

# IMPROVING STAFF WORKING CONDITIONS FOR BETTER QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN AUSTRIA

A brief on the EU technical support project for Austria (2022-2024)



Federal Ministry  
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Education, Science  
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## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN AUSTRIA – AND THE MOTIVATION FOR A TSI PROJECT

Early childhood is crucial for shaping a child's development and future success. The European Pillar of Social Rights states that all children have the right to high-quality, affordable Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Early participation in ECEC lays the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being, and is particularly beneficial for vulnerable children by preventing early skills gaps. Quality ECEC also supports parental workforce participation. The updated Barcelona Targets (2022) also continue to call for the expansion of ECEC access, but with this going hand-in-hand with quality.

In Austria, the demand for ECEC for children aged 0 to 6 is rising, but a shortage of trained professionals has led to limited provision and lower enrolment rates, especially for children under three. The working conditions of staff in ECEC vary greatly across Austria. In Austria, the federal provinces (Länder) have the majority of responsibilities for governing ECEC, and as such each of the nine provinces has its own statutory requirements related to ECEC. There are also significant differences between publicly provided ECEC and private settings. Systemic challenges include partially low value given to the role of ECEC professionals, often uncompetitive salaries, limited career growth opportunities and long days with few child-free hours. As a result, the ECEC sector in Austria is struggling to attract and retain skilled ECEC teachers. It is against this context that the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research sought technical support from the EU's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) to enhance staff conditions, quality, and capacity in Austria's ECEC sector as part of its reforms to improve overall quality of the sector.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS:

The two-year project has now concluded with comprehensive evidence, a staff quality and conditions framework (QualitätsRahmenPlan), a guidance document to strengthen communications related to ECEC and a set of recommendations with a view to implementation of the tools and measures.

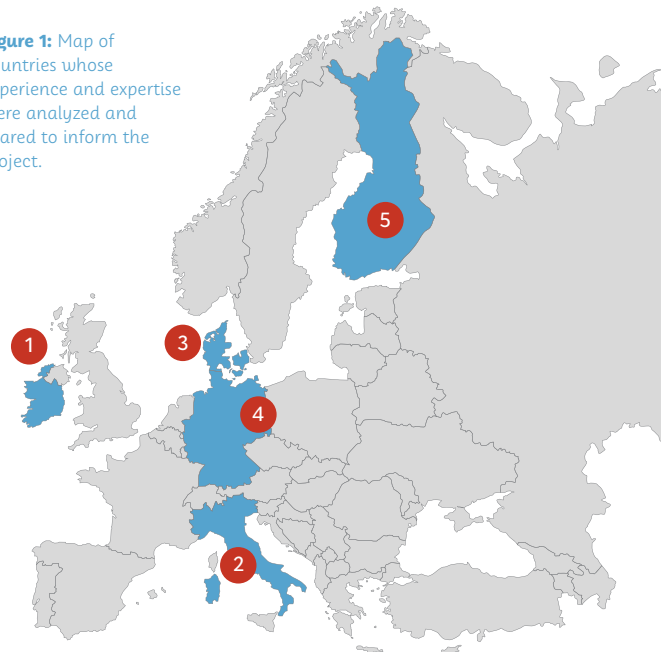
The project worked towards the following outcomes:

## OUTCOME 1:

The first phase of the project helped the Austrian authorities to gain extensive knowledge of the current status of the working conditions in the ECEC sector and their implications for staffing.

Therefore, the project developed the following outputs with a focus on evidence generation for informing the framework development.

Figure 1: Map of countries whose experience and expertise were analyzed and shared to inform the project.



- 1 Ireland**
  - Analyzed for Good Practice report
  - Online peer exchange
- 2 Italy**
  - Analyzed for Good Practice report
- 3 Denmark**
  - Analyzed for Good Practice report
- 4 Germany**
  - Analyzed for Good Practice report
  - Online peer exchange
- 5 Finland**
  - Analyzed for Good Practice report
  - Online peer exchange
  - Study visit

- **A desk review on the working conditions of staff in ECEC in Austria** bringing together and comparing data from across the nine federal provinces, as well as examining Austria's standing vis-à-vis other EU Member States.
- **A report on European good practice on strengthening ECEC workforce conditions** to inform the development of the framework and broader recommendations. Good practices from five EU Members States were used, complemented by peer exchanges with Ireland and Germany and a study visit to Finland. The Staff Value Proposition (SVP) for ECEC was developed as an analytical framework against which systems were assessed.
- **A sector analysis of the ECEC workforce situation in Austria** to create a common understanding of strengths, challenges and bottlenecks of the Austrian ECEC system.
- From these three documents, **a consolidated report with recommendations** based on the SVP model was compiled.



**Figure 2:** The Staff Value Proposition (Damborsky, 2023) was developed and used as a theoretical basis of this TSI project. This SVP is a further unpacking of the EU Quality Framework on ECEC and the UNICEF Build to Last Framework's components related to workforce.

## OUTCOME 2:

In a second phase, the focus of the project was to support the Austrian authorities at federal and province level to jointly develop a Model Framework for ECEC Staffing Quality and Conditions, to serve as a template for adaptation and acceptance at the province level, as well as a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for quality control and coordination of ECEC.

In order to support this outcome, the project developed the following outputs:

- **A Staff Quality and Conditions Framework** was developed, based on the staff value proposition and the recommendations from phase 1. This framework which was co-created by a broadly composed working group of stakeholders, comprises quality statements and indicators across the different elements of the SVP.
- **The monitoring and evaluation component of the framework** was developed concurrently with the working group and was considered in the framework. The actual description was provided in the proposal paper for an ECEC strategy.

## OUTCOME 3:

The third phase of this project provided recommendations for the Austrian authorities as a basis for a future implementation strategy on the improvement of framework conditions and recruitment in ECEC, including recommendations for a national action plan and a roadmap for implementation.

In order to support this outcome, the project developed the following outputs:

- **Proposal paper for an ECEC strategy for Austria** for improving ECEC working conditions, with goals and activities and responsible actors which can serve as a basis for a future action plan or roadmap for implementation. Non-binding recommendations are also complemented with a Monitoring & Evaluation framework to measure the level to which both the Staff Quality and Conditions Framework and the recommendations have been implemented.
- Consolidated project outputs, findings, recommendations and next steps in the form of a **final project summary report**.

## OUTCOME 4:

The final element of the project provided concepts and recommendations to the Austrian authorities to conduct a national communication and advocacy campaign aimed at increasing the value of and the interest in the ECEC profession.

In order to support this outcome, the project developed the following output:

- **A narrative paper with recommendations, a communication strategy, logo and slogan** for voluntary use by all ECEC stakeholders in their communication about ECEC and in possible campaigns.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT:

- This 2-year project was funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument (TSI)
- Technical support was provided by UNICEF Europe and Central Asia regional office's Early Childhood Development section, in co-operation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM).
- On behalf of the Austrian authorities, the project was led by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria, in close partnership with the federal provinces (*Länder*) and other relevant stakeholders.

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