Report on European Good Practice on strengthening ECEC workforce conditions

2023

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AT	Austria	IT	Italy
AU	Australia	LT	Lithuania
BE	Belgium	LU	Luxembourg
BG	Bulgaria	LV	Latvia
CH	Switzerland	MT	Malta
CPD	Continuous professional development	NL	Netherlands
CY	Cyprus	NO	Norway
CZ	Czech Republic	NZ	New Zealand
DE	Germany	PL	Poland
DK	Denmark	PT	Portugal
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care	RO	Romania
EE	Estonia	SE	Sweden
EL	Greece	SG	Singapore
ES	Spain	SI	Slovenia
EU	European Union	SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland	SVP	Staff Value Proposition
FR	France	TSI	Technical Support Instrument
HR	Croatia	UK	United Kingdom
HU	Hungary	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IE	Ireland	WFM	Workforce Management

Executive Summary

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Austria is governed by the Federal Constitutional Law (B-VG), with the federal government (or BMBWF) taking responsibility for the training of ECEC professionals. The 'Länder' or Provinces are responsible for the provision and organization of ECEC services, the training of assistants, continuing professional development, as well as for monitoring and advising ECEC organizations. The decentralized system results in fragmented employment conditions, which negatively contribute to varying levels of staff and of service quality, low prestige of ECEC qualifications and careers and increasing staff shortages vis-à-vis increased enrolment targets. There is concern that these issues have also contributed to the lower participation of under-3-year-olds (as compared to EU average), and affecting access to ECEC provision for this age group.

As such, the EU commission and UNICEF have supported Austrian authorities in addressing some of these challenges through the Technical Support Instrument, by providing support focused on systematically strengthening ECEC workforce quality and conditions. This study was a part of this broader assistance and aimed to identify good practices in the field of ECEC workforce management with the view of developing a foundation for potential future reforms of ECEC workforce management in Austria. The findings of the study were achieved primarily through qualitative research approach that relied on (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) secondary data analysis.

Germany, Italy, Denmark and Finland were selected as particularly suitable candidates for further analysis on the basis of their perceived system performance, innovation potential, and decentralized management of the ECEC system (in the case of Germany and Italy), but additional case studies from other countries, including England and Singapore were also included to further illustrate emergent findings of current ECEC workforce research and practice.

Though, overall, evidence and data in the ECEC sector pertaining to workforce management and its efficacy is relatively emergent, which has made identification of 'best' practices challenging, the research team established a number of key findings, which can be grouped according to the different aspects of the Staff Value Proposition (SVP) framework, which was used to comprehensively analyse good practice across the countries studied:

� Systems, Tools, and Quality Assurance

- **Undertake a comprehensive, systematic approach to ECEC workforce management reform:** Workforce management is a complex issue and is best addressed through comprehensive initiatives;

- **Strengthen data and develop evidence-led initiatives:** Good policy is evidence-led and cannot be developed without good data. Building data frameworks and collection systems to gather that data will help ensure success of all policies founded in it.

> Relevant Case Studies:
> - ✪ Ireland: Governance and quality assurance in ECEC, Tusla and Early Years Inspectorate (pp.17)
> - ✪ Finland: Enhancement-led evaluation (pp.17)

👥 Institutional Leadership

- ▪ **Create a clear career progression framework and don't assume that good teachers make for good managers:** Leadership can take many forms, from operational to pedagogical – this means the skills needed to fulfil these roles vary and need to be reflected in varied career pathways;

- ▪ **Promote autonomy for reduced attrition:** Autonomy can be a powerful tool in improving staff retention and innovation in approach to workforce management (WFM); where institutions and their leaders are trusted to make the right decision for their staff and children, that trust often translated to higher sense of ownership, motivation, and desire to improve.

📖 Learning and Development

- ▪ **Incentivize in-service professional development and facilitate creating communities of practice:** CPDs are associated with child-staff interactions, better outcomes overall, as well as positive perceptions of practitioners' careers and should be incentivized; communities of practice help facilitate sense of career growth and professional esteem – all should lead to improved WFM;

- ▪ **Increase practical aspects of pre-service training:** Including significant portions of pre-service training focused on practical experience improves new staff experience and effectiveness, and provides them with an opportunity to test out working in the ECEC sector before fully committing to it.

💷 Remuneration and Benefits

- ▪ **Avoid qualification bottleneck for new hires:** Blanket qualification requirements for ECEC careers create bottlenecks in terms of reducing the pool of potential candidates. More gradual, incentive-based approaches to upskilling tend to yield same or better results over time with none of the challenges;

- ▪ **Link sectoral funding to compliance and strategic priorities:** Use the leverage of existing (and new) sectoral funding to enforce compliance with key strategic priorities,

such as raising teacher remuneration above a minimum level, achieving qualifications, data reporting, etc.

> Relevant Case Studies:
> - ✪ Ireland: Incentivizing centre quality through staff wage subsidies (pp.26)
> - ✪ Sweden: Boosting the salaries of the best teachers (pp.27)
> - ✪ England: Enabling the pursuit of careers in ECEC through the EYPP programme (pp.32)

☼ Culture and Working Conditions

- ▪ **Develop mentoring and on-boarding programmes, particularly for new teachers can strengthen professionalization over time:** Mentoring programmes appear to improve pedagogical outcomes, as well as provide important alternative leadership pathways for good practitioners. Combined with on-boarding programmes, they can help develop a culture of continuous improvement and better sense of organizational belonging, and professional growth.

> Relevant Case Studies:
> - ✪ Singapore: Mentor Teacher Programme (pp.22)
> - ✪ Italy: Integrating ECEC systems, standards, and qualifications (pp.23)
> - ✪ Germany: Act on Good Day Care Facilities (pp.28)
> - ✪ Germany: More men in ECEC (pp.29)
> - ✪ Norway: attracting men into ECEC (pp.30)

♯\ Career Progression

- ▪ **Offer alternative pathways into ECEC careers, including vocational ones:** to increase the pool of candidates for the ECEC workforce consider developing, and funding, alternative career pathways, such as through vocational training or by developing programmes to promote participation of men or lateral hiring.

> Relevant Case Studies:
> - ✪ Germany: More men in ECEC (pp.29)
> - ✪ Ireland: Nurturing Skills Workforce Plan (pp.31)
> - ✪ England: Enabling the pursuit of careers in ECEC through the EYPP programme (pp.32)

♥ Organizational Purpose

- ▪ **Quality assurance needs to be provided alongside support and self-reflection:** Evaluations that are not advisory – in other words they only provide ratings and grades without specific guidance on how to improve them – are unlikely to lead to positive change, or at least not at the same rate.

> Relevant Case Studies:
> - ✪ Finland: Enhancement-led evaluation (pp.17)
> - ✪ Italy: Changing philosophy of ECEC leads to system integration (pp.18)
> - ✪ Finland: Community outreach helps build trust in the ECEC sector (pp.33)

Introduction

According to the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law (B-VG), the responsibility for early childhood education and care (ECEC) is divided between the federal government and the provinces (Länder) and municipalities. While the federal government oversees the standardised training of ECEC professionals and co-finances provision of ECEC, the provinces and municipalities primarily handle the organisation of ECEC, including the definition of framework conditions (Krenn-Wache, 2017).

In Austria, the participation of children between 3-6 years of age in ECEC surpassed the Barcelona target of 90% by circa 5 percentage points. For children under 3 years old, the target has been set at 33% (and later lowered to 31.9% for Austria), however, with participation in Austria sitting at 23% in 2019 (ECO Austria, 2021), and 31.2% in 2022 (Federal Chancellery, Republic of Austria, 2023). Though showing significant progress, rates of participation for the lower age group fall below the target, and below EU average:

Figure 1: Rates of participation in ECEC for under-3-year-olds across EU27 (2019)
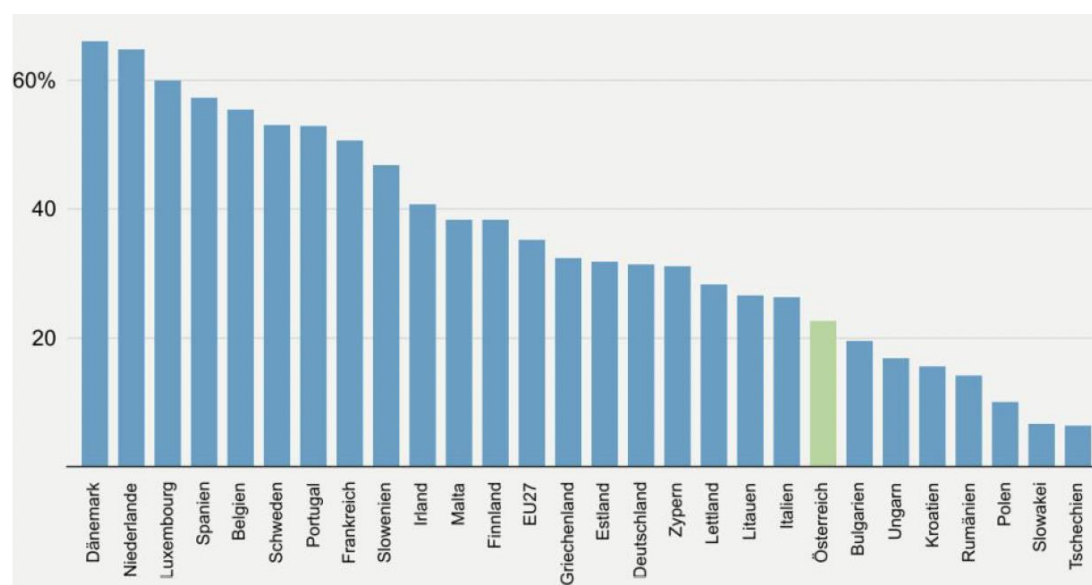
Source: (ECO Austria, 2021)

The significant increase in the number of children under the age of 3 attending formal childcare facilities, has also exacerbated the shortage of ECEC staff, which has made it difficult to meet the growing demand. The lack of staff may be due to a variety of factors, such as differing staffing and employment conditions across the provinces and municipalities, gender inequality in the sector, and a perceived lack of attractiveness of the profession, among others (Krenn-Wache, 2017).

This shortage of ECEC staff has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a competition between public and private employers and resulting in a disadvantage for children (EC, 2022).

To support the effort of the Austrian government in addressing the issues faced by its ECEC sector, particularly with regards to the management, attraction and retention of skilled personnel to its ECEC institutions, this comparative report was commissioned to help identify

existing good practices in ECEC workforce management across the EU. The project, which comprises this study, is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) and implemented by UNICEF in co-operation with the European Commission (MoERS Austria, UNICEF, EC, 2023). Specifically, the study has focused on:

>> Informing the process that the Austrian government can undertake to improve the ECEC workforce conditions, recruitment, and retention;

>> Highlighting the process(es) taken in systems that are developing or have developed their own framework for ECEC staffing quality and conditions, or broader ECEC staffing reforms;

>> Demonstrating good practices and approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of ECEC provision with a focus on the workforce element;

>> Learning from countries that have developed or are developing a vision, and official policy goal, or possibly a quality target or benchmark relating to ECEC workforce quality and conditions.

This report presents the findings of this study, as well as provides some initial recommendations on effective ECEC workforce management (WFM) that Austria can seek to emulate in order to improve its outcomes in the sector.

Methodology and Approach

This study aimed to identify good practices in the field of ECEC workforce management through a primarily qualitative research approach that relied on (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) secondary data analysis. The study utilized purposive sampling to identify participants who had direct experience in ECEC workforce management, within the selected countries, and could provide insights into good practices.

Phased Methodology and Country Selection

The study applied a phased methodology, where the researcher initially undertook a high-level brief overview of the ECEC systems across the EU as well as six non-EU ECEC systems to establish a broad taxonomy and perceived system performance overview. From this preliminary selection a long list was selected, which was further narrowed down to a final selection of countries.

The country-selection process can be visualized as follows:
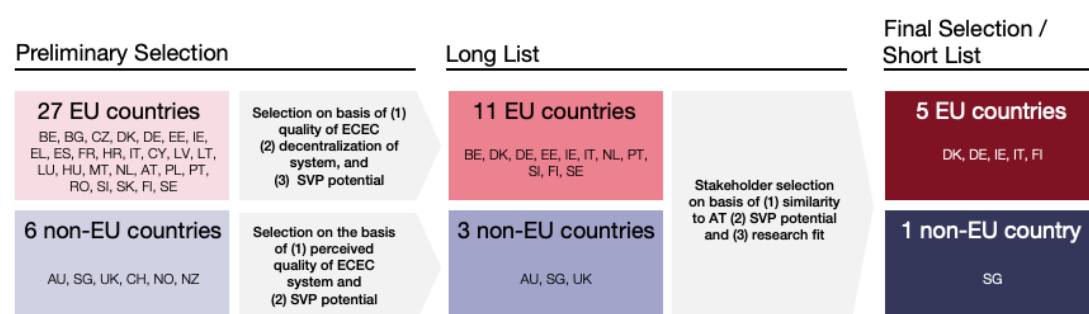
After the final selection, the researcher sought to establish formal contact with a pool of selected representatives from all the short-listed countries and undertake semi-structured interviews to learn about innovative and/or good practices in ECEC workforce management in that country.

Though the initial interviewee selection was done through convenience sampling, interviewing primarily subjects that were identified as relevant and/or available by the European Working Group on ECEC, additional stakeholders were sought through snowball sampling following each interview.

Long List

Selection Criteria

With the view of undertaking a detailed analysis and subsequent in-country visit(s) to the countries with most relevant systems, from which lessons could be drawn, the research has begun by establishing a 'long list' of EU (and a few non-EU) countries, considered for further study.

The criteria used for selecting countries for this list comprised:

EU member state

Due to the nature of the study, countries from within the EU have been prioritized. That said, six additional countries from outside the EU have been included for international comparison. The primary focus of subsequent research, however, has remained on the EU subjects.

Quality of ECEC provision[1]

Though there are no comprehensive comparative studies comparing the quality of ECEC provision across all countries being considered, the research team used some qualitative assessments and reference to a third-party index to identify countries with higher perceived quality of ECEC provision. The rationale for inclusion of this criteria relies on its role as a proxy indicator for the 'health' and performance of the ECEC sector as a whole, there included the performance of the sectoral workforce. The author used the ECEC Quality Index ratings (Performance-Ländervergleich von Kinderbetreuungssystemen) developed by Julius Raab Stiftung (Julius Raab Stiftung, 2021).

Decentralized systems

Given the additional challenges posed by the decentralized management of the Austrian ECEC workforce, it has been considered that lessons can be more easily drawn from countries which have also geographically decentralized the governance of their workforce in one way or another. As such, countries with such systems have been given a priority for inclusion. Generally, countries' whose ECEC systems are decentralized are decentralized either (1) geographically – with regions/states/municipalities taking on parts or all of the system governance and management responsibilities or (2) functionally – with different parts of the ECEC system (typically care for children 0-3, and 3-5 years old) or functions (e.g., curriculum, teacher training, infrastructure, etc.) being managed by different governance bodies. Additional priority has been given to those decentralized geographically in the subsequent analysis.

Staff Value Proposition (SVP) Potential

Given that no country in the EU has been able to manage all aspects of their workforce in a way that could be comprehensively described as best (or even good) practice, the selection process focused on identifying initiatives, policies or practices in at least one area of workforce management (please see the SVP framework below) that could be considered good practices or represent particularly innovative approaches to workforce management, relevant for Austria. Countries were generally rated as having a low / mid / high SVP potential on the basis of (1) number of relevant ECEC workforce initiatives, (2) qualitative evaluation of the impact of these initiatives, and (3) the extent to

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[1] As there are currently no comprehensive indices or reviews of all EU states' ECEC systems to allow for a comprehensive quality comparison, the Austria-based Julius Raab Foundation has recently developed one such rating utilizing a composite index of 14 different indicators relating to the quality of ECEC systems. These indicators included but were not limited to, (1) childcare rate for under 3s, (2) childcare quota for under 3s with care scope of 30+ hours, (3) employment rate of mothers of 0-2yrs children, (4) public spending on child care, (5) PISA test scores, (6) PIRLS results, etc. Since countries for this comparative study are selected on a qualitative basis, the Julius Raab ECEC quality index was deemed sufficiently robust to allow for sufficient granularity of discrimination between better/worse performing ECEC systems across the EU.

which the initiatives were innovative and/or unique for ECEC workforce management.[2]

Selection Matrix

Following the initial classification, the countries were further divided into the matrix below, dividing systems by governance vs. SVP potential and then ordering them in order of ECEC quality rating.

As can be seen from the matrix below, countries that were classified as having low SVP potential also generally scored lower on ECEC quality rating corroborating the assumed relationship between well-functioning, innovative, and dynamic systems and overall quality and outcomes of the ECEC system.

Table 1: Long list categorization results matrix (Julius Raab quality index in brackets)

Governance SVP Potential	Decentralized (geographically)	Decentralized (functionally)	Integrated
High	DE (0.63)	-	DK (0.83) SE (0.81) FI (0.69) IT (0.36)
Mid	-	PT (0.65) IE (0.58) HU (0.43)	SI (0.74) EE (0.61) NL (0.60) LU (0.58) LT (0.56) MT (0.45)
Low	BE (0.63) ES[3] (0.39) EL[3] (0.30)	PO (0.55) FR (0.53) CZ (0.50) ES[3] (0.39) CY (0.37) SK (0.35) BG (0.34) RO (0.33) EL[3] (0.30)	LV (0.54) HR (0.51)

Based on this matrix, several countries (in bold) were selected as better suited for comparison than others, since they are either decentralized, achieve better outcomes, and/or SVP potential.

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[2] Please note that since it was beyond the scope of this study to undertake a comprehensive meta review of all and any initiatives across the 27 countries, the research relied primarily on initiatives referenced in recent research, easily located in the public domain, initiatives described on EC's country education profiles, and additional auxiliary references. The classification as low, mid or high SVP potential was therefore primarily qualitative and would require further extensive validation to be entirely robust.

[3] Please note that Spain and Greece were two countries with governance decentralized both geographically and functionally.

From among non-EU countries, the research team has selected 3 representatives based on similar criteria of generally well-perceived ECEC outcomes and SVP potential and decentralized governance. Though a comprehensive review of all other systems was not possible, the research team leveraged their own expertise to identify likely candidates for further consideration, namely:

- Australia;
- Singapore; and
- United Kingdom.

Short List

The Long List was presented to project stakeholders for further consideration and discussion, after which the project stakeholder group selected the following 5 EU and 1 non-EU country for final inclusion in the comparative study. Below is a list of each country and a qualitative rationale for final selection:

EU Country	Rationale for Inclusion
Germany	Germany's ECEC system was regarded as very similar to that of Austria, both in terms of structure and focus, but also culturally. It is divided geographically, with several successful initiatives undertaken at the federal level which yielded interesting lessons to be learned. The use of the same language as Austria is an additional benefit for policy-maker peer exchange programmes, with some of the regions regarded as well-performing by German ECEC stakeholders (e.g., Bavaria) directly neighbouring Austria.
Ireland	Ireland has introduced a number of strong commitments aimed at improving the conditions and structure of the ECEC workforce (and related policies), including a National Qualifications Framework of Ireland that led to the establishment of career pathways and non-linear career progression for ECEC professionals, which may be of relevance to Austria.
Denmark	Denmark's performance in terms of ECEC quality was noted as of particular interest, as was the country's success with integrating men in the ECEC workforce. Despite the fact that Denmark's ECEC systems is integrated, there are a number of potential case studies and lessons to be drawn relevant to Austria.
Finland	Similar to Denmark, Finland's ECEC system is highly performing, ranking fourth on the Julius Raab index overall. Furthermore, the country achieves the lowest attrition for ECEC professionals in the EU, with 90% of staff trained in ECEC staying in the sector throughout their careers (EPI, 2017). This makes it particularly relevant as a source of potential insight for improving the situation in Austria.
Italy	Italy was the last country selected for the final comparison primarily for two reasons. First, it is a country where many

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unique and innovative approaches to ECEC (and its workforce) have originated (e.g., Reggio Emilia and Montessori). Second, the ECEC system has recently shifted from a functionally decentralized one to an integrated one offering a number of potentially unique lessons to be drawn for any proposed complete or further integration of ECEC systems.

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Non-EU Country	Rationale for Inclusion
Singapore	Finally, from non-EU countries, Singapore was selected due to its unique approach to governance, creating an inter-ministry body between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social and Family Development, as well as for its comprehensive and structured approach to ECEC development utilizing the ECE Industry Transformation Map and development of clearly defined career pathways for ECEC professionals.

Country Selection Refinement

Finally, following the selection, the research team has attempted to establish contacts with relevant representatives in each of the short-listed countries. This was generally successful, though some countries offered more perspectives than others. However, Denmark declined to participate, and Singaporean representatives did not respond to interview requests.

Accordingly, for Denmark and Singapore, the team relied only on publicly available data, reports, and other secondary resources to develop the analysis. As such, the findings section necessarily had to include a few additional references to prominent ECEC workforce management initiatives in countries that were not part of the final short list, in order to give further weight to included examples of good practice and the final recommendations.

Research Framework

In order to create a meaningful comparison between the selected countries and regions, and to facilitate the identification of good practice, the research employed a framework to guide the analysis.

Staff Value Proposition

The *Staff Value Proposition (SVP),* also known as the *Employee Value Proposition (EVP),* was derived from the broader concept of the value proposition in marketing. In marketing, value proposition refers to the unique combination of benefits, advantages, and value that a product or service offers to its target customers (Pawar and Charak, 2015, Rounak and MISRA, 2020). It is the promise or proposition that sets a product or service apart from competitors and demonstrates why customers should choose it.

Staff Value Proposition in the education sector refers to the unique combination of benefits, opportunities, fulfilment and support that educational institutions/ education employers offer to their staff members in exchange for their skills, expertise, and dedication (Raj, 2020). In the

education sector, the staff value proposition is designed to attract and retain talented educators by providing competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, a supportive work environment, recognition for their contributions, work-life balance, opportunities for growth and advancement, and a sense of purpose and fulfilment (Saurombe, et. Al. 2017). Having an SVP has been found to contribute to the retention of staff and increased workforce satisfaction.

SVP in the context of ECEC

In recent years, the ECEC sector has recognised the critical role of skilled and dedicated staff in promoting positive outcomes for young children. Consequently, the development of staff value propositions has gained traction as a strategic approach to effectively recruit and retain high-quality early educators. By creating an appealing staff value proposition (or responding to the key components of an SVP), ministries, local government, private employers and ECEC settings can cultivate a motivated and engaged workforce, resulting in improved child outcomes and overall improved ECEC quality (Thorpe et al. 2020). Using the framework of Staff Value Proposition, as a structure of the project recommendations and to inform early childhood education and care policies as they relate to the ECEC work force aims to enhance staff satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being, ultimately contributing to the provision of optimal experiences and outcomes for young children.

In this context, the SVP being used has the following components, which are the scaffolding for the consolidated recommendations from the Desk Review on the Austrian ECEC system with focus on the workforce: (1) a Comparative Analysis of European Good Practices in ECEC workforce policies and practices and (2) a Sector Analysis of the ECEC workforce development, conducted with a multi-stakeholder working group over a series of workshops.

The same framework was utilized to evaluate countries' SVP potential across a number of discrete workforce management domains:
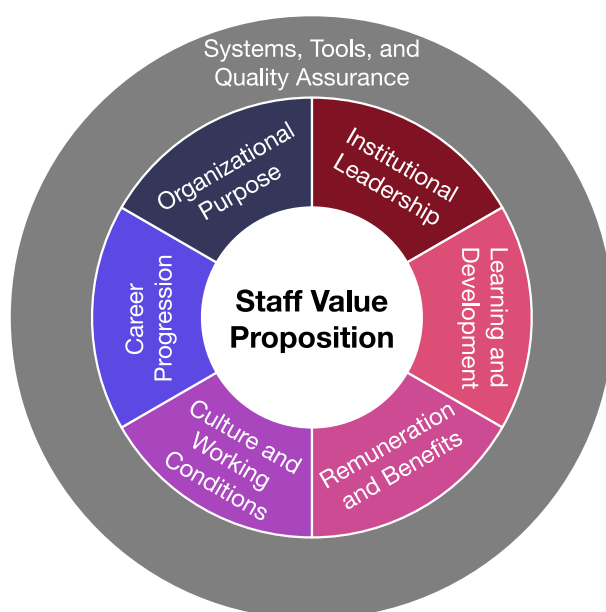
The combined elements of the framework aim to establish a comprehensive approach to effectively attract, retain and manage staff, and in itself therefore provides a useful way of approaching the improvement of ECEC staffing in Austria.

The elements represent levers by which organizations within the sector are able to optimize the attractiveness of the sector, improve the efficiency of staff management and affect the competitiveness of the ECEC labour market.

The elements can be further elaborated as follows:

Systems, Tools, and Quality Assurance

- Defines central-level systems, policies and procedures, which affect the functioning and attractiveness of the sector as a whole;
- Defines policies and procedures that set the limits for the other 6 elements of the SVP framework;
- Develops and provides tools for implementing and monitoring policy adherence, delivery of quality ECEC services, and barriers to entry;
- Defines quality standards and monitors their implementation;
- Tracks and analyses data and determines policy interventions on their basis.

Institutional Leadership

- Defines the institution's management style;
- Underpins the approach to decision-making;
- Sets an inspiring vision and mission for staff;
- Arbitrates and oversees staff performance, growth, and overall recruitment strategy.

Learning and Development

- Sets requirements for pre-service training and qualifications;
- Sets requirements and defines provision of continuous professional development (in-service training);
- Acts as additional benefit for staff in the form of facilitating career progression within sector, and increasing future earnings.

Remuneration and Benefits

- Sets the benchmark for overall salary and benefits in comparison to other sectors, career paths, and/or institutions;
- Establishes important link between performance and personal reward.

Culture and Working Conditions

- Defines the overall working experience of staff in the sector, career path, and/or organization;
- Establishes policies and practice with regards to social and physical working conditions (e.g., staff-child ratios, space allocation, working hours);
- Affects staff well-being, loyalty, integrity and many other 'soft' aspects of staff performance and management.

Career Progression

- Defines clear career pathways and equally available promotion opportunities, which in turn define the competitiveness of the sector or institution;
- Defines how skills are developed and capitalized on within the wider sector.

Organizational Purpose

- Links staff to the bigger purpose and goals of their organization;
- Creates a sense of overall purpose for staff in their career;
- Develops a sense of belonging to the sector, career path, or specific organization.

The framework, which has been specifically applied to this research has not been developed with the intent to replace others in use by the EU and UNICEF, but rather to (1) provide a more in-depth look at the aspects of the respective ECEC frameworks relating to workforce management, and (2) to create a common structure across the two respective frameworks.

Figure 2: The links between the Research Framework, the EU Quality Framework for ECEC and UNICEF's Build to Last framework
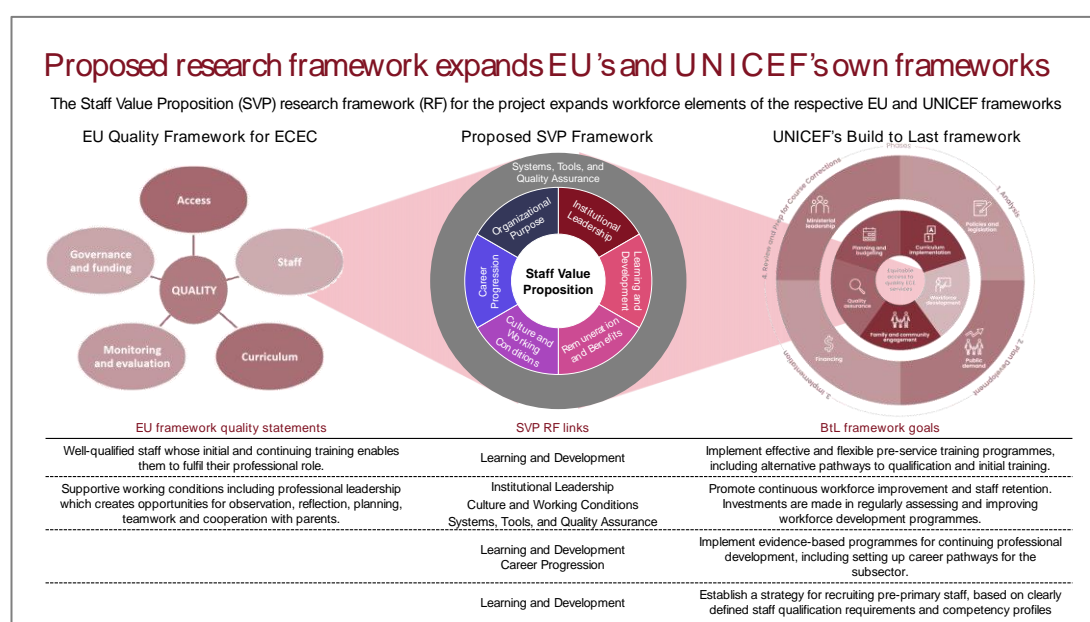
The EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care includes 5 areas of quality in the ECEC. One of the areas is related to staff, and linked to two quality statements:

EU Framework Quality Statements	SVP Framework links
Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role.	Learning and Development Career Progression
Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.	Institutional Leadership Culture and Working Conditions Systems, Tools, and Quality Assurance

Similarly, UNICEF's Build to Last Framework captures the ECEC space through a much broader lens, with Workforce development being but one of its elements (though some workforce-related aspects are included across other elements).

Within Workforce Development the framework sets 4 primary goals:

Build to Last Framework Goals	SVP Framework links
Establish a strategy for recruiting pre-primary staff, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competence profiles	Learning and Development
Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training.	Learning and Development Career Progression
Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development, including setting up career pathways for the subsector.	Learning and Development Career Progression
Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention. Investments are made in regularly assessing and improving workforce development programmes	Learning and Development Career Progression Systems, Tools, and Quality Assurance

As such the SVP framework provides additional depth and structure to the analysis, whilst complementing the other two formal frameworks, providing insights which can be easily adapted to inform key questions, goals and indicators of both the EU and UNICEF frameworks.

Data Collection

During the initial review, as well as during the in-depth research phase, the author used several qualitative and quantitative studies, academic literature, government reports and industry publications to identify elements of good practice and specific initiatives for further consideration.

This was later supplemented by qualitative primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were developed for each element of the SVP framework and focused on participants' experiences and perspectives on good practices in ECEC workforce management in their respective countries. The interviews were conducted mostly via video conference.

The final list of participants was as follows:

Country	Participant Designation
DE	Head of Department at the Lower Saxony Ministry of Culture, responsible for Early Childhood Education, Quality Development and Qualification
DE	Representative of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth
FI	Representative of the Finnish Evaluation Centre
IT	2 Technical Managers (Inspectors), for Italian Ministry of Education and Merit
IT	Representative of the Regional School Office of Veneto

IT	7 Representatives of various ECEC related departments at the Ministry of Education and Merit
IE	Principal Officer of the Department of Children

It is worth noting, that though this is the final list of interviewees, additional interviews were sought from participants across relevant ministries, authorities, ECEC practitioners and other relevant stakeholders. These either did not respond, despite repeated follow-ups, declined to participate, or were not available during the project timeframe.

Data Analysis

The interview responses were recorded and analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The data were initially coded into broad themes, and then sub-themes were identified to further refine the analysis. The coding process was iterative, and themes were refined based on feedback from the research team. The secondary data were analysed using content analysis, with key themes and patterns identified across the various sources.

Limitations

The primary limitation of the study was the limited sample size and the purposive sampling approach, given the narrow focus of the study and general issues with availability of research participants. As such, though every care was taken to present only initiatives that are congruent with good practices identified in broader literature, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other contexts or populations. Readers looking to apply the findings to the Austrian (or other) contexts, are therefore advised to consider the recommendations and their applicability with regards to specific local conditions and challenges. Small-scale piloting, prior to wholesale rollout is recommended to enable policymakers to verify the appropriateness of any initiative and recommendation detailed below to their specific ECEC systems.

The second inherent limitation related to the general lack of quality quantitative data on the ECEC sector in the EU. Many countries in the EU still do not comprehensively collect data on ECEC provision, and those that do often focus only on the most basic indicators such as enrolment or school readiness. Data pertaining to ECEC staff, beyond the total number, gender, and qualifications, is practically non-existent throughout the EU. This makes any analysis or developing evidence-led policy extremely difficult. Furthermore, any initiatives that are introduced in this context are practically impossible to evaluate making it difficult to judge whether or not they actually represent good practice.

Findings

Overall findings

Workforce management (WFM), and some of its most relevant aspects such as attracting, training, and retaining suitable qualified staff in ECEC remains a challenge throughout the EU. Many interviewees noted the difficulties in finding, hiring, training, and motivating suitable staff and the impact this is having on the overall quality of ECEC provision in their respective countries. This was true in both decentralized and integrated systems.

According to the European Commission's (2009) own findings, training and education of staff, as well as general working conditions in the ECEC sector are essential to provide safe, healthy and quality learning environment for children. Nevertheless, the ECEC sector remains associated with relatively poor working conditions and poor compensation leading to high turnover. Historically, this has reached rates exceeding 40% (Moon & Burbank, 2004), which in turn affects staff's ability to attend to the needs of children (Shonkoff & Philips, 2000).

Children benefit from stimulating interactions, which are best nurtured in stable environments where children and educators are given the time to develop meaningful, nurturing and sensitive relationships. This is, of course, significantly hindered in situations where teachers constantly change (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006), or where they are not fully dedicated to their role due to external challenges posed by working conditions. One study (Huntsman, 2008) even found that low remuneration (1) affects children-staff interactions and (2) is related to higher turnover rates.

Overall, the research on effects of working conditions, and by extension staff value propositions, remains limited and does not always make congruent findings (OECD, 2020). This is likely since the effects of staff working conditions, effective workforce management, and staff value propositions are complex and inter-linked and their impact on child outcomes and quality of ECEC provision cannot often be easily singled-out (Sammons, 2010).

The qualitative research, undertaken as part of this study reinforced these findings. Policy and decision-makers noted both (1) the prevailing challenges of status quo, and (2) the assumed positive impact of improved working conditions in the ECEC sector.

Overall, none of the countries studied as part of this research judged their own Staff Value Proposition to be a comprehensive example of good practice in ECEC workforce management, though most found at least some elements within the broader approach they thought other countries should emulate or at least learn from. Secondary research across the EU confirmed similar challenges faced by all of the member countries. In other words, though there was not any one country which could be considered as comprehensively exemplifying the good practice in ECEC workforce management, there exist pockets of good (or even best) practice across different aspects of WFM, which are presented below, and which represent good opportunities for further emulation in Austria (and elsewhere):

Findings by Areas and Case Studies

The following findings are presented by the SVP area to allow for identification of relevant good practices across different aspects of ECEC workforce management in a comprehensive manner that allows for easier evaluation and replication.

Systems, Tools, and Quality Assurance

This first axis of analysis, as per the SVP research framework, focused on identifying good practices in central-level systems, policies, and procedures, which can affect the functioning and attractiveness of the sector as a whole, as well as the provision of tools, guidelines, and methodologies to aid ECEC providers in policy compliance, overall improvement of the provision, and data tracking.

In its recent policy brief OECD (2022), noted that a number of central level policies, particularly those aimed at process quality, such as those pertaining to 'teacher:child ratios, group sizes, the physical size of settings, curriculum frameworks, and minimum staff qualifications' can create conditions for delivering good process quality, and overall improve the interactions between teachers, children, and their environment in the ECEC setting.

Though the differing impact of integrated versus decentralized ECEC systems has not been systematically studied in a way that would enable recommending one over the other, there appear to be a number of self-evident benefits (as well as challenges) pertaining to each type of system, suggesting that the effectiveness of either system with regards to workforce management (and also children's outcomes) is determined by process quality rather than process type. For example, whilst integrated ECEC sectors (at least in the countries evaluated for this study) lent themselves to easier central and unified management, this was sometimes done at the expense of autonomy and affected the variety of parental choice. Geographically and functionally decentralized systems offered more choice and variety of providers, but generally with wider differences in the quality of provision and varying outcomes.

Overall, there was also an observable positive trend with SVP potential, i.e., the extent to which countries introduced new initiatives and reforms, and the availability of data, perception of WFM quality, and improved outcomes. Though the sample size is too small, and the SVP potential methodology not entirely rigorous, this finding may suggest a generalizable maxim about authorities that strive for continuous improvement, sometimes at the cost of introducing additional complexity and confusion to the system, and better educational outcomes in the long run, provided sufficient mechanisms exist to monitor, scale or stop initiatives and reforms that work or not.

The general dearth of ECEC data, particularly those pertaining to the workforce and the success of its management is also a significant finding. In many countries, ECEC was historically understood as an extension of parental care, with the view of enabling parents' return to the labour market. The benefits and impact of ECEC were therefore measured against parental outcomes. It's only relatively recently that the benefits of ECEC for children are being systematically recognized – and therefore measured. As a result, the *inputs* of the different ECEC provisions, such as in the form of qualified, effective, and quality staff have largely not been measured, or are only now beginning to be measured continually and systematically. The lack of data on the inputs and effects of different approaches to WFM in ECEC has made the evaluation of good practices across the EU significantly more challenging, as it is practically impossible to say with any degree of objective certainty, whether certain initiatives are

bringing about the desired changes, either to the workforce, or the sector overall, and how such initiatives compare to others in different parts of the country, in Europe, or globally. Improved data reporting and collection can therefore easily be identified as one of the most important prerequisites for introducing novel and potentially successful WFM initiatives in any country.

In terms of *which* data should be collected, a number of indicators for general ECEC monitoring are already defined by various different frameworks and policies such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These indicators, however, are typically more focused on the 'outputs' of ECEC rather than the inputs. Practitioners looking to define data indicators (and targets) for the ECEC sector WFM needs are, therefore, probably best advised to collect data related to key aspects of each area of the SVP framework. These may include but not be limited to:

Systems, Tools, and QA
- Children's learning outcomes
- Number of registered ECEC centres
- Ratings related to QA frameworks by centre
- ECEC centres' self-evaluations and improvement plans

Institutional Leadership	Learning and development	Remuneration and benefits
- Leader qualifications - Leader retention, promotion, and progression data - Leader CPDs - Leader performance evaluation	- Teacher CPDs, type, length and frequency - Pre-service training content and compliance - Pre-service training application, in-take, and graduation rates	- Salary levels - Staff tenure - Staff monetary and non-monetary benefits
Culture and Working Conditions - Teacher:child ratios - Learning environment quality - Number of teaching and non-teaching hours - Perception of work conditions - Teacher absenteeism and causes	**Career Progression** - Staff movements - Staff performance - Career advancement	**Organizational Purpose** - Staff satisfaction - Staff perception of career pathway - Causes for leaving the workforce - Staff wellbeing

It is equally worth noting that the benefit of increased data collection increases with the consistency and universality of its collection. That is to say that in an ideal scenario all or most of the indicators are defined in a consistent manner across not only the country, but perhaps the entire EU, to allow for easy benchmarking, comparison, and identification of positive outliers and best practices.

Furthermore, there are sub-elements of state-wide ECEC systems and tools, such as access to high-quality professional development opportunities (Neuman & Appelbaum, 2020),

supportive work environments, and adequate compensation benefits and leadership (McLean, et al., 2021), (Bassok, et al., 2021) that have been shown to lead to improved job satisfaction and retention, as have mentoring and coaching programmes (Ambrosetti, et al., 2014), but these are discussed separately under the relevant subheadings, as they relate to specific aspects of WFM as per the SVP research framework.

In terms of overarching findings for systems, tools and policies there are a couple of notable trends:

- **Financing of ECEC**: Many countries have introduced reforms and policies in the last decade aimed at increasing and/or changing the structure of ECEC sector funding. Remuneration revisions were driven by a range of factors from desire to improve the generally lower levels of remuneration, to improving supply of teachers, meeting enrolment targets, as well as broader structural reforms in the sector.

- **Introduction of technology**: many research studies and initiatives explored the role of technology in improving ECEC outcomes, and to a lesser extent, its use for more effective WFM. Particularly with the onset of COVID-19 and subsequent proliferation of distance learning and need to communicate, interact with and manage staff (as well as teach children) remotely has seen many providers adopt new technology-driven solutions in this regard. In most cases this was limited to remote communication platforms, but some have also used technological tools to deliver training, teaching, and assessment.

- **Professionalization of ECEC staff**: Several countries have also introduced initiatives to further professionalize their ECEC staff, particularly those that previously had no or limited requirements for staff. The approach to *professionalization* usually comprised a combination of increasing hiring requirements (qualifications), improving and increasing pre-service and in-service professional development, and changing role designations and responsibilities to create better career progression.

To illustrate some of the more interesting initiatives in this area, the section below presents selected case studies:

Ireland: Governance and quality assurance in ECEC

Ireland has been on a path to improve the systematization and regulation of its ECEC sector since before 1996, when formal arrangements were first made. In 2014, they introduced statutory registration and allocated the responsibility of managing and maintaining the national register to a dedicated state agency called Tusla.

In 2016, Tusla introduced a set of standards for providers, which must be met in order to achieve and maintain registration. The standards are generally focused on ensuring health, safety and well-being of children, as well as promoting their effective development. (Government of Ireland, 2016).

To monitor compliance, Tusla established an Early Years Inspectorate (Tusla EYI), which oversees the structural requirements in ECEC centres nationally and later asked the Department of Education Inspectorate (DE Inspectorate) to extend

its operations to centrally funded ECEC institutions, particularly focusing on process quality standards.

The practice of dividing the responsibilities over regulatory, structural compliance inspections and process quality inspections has been replicated in several other EU countries (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). In certain countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany, and others, the regulatory inspection remains the responsibility of local governments (municipalities).

The separation of responsibilities has allowed Ireland to continue to push for a stronger quality assurance in the sector and to improve compliance, creating a clear line of responsibility and accountability over both foundational compliance and process quality.

Furthermore, this has helped strengthen oversight and limit pushback from providers against quality assurance in general, as the 'minimum' (often binary pass/fail) structural standards are clearly delineated from the more qualitative process standards, which are often measured on a continuous scale.

Finland: Enhancement-led evaluation

Though the Finnish ECEC system is considered integrated both functionally and geographically, it gives great importance to the autonomy of ECEC providers and the plurality of voices that should be considered when determining how quality should be defined in the sector.

From 1st March 2023, Finland is piloting a new evaluation system, since they have not implemented formal inspections in the ECEC sector previously, which is built on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation (ELE).

'[ELE] stresses the fact that evaluation is carried out to develop the organisation's own activities, not for the benefit of an external evaluator or some other actor. Characteristically, enhancement-led evaluation is based on trust between the actors. Orientation towards the future plays a key role in the evaluation process which, rather than relying on a backward- looking evaluation that states the facts, is associated with the possibility of learning. In this document, enhancement-led evaluation is illustrated through four key principles: participation, a multi-method approach, adaptability and transparency.' (Vlasov, et al., 2019)

The approach relies primarily on the centres setting their own targets and goals and developing a strong self-evaluation process to monitor progress towards set goals. The role of the inspector/evaluator is then not to oversee the compliance with externally set standards, nor really to judge the achievement of those targets set internally by each provider; it is rather to provide support and guidance to the providers to achieve internally set targets and standards.

As this is a brand new initiative, the impact on the quality of ECEC provision and learning outcomes remains to be seen; it does, however, build on the relatively well-established finding in the broader education space that formative feedback can only lead to improvement where clear and concrete guidance is given on how to improve (Christodoulou, 2013).

Italy: Changing philosophy of ECEC leads to system integration

Up until 2017, Italy's ECEC system for children 0-3 was highly decentralized and generally split both across regions, and by children's age, with responsibilities for regulation, funding, monitoring and evaluation, as well as general provision devolved to municipalities and individual providers at local levels. At the time the government-maintained responsibility for preschool institutions for children 3-6 in a centralized manner. (OECD, 2017)

Following a shift in ECEC philosophy, recognizing that ECEC for children aged 0-3 is not merely a replacement for parental homecare, but a need arising from each child's *right to education,* led to the initial call for integration. Further combined with the need for guaranteed continuity and quality of provision, this led to a need for a more universal and general framework for quality and governance culminating in system integration. (OECD, 2017)

This resulted in the introduction of the Law 107/2015 (the Good School reform)[4] and enactment of a new decree (Law Decree 65/2017) introducing an integrated system of ECEC under the Ministry of Education.

Within the system, though many of the responsibilities still remain with the municipalities and individual providers, the state has developed a universal quality framework and established a number of mechanisms for further ensuring continuity between 0-3 and 3-6 groups as well as dialogue and discussion at regional and state level to address common issues.

Overall, features of the 'Good School reform' included:

- Teacher recruitment: primarily through a new open competition to recruit circa 64 thousand teachers on a permanent basis in 2016;
- Merit-based component of teacher salaries: linked to criteria established by school-level teacher evaluation committees;
- Teachers' professional development: focusing on developing new/additional skills such as evaluation, innovative teaching, and 21st century and digital skills, and skills for inclusion, supported through €1.5 billion funding;
- School autonomy: given to school leaders to manage their financial, technological, and human resources. (OECD, 2017)

Though the final impact of the integration remains yet to be seen, there is already anecdotal evidence from local stakeholders of the benefits of the system integration for standardizing quality of ECEC provision due to more centralized oversight, improving teaching practices through additional training and intra-sectoral dialogue, and improved continuity and reliability of provision for children, due to increased number of staff as well as some improvements in children's outcomes due to more differentiated and innovative teaching practices being applied.

[4] Please note that the Good School reform has not been limited to ECEC, but also included other levels of education.

Institutional Leadership

The research pertaining to leadership in ECEC settings is primarily descriptive, looking to answer what leadership looks like in ECEC settings, rather than what it *should* look like to be considered effective. Studies generally distinguish between administrative and pedagogical leadership, where the former refers to process and operational leadership, whereas the latter refers to the leader's role in guiding teaching and learning within their institution (Douglass, 2019), with distinct skills and approaches required to effectively discharge either of these specific roles.

Research in the ECEC literature generally converges on a number of factors which help increase leadership effectiveness and their ability to lead. These are:

1 Leadership preparation and credentials
Many studies note the 'accidental' nature of becoming a leader in ECEC settings – as many rise to the role from teaching positions (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015). As such, some countries have opted to support leadership development through dedicated leadership training and credentials delivered to practitioners who find themselves in leadership positions. Preparation focused on developing reflective practice (Ang, 2012) and distributed leadership approaches were found particularly useful in this regard (Hognestad & Boe, 2019).

2 Recruitment of leaders
Research focused on recruitment of leaders to ECEC is limited, but there are findings from basic education, which are pertinent to leaders too. Generally, the link between qualifications and pupil achievement remains tenuous (Goe, 2010), whilst experience and student achievement are linked significantly (Goe, 2007). Better remuneration and bonus structures are linked with lower turnover (Goe, 2010), as are programmes that systematically collect, evaluate, and act on data on turn-over and recruitment (Ibid.). There are also a number of promising programmes for high-quality alternative certification programmes (in basic education and ECEC settings), which have shown success in enabling recruitment to teaching and leadership positions from careers outside of ECEC – effectively increasing the pool of eligible candidates, addressing prevailing bottlenecks.

3 Leadership development and quality improvement
Leaders' effectiveness has been shown to improve significantly as a result of leadership professional development and mentoring programmes. Different studies undertaken in ECEC contexts in Singapore and Canada found the importance of mentorship for leadership development and cascading of mentorship to teaching staff, as well as improved, more reflective, leaders' practices and attitudes, and an overall increase in the quality of ECEC provision and programme completion (Wong, 2015) (Ressler, 2015).

4 Workplace support for leaders
Generally, leaders who are supported by their staff at work (and to a lesser extent the systems and processes) are more effective. Teachers are unlikely to be seen as leaders, unless their role is formally recognized as such (Heikka, 2013), which also helps establish distributed leadership structures. Furthermore, it is important that leadership staff have sufficient time to dedicate to their leadership role

(Hognestad & Boe, 2015) for them to be effective. Finally, staff support for the leaders is also important for leadership success (Hujala, 2016).

5	**Political, economic, cultural and social contexts for leadership**
	The effect of the general context on the effectiveness of ECEC leadership is important but complex. Generally, unfavourable policies, or constraints attached to public funding can pose challenges to leaders devising or enacting their vision; but on the other hand, structural policies and regulations can bring about positive changes, particularly vis-à-vis detrimental cultural practices or help speed up the process of implementation of new more effective approaches to leadership and pedagogy in ECEC.

In terms of good practice initiatives identified among the short-listed countries, the following case study can be presented:

Ireland: Distributed and diverse leadership development

Ireland has recently introduced a new career framework which recognizes the different skills required for pedagogues and leaders (in other words, good pedagogues do not always make for good leaders and vice versa).

The framework has 3 tiers - (1) educator, (2) lead educators, (3) managers – and recognizes the different aspects of practiced leadership, as well as setting a foundation for more effective distributed leadership.
Different staff are therefore allowed to take on different additional responsibilities, which allow for their progress to managerial roles.

Ireland was particularly interested in fostering inclusion, so a role of an inclusion coordinator was introduced. Such a coordinator is then responsible for leadership for inclusion across the entire ECEC centre. To become an inclusion coordinator, the staff member must undertake the Leadership for Inclusion Programme (LINC), which is a qualification that takes one year.
To encourage providers, who are practically entirely autonomous in the Irish system, the state provides an incentive payment for centres that employ one. Currently, it is estimated that between 60-75% of all centres have opted to employ a coordinator.
Though the programme is currently in early stages, the Irish authorities are looking to expand it into different leadership roles, which will also include pedagogical leadership.

It is important to note that, since the state is not the employer, these roles are not created directly by them, but rather the state develops the framework and provides financial incentives for providers to take on the task. This may mean that the day-to-day responsibilities of a pedagogical leader may differ between providers, especially between small and large ones, but overall help develop leadership capabilities in ECEC quality practice.

Denmark: Demystifying leadership through training

During the 2018-2020 period, as part of the agreement on salary and working conditions between Local Government Denmark and the trade union BUPL, a project was implemented with the aim of motivating pedagogues to take on leadership roles. To achieve this, several municipalities collaborated in

developing innovative approaches to prepare pedagogues for leadership positions. The project included a course called 'Leader at the step – the leap for leadership', which provided pedagogues with the necessary knowledge and skills required for leadership positions.

According to a survey, 43% of pedagogues expressed an interest in becoming leaders, but they were concerned about their competences, workload, and responsibilities. However, they were motivated to take on leadership roles to improve staff well-being, job satisfaction, and to influence the profession and educational strategies. To address these concerns, the course provided focused training to pedagogues, allowing for a more flexible transition from core practitioner to leader, and the opportunity to try out the role before taking it on. The course, run by the Centre for Public Development of Competences in three municipalities, incorporated both theoretical and practical components to help participants assess their suitability for leadership roles.

The successful experience of the three municipalities is now being used to inform other municipalities and prepare well-qualified leaders for the future.

Singapore: Mentor Teacher Programme

In 2010, Singapore piloted an intervention related to the development of a new quasi-leadership role titled 'Mentor Teacher' in one of the largest early childhood education provider's centres, with circa 100 institutions participating.

The role was considered a senior role comparable to the Vice-Principal level at the centres but did not carry any formal staff performance management or other supervision responsibilities.

During the programme, it was found that mentoring relationships led to additional opportunities for professional development, for both the mentor and the mentee, and led to improved skills, knowledge and practices among ECEC practitioners. This has been supported by other research, which has shown mentoring relationships as helpful for both parties (Elliott, 2008) (Heirdsfield, et al., 2008), and lead to improved professionalization within the early childhood sector (John, 2008).

In particular, there was a significant correlation between centres with a formal mentoring program and staff with high levels of ECEC, suggesting that mentoring relationships can impact the continuing professional growth, practice, pedagogy and identity of the individuals involved in mentoring.

Recognizing the success of the Mentor Teacher programme, in 2013, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) announced the creation of teaching and leadership pathways. These were developed in order to scale up the benefits of teacher mentorship programmes throughout the system, but also to provide alternative leadership pathways for teachers with at least 3 years of experience, who showed aptitude as 'Mentor Principals' and 'Master Teachers' (ECDA, 2013).

Singapore's experience showcases both the benefit of developing different leadership pathways as a policy initiative that can both provide a varied career

growth opportunities, and strengthen pedagogical leadership within the ECEC system.

Learning and Development

The area of learning and development, which covers both pre-service and in-service training as well as qualification requirements is one of the most regulated and innovated areas of WFM in the ECEC sector, as it is often more directly under the control of the various public administration bodies as opposed to other SVP elements, which often remain within the remit of individual ECEC centres.

Generally, research shows that 'higher pre-service qualifications were found to be related to higher-quality staff-child interactions. This particularly applies to settings for children aged 0 to 2, […] However, higher teacher qualifications were not associated with emerging academic skills or behavioural and social skills. In fact, only staff-child interactions were predictive of children's development and learning' (OECD, 2018).

In terms of in-service training, the findings are also positive, stating that: 'Consistent positive associations for all settings examined were found between staff in-service training (or professional development) and staff-child interactions, especially if the training included ECEC content. The number of studies available for settings for children aged zero to 3 was more limited, but the pattern of results is largely consistent.' (Ibid.)

Additionally, other aspects of learning and development mentioned by the short-listed countries as exemplary of good practice related to (1) increasing entry requirements for ECEC teaching staff in an attempt to improve societal perceptions of ECEC careers, (2) developing shared communities of practice and learning fora between practitioners, (3) integrating practical components (e.g., professional placements) into pre-service training programmes, and (4) increasing the level of financial contribution from the state to place and professionally train staff (particularly to partially offset cost of studying to the staff, and/or motivate providers to employ less experience/trial staff).

Some case studies are presented below to showcase identified good practice:

Italy: Integrating ECEC systems, standards, and qualifications

Until 2017, Italy's ECEC system was highly decentralized. Provision and administration were split not only by age (0-3 and 3-6 years), but also managed by a variety of stakeholders, from the state to municipalities and faith-based organizations. To improve the consistency of outcomes in the system, Italy introduced a new decree, providing a set of pedagogical guidelines and a general framework for ECEC replacing a plethora of previous documents developed and implemented primarily at the municipal level aimed at governing the quality in the sector.

One of the key new requirements was for all educators joining the ECEC workforce to now have an equivalent of a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. This helped unify the entry-level qualification across Italy and replaced a complex and untransparent system of requirements that existed previously. The government also worked with several universities to develop the appropriate

programme, seeking to further standardize the skills and competences acquired by aspiring teachers.

Though, generally regarded as a positive step for attracting more effective staff to the sector and contributing to a more consistent level of quality across ECEC centres in Italy, anecdotal evidence suggests that higher requirements have posed somewhat as additional barriers to entry and have caused further bottlenecks in creating a sufficiently large pool of prospective candidates for ECEC teaching positions.

Furthermore, Italy has also developed an instrument at the regional level – an ECEC conference – where states and municipalities discuss common problems, particularly relating to the progress of the integration. This has helped create stronger communities of practice and facilitate knowledge exchange relating to improving ECEC provision.

Denmark: Practical placements for pre-service training

In Denmark, students seeking to pursue careers in early years must first complete a three-and-a-half-year bachelor's degree. The degree includes practical placements inside actual ECEC institutions for approximately a third of the contact-time required. The practical aspects are included with the goal of helping students gain real-world experience and knowledge and to 'stress test' their ability to be involved in day-to-day teaching activities.

The placements are divided into four parts. The first part lasts for 32 six-hour days. The second and third part each last for six months with average weekly working hours reaching 32.5 hours. The final part takes only 16 days, and is focused on students collecting empirical data in support of their final dissertation. Students' performance is evaluated internally by the provider and supervisor during the first two parts of the placement, whereas during the third part an external evaluator is also present.

To offset the cost of practical placements, students receive payment throughout – the first and final part are paid for by the state, the second and third are paid by providers.

To enhance the impact of the placement, each student is also supervised and partly mentored by a qualified ECEC teacher throughout their time in the ECEC centre. The coaching and mentoring take place informally during the day but also in dedicated meetings, which last on average for an hour a week. Supervisors receive a small bonus for taking on the additional responsibility. In 2014, this equated to c. EUR 550 for a six-month placement. (Litjens & Taguma, 2017), (Oberhuemer & Schreyer, 2018), (OECD, 2019)

England: Varying teacher:child ratios to incentivize upskilling and avoid hiring bottlenecks

When developing the new statutory framework for ECEC providers in England, the Department for Education recognized the inherent challenge that blanket introductions of qualification requirements for ECEC staff poses in terms of (at

least temporarily) creating a bottleneck in terms of limiting the pool of potential candidates.

As such they developed several guidelines for incentivizing on-the-job upskilling, introduced under the umbrella designation of 'Early Years Practitioner Status' (EYPS). The requirement was that, though non-graduates could join and remain teaching within ECEC settings, they had to be working towards a suitable qualification (as opposed to requiring the set pre-service qualification before entry). In addition, centres with more qualified staff had additional benefits, particularly with regards to teacher:child ratios, which were generally higher for EYPS staff (though the system was more complex, tiering the ratios according to children's age, the centre settings and size).

This has meant that the more qualified the staff in a centre is, the fewer staff members are needed, lowering the costs of labour for the provider motivating them to hire more qualified staff and/or upskill existing staff that does not yet meet the requirements (DfE, 2021).

There was no specific guidance on how staff should go about upskilling, but a significant portion of them enrolled (and enrols still) in part-time graduate courses, which they can undertake outside of their regular working hours. As historically many non-graduate ECEC staff were from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and generally had lower household incomes, they were also entitled to a variety of tuition fee, maintenance and livelihood fees and grants available in England to local tertiary students.

Since then, the Department for Education (DfE) has also introduced dedicated funding for early years initial teacher training (such that leads to an Early Years Teachers Status (EYTS)), by providing grants, training bursaries, and employer incentives to attract high-quality graduates. The grant comprises up to £7,000 grant for the trainee, and £7,000 grant as employer incentive. The bursaries are also tiered by the student's performance on the course, for those obtaining a first class degree getting the maximum, and those obtaining a third class degree obtaining no grant (DfE, 2021).

Remuneration and Benefits

Effective workforce management in early childhood education (ECE) relies on a range of factors, including attracting and retaining skilled and committed teaching staff. One key factor in attracting and retaining these staff members is offering good remuneration and benefits. This can help to ensure that ECE centres are able to hire and retain high-quality staff who are dedicated to their work, which can have a positive impact on children's learning and development.

Several studies have examined the relationship between remuneration and benefits and effective workforce management in ECE teaching staff. For example, a study by Li, Zhou, and Liang (2021) found that higher salaries and better benefits were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among ECE teachers. Similarly, data from the US (Guevara, 2022) suggests significant decrease in teacher turnover, with salary increases, each additional $1 per hour translated to c. 1% lower average teacher turnover, with the rate of decrease accelerating with

higher salaries. In fact, wage levels remain one of the highest predictors of staff turnover in ECEC (Caven, 2021). The study also showed that ECEC teacher wages were positively associated with quality and student learning outcomes.

Similarly, another study by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2018) found that low wages and inadequate benefits were major barriers to attracting and retaining high-quality ECE teaching staff in the United States. The study recommended that ECE centres provide fair compensation and benefits packages to their staff, including health insurance, retirement benefits, and paid time off, in order to attract and retain skilled and committed staff.

At the same time, most providers face constraints to financial resources which prevent them from improving remuneration. This is sometimes the result of limits imposed on fees that can be charged to parents and/or by the level of subsidies received from public bodies (OECD, 2019). Countries therefore sometimes look to supplement staff wages, particularly those with specific qualifications or characteristics and to achieve other strategic objectives (Ibid.).

In addition to these studies, various reports and policy briefs have highlighted the importance of remuneration and benefits for effective WFM in ECEC teaching staff. For example, a policy brief by the OECD (2018) stated that investing in ECE teachers through fair pay and benefits is essential for improving the quality of ECE services and ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Ireland: Incentivizing centre quality through staff wage subsidies

Similarly, to many other countries, Ireland's ECEC staff's wage levels have been historically subpar. Since the majority of ECEC providers in Ireland are independent, ECEC staff are employed by individual providers rather than the government. This means that the government is unable to directly increase the staff's wages. This has contributed to the fact that in 2017, a survey undertaken among the ECEC staff suggested that over 40% of them are actively seeking to leave the profession because of low pay (Breakingnews.ie, 2022).

To overcome the challenge of low pay in the sector, whilst addressing the issue of not being the direct employer of practically any ECEC staff in the country, the government introduced a new legal mechanism and a new pay rate set above the national minimum wage (these are sector specific in Ireland).

Ireland introduced a new contract between the state and ECEC providers, with additional financial incentives for providers, who agree to implement the new pay structure and abide by a few additional conditions.

On September 15, 2022, the new pay deal came into force and simultaneously new funding became available, which meant providers, who wished to obtain it had to sign up to the new legal framework. The participation, though optional, saw over 70% of providers sign up already.

The initial rate increase was from €10 to €13 per hour in the first year of the mechanism's implementation, but now that the framework is in place, the state is anticipating being able to use it to increase wages year-on-year. The actual industrial/labour relations were done between employers and employees, the state was not at the table, as it is not the employer, but provided the binding legal framework to guide the discussions.

The additional conditions included in the new contract, which providers also had to accept, relate primarily to fees charged to parents, quality action plan development, and continuous professional development, as well as data collection and reporting, particularly on areas covered by the contract. Though the conditions were deliberately limited to help kick-start the legal mechanism in its inception year, the state is hoping to increase them to further improve quality and standard of provision across Ireland.

Such a mechanism has effectively enabled an ECEC system (which though integrated on paper remains highly decentralized in terms of governance and provision) to develop a mechanism for quality control, monitoring and evaluation, whilst maintaining significant level of autonomy and decentralization of provision.

Sweden: Boosting the salaries of the best teachers

In 2016, Sweden introduced a Teacher Salary Boost initiative (Lönelyftet). As part of this initiative the government funded salary increases of the most talented and highly skilled pre-primary and primary teachers.

The financial incentive of an additional SEK 2,500-3,500 (€230-330) per month is given to teachers selected by the municipality, their school or centre leaders. The state provides guidance on which teachers should be selected, but the exact number and personnel are decided at the local level. The guidance given is centred around preferred qualifications and skills. Additionally, municipalities are also required to allocate additional resources according to specific needs of children identified. The incentive is given with the explicit goals of (1) raising the perception and respect for the profession, (2) recruiting more teachers, and motivating new groups to become teachers, and (3) improve retention of existing staff.

The initial evaluation of the programme undertaken in 2017 showed a high uptake of the programme, despite the initially limited scope and size of the programme. (OECD, 2019)

Culture and Working Conditions

Recent research has highlighted the importance of working conditions and organizational culture in early childhood education institutions for workforce management and children's outcomes. Positive working conditions and supportive organizational cultures have been linked to better job satisfaction, staff retention, and improved child outcomes (Grant, et al., 2019), (Mooney Simmie & Murphy, 2021).

Studies particularly focus on the impact of a positive workplace environment, including supportive colleagues and opportunities for professional growth, and how these can improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout among early childhood educators, this in-turn, leading to better teacher-child interactions and improved child outcomes.

OECD maintains a database of research pertaining to policy initiatives, including those relating to working conditions, including of ECEC staff. The Education GPS (OECD, 2022),

suggests that 'Good working conditions affect the willingness of committed and qualified individuals to work and remain in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) field, as well as ECEC practitioners' job satisfaction and work motivation. […] Research has indicated that work conditions, and therefore the quality of ECEC, can be improved by high teacher:child ratios and a low group size; competitive wages and other benefits; a reasonable workload; and a competent and supportive centre manager. Group size, teacher-ratio and workload influence the stress levels of staff. Remuneration, vacation days and compensation for additional work hours are linked to job satisfaction, and influence the status of the profession. These factors are all also related to the staff turnover rate, which influences children's development and the relationships they form with staff.'

That said, the empirical evidence that could reveal the exact impact of working conditions on child outcomes is still emergent. Working conditions, such as teacher:child ratios and compensation have been linked to staff turnover, but not explored much in relation to overall quality of ECEC provision.

Germany: Act on Good Day Care Facilities

Germany has implemented a series of measures to address its ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) workforce challenge. In addition to major government investment programmes focused on improving ECEC provision, boosting access, promoting extended opening hours, and enhancing early language education, Germany has introduced new measures to increase the attractiveness of a career in ECEC and support the development of the ECEC workforce. One of the key measures is the Act on Good Day Care Facilities (Gute-KiTa-Gesetz), which will see Germany invest an additional EUR 5.5 billion in ECEC between 2019 and 2022.

The Act allows the federal states to choose from ten different fields of action for improving quality, including measures aimed at attracting and retaining ECEC staff. The federal government then enters into individual contracts with each of the 16 federal states, outlining the specific measures that will be taken. Other measures include the 'Skilled Labour Initiative', which seeks to raise the standards of workplace-based learning and provide apprenticeship pay during pre-service training to make ECEC training more attractive, and establish bonus payments for ECEC staff who undertake professional development activities or take on special responsibilities.

Additionally, two European Social Fund programmes aim to encourage both women and men to pursue careers in ECEC.

The first programme called 'MEHR Männer in Kitas' used circa €13 million in federal and European Social Fund funding to fund recruitment of men to ECEC careers across 16 model regions. Different regions used different strategies which included:

- Instruments, procedures and measures that take into account the special situation of male professionals in day-care centres and enable them to start and continue working with little conflict.
- Concepts that have contributed to improving the prospects for men in day-care centres and to promoting good cooperation between men and women.

- Cooperation between training institutions, day-care centres, schools and local boys' work that have made sustainable agreements/alliances in order to attract more boys and young men in vocational orientation and trainees for internships and internships in day-care centres (e.g., with the help of Boys Day).
- Strategies for addressing and recruiting men who want to reorient themselves professionally. (BMFSFJ, 2013)

The second programme called Quereinstieg - Männer und Frauen in Kitas, also funded by the ESF, focused on encouraging lateral entry into ECEC careers for men and women who were previously in different careers or unemployed, with particular focus on *older* entrants. The programme recognized the cost of retraining as the primary barrier for lateral entries into ECEC careers and allocated a subsidy of €1,250 per month to support participating technical students (BMFSFJ, 2020).

These measures build on the efforts of federal states, local authorities, and providers to improve the quality and availability of ECEC and enhance the attractiveness of ECEC as a career. (OECD, 2019)

Germany: More men in ECEC

The German ECEC sector, like all others, has a low percentage of men in the workforce. Though the rate has risen significantly over the years, in 2013, it was still only c. 3.5%.

To help promote careers in the sector among prospective male employees, the German Coordination Centre 'Men in ECEC' was established – financed and supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend) and the Catholic University of Applied Sciences in Berlin – in order to promote dialogue between policy, practice and research in order to improve the prospects for male ECEC workers in the long run.

The centre developed strategies to engage more men, but also provided counselling and information, organized events, undertook research and liaised with the press.

The Centre delivered a programme titled 'More men in ECEC', which obtained financial support from the European Social Fund. Activities under the project included occupational orientation projects for boys and young men, working with schools to organise internships in ECEC settings and giving pupils a more detailed and attractive insight into the profession.

There was also a significant public relations aspect of its activities engaging in social media campaigns, video, cinema, radio spots, large-scale campaigns, posters, press releases etc.

Norway: attracting men into ECEC

Over the past 30 years, Norway has made sustained efforts to improve the gender balance of its ECEC workforce. As early as 1990, the Norwegian government

implemented measures to encourage men to enter the sector, including the development of networks for male workers, conferences, and the creation of documents and videos to encourage discussion.

In 1997, Norway launched its first action plan to increase male representation in ECEC, setting a target for men to make up at least 20% of the workforce by 2000. Positive action policies were also introduced to promote male recruitment, with male candidates being favoured if two applicants have the same qualifications.

While Norway has not yet reached its 20% male workforce target, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of male ECEC workers. According to Statistics Norway, the percentage of male teachers in ECEC rose from 8.8% in 2015 to 10.1% in 2021 (Statista, 2022).

However, male employees are still underrepresented among kindergarten teachers and centre leaders. Norway also reports an increase in male students registering for kindergarten teacher education, although the dropout rate is higher for men than for women. (Engel, 2015)

Career Progression

There is a growing body of research indicating that good career progression and career pathways for teaching staff in ECEC institutions is important for improving sectoral retention, job satisfaction, and overall quality of staff. That said, the research on the importance of career development for effective WFM specific to the ECEC sector remains very limited, making it difficult to identify good practice. Studies undertaken in other education sectors, however, point to the link between low career progression opportunities and lower retention rates for teachers throughout their career (Booth, et al., 2021) supporting an argument for development of multiple career progression pathways. Despite that, among OECD countries, less than half currently offer multi-stage career structures and only few offer clear career pathways and development opportunities into school leadership and in other directions (OECD, 2022).

Furthermore, career progression into the ECEC sector from other sectors has also enabled some countries to benefit from an increased pool of ECEC workforce and cross-development of skills between sectors. (Hadfield, 2012)

Finally, there is an emerging understanding that career progression in ECEC (as well as all other education sectors) typically flows from a teaching position into a managerial/leadership one, where the skill sets required to excel at either role may differ significantly. This would suggest that there is a need for developing parallel pathways where excellence in teaching leads to pedagogical leadership positions, whereas managerial positions require entry from junior administrative and managerial roles (European Commission, 2020).

Ireland: Nurturing Skills Workforce Plan

In 2021, the government of Ireland has introduced the Nurturing Skills workforce plan for the ECEC sector between 2022 and 2028.

One of the key aspects of the plan is a new career framework that is being proposed. Ireland has committed to the 'development of career pathways, making it easier for educators and practitioners embarking on a career in the sector to see how they can progress'.

Along the lines recommended by the European Commission (2020) report, the plan recommends identifying competences for the different roles of 'assistants', 'core practitioners' and 'leaders' and creating different pathways for each of the roles.

It also unpacks the different competences required for the leadership role, along different functions, differentiating particularly between 'administrative leadership' and 'pedagogical leadership' and then further into distributed leadership responsibilities across four areas: (1) pedagogy, (2) diversity and inclusion, (3) family and community partnerships, and (4) student placement and induction.

Each pathway comes with specific responsibilities, additional training and benefits enabling a diverse variety of possible roles into which good practitioners can progress over the course of their careers.[5]

Figure 1: Career pathway for Early Years Educators within an ELC and SAC setting
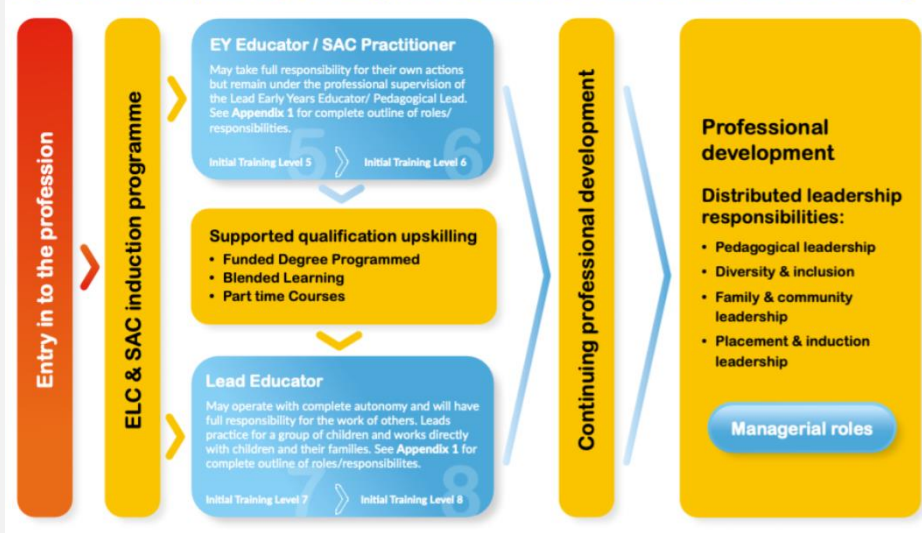
(Government of Ireland, 2021)

England: Enabling the pursuit of careers in ECEC through the EYPP programme

The Early Years Professional Programme (EYPP) was implemented in England in 2007 to address the lack of university-educated staff in the private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector. The EYPP included the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) award, which required at least one member of staff with a university-level qualification in any discipline to have accredited EYPS by 2015.

EYPS was not a standalone qualification; instead, it was an award given to staff with university-level qualifications following placement, training, and

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[5] In the figure below, taken directly from the Government of Ireland's own materials, ELC stands for Early Learning and Care and refers to provision for pre-school age children, and SAC stands for School Age Childcare, which is childcare provided to school-aged children.

assessment. Those who were not already working in the ECEC sector could achieve EYPS through a one-year training programme.

The EYPP had various goals, such as attracting graduates to the sector, professionalizing ECEC jobs, creating opportunities for career progression, and elevating the perceived status of early years practitioners. Staff with EYPS were also expected to use their skills to enhance practice and assist other workers in developing.

The EYPP was deemed successful in many ways. It resulted in a significant increase in the number of staff with at least a university degree in private full-day care centres, from 5% in 2008 to 13% in 2013 to 25.1% in 2018 (EPI, 2019) (Gov.uk, 2022). The proportion of senior managers with a degree also rose from 17% in 2008 to 33% in 2013. An evaluation commissioned by the UK Department of Education revealed that the EYPP had a highly positive impact on workforce development and that gaining EYPS had helped many staff improve their sense of status. A second study found that having a staff member with EYPS was associated with a significant improvement in quality, according to process quality measures. (Mathers, 2011), (Hadfield, 2012).

Since 2013, the requirements and implications of both EYPP and EYPS have been implemented into the wider ECEC policy and guidance in England.

Organizational Purpose

Organizational purpose refers to the sum of a range of factors such as staff's professional identity, perceived social status of the profession, sense of belonging to the institution and/or the sector and a range of other 'soft' aspects of the value proposition. The research on these aspects of the SVP is also limited, offering few opportunities to examine initiatives and identify good practices. There are however some general findings from ECEC and other education sectors worth mentioning here.

In many cases, ECEC careers suffer from negative perceptions that they are primarily low or un-skilled work as well as being traditionally regarded as 'women's work' (OECD, 2019). This leads to the undervaluing of skills and competences in the sector. Combined with generally lower salaries and lack of clear career progression, ECEC careers tend to be regarded much more negatively than even comparable careers in the basic education sector. The situation is even more dire for the care-oriented day care sector for children of 0-3 (Ibid.).

There are few good examples of how countries have succeeded in building organizational purpose among their ECEC staff, nevertheless a couple of case studies are included below for reference:

Finland: Community outreach helps build trust in the ECEC sector

In Finland ECEC, pre-primary, and basic education institutions are required to work together with community organizations such as libraries, science centres, museums, cultural centres and sports facilities. The national Agency for Education provides development grants and professional development programmes to help ECEC staff align with national policies and establish similar partnerships and community outreach programmes. Though the main aim of these programmes is

to enrich children's learning and development, they often also help the community see the benefits of ECEC and as a result improve their evaluations of it.

There have been programmes such as the 'Fiskars Model', where community artists and tradespeople provide workshops and experiences to pupils within the local educational institutions, or various programmes with children's museums focused on technology and creativity.

'Through an emphasis on both parental and community engagement, Finland fosters a deep societal embrace of ECEC and the early years, thus contributing to the sustainability of the system' (Kumpulainen, 2018).

Key Findings

Though the impact of the different elements of the SVP framework on effective workforce management and children's outcomes in ECEC settings remains under-researched, available evidence as well as a number of successful and promising case studies can help synthesize a number of key findings and lessons for the Austrian government going forward:

Undertake a comprehensive, systematic approach to ECEC workforce management reform

Workforce management is a complex issue, the effect of which on ECEC outcomes is not always easily disentangled. Improving results of key indicators in WFM, such as staff turnover, satisfaction, retention and performance is often achieved through a number of holistic measures addressing the variety of factors relating to staff. As such it is recommended that any approach to ECEC workforce management reform considers *all* of the elements of the SVP framework aiming to achieve good practice comprehensively.

Strengthen data and develop evidence-led initiatives

High-quality, workforce-related data in ECEC is a rarity across the EU (and the rest of the world). This makes understanding the key issues affecting the sector, and devising any meaningful evidence-led initiatives incredibly difficult. Any WFM reform to be introduced should aim to increase the scope and frequency of relevant data collection, as well as create reliable mechanisms for collecting, evaluating and reporting on the data.

Link sectoral funding to compliance and strategic priorities

In highly decentralized systems compliance is difficult to enforce. Yet, where supplementary subsidies or funding are given to providers, there is scope for introducing new compliance enforcement mechanisms, even on an optional subscription basis. Contracts with independent providers, as pre-requisites for supplementary funding can be used to stipulate a significant number of conditions and strategic priorities aligned with the state's own vision for the sector, without impinging on the providers' nominal independence. For example, supplementary funding can be given for improvement in staff qualifications, specific training, gender ratios, and/or to enforce data reporting, policy compliance and implementation.

Avoid qualification bottleneck for new hires

Though increasing general qualification requirements for working in the ECEC sector has multiple benefits, a strictly enforced quota of minimum qualifications will lead to further staff shortages as the pool of candidates is (at least temporarily) shrunk and new qualifications introduced. By providing positive incentives for staff qualifications, as opposed to strict barriers, the ECEC system is likely to see significant and continued improvements in staff professionalization over time, with none of the negative consequences of qualification quotas.

★ **Offer alternative pathways into ECEC careers, including vocational ones**
Alternative pathways into ECEC careers, including vocational ones, will expand the pool of candidates and enable attracting talent from other sectors, who may otherwise not consider ECEC careers as their only option. Subsidies for candidates with 'non-traditional' profiles such as lateral entrants, older candidates, or men can also help increase the overall pool.

★ **Increase practical aspects of pre-service training**
Including significant portions of pre-service training focused on practical experience improves new staff experience and effectiveness, and provides them with an opportunity to test out working in the ECEC sector before fully committing to it. This should, in turn, help increase their chances of long-term retention in the career and the sector more broadly.

★ **Develop mentoring and on-boarding programmes, particularly for new teachers can strengthen professionalization over time**
Mentoring programmes appear to improve pedagogical outcomes as well as provide important alternative leadership pathways for good practitioners. Combined with on-boarding programmes, they can help develop a culture of continuous improvement and better sense of organizational belonging, and professional growth, which in turn promote professionalisation and staff retention.

★ **Incentivize in-service professional development and facilitate creating communities of practice**
Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is associated with improved child-staff interactions, better outcomes overall, as well as positive perceptions of practitioners' careers. As such, it is important to promote extensive CPD opportunities, which can be undertaken by staff alongside their work. This is often best achieved through providing additional incentives, such as linking CPD to progression, remuneration, or by subsidizing them. Additionally to CPD, there is emerging evidence that creating shared communities of practice for the exchange and sharing of ideas, practices, guidance, tools, and mentoring among groups of practitioners helps strengthen their practice as well as sense of belonging and career recognition.

★ **Create a clear career progression framework and don't assume that good teachers make for good managers**
Today, ECEC careers are marked with fixed designations, limited career prospects and non-existent paths for progression. To ensure that people stay in the career for longer term and their experience can be cascaded onto new generations of ECEC practitioners, it is important that a clear and interesting career progression framework is created. Such a framework should ideally provide a multitude of opportunities across different aspects of leadership – from administrative and operational to technical and pedagogical, to allow the natural development of talents and competences. Such progression must also be linked to remuneration growth.

> ★ **Quality assurance needs to be provided alongside support and self-reflection**
>
> Evaluations that are not advisory – in other words they only provide ratings and grades without specific guidance on how to improve them – are unlikely to lead to positive change, or at least not at the same rate. Research shows that where specific and targeted support was given following evaluations, combined with school's own self-evaluation and self-reflection, schools were able to adapt and improve much more effectively and efficiently.

> ★ **Promote autonomy for reduced attrition**
>
> Practice in Finland shows that autonomy can be a powerful tool in improving staff retention and innovation in approach to WFM. Where institutions and their leaders are trusted to make the right decision for their staff and children, that trust often translated to higher sense of ownership, motivation, and desire to improve

Implications for Austria

The current ECEC workforce in Austria faces a number of challenges, which were identified in the Desk Review of ECEC Workforce conditions in Austria (Kovacs-Cerovic, 2023):

Austrian ECEC workforce status	Implications from good practice
Young ECEC workforce: around 50% of Austria's ECEC workforce is between 30 and 50 years old, which makes Austria's ECEC workforce among the youngest on average among OECD countries.	Increasing the pool of available candidates interested in pursuing ECEC careers by creating alternative pathways into the profession, as well as providing incentives for under-represented groups such as older lateral entrants and men.
Staff shortages: growing demand, Barcelona targets, and challenging working conditions have led to significant staff shortages which in turn affect quality of provision. It is estimated that between 6,200 and 20,000 new ECEC staff will be required by 2030.	Staff shortages are a complex issue, which is the result of a number of underlying causes. The aim should be to improve the Staff Value Proposition comprehensively across all of its aspects to create an offering which is able to attract a larger pool of prospective applicants.
Low attractiveness of ECEC careers: current working conditions, combined with lower remuneration has negatively affected attractiveness of the careers in the sector, which is declining further due to changes in regulations, increasing contact hours, and staff shortages	Similarly, to the above, attractiveness is also best addressed comprehensively, though research and practice indicate that improved remuneration, career progression and increased qualification requirements may be the areas of particular focus to improve this specific issue.
Diverse approaches to WFM across Länder: different länder	With regards to WFM, autonomy is good as a *means*, terrible as an *end*. Lack of unified

manage ECEC staff and their working conditions in different ways, which creates further confusion and complexity in an already difficult-to-manage system	quality standards, compliance requirements and data reporting means that the goals and targets vary between länder (sometimes centre to centre), if they exist at all. Funding is provided according to varying conditions, few of which link to the central authorities' goals and targets for the sector. Creating common targets and minimum standards, and incentivizing providers to achieve them in an autonomous way will create innovation and good variety in provision, while ensuring that quality is delivered, compliance achieved, and relevant data reported.
Lower salaries in the ECEC sector: which lead to further issues with staff shortages, as staff transition to better paid roles in the social sector or care for the elderly.	Most good practice countries opted to supplement ECEC staff salaries through various schemes, often again linked to additional compliance or qualification requirements. It may be advisable to set *minimum* salaries, with additional top ups used as incentives and linked to career progression pathways to promote staff's professional growth, improve hiring of talent and overall retention.
No formal qualification requirements for teachers and leaders: Austria is among the minority of EU countries that does not require degrees for its ECEC teaching staff nor ECEC leaders. There is also no induction period for novice teachers.	Qualification requirements have been shown to improve perception of sector careers. That said, blanket qualification requirements introduced at once had significant negative impact on staff shortages in short and medium term and often caused additional issues with training providers struggling to develop and deliver relevant curricula at short notice. Instead, a system with alternative pathways for entry, including for non-qualified staff, where professionalization is continually encouraged through further incentives (in terms of pay, responsibilities, progression etc.) provides a better alternative. Establishing mentoring programmes has also shown promise in developing a culture of continuous learning and improvement and increasing professionalization over time.
No competence framework for ECEC roles: Austria has no formal competence framework defining key skills and competences expected of ECEC staff, which poses further challenge for quality assurance of training programmes and further diversifies the quality of 'output' in	Singapore's, and similarly Ireland's clearly defined skills framework and alternative career pathways that recognize different development journeys ECEC practitioners can take (e.g., management, pedagogical, inclusive education leadership routes), have made it easier to define the competences and skills required of ECEC staff and those needed to progress along defined career paths. This, in turn, made it easier to

terms of qualified and competent staff.	evaluate training programmes in terms of their content relevant for the careers, unified the quality of 'output' and made career progression more transparent.
CPD offerings miss out on key skills and offer no peer-learning opportunities: CPD is compulsory and offered free of charge, but does not cover some of the key skills such as ICT skills, administrative skills, or management nor do the CPDs offer any opportunities for peer learning and knowledge exchange.	Building on the implication above, clearly defined skills and competences also make it easier to identify CPD needs and ensure comprehensive CPD offerings. Additionally, linking CPD to career progression and providing additional incentives to undertake development activities can increase perception of professionalization. Finally, establishing communities of practice has helped Italy improve quality and variety of pedagogical approaches and develop a culture of continuous improvement.

Conclusions

The research study sought to identify good practices in Early Childhood Education and Care workforce management in selected EU countries, namely Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy and Ireland with the view of assisting the Austrian government in addressing some of the challenges it faces in this domain.

The study presented a summary of existing research as well as selected initiative case studies across 7 key elements of the Staff Value Proposition research framework.

Though many of the practices presented represent emergent good practice, due to the limited scope of data collected so far to support them, and limited possibility to benchmark practices against one another, as few comparative indicators are collected across all of EU, there are a number of practices that Austria could seek to emulate and adapt in its effort to improve ECEC workforce management specifically, and ECEC outcomes more generally. These practices include, but are not limited to:

1. Strengthening evidence generation and use: through the development of ECEC data and indicator frameworks, which generate evidence on 'inputs' (i.e., teacher, leader, staff, and environment data) as well as 'outputs' (e.g., learning outcomes, performance standards etc.), Austria would gain greater insight into the specific issues and challenges affecting its ECEC sector, as well as potentially identify locally sourced good practices, which are better suited for national scale-up;

2. Linking state funding to compliance and strategic priorities: state funding for ECEC represents the most significant leverage the federal ministry has over ECEC providers, however decentralized and independent they may be. By linking that funding more closely to compliance verification mechanisms, such as quality of provision, data reporting, and/or qualification requirements, Austria can achieve better oversight and quality control over the ECEC sector without additional expenditure;

3. Piloting initiatives pertaining to improved staff hiring and professional development practices: such as mentorship schemes, increasing practical aspects of pre-service training, providing subsidies to lateral entrants and men can help Austria identify the specific practices and initiatives that may do well at a national level, and give the ministry opportunities to adapt and try out projects and programmes that showed promise elsewhere, without running substantial risks of system disruption or high costs associated with immediate national roll-out.

Following the conclusion of this report, representatives of the Austrian government will engage in peer exchanges with colleagues from two countries included herein and a study visit to one of the selected countries for closer engagement.

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