educators and language educators, but some participants, also in the focus group, noted that they are with limited deployment time (e.g. 10 hours weekly per child with diagnosis, of which 3 hours are for preparation). The participants therefore addressed the need to create more multi-professional teams that are permanently present in the facilities – e.g. occupational therapists, speech therapists, professional advisors and psychologists. This approach would also provide

⁸ BAfEP = Bildungsanstalt für Elementarpädagogik (Training Institute for Early Childhood Education)

opportunities for career changes, encourage professionals from other fields to join the sector, and prevent ECEC staff from feeling a lack of support due to the absence of multidisciplinary support teams and specialized counselling for institutions.

Goal 2: Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training

The discussions during the workshops recognized the well-organized system of standardized initial education of ECEC teachers. The need for a unified competency framework, standardized training for assistants, and improved accreditation processes for the education of professionals in the field of ECEC in Austria were also discussed. Addressing these challenges would help create a consistent and high-quality system, ultimately benefiting both professionals and the children they care for.

The participants proposed several measures to address these issues, such as the development of a national competence framework, the establishment of common standards for training and qualifications, the creation of a unified system for accreditation and quality assurance, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion in ECEC. They also stressed the importance of providing adequate support and resources for ECEC professionals, including enhanced opportunities for mentoring, and coaching as well as ongoing professional development.

Measures
4. Specific to early childhood education and care, effective pre-service training programmes and relevant pre-service training providers are in place.
<i>Summary assessment: While the initial education of ECEC teachers is regulated through the required graduation from the BAfEP or other training leading to professional authorisation, there is no such regulation for the training of assistants. The training that exists for assistants working in ECEC is regulated weakly, at federal province level, and is of diverse duration and quality.</i>
Several participants were concerned about the lack of coherence and standardization in the ECEC system, especially regarding the training and qualifications of assistants in ECEC. They identified a range of issues, including the absence of a clear competency framework for ECEC, the partial lack of uniformity in training and qualifications, the challenges posed by working with children under three, and the need to promote inclusion and diversity in ECEC.
Some participants noted that there is often a difference in perception between ECEC teachers working with 3-6 years old children and staff in early childhood education, for children below 3 years of age, with the latter being perceived as those only playing with children, even though their impact on children is highly significant.

Some participants argued that the focus should not only be on encouraging more people to enter the profession through better training ("push") but also on improving the attractiveness of working conditions to retain professionals in the field ("pull").

There were disparities identified by some participants in the quality of training providers and accreditation processes, with private providers bearing more responsibility for their own quality criteria.

Some participants also emphasized the importance of self-reflection and biography work in the training of assistants, particularly given the short duration of many training courses. The group expressed concern that the compressed nature of some of these courses may not allow for adequate development of reflective abilities.

5. Content and methods of pre-service training programmes are appropriate for achieving established competency profiles and standards.

Summary assessment: There is no nationwide competency framework for early childhood educators and assistants. The training sector as a whole could benefit from a review, which would contribute to a rethink, an upgrade, quality improvements and better regulation.

The participants observed that there are varying levels of education and requirements for the different profiles of ECEC staff (e.g. ECEC teachers and ECEC assistants) across Austria's federal provinces, that could lead to disparities in quality in case of assistants.

Several members of the working group discussed the need for an induction phase of at least one year, guided by well-trained mentors, and the importance of practice-oriented tertiary education.

Concerns about the quality of BAfEP was also raised by some participants questioning whether the age of the students is set too low for mastering the complex skills needed to become a successful ECEC teacher. Some experts noted that the early starting age of the five-year BAfEP programme could mean that young graduates do not always enter or remain in the profession. One participant stated: "The higher the quality of training (BAfEP Kolleg; university course), and the older people are when they start their training, the better they can cope and the better prepared they are". However, some other participants found the entry age appropriate. They noted that the BAfEP curricula have been predominantly competence-orientated since 2016.

Participants discussed at length the importance of practical experience and support for professionals in training. Some expressed concern that the lack of a standardised, overarching competency framework makes it difficult to assess the quality of practical training. Practical guidance (Praxisbegleitung) was cited as an important aspect of professional development but implemented differently depending on the institution. Although practical guidance is an important part of the BAfEP curricula and is implemented by all BAfEP, not all have practice kindergartens. Some students must get practical training in other ECEC institutions.

It was observed that the training system does not always sufficiently lead to the competences required for practice, creating a discrepancy for some graduates. Several participants noted that the training insufficiently prepares for concrete group situations and for the work with parents/guardians/families. On the other hand, mentoring in ECEC settings is usually not funded, mentors are not additionally trained and often do not have a dedicated period for providing mentoring. There are problems for students in finding a good practical training place, and induction is not a standard practice.

Some workshop participants noted that there are challenges in accessing training for students from rural areas, high transportation, and accommodation costs for them, and insufficient financial rewards for higher education were also mentioned. The group noted that, although there is a growing number of digital formats and studies, the provision is not yet sufficient. Lastly, they agreed that there is a diverse range of training providers in Austria, but the current situation is too varied to provide a comprehensive answer on the sufficiency of providers. Diversity is an excellent route to high quality, provided there is an agreed overall conceptual framework and an agreed, binding quality assurance system.

6. A system for recognition and accreditation or licensing of pre-service programmes has been developed.

Summary assessment: Accreditation procedures and criteria are fully in place for the ECEC teachers; however these are either limited or missing for many programmes preparing assistants.

The workshop participants highlighted disparities in the accreditation processes between federal provinces and educational levels. While universities, including universities of education (PH) and universities of applied sciences (FH) have accreditation systems in place, and BAfEP are established and run by the Ministry, the education of assistants may lack such systems. The lack of a unified framework leads to diverse continuing and advanced education, pre-service training for assistants and standards across sectors and federal provinces, therefore clear accreditation procedures would be welcome. The lack of these can particularly contribute to a suboptimal pre-service training for assistants. The quality of training providers varies between federal provinces, with some federal provinces having more stringent requirements than others. Also, at the regional level, accreditation processes and feedback loops are inconsistent, further highlighting the need for a unified approach to accreditation. Participants also mentioned that there is a lack of well-defined core competences and feedback loops in accreditation, except for new higher education institutions.

7. Staff who currently do not meet qualifications have opportunities to develop the same levels of competency as qualified practitioners.

Summary assessment: Such possibilities are available for obtaining higher qualifications but are underdeveloped for obtaining the first qualification.

The working group participants acknowledged the benefits of acquiring qualifications while already working in ECEC, especially for alleviating the current staff shortages, but they also identified several bottlenecks in this kind of provision. Programmes that provide non-degree 60-120 ECTS courses for acquiring relevant certificates for working in the ECEC sector are increasing at almost all universities of education and professional higher education institutions (so called “lateral entry” or “*Quereinstieg*” courses). Many of these courses are adjusted and modularized in order to meet the needs of already employed students. Modularized courses are usually aimed at candidates pursuing higher qualifications, such as inclusive early childhood educators or language educators⁹, or a leadership position, and less often for those pursuing their initial qualification. There are exceptions, though, including for example a programme in cooperation between a German university of education and a large independent provider in Vienna. This programme ensures a dual education while working part time. Some of the BAfEP Kollegs are starting to open in this direction, too. Also, there are possibilities to obtain lower qualifications, as for the assistant profession, which are often provided by private or public providers and are rarely connected to higher education institutions. A new programme, Elementar+, has started in Autumn 2023 and provides an opportunity for assistants to get qualifications while being employed.

Additional bottlenecks highlighted by the participants are often tied to candidates having to reduce their workload and consequently their salary in order to undertake these training courses. Due to this, their income can fall below acceptable levels, especially if they are supporting their families. In order to mitigate this risk, as part of the new programme Elementar+ it is pointed out that financial support from the AMS can be claimed. Also, it can happen, according to the Focus Group participants, that the newly obtained higher qualification is not appropriately remunerated and the personal investment does not pay off financially – it can bring personal satisfaction from a higher quality of work, though.

Further barriers pinpointed by several participants include instances when the ECEC institution might have such a staff shortage that does not allow for more flexible working hour options to enable candidates for enrolling in modules and combining work and continuing and advanced education. The digital formats of continuing and advanced education opportunities, either asynchronous or synchronous, are in the process of development and are not yet offered widely.

Goal 3: Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development (CPD), including setting up career pathways for the ECEC sector.

⁹ In German *Inklusive Elementarpädagog/inn/en* and *Sprachförderkräfte*

Continuing professional development (CPD) of the ECEC professional staff is an important area in ECEC practice in Austria which is fully in the responsibility of the federal provinces. CPD is widespread and obligatory for ECEC staff. There is a wide range of available CPD courses in Austria that include those offered by the federal provinces, the universities of education, other institutional or sometimes also individual providers. From this wide offer either the ECEC institutions select the courses for their staff or the staff themselves, while some courses or topics can be required for all. Some measures that would render the CPD system to become a powerful avenue for staff to enhance their qualifications and update their competences, are not fully developed or widespread. CPD in Austria is mostly organized at the workplace, while reflective practice and on-site coaching is rather an exception. CPD is leading to higher qualifications of staff if it is provided by higher education institutions in a modularized way, while the training by other providers usually does not bring recognition or higher remuneration, even if someone participates in more training than prescribed. In the ECEC sector, career development of staff is not regulated and progression is possible mainly by moving into a leadership position or by becoming an inclusive early childhood educator or language educator. Issues of quality, availability and affordability of the provision were raised and discussed, as well as evaluation and other quality assurance mechanisms, that were found to be in need for further development.

The identified systemic gaps bring to light the issues of quality, effectiveness and accountability of the CPD provision, and indicate the need for a rethinking of the CPD offer.

Measures
8. CPD programmes are evidence-based and effective in leading to ongoing professionalization of staff.
<i>Summary assessment: The rationale for the development and selection of CPD programmes is based on complex considerations between policies, needs, provision possibilities and demand. Evidence on the effectiveness or impact of CPD courses is rarely collected systematically or used for further development of the offer.</i>
A substantial part of the working group discussion, especially with participants from the institutions that are among CPD providers, such as the assigned federal province's departments for ECEC and of universities of education (PH) or universities of applied sciences (FH) focused on exploring in detail the evidence base of the CPD provision. The discussion pinpointed that while the argumentation for selecting any CPD topic or particular course to be offered for ECEC staff is diverse, the evidence base for these arguments, and consequently for the offer of particular topics and courses is not fully systematic. According to several participants, the reasons to develop and offer a particular course can be political imperatives, e.g. in case of trainings that address topics arising due to changes in regulations, concepts or standards that the federal government, the provinces, or the providers consider important (e.g. focus on children's rights or the introduction of a new curriculum). Courses can emerge as inspired by international political priorities, international developments and trends and the question of the

direction in which the system is fundamentally developing such as inclusive education or multicultural education. The development of new continuing and advanced education programmes can also be a response to practical problems identified during monitoring visits by professional supervisors or otherwise and provide insights into relevant local or widespread problems in ECEC practice, e.g. through claims, reports, complaints, and appeals. The ideas for trainings might often come as contributions from highly respected experts from academia based on their insights, research or international exposure (the participants gave the example of working with families as a topic deriving from such sources). In addition to these, ECEC principals can also initiate trainings deemed relevant for the staff they are working with. It was noted that larger private providers often initiate, develop, and deliver trainings to the staff they employ.

Participants agreed that the complex procedure of developing CPD courses is embedded in a close exchange and an iterative process between the federal provinces' administration and the provider, be it the regional PH or individual experts. Usually, an advisory board negotiates in cooperation with PH or education institutions and larger providers on the topics of CPD or there is a contract between the federal province and PH. This process usually does not include targeted evidence collection for the purpose of CPD design, neither as systematic needs assessment of ECEC teachers, nor as research on the possible impact of capacity-building in the particular area or in the particular training modality/methodology.

Some working group participants identified further gaps and challenges in the evidence base of CPD on the impact side through the focused discussion and concluded that there is no systematic approach to collecting evidence on the impact of training. The feedback collected regularly is the imminent assessment of the training by the participants, at the end of the training course. Delayed feedback on the implementation of new competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) in the everyday ECEC practice is not requested, or required only exceptionally, by the providers themselves. That information occasionally might be shared with the federal province's departments for ECEC, but not regularly and not nationwide. The imminent evaluation data is also not collected nationwide, not even everywhere at the federal province level.

The working group participants additionally noted that it is difficult to draw nationwide conclusions and statements on the quality and effectiveness of CPD, because systems across Austria are not fully comparable, and the CPD offers are essentially different. The relevance of CPD in terms of their contribution to the development of competences is additionally not easy to assess as no competency framework has been established for ECEC staff.

The quality of the continuing and advanced education based on the working group participants' assessment varies greatly. Some quality relevant information can be distilled from the interest of ECEC staff in certain CPD programmes, and courses that attract few

participants can become cancelled in the future, while more attractive programmes can expand. This way the provision is also partially responding to the expressed demand. Based on these inputs, the participants noted that ECEC professionals prefer hands-on training, but that many topics that would be attractive for ECEC staff, such as coaching, mentoring or teamwork are scarce and usually a long waiting list for participation in them is created.

Initial, continuing and advanced education of ECEC staff are not systematically linked everywhere, except indirectly since CPD often helps to close the gaps left by initial education. CPD courses can be connected to a further qualification, this is possible albeit uncommon, as already discussed, if universities of education or universities of applied sciences offer modularized training programmes. For example, University of Applied Sciences Vienna offers a 15 ECTS course “Diversity in ECEC” as a further education measure parallel to the BA course, which can be credited for the BA course and is also considered a CPD programme.

Moreover, participants highlighted further possibly systemic gaps, as in Austria ECEC research is a nascent academic and research area. A lot is in the making, some initial research is already underway, but well targeted funding schemes for ECEC research are not yet palpable. In 2020 the International Centre for Professionalization in Early Childhood Educational Practice at the University of Graz was founded with continuing and advanced education offers, evaluations and publications as their remit, and there is expectation that the research agenda will be boosted as the impact of this initiative.

Some participants noted that a modest shift in orientation from training inputs towards focusing on the outcomes and impact could provide feedback important for developing a better suited and more effective offer. An uncomplicated pragmatic option to achieve this important outcome could be an e-mail survey a few months after the training with the question "What has changed in the practice?", which is currently not being done.

9. Ongoing opportunities for professional development are flexible and accessible to all ECEC personnel.

Summary assessment: Although a wide offer of CPD courses is available, there are some availability and affordability related gaps that would need to be overcome to better serve the needs of all ECEC staff for developing their competences.

In Austria CPD is perceived and treated as a professional responsibility, both by the staff and by the authorities. All ECEC teachers as well as other professionals (e.g. language educators, principals) and, more recently, assistants, are required to participate in CPD with minimum hours or days prescribed by law.

Although slightly different requirements apply in the various federal provinces, the requirement is around 2-4 days of continuing and advanced education annually. Therefore, there is both demand and an available offer of CPD in the form of training courses in the workplace which ECEC institutions select for all staff ('in-house seminars') or individual ECEC staff selects based on their interests ('individual seminars'). The course

offer is usually rather extensive and displayed in catalogues with several hundred training courses. From these, some topics can be prioritized and declared as obligatory (for example, participating in a 4-hour training on children's rights and child protection every 3 years), while the majority are optional and subject to choose. The courses provided by the federal provinces (either as courses delivered in the organisation of the appointed department, or in cooperation with the PH) are free of charge, while external courses can be acknowledged and are often pay based.

The working group participants identified certain gaps in respect of availability and affordability of trainings. They noted the realistic danger of limited access to very attractive free of charge courses, since popular topics that are in demand in practice are often overcrowded. In some cases, the further training obligation cannot be ensured via offers from the federal province and fee-based courses need to be accepted in order to fulfil the yearly training obligation. Also, depending on the location, there may be differences in access to CPD. Ensuring free days for participation in trainings can be an additional bottleneck for attendance - although free days are legally provided, in the proscribed number of hours, in reality replacement needs to be found for staff on trainings, which is not always possible and is resource-bound for the ECEC centre. Participation of ECEC assistants in training is also often resource-bound and depends on the judgement and decision of the provider.

Moreover, providing systematic reflection time about the CPD experience and use of new skills is not a widespread practice, although in a number of institutions it was reported that a group reflection is organized after the course. Participants of the working group noted that there are a growing number of online, synchronous or asynchronous CPD modalities that can help mitigate some of the bottlenecks but cannot fully replace an interactive training session.

10. CPD is provided to staff in the ECEC system who do not directly accompany children.

Summary assessment: There is a diversity of continuing and advanced education/qualification possibilities for ECEC principals.

The working group discussion highlighted that ECEC principals usually have higher CPD requirements than ECEC teachers, and that the required leadership trainings are targeting both pedagogical and managerial and administrative competences. However, there is no uniform regulation regarding leadership and management training, and the legislation of the federal provinces differs in this respect.

The working group and Focus Group participants identified interesting practices, but also some gaps. They highlighted nice examples of further training courses for principals that are linked to PH and through which credits can be obtained, BA degree courses recommended for principals or lateral entry programmes for principals at several PH and FH.

However, many participants noted that induction for newcomers is usually not available, although participants acknowledge how important an institutionalized induction phase for new principals would be throughout the country. It was also mentioned that training courses are sometimes not recognized for principals across federal provinces and noted that leadership related continuing and advanced education is often also self-financed by the aspiring candidates or completed in their free time.

11. CPD providers have adequate capacities and technical skills / framework conditions.

Summary assessment: The development of capacities of CPD providers is not seen as an overall public responsibility.

Several working group participants agreed that it is not easy to assess the capabilities and capacities of CPD providers. Although careful selection of educators is the expected practice, certain bottlenecks have been mentioned¹⁰. In some cases, financial constraints can limit the access of all ECEC teachers and assistants to the CPD offer of their choice at an appropriate length. Capacity bottlenecks can also occur at the training providers' end – several participants of the working group acknowledged that it is not easy to find enough scientifically up-to-date speakers or a sufficient number of multipliers for new topics.

Moreover, the capacity building of providers themselves is not supported by public funds, internal capacity development of educators is covered from own resources, and some providers invest more, others less in this regard, which then in turn has effects on the quality of the offer.

Goal 4: Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention

Austria still has some catching up to do to reach this goal. Although, several initiatives for improving workforce development programmes exist in the different federal provinces and by different providers, monitoring of these innovations, their impact on ECEC workforce retention and quality and outcomes for children is largely missing. Multi-level career advancement schemes¹¹ for ECEC staff are not yet developed. Although innovations aimed at retaining high quality staff are mushrooming, nationwide mechanisms for sharing, cooperation and coordination are not yet in place.

Measures

¹⁰ A part of the concluding discussion on priority challenges for ECEC staff policy highlighted capacity problems in this area.

¹¹ Under multi-level career advancement or progression scheme the possibility is understood that staff advance through a diversified career ladder by meeting certain quality criteria, taking on progressively more complex tasks, and receiving higher remuneration. Usually, the ladder consists of 3-5 steps (Please see for example European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. Teaching Careers in Europe: Access, Progression and Support. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.)

12. Training and support opportunities for ECEC staff are well-coordinated across the sector and promote career progression and retention

Summary assessment: In Austria a multi-level career progression scheme for ECEC staff, as an important mechanism to attract and retain high quality professionals is still to be developed, therefore the federal provinces and providers use many lateral and occasionally innovative possibilities to reward and retain high quality staff.

While a formal advancement process associated with higher status and salary increase and based on CPD and other benefits is considered an important quality incentive in many countries, this measure is neither developed nor practiced in Austria. In the discussion, working group participants explored possible ways on how, in the absence of a developed career advancement mechanism, excellence and commitment to capacity building and continuing and advanced education can be recognized and rewarded in the Austrian ECEC system.

Many different innovative options partially filling the gap were identified in the different federal provinces. For example, the participants highlighted the possibility to provide performance bonuses, since the federal provinces are designing the salary classification, therefore additional trainings can be recognized (the example derives from Vorarlberg). The arrangement of providing free time, i.e. reducing immediate work for the same salary, is practised as an incentive in several places, including Vienna. There are good practices in providing paid time off to be used for training as well as payment of continuing and advanced education courses, e.g. for professionals working with children under 3 years and/or for assistants, e.g. in Tyrol. Participants also identified practices that provide appreciation for exceptional ECEC teachers via participation in projects, involvement in presenting own practice to others, serving as speakers, trainers or multipliers, and being engaged in peer learning (for example in Lower Austria and Styria). These opportunities most often provide not only recognition but also additional honoraria, which in turn top up the salaries of the ECEC teachers involved.

13. Mechanisms are in place to monitor working conditions and ensure that they are favourable and supportive.

Summary assessment: The federal provinces are developing various mechanisms to respond to the need to attract and retain highly qualified professionals, however regular evaluations of these innovations and nationwide sharing, cooperation and coordination mechanism are not yet in place.

During the discussion about this measure, some workshop participants reminded about the generally unfavourable conditions that are often not supportive enough for ECEC staff, such as high staff-child ratio and scarce time for preparation, professional development, or peer learning. Also, they discussed the prevailing problems in lack of mentoring and scarce incentives, monetary or non-monetary for rewarding notable performance.

The participants noted that, in the absence of policy measures, providers use various mechanisms to attract and retain highly qualified ECEC professionals.

The discussion mostly focused on the examples of arranging flexible working hours for staff, including a flexible working time structure and flexible contact hours. New working time models, e.g. a 4-day week, are used as incentives in some areas, such as in Carinthia. It was discussed that although this measure is often very well received by staff, it could jeopardize the interaction and attachment of children to their ECEC teachers on a regular, everyday basis. Reducing administrative tasks for excellent ECEC teachers was mentioned as another supportive mechanism and incentive to retain high quality staff, used for example in Upper Austria.

Mentoring for prospective ECEC teachers (in Vienna) and induction time coupled by management courses for principals (in Upper Austria) are being developed to enhance attracting and retaining professional staff. A new mentoring system (in Lower Austria, in place since January 2023) was described. It encompasses 1:1 supervision for 8 hours during 12 weeks by trained mentors. The activity brings benefits both for the ECEC teacher and for their mentors. In addition to these, a model of collaborative generation of new ideas through dialogue groups, regular meetings of major providers in Vienna were mentioned.

The working group participants were at the end of this session invited to share good models in CPD and employee retention from different sites. A non-exhaustive but inspirational list of these practices are as follows:

- Vienna: Kolleg Change is supported – dual training in connection with employment (training + practice), which successfully binds the employees. There is also a new competence centre for child protection and a child protection officer to raise awareness about the importance of child protection.
- Styria: There is a wide variety of training formats: asynchronous with 30 different offers, digital formats, face-to-face events, courses, cooperation with PH and universities.
- Lower Austria: Regional teams are available on specific inclusive education topics (e.g. ADHD, sign language, etc.) and career opportunity offers are available through participation in these teams. This results in a good, direct transfer of knowledge, adapted and customized for the specific ECEC setting. Also, Montessori workshops are organized in the format of an annual international conference for educational innovations.
- Vorarlberg: A specialist conference is organized every 2 years for the entire staff of ECEC institutions on a current topic (for example quality, transition to school, etc). Experts are on site, and time for extensive exchange is scheduled. There are also continuing and advanced education opportunities available, such as the

introduction of the Dual College with simultaneous employment in an ECEC institution.

14. Specific data on ECEC professionals' training and support programmes are collected and used to inform ongoing improvements in the ECEC workforce.

Summary assessment: Data collection on ECEC professionals' training and support programmes and the use of these data for policy improvements was a somewhat missing link in the Austrian ECEC system. Data collection and sharing in general is a challenge due to the decentralised nature of the system.

Data collection for Austria in ECEC is generally unsatisfactory and gaps in the system are visible. Since the ECEC system is fragmented between the federal provinces and the providers, and all relevant regulations on CPD, career advancement, salaries and working conditions are set at the level of federal provinces, no nationwide data is collected throughout Austria regarding process quality and CPD. Some data on several aspects of the working conditions describing structural quality are available through the data collection of the national statistics office, but these do not include ECEC staff continuing and advanced education and available supports.

Data are usually gathered at the level of providers, and occasionally and in some cases compiled to the level of the federal provinces if requested. The major venue for information collection on staff training and quality of work is through inspection. Regular inspections, monitoring and consultations take place for data collection at the federal province level, but with significant gaps.

Working group participants discussed the major gap being the lack of supervisors, resulting in supervision carried out only superficially every year and more extensively only once in several years, sometimes even 8 years. Such a low frequency of data collection on the relevant processes in ECEC institutions does not allow for a systematic evaluation, the participants pointed out. In parallel to the federal province-run supervision system, larger providers offer their own supervision. In some cases, they engage national consultants and advisors some of which supervise while others provide support and advise to the staff.

Summary discussion on Module 4 (Quality Assurance) and 5 (Parental and Community Engagement), and Key Factors 1 and 4 (Ministerial Leadership and Public Demand).

The Sector Analysis primarily focused on the workforce component of the UNICEF Diagnostic Tool. Since the workforce exists within the broader system, these additional key areas were also included. The discussion on all four topics was informed by the Diagnostic Tool material and questions, but it was conducted in a semiformal and shortened way. The working group was divided into four small groups to take part in the individual discussions. Nevertheless, several relevant aspects were raised worth mentioning in the current report, since the highlighted

shortcomings can directly or indirectly influence the workforce development processes and overall prospects.

The workshop participants discussing this module (mostly the representatives of the federal provinces' departments for ECEC) highlighted that in recent years quality development and quality assurance became an important focus of their work. There is a lot of activity focused on conveying the need for ensuring quality work in ECEC to principals and other ECEC staff – checklists, guidebooks, different supportive materials are created and disseminated, with the aim to spotlight quality. However, a unified nationwide quality framework is yet to be developed. Also, participants agreed that mechanisms to obtain information about the process quality, the actual quality of work with children, are largely limited to the work of inspection, and supervisors' visits to the ECEC centres. Participants highlighted that an important barrier to these mechanisms of data collection is the scarcity of ECEC supervisors at the federal provinces. ECEC departments have only a small number of supervisors who can only reach ECEC with a targeted visit, sometimes only once in several years. This staff shortage seriously jeopardizes quality development processes and at the same time calls for changes in Austria, not only in staffing but also in conceptualizing quality assurance as a powerful development process.

Focusing on the *Family and Community Engagement*, participants mostly focused on the obligatory one on one parent-teacher conferences, as a very useful practice. However, they highlighted that novice ECEC teachers are usually unprepared and not effective in conducting this task. Participants also highlighted that parents/guardians/families are seen as partners in educating and caring for the child, they can choose the type of setting they feel comfortable with, but there are no strong mechanisms by which parents/guardians/families could influence major changes at the level of the ECEC institutions (for example about staffing, curriculum, etc.).

In the discussion on *Ministerial Leadership*, the participants of the small group highlighted the complexities of the ECEC governance structure in Austria and acknowledged the need for effective cooperation between the federal provinces' departments for ECEC and the ECEC department of the Federal Ministry. They also suggested increasing the number of ECEC responsible staff at both levels and strengthening the financial incentives for the ECEC sector.

The questions on *Public Demand* were discussed by a very small group of 3-4 experts. They highlighted the lack of a strong awareness and understanding of the importance of early childhood education and care. They noted that there is too little information about the importance of play based pedagogies in the society and that a rather traditional attitude and traditional family image still has a strong impact in Austria, which, in turn, frames the social and cultural approaches to ECEC.

Conclusions of the workshop discussions on workforce development

The three workshop discussions provided an opportunity for exploring the most important policy and practice areas relevant for the ECEC workforce, its quality, development, and wellbeing. The discussions also allowed for a deeper understanding of underlying processes, innovative

solutions but also barriers and entrenched yet ineffective solutions that can create pertinent challenges to a harmonious and effective development process regarding the ECEC workforce in Austria. In addition, the wide range of stakeholders invited and participating in the workshops benefited from the possibility to share knowledge and experiences as well as concerns and ideas and to develop a wide understanding of the entire area of ECEC staff policy.

The systematic overview of the subsector guided by the Diagnostic Tool shed light on many constructive and innovative practices regarding the ECEC workforce, but also several barriers and challenges. The following summary will however mostly focus on gaps and challenges, as the main purpose of the analysis was to provide important insights for the forthcoming strategy and change agenda regarding the ECEC workforce.

The working conditions of ECEC staff were discussed in a largely critical light, highlighting the need for urgent action in reducing staff-child ratios, group sizes and increasing salaries of ECEC staff. Also, the lack of or multitude of diverse and occasionally confusing regulations of the initial education of ECEC staff working with 0-3 years old children, and of assistants throughout the system was addressed as an area that needs coordinated development.

On the other hand, the Sector Analysis yielded insight into areas that are not easily researched with other methodologies and spotlighted potentially unfavourable practices, policy gaps and challenges. Among these are the absence of a Competency Framework for ECEC professionals and the consequences of this gap on assuring the quality of initial, continuing and advanced education, but also non-degree continuing and advanced education courses. The scarcity of support to practicing ECEC teachers in terms of mentoring, coaching, induction is another such area. The frequent lack of evidence regarding the relevance, effectiveness and/or impact of the CPD system, which means that no accountability can be given for the resources spent on it, is also a challenge.

The low number of supervisors, supervision of the practices of providers by the providers themselves, lack of data collection systems about continuing and advanced education and many other workforce relevant data, coupled with not fully developed research capacities in the ECEC subsector and scarce research are also insights that are usually not readily available using other methodologies. In this list, the information about the lack of regulations that can cause many practical problems to ECEC staff should also be mentioned. Some of such problems are that continuing and advanced education courses might be not acknowledged across federal provinces, that years spent in practice might not count for remuneration if the provider is changed, and that higher degrees might not influence better remuneration. It seems that many decisions in the aforementioned areas affecting the staff are not fully transparent and are depending on the capacities and understandings of the provider and the ECEC institution's principal.

The Sector Analysis process, in addition to the gaps, spotlighted an impressive multitude of interesting, potentially effective, and innovative practices by which the federal provinces, the providers and the ECEC centres themselves are trying to bridge existing policy gaps and work in

favour of attracting, educating and retaining high quality staff, albeit without due coordination and, most probably without evaluation of the impacts.

In conclusion, the analysis revealed that on one hand, all of the measures explored with the Diagnostic Tool are present in the system, none is entirely missing. On the other hand, in the remit of every measure, some aspects are underdeveloped, and these, sometimes even seemingly minor, fissures can prevent the full progression of the measure and limit its effectiveness.

Prioritised challenges

The working group participants provided in the course of the 3rd workshop their joint list of prioritized challenges for workforce development as well as a list of best -nationwide practices, measures or recent positive developments.

The nation-wide best practice accomplishments or processes important for the development of ECEC workforce that are already at place, according to the working group participants, are:

Measures regarding working conditions of staff	Measures regarding initial, continuing and advanced education of staff
<p>Discussing ECEC staff working conditions through a variety of networking events and modalities, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects (the TSI project) • The Advisory Board for ECEC (Beirat für Elementarpädagogik), • Networking of practitioners in ECEC (such as NeBö, Education, EduCare), and through • Thematic conferences <p>Agreement pursuant to Art. 15a B-VG between the federal government and the federal provinces on ECEC</p> <p>The Nationwide Education Framework Plan (BildungsRahmenPlan 2009) for ECEC institutions in Austria</p>	<p>At the level of initial education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse offers of the universities of education and other universities relevant for ECEC teachers, including modularized system of training and possibilities for combining work and education • Expansion of the BAfEP Kollegs <p>At the level of continuing and advanced education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple training opportunities • New model of in-house training • Model centres <p>As exchange of experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings by EduCare • Days of ECEC conferences

The list of challenges that should have priority in being addressed is long. Participants first identified 3-5 priorities per group per session, presented them, attached them to a board and after a discussion the whole group “voted” individually – each participant could place two points to the most appealing challenge on the board.

This two-stage process of prioritizing distilled out those challenges that most of the participants felt as important to address as a priority. The timeframe and number of challenges meant that the prioritisation process was more general and didn't allow for a deeply detailed or nuanced prioritisation process.

The most important challenges (in ascendent order of prioritizing) regarding ECEC staff working conditions selected by the working group participants is presented in Figure 4.

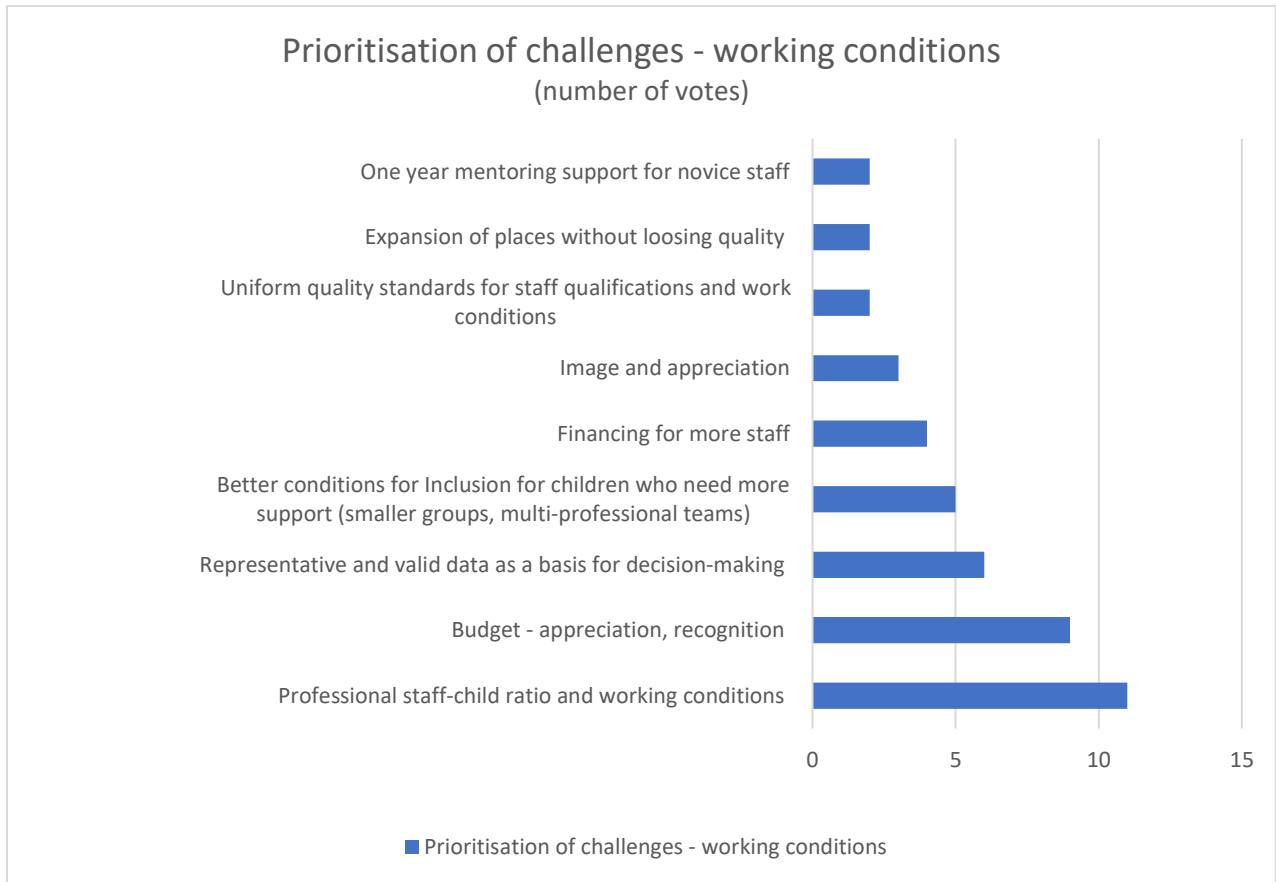


Figure 4. The most important challenges regarding ECEC staff working conditions in ascending order of prioritizing. The numbers refer to the number of “votes” received from the participants, while each participant could place 2 votes.

Several small group priorities did not get further votes in the two-phase prioritization, nevertheless, since they were identified as challenges by the small groups, they are listed here as well: managing simultaneously lack of staff and need for higher quality of service, ensuring conceptual clarifications in the ECEC sector, and creating comparability across the federal provinces.

The most important challenges (in ascending order of prioritizing) regarding initial, continuing and advanced education of ECEC staff are presented in Figure 5.

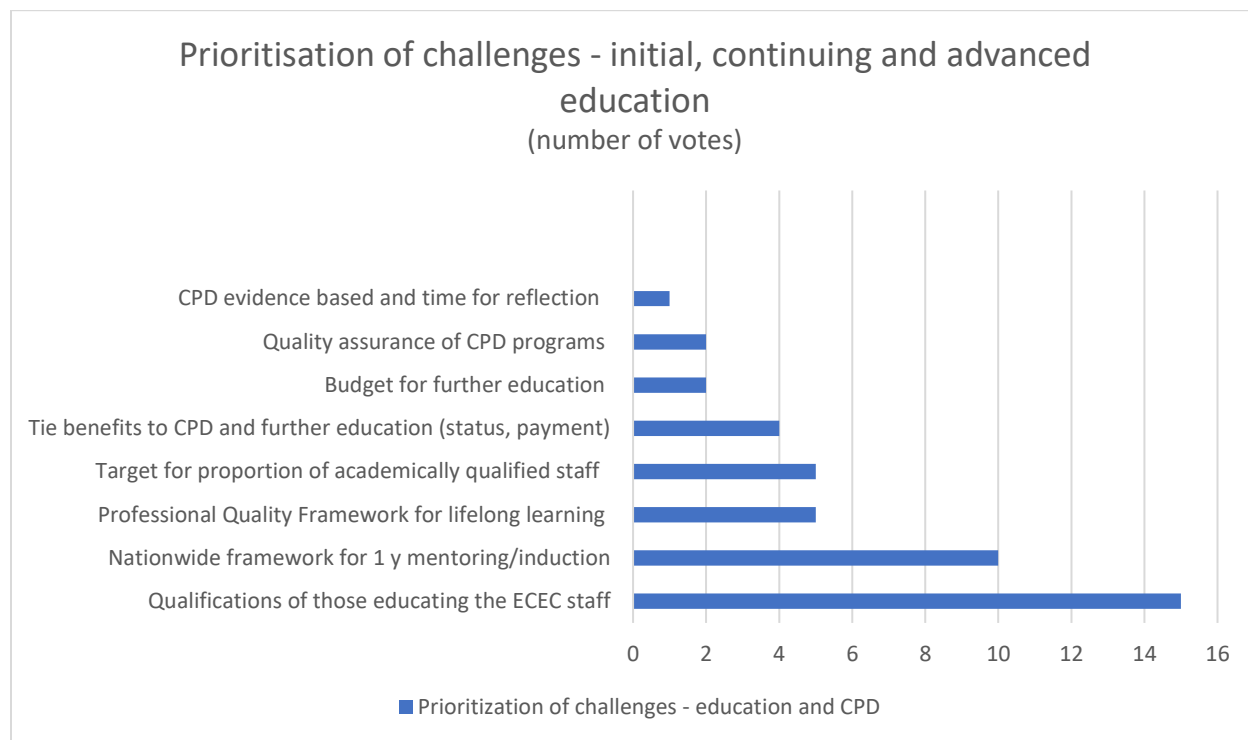


Figure 5. The most important challenges regarding ECEC staff initial, continuing and advanced education - in ascending order of prioritizing. The numbers refer to the number of "votes" received from the participants, while each participant could place 2 votes. Please find full statements of priorities as formulated by participants in footnote¹².

Several small group priorities did not get further votes in the two-phase prioritization, nevertheless, since they were identified as challenges by the small groups, they are listed here as well. These were concerns to ensure proper requirements for child protection, better differentiating the professional field (and separating professional work from administration), ensuring higher diversity of staff & career changers, defining the different responsibilities for personnel, ensuring time-based compensation for further training, ensuring better knowledge transfer in multidisciplinary teams, ensuring better, theory - practice transfer, and (evaluating the) sustainability of educational programmes.

¹² Qualifications of those educating the ECEC staff, in all sub-systems; Nationwide framework for mentoring in the career entry induction time; Professional quality framework in the sense of lifelong learning; Formulation of a target indicator for the proportion of academically qualified staff in each ECEC center (e.g. until 2030); Ensuring that benefits are tied to continuing and advanced education (status, time resources, hierarchies, development opportunities, payment, professional career); Budget for initial, continuing and advanced education; Quality assurance of CPD programmes.

Conclusions, recommendations, and way forward

Since the function of the current analysis was to spotlight areas that need improvement, the conclusions and recommendations will for this pragmatic reason focus on the gaps and challenges, and somewhat disregard the many already developed accomplishments in the ECEC system. The participatory analysis has provided an opportunity to comprehensively assess the strengths, weaknesses and bottlenecks relating to the ECEC staff.

The use of the Diagnostic Tool showed that the ECEC workforce is in need of serious support. A number of major challenges and gaps have been identified.

A robust, well-justified strategy for recruiting staff in the ECEC sector is not yet fully in place, there are serious staff shortages and several areas of the work context including salaries are burdened by challenges that need to be overcome in order to reach a well-functioning ECEC with well-qualified and committed staff. Neither a competency framework nor quality standards for ECEC staff defined therein are in place, and there are many consequences of this gap, especially visible regarding CPD of ECEC staff. The initial qualification requirements for ECEC professional staff are standardized nationwide and set at the level of the federal government. The discussion about the need for academization of the initial education of ECEC teachers is ongoing, while for assistants, regulations are at the level of the federal provinces, and are in many cases weak or even missing.

There are indicators that the pre-service education of ECEC staff overall needs some rethinking, upgrading, improved quality, and also better regulation in case of assistants. Accreditation procedures and criteria are fully in place for the ECEC teachers, while weak or missing for many programmes preparing assistants. Possibilities for obtaining qualifications during employment are available for obtaining higher qualifications but are less developed for obtaining the first qualification.

A wide offer of CPD courses and qualification possibilities is available for principles of ECEC institutions. However, there is room for improvement in order to better serve the needs of ECEC staff for developing their competences. The rationale for the CPD programmes is usually not based on empirical research evidence, neither is a systematic insight into the effectiveness and impact of CPD collected or used for further development of the offer.

In Austria, career progression schemes for ECEC staff are not developed, and the federal provinces and providers use many lateral and innovative possibilities to reward and retain high quality staff. Federal provinces are developing various mechanisms to respond to the need to attract and retain high quality professionals, however regular evaluations of these innovations or nationwide sharing, cooperation and coordination mechanisms are still absent. Data on ECEC professionals' continuing and advanced education and support programmes is not readily

available in the Austrian ECEC system.

In addition to the identified challenges, a most valuable output of the analysis is the consensus developed between stakeholders participating in the workshops. The common understanding and joint prioritization they participated in contributed already to creating a shared vision of the improved conditions for ECEC staff, the group will be working towards in the next phases of the project. This is an important asset gained through the Sector Analysis process.

Recommendations

The greatest challenges were identified by the participants in a prioritization workshop. Translating these challenges into recommendations, a comprehensive list is obtained.

The discussions yield a map of interconnected and partially overlapping recommendations, that can be structured in a variety of ways, depending on the purpose.

From the perspective of target areas, most recommendations focus on the improvement of the structural working conditions of ECEC staff. Unfavourable staff-child ratios and large group sizes prevent ECEC teachers from conducting their work the way they would like to and the way it would be developmentally most appropriate for the children. Research shows that only high quality ECEC brings the benefits early education could and should bring to children and foster their development. On the other hand, working under such conditions is not conducive for staff either – it contributes to a feeling of helplessness, burnout and attrition, leaving the system in even higher need for new staff. Group sizes must therefore be decreased, and staff-child ratios rendered more favourable. In parallel to setting (and reaching) targets in this respect, action needs to be taken that synchronizes and standardizes the working conditions of ECEC staff across the country.

There are other aspects of the working conditions that should be improved and have the potential of contributing to staff satisfaction and binding. These include mentoring, coaching, participatory leadership, possibilities of career advancement and a better worktime structure that allows more time for reflection, planning, preparation, teamwork, and other non-contact obligations of ECEC teachers. Identifying these “soft” conditions were a special gain of the Sector Analysis, in quantitative overviews they can easily go unnoticed. Many of these conditions can be improved with well targeted and joint professional support to the system, and this should be done urgently.

Finally, among the unfavourable working conditions there is the comparably low salary level of ECEC teachers and other staff. This contributes to a low image and social status, a negative selection of staff and decreasing quality of services. Reassessing the remuneration of ECEC staff across the country should therefore be a priority.

Another important target area are the qualifications and competences of ECEC staff. In comparable EU countries, training at Bachelor's level has been standard for ECEC teachers for some time, while an upper secondary level qualification is common for assistants. In Austria, the views on the required pre-service training levels are controversial. Lower qualifications can contribute to a negative image of the ECEC profession and short education cycles do not allow to embrace the complexities implicated in ECEC, as a critical means to fostering cognitive, social and emotional development of each child. Qualifications would need to be gradually increased and targets for academically educated staff set. That would certainly implicate the need for many other complex, demanding and time-consuming quality measures, such as strengthening institutional cooperation between the currently dominant pre-service training providers and academic institutions, responding to an increased need for fully qualified university professors in the ECEC area, the number of doctorates in the area will need to increase, and academic research in ECEC should be supported. This all might need curriculum development processes, as well as finding good solutions for ensuring high quality mentoring/guidance during practical training of all students for conducting the practical part of their studies and more mentors. In parallel to these endeavours, many new possibilities for educating assistants to enter the profession, and for modularized continuing and advanced education of those already working is needed, to ensure that the size of the workforce expands to meet the demand.

The third target area is a set of recommendations relevant for improving continuing and advanced education of staff working in ECEC. CPD is an important financial and human resources investment that should contribute to the quality of provision. Therefore, the CPD system would benefit from strengthening its evidence base, from systematic needs assessments and tracking the impact of CPD. For the teachers and other staff participating in CPD it is essential that benefits are connected to participation, in terms of remuneration and status – these requests would create new incentives for retaining ambitious staff in the system and should be considered as recommended measures.

From a more stringent perspective, the recommendations distilled from the Sector Analysis process can be structured according to the goals of the Workforce Development Module and seen as actions and steps needed to close the identified gaps and overcome the challenges on the way of reaching each goal. Looking from this perspective, more granular recommendations can be formulated.

In order to overcome the challenges in reaching Goal 1, *Establish a strategy for recruiting ECEC staff across the whole sector, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles*, the following actions would need to be initiated:

- ✓ Improving the working environment for ECEC staff, with a particular focus on reducing group sizes and ensuring a staff-child ratio that is appropriate for developmentally stimulating staff-child and peer to peer interactions to take place.
- ✓ Higher budgetary resources need to be directed into the ECEC sector that would ensure the implementation of a step-by-step plan of financing both more staff and salary

increases and would have a positive impact on the image and increased appreciation and recognition of the profession of ECEC teachers and assistants.

- ✓ Effective balance between expansion of places and high-quality provision needs to be reached.
- ✓ A comprehensive competency (skills, knowledge and attitudes) framework for ECEC staff should be developed, along with clear and Austria-wide qualification standards for all profiles of ECEC staff.
- ✓ Representative and valid data need to be collected and used as a basis for decision-making in the sector. It is important to ensure comparable data across the ECEC system, by improving interoperability and standardization of data.

In order to address the barriers in reaching *Goal 2: Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training*, the following developments should ensue:

- ✓ A target for the proportion of academically educated ECEC staff should be set in a 5-10 years perspective.
- ✓ The qualification and competences of those educating the ECEC staff, in all sub-systems (teachers at the BAfEP, educators of CPD programmes, mentors in schools, and higher education teachers in the field of ECEC) should be further developed and supported.
- ✓ The practical studies for students at real life settings should be strengthened, with clear curriculum and qualified mentoring.
- ✓ Constant attention should be paid to updating curricula to reflect the rapidly growing scientific knowledge base in ECEC and emerging measures that could contribute to improved practice.

In order to mitigate the challenges in reaching *Goal 3: Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development (CPD), including setting up career pathways for the Sector*, the undermentioned developments would need to be introduced:

- ✓ Clear and predictable benefits should be tied to continuing and advanced education, e.g. higher status, elevation on a professional career ladder reflected also on remuneration, further development opportunities and adjusted time resources.
- ✓ Introducing a well-developed system of quality assurance for CPD, including evidence base, clear selection criteria, data collection, monitoring effects and impact assessment, feedback loop for improving the CPD offer.
- ✓ Ensuring free access to continuing and advanced education possibilities to all candidates interested to obtain higher qualifications for the ECEC sector.
- ✓ Increasing the relevance of CPD offer, by focusing on the real-life environment of the children, on transferring skills of implementing play-based methodologies. CPD offer should be evidence based and based on the needs of the ECEC staff.

In order to overcome barriers in reaching *Goal 4: Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention*, the next measured would need to be commenced:

- ✓ A nationwide framework of mentoring and induction should be developed and implemented, including specialized training and remuneration for mentors.
- ✓ Appropriate planning and reflection time for ECEC teachers and other staff should be ensured.
- ✓ Better supervision but also more frequent and comprehensive pedagogical support should be put in place.
- ✓ Inclusion for children who need more support should be supported by better work conditions such as smaller groups and multi-professional teams. In the absence of a well-developed quality assurance and data collection system, and a career advancement system, and in light of the unfavourable working conditions, local innovative action should be fostered, rewarded and shared, but also exchanged across the system as possible good practice examples.

The Sector Analysis demonstrated that all federal provinces in Austria are facing similar significant problems (staffing, funding, quality, equity), have similar neglected areas, (e.g. training of assistants), a comparable lack of services (mentoring, interdisciplinary teams, coaching, counselling) and weak data collection mechanisms as well as limited research capacities. Despite many proactive measures that have been taken in recent years, the accumulated problems and major dilemmas in the Austrian ECEC system need to be addressed urgently, considering that every child who misses the opportunity to develop and socialise in a high-quality environment is a loss not only for themselves and their family, but also for the society. The nature of the problems and dilemmas Austria is facing requires the development of a full-fledged ECEC staff policy, that:

- builds on professional and research evidence-based concepts, targets and solutions,
- is consensually acceptable across stakeholders,
- is coordinated very precisely across different locations and along a longer timeline, and
- includes the monitoring of progress and correcting of procedures based on evaluation.

However, the Sector Analysis clearly revealed that each of these four requirements has serious shortcomings at the moment. ECEC is a nascent research area, and research capacities have not yet been built up to a satisfactory degree to provide the needed professional guidance. The major stakeholders in ECEC (ECEC teachers, parents/guardians/families and employers) are not structured at national or even federal province level, therefore building consensus among them around the most important development steps in ECEC seems to be a long way ahead.

Coordination across the federal provinces, and additionally between all providers is a new and still fragile process. Also, there is no full consensus about what should and what should not be coordinated. Finally, the monitoring and data collection system is very weak in ECEC, mostly relying on the scarcely staffed inspection and, for some agreed upon structural indicators, on the

national statistics office. It would need to be substantially upgraded in order to provide a reliable support for a long-term development process.

Therefore, it is recommended to focus in parallel to addressing the more obvious and clearcut recommendations, also on alleviating the listed underlying barriers – and build research capacities, support the establishment of stakeholder representation and consensus building processes, strengthen coordination across the federal provinces and providers, and set up data collection and monitoring capacities and information processing channels.

Annexes:

1. Extract from Module 3 of the Diagnostic Tool used in the workshops.
2. Extract from Module 4 of the Diagnostic Tool used in the workshops.
3. Extract from Module 5 of the Diagnostic Tool used in the workshops.
4. Extract from Key Factor 1 of the Diagnostic Tool used in the workshops.
5. Extract from Key Factor 4 of the Diagnostic Tool used in the workshops.

Goals and Measures of Module 3 – Workforce Development



Goal 1: Establish a strategy for recruiting ECEC staff across the whole sector, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles

A vision for the entire ECEC workforce is defined, including delineation of appropriate competency profiles and staff qualifications as well as strategies to attract a diverse and motivated workforce. T

Measure 1 – A robust, well-justified strategy for recruiting appropriate staff for the ECEC sector is in place.

A comprehensive strategy outlines the specific needs for early childhood educators, including underlying rationales, taking the realities of ECEC staff’s scheduling and work hours into consideration and responding to differences in employment conditions across split systems if relevant. The strategy includes ways to attract new talent and to deploy new ECEC personnel effectively. Strong policies, directives and programmes to recruit ECEC personnel are in place, including policies leading to appropriate salaries.¹³ Strategies are intended to ensure sufficient numbers of qualified ECEC personnel to meet the ambitions for the ECEC sector.

Measure 2 – A core set of professional competencies and standards for ECEC professionals is clearly defined.

The diversity of roles and settings in which ECEC personnel work makes it important to have a common, unifying vision for this group of professionals. Whatever their roles, the work of all ECEC personnel is directed by a common core of competencies and standards that respond to the developmental characteristics and needs of children from 0 to 6 years. The core set of professional competencies is applicable to all ECEC personnel, with additional specialized expectations for particular roles and in accordance with the setting.

Measure 3 – Initial qualification requirements define the level of education and training needed to enter the profession. These requirements are achievable in the current environment, while also aiming towards higher requirements over time.

The responsible governing structures specify qualifications for the ECEC workforce, considering immediate policy goals and opportunities, while retaining the long-term goal of a highly qualified professional workforce.

¹³ For example, policies, directives and programmes might consider parity in ECEC salaries, benefits and training opportunities, with the primary/secondary education levels.



Goal 2: Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training

Before entering the profession, ECEC professionals receive high-quality preparation that integrates theory with practice and that responds to the diverse landscape of ECEC services provision.

Measure 4 – Specific to early childhood education and care, effective pre-service training programmes and relevant pre-service training providers are in place.

Pre-service programmes, linked with the higher education system and formal degrees, prepare ECEC professionals to meet qualifications and enter the profession. These programmes offer multiple options for high-quality training – options that build the qualifications and practical skills of ECEC professionals across all levels of staff. A wide range of training providers may be engaged in offering these programmes, including higher education institutions, other training institutions, and professional associations at the national and subnational levels.

Measure 5 – Content and methods of pre-service training programmes are appropriate for achieving established competency profiles and standards.

Along with explicit alignment between core competencies and pre-service training, the content of the training and the methods adopted for its delivery enhance the development of key competencies. This is achieved by blending theory and practice, and by offering pre-service training with sufficient intensity and duration to prepare new staff for successful engagement in their work. These questions may also be applied to pre-service training programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national pre-service training programmes.

Measure 6 – A system for recognition and accreditation or licensing of pre-service programmes has been developed.

This includes identification of a body that assesses such programmes, approves or accredits, and recommends improvement strategies. A variety of evaluation approaches helps ensure that pre-service programmes support participants' achievement of their goals for professional competency. The presence of an accreditation or recognition system for initial and continuing professional development (CPD) training providers, such as higher education institutions and other training centres, helps assure consistent quality and adherence to professional and training standards. These questions may also be applied to pre-service training programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national pre-service training programmes.

Measure 7 – Staff who currently do not meet qualifications have opportunities to develop the same levels of competency as qualified practitioners.

While keeping the acquisition of a full university degree as a long-term goal, interim strategies such as part-time, short-term certificate programmes, 'bridging courses', distance learning and/or intensive CPD, brief, intensive or alternative on-the-job programmes for service providers

in emergencies and/or refugee settings, credit for prior learning are used to support the professional advancement of currently non-qualified ECEC professionals.



Goal 3: Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development (CPD), including setting up career pathways for the ECEC sector

The ECEC workforce is respected and recognized as a group of highly qualified professionals. This is reflected in the provision of CPD opportunities as a key incentive for staff to enhance their qualifications and update their skills, including through in-service training, reflective practice and on-site coaching, among other initiatives offered in ECEC settings.

Measure 8 – CPD programmes are evidence-based and effective in leading to ongoing professionalization of staff.

The positive impact of professional development depends on the content and delivery mode of the training. CPD programmes are evidence-based, utilizing the right training and support strategies to help ECEC staff apply new knowledge and skills in their work. In addition, these programmes actively involve practitioners in designing content for the training by addressing issues that arise in everyday practices. These questions may also be applied to CPD programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national CPD efforts.

Measure 9 – Ongoing opportunities for professional development are flexible and accessible to all ECEC personnel.

CPD programmes offer to all ECEC professionals equitable and flexible access to training that is responsive to cultural and contextual diversity. This includes formal support provided to all ECEC staff and opportunities for reflection on their practice. These questions may also be applied to CPD programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national CPD efforts.

Measure 10 – CPD is provided to non-teaching personnel in the ECEC system.

Ongoing training and support are viewed as essential not only for ECEC educators but also for other ECEC personnel, including supervisors, programme directors, inspectors, technical specialists, and others who are essential to educators' effectiveness and programme quality. Implementing CPD for all staff working in ECEC context helps to create a shared understanding of quality while also meeting the diverse needs of diverse personnel. These questions may also be applied to CPD programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national CPD efforts.

Measure 11 – CPD training providers have adequate capacities and technical skills.

Once training providers with the proper capabilities are identified and secured, CPD programmes take place under multiple auspices – including higher education institutions along with national and subnational professional associations, community groups, government training institutions,

NGOs and ECEC programme managers and supervisors. These questions may also be applied to CPD programmes for emergency or refugee ECEC service providers if included or separate from the national CPD efforts.



Goal 4: Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention

Investments are made in regularly assessing and improving workforce development programmes, including their impacts on ECEC professionals' effectiveness and relevant outcomes for children. Working conditions are monitored and prioritized in the ECEC sector.

Measure 12 – Training and support opportunities for ECEC staff are well-coordinated across the sector and promote career progression and retention.

The diversity of professional learning provision in the ECEC sector is fully considered, for example, when assessing whether core competencies and qualifications are being addressed consistently to meet the needs of all personnel, during both pre-service and in-service training, and whether these promote career development and retention. Service providers in emergencies and/or refugee settings should also be considered when responding to these questions.

Measure 13 – Mechanisms are in place to monitor working conditions and ensure they are favourable and supportive.

Monitoring mechanisms apply, for example, to providing data that inform decisions on raising staff salary levels, providing non-financial benefits, and increasing the staff-child ratios in ECEC settings. Conditions in emergencies and/or refugee settings should also be considered when responding to these questions.

Measure 14 – Specific data on ECEC professionals' training and support programmes are collected and used to inform ongoing improvements in the ECEC workforce.

This includes a coordinated system to monitor and evaluate individual staff performance, and to monitor and evaluate the quality of training and support programmes. These questions may also be applied in humanitarian or refugee settings, however they may be most relevant and able to be examined in protracted crises.

Module 4 – Family and Community Engagement



Goal 1: Include families and communities as strategic partners in ECEC

Families and communities play a vital role as strong advocates for and supporters of quality early childhood education and care. Equipped with the knowledge and understanding of what 'quality' entails in early childhood education and care, they are empowered to demand quality programmes from policymakers and to contribute to these programmes.

Measure 1 – Family and community engagement is a priority for the ECEC Sector.

ECEC Sector policies and plans treat family and community engagement as a vital, not optional, component of quality ECEC services. An established arm of the lead government bodies for early childhood education and care – such as the ministry of education and the ministry of social affairs, nationally or subnationally – is formally designated with responsibility for this core function.

Measure 2 – A mix of strategies is deployed to encourage family participation.

Partnerships are created between families and early childhood education and care programmes. Parents are engaged not only as 'users' of ECEC services, but in a variety of ways – for example, as volunteers, decision makers, and advisory or management partners.

Measure 3 – Engagement with families and communities is reflected across the ECEC Sector's core functions.

A family and community emphasis is reflected in other core functions, for example, through family and child-related policies; standards for family and community engagement; ECEC professionals' training programmes with a focus on communicating and working with families; and tools and mechanisms to monitor participation and engagement.

Module 5 - Quality Assurance



Goal 1: Establish comprehensive standards for service quality

The broad scope of these standards is set by key stakeholders in the sector and form the basis of quality assurance. Standards are clear, comprehensive and measurable, and embrace a holistic view of child development to cover multiple dimensions of early learning and care environments.

Measure 1 – Standards set forth a country’s expectations and goals for the quality of ECEC services.

Well-defined and measurable standards specify whether they are intended to serve as a minimum ‘floor of quality’ standard or to set aspirational goals. Countries may have either type of standards; it is important to be clear in communicating which are being developed or implemented.

Measure 2 – The quality standards are comprehensive and evidence-based.

The standards are based on evidence and reflect current knowledge from the science of child development and learning. The standards also include two aspects of quality: structural factors and process quality.

Measure 3 – The service quality standards are intentionally and clearly aligned with standards for staff and standards for the ECEC curriculum(a).

Consistency of content and emphasis is evident across all standards related to ECEC. This can include standards for service quality, early learning and development, ECEC staff competencies and training, and the ECEC curriculum(a). Assess the extent to which standards are consistent in emergency and/or refugee settings.

Measure 4 – Service standards are designed to facilitate monitoring.

The standards are detailed, coherent and feasible for use by ECE professionals, trainers, supervisors, inspectors and others in the ECEC Sector, connecting with monitoring tools for assessing and improving quality. Assess the extent to which these are feasible in emergency and/or refugee settings.



Goal 2: Establish functional quality assurance mechanisms, based on the overarching goals.

Decisions about what to monitor should align with the overall ECEC vision and its desired outcomes, i.e., measuring what matters most. A coherent approach to quality assurance balances external and internal monitoring mechanisms and establishes a process for acknowledging and rewarding quality achievements or improvements. Standardized data collection processes and appropriate tools are in place to encourage improvements across providers and settings.

Measure 5 – The primary purpose and goals of the quality assurance system are clearly specified and take account of the country context.

Purposes for monitoring quality can include: tracking accountability for government funds; managing and improving performance in ECEC settings; providing parents with information to choose the best option for their children’s participation in ECEC programmes; and informing policy discussions by generating data that reveals strengths and areas for improvement. If multiple quality assurance mechanisms exist, for example in humanitarian or refugee settings, analyse the extent to which these are harmonized and/or integrated with national systems.

Measure 6 – Appropriate tools for external monitoring are in place. External quality assurance mechanisms and procedures are established for monitoring and enforcing the quality standards across all types of providers.

Typically, external monitoring includes an accreditation process for ECEC programmes and for professional development providers as well as inspections or other external reviews that may be a part of the monitoring system. Relevant data collection processes are developed and standardized, ideally through the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) and/or National Statistical Authorities or other established data collection mechanisms. Assess the extent to which ECEC components in national databases are crisis-sensitive. Where multiple mechanisms exist, for example in humanitarian or refugee settings, analyse the extent to which these systems have ECEC data collection mechanisms and tools developed and utilized based on crisis type and length.

Measure 7 – Internal quality assurance mechanisms and tools are established and implemented.

Relevant mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring, e.g., programme and staff self-evaluations, are established and standardized, with the purpose of helping staff and administrators document and critically reflect on their practice and the service’s overall functioning. Analyse the extent to which these mechanisms and tools are developed and utilized in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length or identify if additional, parallel internal mechanisms and tools are utilized in these settings.



Key factor 1: Ministerial Leadership

In order to advance the field of ECEC, ministerial leadership is required, accompanied by expertise and personnel in the relevant government departments and government-related organisations.

Measure 1 – There is an identified ‘ministerial anchor’, i.e., one lead ministry holds the ECEC vision and actions together while linking with other relevant ministries and stakeholders in countries with an integrated ECEC system, or strong coordination between two lead Ministries in the case of countries with a split ECEC system.

Measure 2 – Channels of communication and coordination are established between national, subnational and local government authorities and leaders who are collectively responsible for ECEC sector’s success.

Measure 3 – Sufficient staff with early childhood expertise are present within the lead ministries and other relevant bodies to support policy development and implementation.

Measure 4 – Early childhood education and care expertise is identified and drawn upon from other institutions such as local universities, professional associations and unions, and research institutes.



Key factor 4: Public Demand

Advancing the ECEC sector requires a broad national understanding of the importance of early childhood education and care and shared acknowledgment of these services as a public good.

Measure 17 – Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities and know how they are expected to work together. For example, a formal set of arrangements enables parents and other stakeholders to engage with and support ECEC services and settings.

Measure 18 – The belief that early childhood education and care is a public good, similar to views about primary and secondary education, is widely held among the population.