



# World Class

What England can learn from global experience to make early years policy work for disadvantaged children

## The Authors

**Elena Rosa Brown**

**Merrilyn Groom**

**Kankan Zhang**

**Sarah Angell**



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# Key findings

## England's system

### Existing provision

- There is increasing appetite to reform England's early years system, including the recent government announcement of a large-scale expansion.
- There is an opportunity to ensure England provides equitable, high-quality provision to all families, particularly as evidence tells us that high-quality early years provision has the potential to improve life chances for children, reducing the attainment gap between lower income children and their better-off peers.
- ▲ England currently has some policies which support equitable, high-quality early education and care, including the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, funded 15 hour places for disadvantaged two-year-olds, and support with childcare costs for working families on Universal Credit (up to 85% of costs, with the maximum amount parents are able to claim going up to £951 a month for one child, or £1,630 for two or more).
- But there is still considerable room for improvement to ensure England's early years system works for the poorest children and their families. Many disadvantaged two-year-olds are not enrolled in the existing offer, and many poorer families are locked out of the 30 hour entitlements to early education and care at ages three and four.
- There are concerns about the quality of provision on offer, with the amount of funding given to providers for the 15 and 30 hour entitlements lower than the cost to settings to provide those hours, with potential impacts on quality. Staff qualification levels in the sector are also falling.

### Plans for change

- The recent government announcement to extend early years entitlements so that 'working families' have access to free provision when children are 9-months old are problematic, with figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies showing that only a fifth of families earning less than £20,000 a year will have access to the expansion.
- There are also concerns that high quality will not be maintained or improved during the planned expansion, with government currently consulting on several suggestions to reduce the qualification levels of the workforce (a factor directly linked to quality).



## Looking at early years policy internationally

This report looks at a range of countries, from the 'usual suspects' often held up as exemplars in the early years (such as the Nordics), to countries where provision has been improved more recently, or where specific aspects of their early years systems could be beneficial for England.

The report also includes cautionary tales, where changes made by countries have resulted in unintended consequences or poor outcomes.

### Examples include:

- An expansion of cheap, subsidised childcare places in Quebec, Canada, in the late 1990s, which aimed to provide childcare places to all children aged nought to four at a cost of \$5 (about £4 per day). However, research found the expansion reduced the quality of provision with negative outcomes for children in the long-term, including worse health outcomes, lower life satisfaction and higher crime rates later in life. Quebec shows the dangers of expanding early years provision without a focus on quality.
- Recent efforts made to increase staff qualification levels in Estonia so that the minimum requirement for early years educators, directors and headteachers since 2015 has been a three-year bachelor's degree. By increasing pay and protecting working conditions alongside this requirement, Estonia has successfully increased the qualification levels of their staff, with the share of early years teachers with higher education up from 20.9% in 1995 to 69% by 2018.
- ▲ A major programme run in New York in the USA, which nearly tripled the rate of four-year-olds from low income families attending early years provision. This was achieved by investing \$1.5 billion (just over £1 billion) to recruit and train almost 2,000 new early years educators, alongside an extensive multi-million dollar outreach programme.



# Lesson for England from international best practice

Bringing together lessons from successful early years systems worldwide, key recommendations that would help ensure equal access to high-quality provision in England are listed below. Addressing these three key themes would help put England on a path to ensuring that all children, regardless of family situation, are able to access high-quality provision and, ultimately, enjoy better outcomes.

## Children benefit from being in settings with highly qualified staff

- Pre-service and ongoing training to improve staff qualification levels should be a priority.
- Financial support and protected time for participation in initial qualifications and ongoing training are needed.
- ▲ England should re-instate the Graduate Leader Fund and consider targeting it to areas with higher disadvantage.
- Early years staff wages should be increased and made more equitable across setting types.

## Having a higher number of staff to children supports better quality provision

- England should at a minimum maintain and ideally increase the number of staff per child in early years settings - other than at age two and under, where given England's ratio is broadly in line with other countries with high-quality provision, existing staff-to-child ratios should be maintained.

## England should remove barriers for disadvantaged families to increase participation.

- There should be equal access to early years provision for all children, particularly at ages two, three and four – where there is greater existing evidence of educational benefit. At a minimum, the government's free early year entitlements should be expanded to lower-income families, for example using the same criteria as the current offer for disadvantaged two-year-olds.
- Ideally, all families would have equal access to early years provision, for example by making the government entitlements universal. Alternatively, a sliding fee scale based on parental income could provide universal access at an affordable funding level for the state, while supporting the most disadvantaged children to access early education and care.
- ▲ England could also consider offering universal, completely free part-time places in disadvantaged areas.
- More should be done to support disadvantaged families to take up early years entitlements.

Additionally, the early years is not just about formal provision in a pre-school or nursery, but also crucially about the wider support given to families. England should capitalise on the previous work of Sure Start Centres and current Family Hubs to offer combined services (also including health and family support services) – ideally to all families, but at a minimum as universal provision in the most disadvantaged areas.



## About the Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust champions social mobility from birth to the workplace so that all young people have the chance to succeed in life. It does this through evidence-led programmes, agenda setting research and policy influence.



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# Introduction

England's early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is at a turning point, leaping up the political agenda in recent years, with significant interest from both major political parties. A recent government announcement of a large-scale expansion to England's ECEC system provides the opportunity for England to become a leader in high-quality provision, but only if policies and corresponding implementation are well thought through.

Given there is increasing appetite to reform England's early years system, this report looks at what the country can learn from others to apply to that process. While other recent reports (*Ofsted, 2023 and Ville et al., 2022*) have looked at early years policy internationally, this is the first to focus on what we can learn from others to ensure England's system works to support the most disadvantaged children.

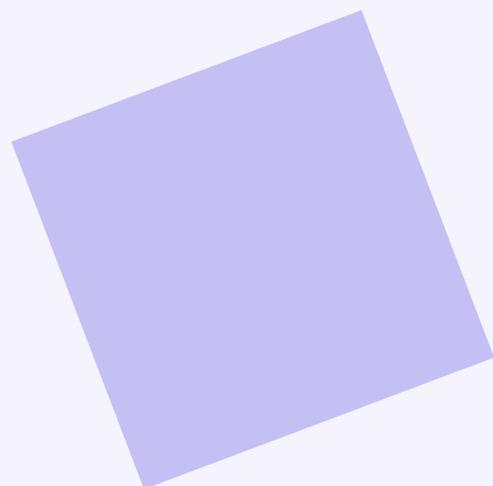
Example countries, nations and jurisdictions include some of the 'usual suspects', those whose early years systems are very well developed and frequently held up as exemplars of good practice (such as the Nordics), but also includes countries where provision has been improved more recently, or where specific aspects of their early years systems could be beneficial for England. The report also includes cautionary tales, where changes made by countries have resulted in unintended consequences or poor outcomes. Throughout, learnings and implications for England's early years system are highlighted.



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Only a fifth of families earning less than £20,000 a year will currently have access to the government's planned expansion from nine months to age two.

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# Background

## Why is a high-quality, equitable early years policy needed?

High-quality ECEC can be a significant gap-closer, reducing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers (*Gambaro et al., 2014*). By the time children start school, disadvantaged children already lag behind their more advantaged peers (*Archer & Oppenheim, 2021*).

As well as the benefit to individual children, there is an economic case for investing early too. Research has found high quality early education to have a 13% return on investment (*Garca et al, 2020*), and that for every £1 spent on early years education, £7 has to be spent to have the same impact in adolescence (*Public Health England, 2015*).

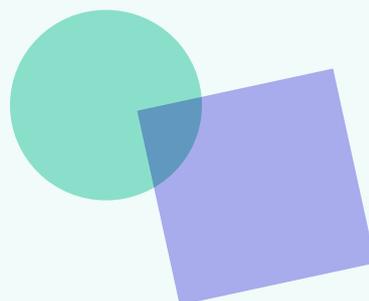
## Existing provision in England

Currently, England has some policies that support equitable, high-quality ECEC. For example, the ECEC curriculum in England (the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile) is well evidenced and widely respected (*Wall et al., 2015*). Furthermore, funded places are available for disadvantaged two-year-olds to support access to ECEC.

However, despite these measures there are significant areas for improvement. While funding is in place for disadvantaged children at age two, close to a third of eligible children are not enrolled (*Archer & Oppenheim, 2021*).

There are also inequalities in access to provision. Currently at ages three and four in England, while all children are eligible to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year (570 hours total), parents in families meeting certain work-based criteria can access 30 hours (1140 hours total). Previous Sutton Trust research has found that only 20% of families in the bottom third of the earnings distribution are eligible for the 30-hour entitlement (*Pascal et al, 2021*). This suggests that the current criteria are not sufficient to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged families in England.

There are also long-running issues in England with how the provision is operationalised. The amount of funding given to providers for the 15 and 30 hour entitlements is lower than what is needed by settings to provide those hours. As a result, many providers need to find ways to subsidise these shortfalls, either by charging more for additional hours above the entitlements, and/or by charging for extras such as lunch or snacks (*Pascal et al, 2021*). Qualification levels of staff are also a concern, with the proportion of unqualified staff working in the early years rising, alongside worryingly high levels of staff turnover (*Pascal et al, 2020*).



## Plans for expansion

Recent announcements to extend free ECEC provision for working families are also problematic, with the government announcing a move towards 30 hours per week for 'working' families of children from nine months. The extension is being introduced in stages, with the full expansion planned for September 2025.

However, recent analysis from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that only a fifth of families earning less than £20,000 a year would have access to the full expansion from nine months to age two (*Drayton et al, 2023*), with families falling between new and existing offers at age two being left with no free provision.

There are also concerns on how quality can be maintained and improved during the planned expansion. A [recent government consultation](#) on changes to the early years workforce in view of the expansion includes several suggestions to reduce the qualifications of the workforce, for example, by reducing the percentage of level 2 qualified staff required from 'at least half' to either 30% or 40%.

Evidence from other countries tells us that increasing ECEC provision without focusing on quality risks exacerbating inequality even further ([see Quebec case study](#)).

The aim of this report is to summarise the evidence behind high-quality ECEC provision, focusing particularly on areas where England appears to fall behind other countries, such as staff quality and participation of disadvantaged families. We also reviewed what other countries have done or are doing to address some of these issues, including country profiles for each of these providing further information.

<sup>1</sup> We define high-quality as being above average in OECD metrics (OECD 2023) for a particular theme (*i.e.*, *engagement of disadvantaged families, high staff-to-child ratios, well-qualified staff*).

<sup>2</sup> Publicly available and identifiable in English-based searches in online search engines.

<sup>3</sup> Evidenced through publicly available published reports.

## Quebec case study:

### Increased access did not lead to better outcomes for children.

In Quebec in the late 1990s, subsidised childcare was introduced as part of the Centres de la petite enfance (CPE) initiative. The initiative aimed to provide childcare places to all children aged nought to four at a cost of \$5 a day (approximately £4; subsequently increased to \$7 or about £5.50), regardless of whether their parents were in work. Over 15 years childcare places in the province tripled from 78,864 in 1997 to 245,107 in 2012. The costs were covered by government subsidies totalling \$2.2 billion (approximately £1.7 billion).

While this increased enrolment and attendance in ECEC, quickly ramping up new private sector provision combined with a low supply of high-quality staff led to reduced quality. One study looked at the long term impact of the programme on a variety of relevant outcomes using data available into young adulthood. The study found that children who had been involved in CPE were more likely to have externalising behaviour problems in school, as well as worse health, lower life satisfaction, and higher crime rates later in life (*Baker, 2019*).

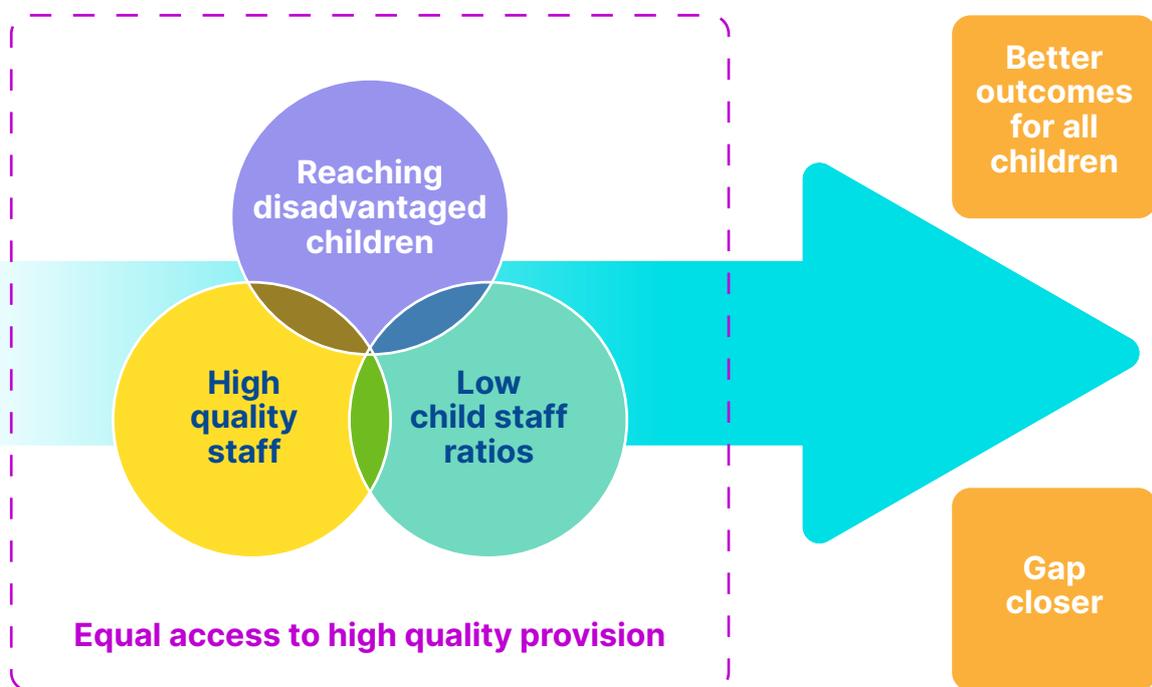
For more information on early years in Canada, [see the full country profile](#).

Using desk-based research, we focused on countries that met the following criteria: Where ECEC is already high-quality, or progress is being made to make it high-quality,<sup>1</sup> data on policies is available,<sup>2</sup> and wherever possible, where outcomes related to those policy choices have been evidenced.<sup>3</sup> Through dedicated searching we also identified where progress is being made towards high-quality provision (e.g., [New York](#)). Full country profiles for all the countries examined in this report are available in [Appendix 2](#).

# Key themes and recommendations

In reviewing the available literature three key themes emerge:

- Remove barriers for disadvantaged families to increase participation.
- Children benefit from being in settings with highly qualified staff.
- ▲ Having a higher number of staff to children supports better quality provision.



Key recommendations that would help ensure equal access to high quality provision in England are listed below. Addressing these three key themes would help put England on a path to ensuring that all children, regardless of family situation, are able to access high quality provision and, ultimately, enjoy better outcomes.

**Children benefit from being in settings with highly qualified staff.**

**Provide opportunities for pre-service and ongoing training to improve staff qualification levels.**

- Use existing infrastructures (i.e., universities, existing teacher training bodies) to increase capacity for initial teacher training and ongoing professional development.

**Ensure there is financial support and protected time for participation in initial qualification and ongoing training.**

- Reinstate the Graduate Leader Fund and consider targeting it to areas with higher disadvantage.

**ECEC staff wages should be increased and made more equitable across settings.**

- Bringing ECEC staff wages more in line with teacher pay is likely to improve the quality of the workforce.

- Bring wages in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings, in line with those in maintained settings.
- Wage increases should be accompanied by proportionate spending by government otherwise providers may be required to charge parents higher fees to compensate. This would disproportionately affect more disadvantaged families.

**Having a higher number of staff to children supports better quality provision.**

**Increase the number of staff per child but not at the expense of quality.**

- England should not relax current staff to child ratios in early years settings.

- Government should ensure that high-quality initial ECEC educator training and ongoing professional development is in place.

**Remove barriers for disadvantaged families to increase participation.**

**Provision of early years education to all children should be equalised.**

- England should provide equal access to early years provision for all children, particularly at ages two, three and four – where there is greater existing evidence of educational benefit.
- A sliding fee scale based on parental income could provide universal access at an affordable funding level for the state, while supporting the most disadvantaged children to access ECEC.

- If universal free provision is not possible, England could consider offering universal, completely free part-time places to all children in disadvantaged areas to help with take-up while avoiding stigma.

**More needs to be done to support disadvantaged families to take up the offer.**

- Capitalise on the previous work of Sure Start Centres and current Family Hubs to offer combined services.

- Outreach, through grassroots or targeted public ad campaigns could stimulate demand and engagement of disadvantaged families ([see New York case study](#)).
- Use initial education and ongoing professional development to build the ability of ECEC staff to engage traditionally disadvantaged groups.

# Children benefit from being in settings with highly qualified staff

## What does the evidence base tell us?

The most influential factors affecting quality are the education, qualifications, and training of the workforce, with higher education qualifications associated with better child outcomes (*Pascoe and Brennan, 2017*). In particular, it's been shown that early years educators with appropriate skills, knowledge, and qualifications significantly contribute to children's early learning and development, particularly for children from low income and at-risk families (*Mathers et al., 2014*).

One study found that disadvantaged children in particular benefited from attending early years settings with a graduate for more than 15 hours per week, with positive impacts on children's learning up to the age of 11 (*Bonetti & Blanden 2020*).

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Educated, qualified, and trained staff are associated with high quality provision, and these lead to better outcomes for children from low income and at-risk families.

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Evidence suggests that educators with higher pre-service qualifications are able to provide higher-quality provision (*OECD, 2018*), but in-service training has also been found to be associated with higher scores in language and literacy (*OECD, 2018*). This is perhaps why a relatively high number of countries prioritise professional development: 47.2% of OECD countries require a minimum yearly participation in professional development for all teachers in ECEC settings (*OECD, 2023*).



## Approaches in other countries

A review of countries with high-quality ECEC suggests there are three key approaches used to develop a highly qualified ECEC workforce:



### Ongoing professional development



### Raising initial qualification requirements



### Improving salaries and benefits



### A number of countries have explored how to use ongoing professional development to improve quality.

- Ongoing professional development can take the form of staff education programmes or professional development (Northern Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Australia, Estonia), and continuing education in university (Sweden, New York).
- Professional development has to be high-quality, evidence-based and targeted, as in the case of the Australian professional development programme 'Leadership for Learning'. Evaluation shows that this professional development programme has positively impacted on the quality of practice and has led to improved outcomes for young children in key domains of language, numbers, and socio-emotional regulation.
- Regulating professional development through yearly requirements or having it part of common practice is used in a number of countries with strong provision (Estonia, Norway, Finland).
- Financial support and protected time for participation in training has also been shown to encourage uptake (Australia, Sweden, Estonia).



### As higher workforce qualifications are associated with higher quality service, countries are raising initial qualification requirements for Early Year educators (Australia, Norway, South Korea).

To ensure a sufficient supply of workforce that fulfils the qualification requirements, governments have explored a range of actions, including:

- Providing financial support in the forms of student grants and scholarships (Norway)
- Creating additional early childhood education university places (Australia, New York)
- Validating existing competencies to allow easier entry into the profession (Estonia, Australia, Germany, Norway). For example, the Australian government introduced a recognition of prior learning (RPL) initiative, which makes it easier for experienced early childhood workers to obtain or upgrade their qualifications through a national assessment process.



### Estonia case study:

#### **Increased requirements accompanied by better pay has led to significantly increased qualifications in the ECEC workforce.**

In recent years, Estonia has focused on improving quality in ECEC through investment in higher qualified staff. Since 2015, the minimum requirement for Early Years educators, directors and headteachers has been a three-year bachelor's degree programme.

The country has successfully increased qualification levels, with the share of ECEC teachers with higher education increasing from 20.9% in 1995 to 69% by 2018. Despite the increased requirements, there is high demand from applicants for early years educator training (a ratio of seven applicants for every place) which suggests that it is a sought-after job.

One motivating factor could be increased pay. Since 2017, local governments receive additional financial support for increasing the salaries of qualified preschool teachers to 80% of a school teacher's salary. The average gross salary of preschool teachers rose from 936 euros per month (approximately £805) in 2017, to 1,125 euros in 2019 (approximately £970). Furthermore, in 2020, preschool teachers with a master's degree now receive the full 1,350 euros (approximately £1,160) minimum salary of primary teachers.

Another factor could be the working conditions. Estonia also have protected time for ECEC teachers separated from their contact time with children to plan, prepare, attend professional development, and reflect on their practice.

For more information on early years in Estonia, [\*\*see the full country profile here.\*\*](#)

 **Improving salaries and benefits, as well as providing opportunities for promotion and progression can encourage people to pursue a career in early years and help with retention.**

A number of countries focus on raising salaries and improving benefits (Australia, USA, New Zealand, South Korea, Estonia):

- ▲ Estonia have recently seen a successful increase in qualified staff which has been linked to increases in pay ([see Estonia case study](#)).
- ▲ Research from New Zealand and Head Start in the USA finds that increases in pay help to increase the number of early years educators in the sector. In the case of the USA, this further contributes to the retention of staff with higher qualifications, which then leads to an increase in children's performance.
- ▲ There are further examples from Australia and South Korea, although the related impacts are not evaluated: In Australia, the statutory salary of pre-primary teachers in 2014 was significantly higher than the OECD average. In South Korea, wages for childcare teachers were raised to close the wage gaps between childcare and kindergarten teachers. Childcare staff can also receive additional remuneration for working in rural areas, working overtime, and working evening or weekend shifts.
- ▲ A few countries look for opportunities to encourage promotion and progression – in Norway and Sweden, preschool teachers have the opportunity to be promoted as school managers and municipal administrators.



## Implications for England

Developing a highly-qualified ECEC workforce is most successful when accompanied by funding to pay for initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, and higher salaries.

Current	Recommendations
<p><b>ECEC qualifications vary between settings and evidence suggests they could become less qualified in future.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ EEC staff in maintained settings (i.e., those attached to a school) tend to have higher qualifications than those in PVI settings (OECD, 2023).</li> <li>▲ Almost half of highly qualified staff (level 6 and above) are aged over 40, with 21% aged over 50 and approaching retirement in the next 10 to 15 years.</li> <li>▲ Fewer staff are now working towards higher qualifications which could be linked to financial limitations on individuals and/or settings to resource time and money for further training and a lack of incentives to pursue higher qualifications.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Increase the number of staff per children but not at the expense of quality.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use existing infrastructures (i.e., universities, existing teacher training bodies) to increase capacity for initial teacher training and ongoing professional development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Without ring-fenced funding, successful schemes have plateaued or failed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ The Graduate Leader Fund considerably increased the number of early years workers with a bachelor's degree or equivalent, by 76%, from 16,500 workers to 29,100 workers between 2007 and 2011. However, when funding was no longer ring-fenced, rates for some qualifications fell or remained static.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ensure there is financial support and protected time for participation in initial qualification and ongoing training.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reinstate the Graduate Leader Fund and consider targeting it to areas with higher disadvantage so the workforce will have the highest impact.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wages for ECEC staff in England are low and inconsistent between settings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ The average entry-level childcare worker earns less per hour than a retail worker with similar level qualifications (Akhal, 2019).</li> <li>▲ There are more childcare workers claiming benefits compared to the population as a whole (Akhal, 2019).</li> <li>▲ While pay is low in general, it ranges considerably from £8.30 for staff in PVI settings, to £14.40 for nursery staff in maintained settings (Campbell-Barr et al., 2020). The average pay for junior staff in maintained settings is generally higher than more senior staff in PVI settings (Campbell-Barr et al., 2020).</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECEC staff wages should be increased and made more equitable across settings.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bringing ECEC staff wages more in line with teacher pay is likely to improve the quality of the workforce.</li> <li>● Bring wages in PVI settings in line with those in maintained settings.</li> <li>● Wage increases should be accompanied by proportionate spending by government, otherwise providers may be required to charge parents higher fees to compensate. This would disproportionately affect more disadvantaged families.</li> </ul>

## Other UK nations:



### Wales

- The qualifications of ECEC practitioners in Wales are below the average for developed countries, while pay in the sector fell between 2005 and 2014. Because of the separation between education and care, childcare practitioners have low status, qualifications and pay (Dallimore, 2019).



### Scotland

- Every Scottish childcare setting requires a lead practitioner who is qualified to degree level and acts as a manager or deputy. Entry level workers are also required to have a Scottish Qualifications Authority qualification that is the equivalent to level 2 NVQ in England.
- Every practitioner is also responsible for undertaking continuous professional development each year. Practitioners are regulated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and need to be registered with the council to work.
- It is estimated that around 80% of practitioners in the private sector are paid less than the Living Wage (Wane, 2019). In its 2017 assessment of the ELC workforce, Skills Development Scotland (2018) found that overall, the ELC (early learning and childcare) sector is perceived as unattractive and the work of low status. It is characterised by low pay and poor terms and conditions, with little prospect for career progression. There is also the perception that better qualified staff prefer to work in the public sector because of better terms, conditions and career development opportunities (Skills Development Scotland, 2018).

**Note:** Northern Ireland has not been included here due to limited available information.



# A higher number of staff to children

## What does the evidence base tell us?

Countries that are known for high-quality early years provision (Norway, Sweden) or that have seen improvements over recent years (Australia, Estonia) have made progressive changes to ensure there are fewer children per educator. Indeed, having a higher number of staff to children is associated with better quality (OECD, 2018).

Settings where there are fewer children per educator are more likely to be rated better quality than those settings where there are more children per educator.

It has been suggested that particularly positive benefits are seen when staff have time to combine education with responsive care – when staff respond to the individual needs of the child and engage in one-to-one play and conversation (Coface, 2023). Low child-to-staff ratios have a direct impact on the ability of staff to provide sensitive and responsive care, which is particularly important for disadvantaged children who may be behind some of their more advantaged peers in terms of social, behavioural and/or language development (Mathers et al., 2014).

## Approaches in other countries

There is no established number associated with better quality provision. However, a look at some of the most successful countries suggests a range of between 1:3 or 1:4 for younger children, with up to 1:6 or 1:11 for older children.

- While England's ratios are comparable for children aged two or under, the ratio for those two and over three are comparatively higher.

Country	Age	Ratio (adult: children max)*
Norway**	Under three	1:3
	Three and older	1:6
Sweden		1:5:3
Australia	Under two	1:4
	Two-three	1:5
	Over three	1:11
 England	Under two	1:3
	Two	1:4***
	Three and older (adult qualified to level 6)	1:13
	Three and older (adult not qualified to level 6)	1:8

\* These are largely suggested guidelines in these countries.

\*\* Norway also has guidelines on the number of qualified staff (Pedagogue) to child ratios. Pedagogue-to-children ratio is a minimum of one pedagogical leader per 14–18 children when children are three years or older, and a minimum of one pedagogical leader per seven to nine children when children are younger than three years old.

\*\*\* Government has recently announced plans to increase this to 1:5, for more details see the section below.

It is also important to note that any increases in staff-to-child ratios should be careful to avoid a decrease in service quality, which may be due to a lack of higher-qualified staff, as in the case of Wales ([see Wales case study](#)) (Siraj et al., 2017).

### Wales case study:

#### The perils of increasing staff-to-child ratios at the expense of service quality.

During the pilot of the Foundation Phase (ages three to seven) that commenced in 2004, there was a focus on recruiting more staff so that there would be more staff per child for three to five-year-olds. The aim was to achieve a ratio of approximately 1:8 (from 1:8-30 depending on the nature of the provision).

However, while they were successful at having a higher number of staff to children, the quality of interactions and the levels of early literacy fell. This was mainly due to the fact that lower paid, less qualified or unqualified staff were recruited instead of the usual trained graduate teachers, who command a higher salary. This reduced the quality of provision.

As a result, although the ratio of staff to children was raised, the quality of settings suffered due to the reliance on less-qualified staff.

## Implications for England

Having a higher number of staff per child increases the quality of education in ECEC settings, particularly for disadvantaged children, but only when staff are qualified and well trained.

Current	Recommendations
<p><b>At age two and under, England currently has a child-to-staff ratio in line with countries that have a quality ECEC system, although there are plans to raise it for two-year-olds.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ In March 2023 the UK government announced plans to change the staff-to-child ratios for two-year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5 (from September 2023). This is directly in opposition to countries that have high-quality ECEC provision (<b>see Table above</b>), where there are a high number of adults to children.</li> <li>▲ It should also be noted that countries that are known for high-quality provision have low child-to-staff ratios <i>and</i> staff with high qualifications, ensuring that children benefit from quality interactions with well-trained educators.</li> </ul>	<p><b>At a minimum, maintain, but ideally increase the number of staff per child – other than at age two and under, where existing staff to child ratios should be maintained.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High-quality initial ECEC educator training and ongoing professional development should always be in place before increasing staff-to-child ratios.</li> <li>● England should at a minimum maintain and ideally increase the number of staff per child in early years settings, other than at age two and under, where given England’s ratio is broadly in line with other countries with high quality provision, existing staff to child ratios should be maintained.</li> </ul>

Other UK nations:		
Nation	Age	Staff Child Ratios
 Scotland	Under two	<b>1:3</b>
	Two	<b>1:5</b>
	Three and over*	<b>1:8</b>
 Wales	Under two	<b>1:3</b>
	Two	<b>1:4</b>
	Three-seven	<b>1:8</b>
 Northern Ireland	Under two	<b>1:3</b>
	Two	<b>1:4</b>
	Three-twelve	<b>1:8</b>

\*Where children aged 3 and over attend facilities providing day care for a session which is less than a continuous period of four hours in any day, the adult: child ratio may be 1:10, providing individual children do not attend more than one session per day. Two adults to be in attendance at any one time. Only adults in contact with children for the majority of the session should count towards the ratios. The regulator would be able to vary the ratios up or down where warranted for example attendance of children with special needs, awkward premises and additional support staff on the premises.



# Remove barriers for disadvantaged families to increase participation

## What does the evidence base tell us?

High-quality programmes that focus on engaging disadvantaged families can narrow the attainment gap by almost half between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children (*Pianta et al, 2009*) and evidence shows that targeted initiatives can increase access to early years education, especially for disadvantaged children (*OECD, 2017*). However, the scale of the problem is particularly challenging, with generally low enrolment across low-income families and marginalised populations seen across many countries (*OECD, 2017*).

Findings from one study comparing data across European countries suggest that free, subsidised provision, and/or early entitlement to provision are closely related to higher participation in ECEC for disadvantaged groups (*Ünver et al., 2021*). Other studies have suggested that direct and indirect costs (e.g., fees and travel) are particularly important barriers for disadvantaged families (*Beatson et al., 2022*).

Low-income families and marginalised populations generally have lower-than-average enrolment in ECEC, but it can be improved through targeted outreach and initiatives.

Some research has shown that participation can be facilitated through promotional outreach that focuses on the benefits of high-quality learning in ECEC centres, and professional training of staff (*Beatson et al., 2022*). One study found that being provided with information about the likely benefits of attending formal ECEC is one of the most important facilitators in enabling participation for disadvantaged families (*Beatson et al., 2022*). Building relationships with families and their community has also been seen to support families to overcome barriers associated with enrolment (*Beatson et al., 2022*).



## Approaches in other countries

Countries encourage disadvantaged families to enrol in ECEC using a number of approaches, but the main areas of focus of countries with high-quality provision are:



### Subsidising fees



### Using outreach to engage families



### Training on working with underserved populations



### Subsidising fees can help broaden access to ECEC for disadvantaged families.

- ▲ Some countries have adopted a 'sliding-scale' approach based on parental income, so parents with less means are able to afford childcare (Slovenia, Denmark, Iceland).
- ▲ Another approach is to cap fees for low-income or unemployed parents by placing limits on maximum fees for low-income families (Japan, Norway), low and average-income families (South Korea) or all families (Sweden) so that cost of accessing ECEC is either low or non-existent.
- ▲ A few countries provide free access for specified hours of ECEC starting from age three (Japan, Norway, Sweden).
- ▲ Subsidies in some countries are offered universally in targeted areas of high disadvantage to encourage take up by reducing stigma and reducing costs (Norway, Ireland). [See Norway case study box.](#)

## Norway case study:

### Targeted universal access to reduce stigma in disadvantaged populations.

In Norway, children from immigrant and migrant families are statistically more likely to live in poverty. Norway offers free part-time kindergarten to children in areas with a high proportion of immigrant or migrant families. The measure is universal within these areas to avoid stigma.

Norway combines Norwegian language training for immigrant or migrant parents with open access to kindergartens. Parents can take up language training while their children are being taken care of in kindergartens. The objective is to stimulate immigrant and migrant parents to learn the language and stimulate participation of immigrant children in ECEC.

For more information on early years in Norway, [see the full country profile here.](#)





**Outreach through targeted campaigns or through the use of family centres is a popular approach to engage disadvantaged families.**

- Some countries use targeted outreach through grassroots or targeted public ad campaigns to stimulate demand and engagement of disadvantaged families ([see New York case study box](#)).
- A number of countries use family centres – integration of childcare, health, and family support services – to engage families.
  - A family centre is a service model which brings together the services that promote the wellbeing and health of children and families on the basis of a promotive and preventive approach, to support parenthood and to combat social exclusion (Norway, Sweden, Italy).
  - The aim is to develop a fully-integrated model of family support with integrated policy frameworks and training that supports joined-up working between services (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland). This is very similar to the use of Sure Start centres in England in the early 2000s and in the current Family Hub model.



**Some countries use teacher training and professional development to support staff working with disadvantaged communities.**

- Using initial education and ongoing professional development opportunities for ECEC staff to improve the ability of staff to teach traditionally disadvantaged groups (Australia).
- South Korea has developed a 60-hour training programme and teaching manual for those working with multicultural family backgrounds. Teachers can register voluntarily for the training course and receive full financial support to do it.



## New York case study:

**Between 2013 and 2014 enrolment rates in non-statutory ECEC for four-year-olds from low-income families in New York nearly tripled (Potter, 2015). The incoming administration did this through a number of highly effective activities:**

**Expansion was backed by significant increase in public spending.**

- \$1.5 billion (approximately £1.2 billion) was secured for ECEC reforms.
- Investments in teachers was a critical part of expansion, with teacher recruitment, certification programs, and professional development being central to the ability to offer an increased number of high-quality places.

**Building on the existing infrastructure enabled delivery to expand rapidly.**

- Expansion of the ECEC offer required the creation of new spaces which was achieved by expanding the offer in existing centres and by enlisting schools to provide ECEC.
- To recruit and train almost 2,000 new early years educators, the city partnered with the Department of Education and City University; the Department of Education also took steps to reduce the pay gap between ECEC educators across settings; new investments in ongoing professional development were also established in partnership with the Department of Education and the Bank Street College of Education.

**An extensive outreach programme led to increased awareness of and support for the ECEC offer.**

- A multi-million-dollar awareness-raising campaign focused on generating public support for ECEC reforms which in turn seemed to increase support for increasing taxes on the wealthiest.
- A grassroots campaign to recruit and enrol families was launched in partnership with the Department of Education and the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs using a range of approaches, including canvassing, cold-calling, and public ad campaigns.

For more information on early years in the United States of America, [see the full country profile here](#).

## Implications for England

Removing barriers, particularly around cost but also around take-up, could improve access for disadvantaged families.

Current	Recommendations
<p><b>The current system could be widening the attainment gap by excluding disadvantaged families.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ All children aged three and four can access 15 hours ECEC provision per week without charge, whereas children with parents in ‘working families’ (meeting certain work requirements) can access 30 hours per week.</li> <li>▲ This means that children whose parents do not work or who don’t work enough hours, potentially the most disadvantaged, are missing out on 570 hours of provision per year compared to their more advantaged peers.</li> <li>▲ The money that settings receive from government is not enough to cover the cost of the 15 and 30 hour entitlements, so some providers have responded by raising prices on parent-funded hours, reducing accessibility of further hours for disadvantaged families.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Provision of early years education to all children should be equalised.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● England should provide equal access to early years provision for all children, particularly at ages two, three and four – where there is greater existing evidence of educational benefit.</li> <li>● If universal provision is not possible, a sliding fee scale based on parental income could provide universal access at an affordable funding level for the state, while supporting the most disadvantaged children to access ECEC.</li> <li>● Alongside this offer, England could consider offering universal, completely free part-time places to all children in disadvantaged areas to help with take-up while avoiding stigma.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Despite the existing 15-hour offer at age two, disadvantaged children in England could be missing out on as many as 45 million hours of ECEC learning per year.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ Only 72% of eligible families take up the government’s ECEC entitlement scheme for disadvantaged two-year-olds, and those that do have lower attendance rates than their less disadvantaged peers in the same childcare settings.</li> <li>▲ There is significant regional variation in take-up of entitlement for disadvantaged children.</li> </ul>	<p><b>More needs to be done to support disadvantaged families to take up the offer.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Capitalise on the previous work of Sure Start Centres and current Family Hubs to offer combined services.</li> <li>● Outreach, through grassroots or targeted public ad campaigns could stimulate demand and engagement of disadvantaged families (<a href="#">see New York case study box</a>).</li> <li>● Using initial education and ongoing professional development to build the ability of ECEC staff to engage traditionally disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>

## Other UK nations:



### Wales

- Wales' Flying Start programme offers part-time childcare for certain two-to three-year-olds in disadvantaged areas – 2.5 hours a day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks, with at least 15 sessions during the school holidays; this is 487.5 hours a year, plus extra for holidays.
- Universal funded childcare is available to all three- and four-year-olds for 10 hours a week. This is increased to 12.5 hours for three- and four-year-olds in Flying Start areas.
- Certain working parents of three- and four-year-olds in Wales are eligible for up to 30 hours per week of childcare or early education. The 30 hours is made up of a minimum of 10 hours of early education per week and a maximum of 20 hours of childcare per week. The provision is for up to 1,440 hours per year, which can be taken over 48 weeks.
- In Wales, there are still some gaps in availability, with no local authorities reporting enough childcare for disabled children, parents working atypical hours and families living in rural areas.



### Scotland

- Up to 1,140 hours of ECEC per year is available to certain two-year-olds with parents in receipt of certain benefits (including in-work benefits), or those who are looked after.
- Universal funded ECEC is available to all three- and four-year-olds. The provision is for 1,140 hours per year (30 hours per week if taken during term time, or about 22 hours if spread across the year).
- The estimated uptake rate for ages three and four increased from 97% in 2021 to 99% in 2022. The proportion of two-year-olds registered for funded ELC also increased, reaching 14% in 2022, although around 25% of two-year olds are estimated to be eligible.
- The 'Parents' Views and Use of Early Learning and Childcare 2022' report found that parents from more disadvantaged households were less likely to use childcare generally and tended to use fewer hours.



### Northern Ireland

- There is currently no government-funded programme for childcare for those aged under three.
- The Department of Education sponsors a Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP), which funds one year of non-compulsory pre-school education.
  - Most pre-schools offer 'part-time' places of 2.5 hours a day (12.5 hours per week; 475 hours per year); some offer 'full-time' places of 4.5 hours a day (22.5 hours per week; 855 hours per year).
  - Every child is entitled to this provision in the year immediately before they start primary school, but parents have to apply and meet an individual provider's criteria.



# Making system level change in the early years

Research suggests that system-level change takes decades before effects can be seen (Naumann 2011), but some changes, particularly those on a smaller scale, can lead to impact in a shorter timeframe (see [‘Change and ECEC systems’ box below](#)). Given this, we have been careful to review a mix of approaches that would lead to impact in both the short and long term.

## Change and ECEC systems:

### How long to usher in change?

#### The length of time it takes to usher in change depends on the scale:

- Research suggests that big reforms, such as those in Norway and Sweden, which leads to a universal provision ECEC from a young age (i.e. age 1), need a long lead time to have an impact in practice – it often takes 10–15 years before it is possible to see concrete effects (Naumann 2011).
- For example, 10 years after the 1998 Preschool Reform (pre-school transferred to the educational system and received its own curriculum) in Sweden, an evaluation by the Swedish National Agency for Education showed that an already high take-up of places increased and, that the effect of background factors (e.g. where families lived, parents’ employment status, parents born within/outside Sweden) was reduced (Skolverket 2008).
- ▲ The results also pointed to improved family finances, especially for lone parent and lower income families, and greater social inclusion (Cohen et al., 2021; Skolverket, 2008).

#### However, it’s also possible for changes to happen more quickly:

- Smaller scale change, such as the Universal Access to Early childhood Education National Partnership (UANP) in Australia, which only aimed at children in the year before full-time school, can take place over a shorter period of time (2008-2021).
- Specific, targeted goals, such as increasing enrolment rates for disadvantaged children in New York, have happened within a few years, but require significant resources.

**Significant increase in public spending has been observed in most of the countries to ensure the expanding provision of ECEC is of good quality.**

#### Specifically, public spending is used:

- To ensure the affordability of ECEC services by introducing a maximum fee (Norway, Sweden).
- To fund salaries and workforce initiatives in order to ensure the supply of a high-quality workforce (Norway, Australia).
- ▲ To boost enrolment of underserved communities through outreach (New York).

# Conclusion

## England's system

Improving outcomes for disadvantaged children starts with an equitable, high-quality ECEC offer. While England does have successful elements of ECEC provision, those that would most benefit disadvantaged children, such as access to free hours, high-quality staff, low child-to-staff ratios and greater efforts to improve participation rates of disadvantaged families require improvement..

**The evidence points to three key areas where changes to policy would support a more equitable, high-quality ECEC offer in England:**

- **Removing barriers for disadvantaged families to increase participation.**
- ▲ **Ensuring settings have highly qualified staff.**
- **Having a higher number of staff to children supports better quality provision.**

Our accompanying recommendations further suggest practical ways in which these areas can be improved in England. Critically, funding ECEC appropriately is the strongest emerging theme. This is also supported by several other recent reports (*Statham, et al., 2022; Nutbrown 2021*). Evidence from New York suggests that funding in the right places can lead to revolutionary changes in quality and take-up (**see New York case study box**).

By actioning the recommendations in this report, England would place itself on a path to ensuring that all children, regardless of family situation, were able to access high quality provision and, ultimately, enjoy better outcomes.



# Appendix 1

## Early Childhood Education and Care at a glance

– summary statistics for ECEC across countries mentioned.

	Expenditure		Staff-to-child ratios in practice		Enrolment rates			Affordability	
	Expenditure on ECEC as a % of GDP (2018) <sup>1</sup>	Private expenditure on ECEC (as a % of total expenditure; 2019) <sup>2</sup>	Average staff-to-child ratio – children under 3 (2019) <sup>3</sup>	Average staff-to-child ratio – pre-schoolers (2019) <sup>4</sup>	Enrolment of children under age 3 in formal ECE (2020) <sup>5</sup>	Enrolment of children in organised learning one year before school (2020) <sup>6</sup>	Enrolment in private institutions (2019) <sup>7</sup>	Proportion of income spent – two-earner couple on average earnings (2022) <sup>8</sup>	Proportion of income spent – single parent on low earnings (2022) <sup>9</sup>
<b>UK</b>	0.42%	40.36%	2.66	4.55	18.76%	99.94%		25%	5%
<b>Ireland</b>	0.19%	13.07%			18.21%	98.08%	99.32%	28%	2%
<b>Norway</b>	1.95%	13.31%	3.15	5.46	58.28%	96.30%	49.79%	8%	1%
<b>Sweden</b>	1.83%	5.90%	5.11	6.15	47.57%	99.68%	18.46%	5%	3%
<b>Denmark</b>	1.33%	24.17%			55.27%	99.68%	19.53	11	2%
<b>Iceland</b>	1.78%	11.05%	2.88%	5.01%	48.67%	96.88%	16.69%	5%	4%
<b>Italy</b>	0.57%	15.19%		11.96%	5.22%	92.02%	27.84%	0%	0%
<b>Slovenia</b>	1.05%	22.89%	5.45%	9.67%	45.54%	93.54%	5.56%	9%	8%
<b>Estonia</b>	1.24%	13.04%			25.84%	93.17% (2017)	4.10%	7%	0%
<b>Canada</b>						99.28%		31% (2021)	-3% (2021)
<b>Australia</b>	0.57%	35.37%			44.95%	82.05%	85.61% (ISCED 02 only)	24% (2021)	7% (2021)
<b>USA</b>		23.70% (ISCED 02 only)		10.32%		90.95%	39.94% (ISCED 02 only)	32%	32%
<b>Japan</b>	0.19%	34.34%		12.52%	2.72% <sup>10</sup>	91.77% (2015)	76.91%	14%	1%
<b>South Korea</b>			5.35%	12.46%	62.59%	89.82%	79.45%	5% (2021)	5% (2021)
<b>OECD Average</b>	<b>0.88%</b>	<b>17.92%</b>		<b>10.59%</b>	<b>26.80%</b>		<b>31.18%</b>	<b>15%</b> (2021)	<b>6%</b> (2021)

<sup>1</sup> From OECD Education Indicators at a Glance, 2021

<sup>2</sup> From OECD Education Indicators at a Glance, 2022

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Defined as children to contact staff (teachers and teachers' aides).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Defined as children to contact staff (teachers and teachers' aides). <sup>5</sup> Ibid. <sup>6</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2023. Data available here. <sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> From OECD Social and Welfare Statistics. Data can be found here.

Data from 2022, or most recent available year, noted in parentheses. Couple on average earnings defined as a couple with 2 children in ECEC, both earning the average wage. Figures given as a percentage of the average wage.

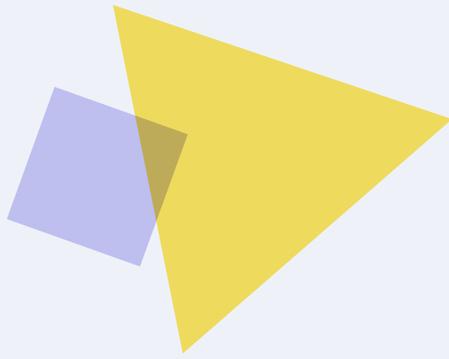
<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Single parent on low income is defined as a single person with 2 children in ECEC, earning 67% of the average wage. Figures given as a percentage of the average wage. <sup>10</sup> Japan has high enrolment for this age group in other registered ECEC services, at 33.19%

# Appendix 2

## Country profiles

– summary of information of 13 countries.





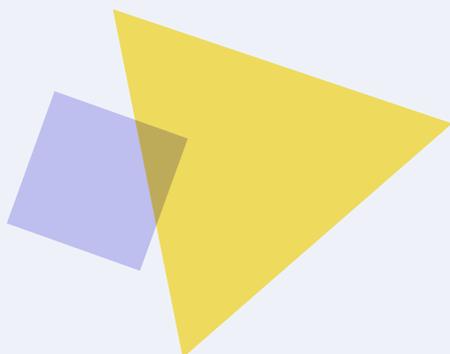
Country Profile:



**AUSTRALIA**

<p><b>Types of Provision:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Long day care: most commonly used, taking children from 0 – 6 years.</li> <li>■ Preschool: from age 4 in most states.</li> <li>■ Family day care.</li> <li>■ In 2019, over 85% of children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Early Years Funding:</b></p> <p>As part of the universal access to preschool, the Commonwealth government has committed to providing \$1340 (approximately £714) per child to attend quality, affordable preschool. This money is provided to states and territories, who are then responsible for setting out costs of preschool to parents. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 0.57% of GDP.</p>
<p><b>Ages Covered:</b></p> <p>1 - 5 years</p>	<p><b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b></p> <p>1<sup>a</sup></p>
<p><b>State Provision:</b></p> <p>The Universal Access National Partnership (2018) ensures all children have access to 15 hours of preschool each week (600 hours per year), regardless of location or personal circumstances. It is subsidised by the government but is generally not free.</p>	<p><b>State Subsidy:</b></p> <p>The government subsidises private childcare directly, up to 90% of costs dependent on income. The Child Care Subsidy, introduced in 2018, subsidises the cost of approved childcare for children aged under 13, with the amount each family receives depending on income and activity level. Recognised activities, for the purposes of receiving a subsidy, include: paid work, paid or unpaid leave, volunteering, training/education and active job-seeking. Subsidies are provided directly to the ECEC provider, rather than to parents.</p>
<p><b>Low-income Parents:</b></p> <p>Low-income parents receive a higher childcare subsidy. From July 2023, the subsidy received by families starts at 90% of costs for those earning less than AUD80,000 (approximately £42,582) and falls progressively with income, until it reaches zero for those earning more than AUD530,000 (approximately £282,105). In 2021, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 7% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b></p> <p>Communities for Children initiative is similar to Sure Start, in offering integrated child and family services in one site to support early childhood development and wellbeing, but smaller in scope, currently operating in only 52 communities.</p>
<p><b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b></p> <p>For family day care: 1:7 ratio, but only four of those can be preschool age or under</p>	<p><b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b></p> <p><b>Within a centre:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Under two years old: 1:4</li> <li>■ Two – three years old: 1:5 (except VIC which is 1:4)</li> <li>■ Three years old plus: 1:10 and 1:11</li> </ul>

**SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:** OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Department of Social Services, Department of Education, Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, and Ville et al (2022).  
<sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available [here](#). <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found [here](#).



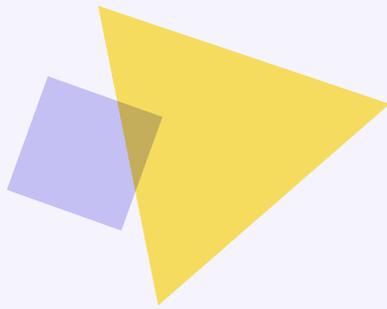
Country Profile:



**CANADA**

<p><b>Types of Provision:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Centre-based childcare.</li> <li>■ Family/home-based childcare.</li> <li>■ Wrap-around care.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Early Years Funding:</b></p> <p>In most provinces, childcare is primarily funded by private fees, with subsidies available to parents with lower incomes. Quebec is the exception, with most childcare providers funded by the government based on number of available and occupied childcare spaces in the setting.</p>
<p><b>Ages Covered:</b></p> <p>0 – 5 years.</p>	<p><b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b></p> <p>1<sup>a</sup></p>
<p><b>State Provision:</b></p> <p>Provision is largely private in Canada. The exception is Quebec, as noted below.</p>	<p><b>State Subsidy:</b></p> <p>Subsidies are available to working parents, but the amount available and eligibility criteria vary by province or territory, with these provided directly to the ECEC providers, rather than parents. The exception is Quebec, which does not use fee subsidies: parents instead pay a flat fee which does not depend on employment status or income. In 2021, this fee was \$8.50 (approximately £4.90) per day.</p>
<p><b>Low-income Parents:</b></p> <p>Subsidies are available to support low-income parents, with the amount and eligibility criteria varying. In 2021, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was -3% of the average wage,<sup>b</sup> representing a more than 100% subsidy and acting as an incentive to enrol children in ECEC.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b></p> <p>There is no nationwide provision of support within the community. Isolated offers include Ontario’s EarlyOn Centres, which offer childcare alongside combined family and child activities, parenting advice and information on child development, or Alberta’s Provincial Family Resource Networks, which coordinate community services and provide early intervention to prevent use of social services.</p>
<p><b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b></p> <p>Staff working in regulated settings are required to have a two-year post-secondary ECEC diploma in the majority of jurisdictions.</p>	<p><b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b></p> <p><b>Varies by jurisdiction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>One year:</b> 1:3 – 1:5</li> <li>■ <b>Three years old:</b> 1:5 to 1:10</li> </ul> <p><b>Example for Quebec:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Less than 18 months:</b> 1:5</li> <li>■ <b>18 months – four years old:</b> 1:8</li> <li>■ <b>Four – five years old:</b> 1:10</li> </ul>

**SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:** OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Quebec Ministry of Families and Ville et al (2022). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available [here](#). <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found [here](#).



## DENMARK

## Country Profile:

## Types of Provision:

**Operates an integrated system with both age-integrated and age-separated ECEC centres:**

- Age-integrated day-care centres (aldersintegrerede institutioner) for children 6 months – 6 years. This is the most common type of provision.
- Day nurseries (vuggestuer – ‘cradle room’) for children up to age 3.
- Kindergartens (børnehaver – ‘children’s garden’) for 3 – 6 years.
- Family day-care (dagpleje) – generally for children up to age 3.
- In 2019, 20% of children were enrolled in private settings.

## Ages Covered:

6 months – 6 years.

## State Provision:

There is universal entitlement to a fee-paying, full-time place for ECEC **from 6 months of age. These provisions are generally** publicly-subsidised. If a municipality is not able to provide the ECEC provision it must either cover the cost of private day care, cover the cost of an ECEC setting in another municipality, or provide parents a subsidy to take care of the child themselves.

## Low-income Parents:

ECEC provision can be accessed free of charge if the household income is no larger than 15475 DKK (approximately £1,773) a month. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 2% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup>

## Staff Requirements – Qualifications:

There are no regulatory minimum qualifications for practitioners or assistants under the Day Care Act. However, in 2018, 58% of all ECEC staff held a BA in pedagogy. Generally a teacher or pedagogue holds a BA and assistants hold a 2-year post-secondary vocational qualification.

## Early Years Funding:

ECEC provision is generally publicly provided and heavily subsidised. Public funding generally makes up at least 75% of the running costs. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.33% of GDP.

## Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:

N/A<sup>a</sup>

## State Subsidy:

Fees are charged at ECEC settings, but these are heavily subsidised by the municipality. As stipulated in the Day Care Act 2022, parent fees cannot exceed 25% of the operating costs, including provision of lunch. Public funding thus covers at least 75% of the running costs. In 2023, fees in municipal day-care for children aged nought-two years old was on average 34393 DKK (approximately £3,941) and for children aged three-five years old was on average 34104 DKK (approximately £3,908). Nurseries (ages nought-two years old) were more expensive, at 41582 DKK (approximately £4,765), and kindergartens (three-five years old) cheaper, at 23214 DKK (approximately £2,660). Denmark also gives parents with siblings already in early years provision reduced fees, with the less expensive place of the two half price.

## Provision of Support within the Community:

None mentioned.

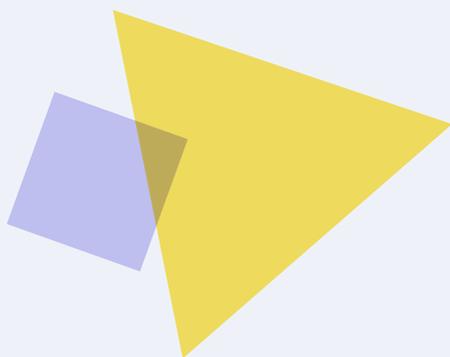
## Staff-to-child Ratio:

There are no regulatory limits on staff-child ratios. In 2021, the average staff-child ratio for children aged nought – two years old in day care settings was 1:2.9 and for children aged three-five years old was 1:5.7. This may mask substantial regional differences, however.

**SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE: OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice, Statistics Denmark, Jensen (2017), Schreyer and Oberheumer (2017) and Cost of Childcare, City of Copenhagen.** <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available [here](#). <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found [here](#).



Country Profile:	ESTONIA	
Types of Provision:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Integrated ECEC centres ('kindergartens') – the majority of settings fall in this category.</li> <li>■ Kindergartens within schools ('kindergarten schools').</li> <li>■ Day nurseries.</li> <li>■ Family day care (perepäevahoid).</li> <li>■ In 2019, 4.1% of children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	Early Years Funding:
		Provision of ECEC is largely state funded and composed of state-run (public) ECEC centres. Privately-run settings are subsidised to some extent, particularly with regards to staff salaries and professional development. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.24% of GDP.
Ages Covered:	18 months – 7 years.	Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:
		0 <sup>a</sup>
State Provision:	All children aged 18 months to seven years old are legally entitled to a place in an ECEC setting. Municipalities are obliged to provide a place to any child within the catchment area if the parents ask for one, but attendance in ECEC is not compulsory.	State Subsidy:
		Settings can charge a maximum fee of 20% of the minimum wage, as well as charging parents for meals and enrolment fees. There are some municipalities where parents do not pay a fee, with the running costs then subsidised entirely by the municipality.
Low-income Parents:	Settings cannot charge more than 20% of the minimum wage. Workers earning at the minimum wage earn 725 euros per month (approximately £619), and so pay no more than 145 euros per month (approximately £124). In practice, however, childcare costs for low-income families are lower. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 0% of the average wage. <sup>b</sup>	Provision of Support within the Community:
		Communities for Children initiative is similar to Sure Start, in offering integrated child and family services in one site to support early childhood development and well-being, but smaller in scope, currently operating in only 52 communities.
Staff Requirements – Qualifications:	Teachers require a BA. Childcare assistants need to complete compulsory high school and a further 1 year of tertiary study, equivalent to International Standard Classification of Education Level 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary education).	Staff-to-child Ratio:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 18 months – three years old: 1:7</li> <li>■ Three years old plus (mixed age group): 1:9</li> <li>■ Six-seven years old only: 1:10</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice, Veisson (2017), and Schreyer and Oberhuemer (2017). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		



## ICELAND

## Country Profile:

## Types of Provision:

- Home-based provision (Dagforeldri) for infants (from 0 – 2 years).
- Preschool (Leiksskóli) for children aged 1 - 6 years.
- In 2019, 17% of children were enrolled in private institutions.

## Ages Covered:

1 – 6 years (or from birth in home-based provision).

## State Provision:

There is a legal entitlement to ECEC, but no age limit is specified. Municipalities are responsible for the financing and operation of preschools. Most pre-schools are public, and whilst fees vary by municipality and may depend on parents' circumstances, the municipality generally contributes, depending on the source, somewhere between two-thirds to 75% of the total operating cost.

## Low-income Parents:

Municipalities each have their own schemes for low-income families. For example, in Hafnarfjörður, lower income families earning 459603 kr or less a month (approximately £2,645) can receive 75% off of pre-school fees, while those earning less than 551523 kr per month (approximately £3,174) receive 50% off. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 4% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup>

## Staff Requirements – Qualifications:

One in three staff members in ECEC centres are required to have a tertiary qualification. Preschool teachers require as a minimum a Masters degree.

## Early Years Funding:

Most preschools are publicly run and funded, although private settings exist, with the municipality generally contributing the bulk of the total operating cost. Parents pay a co-contribution or fee. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.78% of GDP.

## Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:

N/A<sup>a</sup>

## State Subsidy:

Parental fees for kindergartens and family day care are capped, decided annually by parliament. The Kindergarten Act prohibits families paying more than 6% of their income. Municipalities are also required to offer reduced fees for siblings.

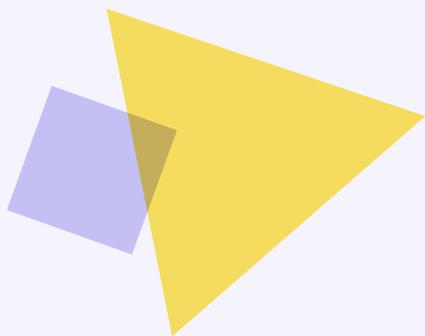
## Provision of Support within the Community:

None mentioned.

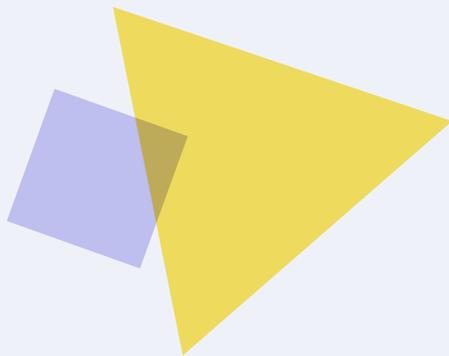
## Staff-to-child Ratio:

- Child-staff ratios are not regulated by law, but set by the ECEC setting head teacher and the local municipality. This allows for flexibility of group size depending on need.

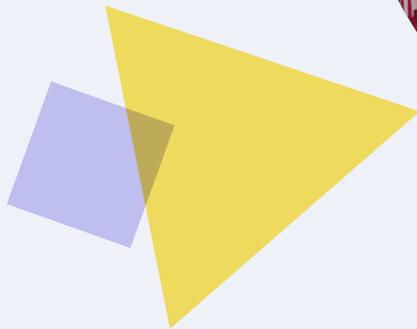
**SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:** OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice and Hafnarfjörður fee tables. <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available [here](#). <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found [here](#).



Country Profile:	IRELAND	
<b>Types of Provision:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nurseries and daycare.</li> <li>■ Preschools (including naíonraí, or Irish medium pre-schools).</li> <li>■ Playgroups and childminding.</li> <li>■ In Ireland, 99% of children are enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<b>Early Years Funding:</b>
		The government funds free entitlement to preschool for all children from age three to five and a half, and all children in infant classes in primary schools (for children aged 4 – 5). In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 0.19% of GDP.
<b>Ages Covered:</b>	0 - 5 years	<b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b>
		1 <sup>a</sup>
<b>State Provision:</b>	There is free state provision from the age of three to five and a half years within the ECEC sectors, or from age four – five years old in infant classes within schools. The ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) programme, introduced in 2010 and expanded in 2016 and 2018, ensures universal access to ECEC to children in the two years before starting primary school for 15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year, starting from age two years and eight months or above.	<b>State Subsidy:</b>
		In addition to the 15 hours free childcare for children aged two years and eight months or above, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), introduced in 2019, provides universal and targeted subsidies for families depending on parents' income and other circumstances. The universal subsidy provides €1.40 (roughly £1.20) per hour for a maximum of 45 hours per week.
<b>Low-income Parents:</b>	Low-income parents receive ECEC subsidies under the NCS, introduced in 2019. In 2023, those with a family income of €26,000 (approximately £22,250) or less (net of some benefits) are eligible for the maximum hourly subsidy rate of between €5.10 and €3.95 (about £4.40 – £3.40) depending on the age of the child. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 2% of the average wage. <sup>b</sup>	<b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b>
		None mentioned.
<b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b>	As a condition of receiving state funding under the ECCE programme, centres must commit to employing only qualified staff. All leaders/teachers and assistants need post-secondary vocational qualification (equivalent to ISCED level 4).	<b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Under one-year:</b> 1:3</li> <li>■ <b>One to two and a half years old:</b> 1:5</li> <li>■ <b>Two and a half to 6 years old:</b> 1:11</li> <li>■ <b>Children in home-based childminding/ family day care:</b> 1:5</li> </ul> <p><b>Services participating in ECCE must additionally meet the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Up to 11 children:</b> 1 room leader + 1 early years assistant</li> <li>■ <b>12 - 22 children:</b> 1 room leader + 1 early years assistant</li> <li>■ <b>23 - 33 children:</b> 2 room leaders + 1 early years assistant</li> <li>■ <b>34 - 44 children:</b> 2 room leaders + 2 early years assistants</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Early Childhood Ireland (2023), Schreyer and Oberhuemer (2017) and Duignan (2017). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		



Country Profile:  ITALY	Types of Provision:	Early Years Funding:
Italy moved to an integrated system of provision from 0 – 6 years in 2017:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nursery schools (nidi d'infanzia), largely serving children from ages 0 – 3 years.</li> <li>■ Preschool (scuola dell'infanzia, or 'childhood school') for ages 3 – 6 years, although some have a 'spring section' (sezione primavera) which take children from 2 years.</li> <li>■ Supplementary educational services (servizi integrative), which are considered alternative provisions to the above and include home-based provision for ages 0 – 3 years.</li> <li>■ In 2019, almost 28% of all children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<p>The provision of preschool, from ages 3 – 6 years, is publicly funded. Nursery schools, however, are generally not free to parents. In 2019, expenditure on ECEC was 0.57%.</p>
Ages Covered:	0 - 6 years	Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:
State Provision:	<p>The ISCED 01 provision, for those aged 0 – 3, collectively known as educational services for childhood (servizi educativi per l'infanzia) includes public settings, but these neither compulsory nor free. Preschool (ISCED 02) is also not compulsory, but is often publicly provided and free. There is no legal entitlement to a place, however.</p>	State Subsidy:
<p>Preschool is fully subsidised from the age of three, with low-income families not charged for meal and transport either. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 0% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p>Preschool is fully subsidised from the age of three, with settings able to charge a small fee for meals and transport. The educational services for younger children however, are not subsidised.</p>	Provision of Support within the Community:
<p>Preschool is fully subsidised from the age of three, with low-income families not charged for meal and transport either. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 0% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	–	Staff Requirements – Qualifications:
<p>In infant settings (0 – 3), educators must have either a BA in Education, with a focus on early childhood education, or a five-year degree (BA and Masters) in primary and pre-primary education. In preschools, staff must have completed the five-year degree (BA and Masters) in primary and pre-primary education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ For infant nursery schools, the municipality decides on the required group size and staff-child ratios.</li> <li>■ For preschools, the group size in state run provision varies between a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 26. In 2014, the ratio of qualified staff to children was, on average, 1:12.2.</li> </ul>	Staff-to-child Ratio:
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice, Bove and Cescato (2017) and Schreyer and Oberheumer (2017). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		



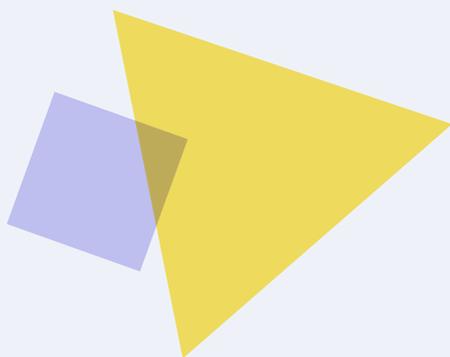
Country Profile:



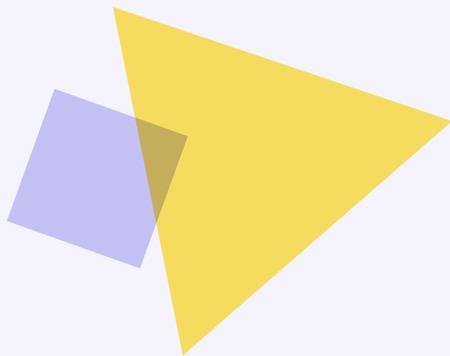
**JAPAN**

<p><b>Types of Provision:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Day-care centres (0 – 5 years).</li> <li>■ Kindergartens (3 – 5 years).</li> <li>■ Integrated ECEC centres (0 - 5 years).</li> <li>■ In Japan, almost 77% of all children are enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Early Years Funding:</b></p> <p>Funding responsibilities are shared between national and local authorities, with different authorities in charge of different settings. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 0.19% of GDP.</p>
<p><b>Ages Covered:</b></p> <p>0 - 5 years</p>	<p><b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b></p> <p>0<sup>a</sup></p>
<p><b>State Provision and Subsidy:</b></p> <p>In 2019 legislation was enacted to make pre-school education free for three – five year-olds regardless of parents' income, and for nought – two year-olds from lower income families.</p>	
<p><b>Low-income Parents:</b></p> <p>Under the income-related fee scale, parents with the lowest earnings (average earnings up to €221.46 (approximately £190) per person per month) pay no fees at all. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 8% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b></p> <p>There are some children's centres in Japan comparable to Sure Start services. These tend to offer physical spaces where children and parents can play, health and child-rearing counselling and parent-led clubs. The aim is to address social deprivation and isolation and to offer early intervention to prevent child abuse.</p>
<p><b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b></p> <p>Teachers are required to have a tertiary qualification to work in regulated ECEC settings.</p>	<p><b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b></p> <p><b>Staff-to-child ratio: Varies by age-group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Less than one year old: 1:3</li> <li>■ One-two years old: 1:6</li> <li>■ Three years old: 1:20</li> <li>■ Four years old: 1:30</li> </ul>

**SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:** OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Ville et al (2022) and OECD (2015). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available [here](#). <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found [here](#).



 <b>NORWAY</b>	
<b>Types of Provision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Kindergartens (Barnehager).</li> <li>■ Family day care (Familienbarnehage).</li> <li>■ In 2019, nearly 50% of children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<b>Early Years Funding:</b> <p>With the cap on parental fees at no more 6% of parents' income, kindergartens are predominantly funded by local authorities (municipalities). In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.95% of GDP.</p>
<b>Ages Covered:</b> <p>0 – 5 years.</p>	<b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b> <p>0<sup>a</sup></p>
<b>State Provision:</b> <p><b>Legal entitlement to ECEC:</b> There is a legal entitlement to a place in kindergarten from one year old, but free provision only starts with primary school at age of six.</p>	<b>State Subsidy:</b> <p>Parental fees for kindergartens and family day care are capped, decided annually by parliament. The Kindergarten Act prohibits families paying more than 6% of their income. Municipalities are also required to offer reduced fees for siblings.</p>
<b>Low-income Parents:</b> <p>Low-income families are offered a place free of charge for 20 hours per week to children over the age of three. The cap on fees acts to keep fees low for low-income parents. For instance, a waiter in Norway, who earned on average 402,600 NOK (approximately £29,808) a year in 2022, the maximum fee would be just 24,156 SEK (approximately £1789) a year. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 1% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b> <p>Norway provides Åpne barnehager (open kindergartens), which are drop-in centres for children and parents/ caregivers, with parents participating in programmes with the child.</p>
<b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b> <p>Teachers and Leaders require a BA. Childcare assistants require upper secondary and vocational qualifications. Approximately 45% of staff in ECEC are teachers/leaders, and thus BA qualified.</p>	<b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Under three years old:</b> 1:3</li> <li>■ <b>Three years old plus:</b> 1:6</li> </ul> <p><b>In addition, settings must have BA-qualified teachers, with the following teacher-to-child ratios:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Under three years old:</b> 1:7</li> <li>■ <b>Three years old plus:</b> 1:14</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice database, the Norwegian Kindergarten Act, Engel et al (2015) and OECD (2022). <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	

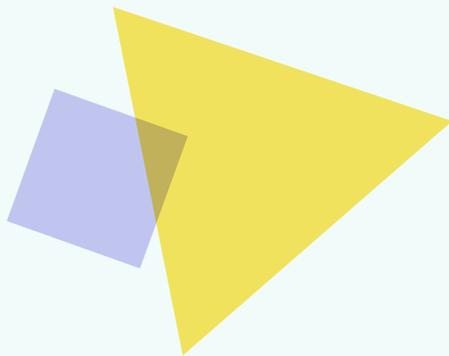


## SLOVENIA

<b>Types of Provision:</b>  <b>Slovenia operates a unitary system of ECEC:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Kindergartens/early childhood centres (vrtec) take children from 11 months - 6 years, and can either be independent (samostojni vrtec) or affiliated with a school (vrtec pri osnovni šoli).</li> <li>■ Home-based settings (vzgojno-varstvena družina) are a much smaller part of Slovenia's provision.</li> <li>■ In 2019, 6% of children were enrolled in private settings.</li> </ul>	<b>Early Years Funding:</b>  All children have a legal entitlement to ECEC, from the age of 11 months. Parents pay means-tested parental fees, which vary from €0 for the poorest parents to up to €500 per month (approximately £430), but parents never pay more than 77% of costs. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.05% of GDP.
<b>Ages Covered:</b>  11 months – 6 years.	<b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b>  0 <sup>a</sup>
<b>State Provision:</b>  All children have a legal entitlement to a full-time place in an ECEC setting from the age of 11 months. Most ECEC settings are publicly-provided and mainly funded by municipalities. From July 2017, children not already enrolled in ECEC have a right to 240 hours fully funded provision annually, in an attempt to improve ECEC participation rates. If a child cannot be offered a place at the public kindergarten, parents can enrol in private settings or home-based provision, and municipalities must co-fund the costs.	<b>State Subsidy:</b>  The funding of ECEC centres is largely covered by municipalities and state subsidies. Parents additionally pay income-related parental fees, up to but no more than 77% of costs for parents in the highest income bracket (average earnings of €1,218.09 (approximately £1,043) per person per month or more).
<b>Low-income Parents:</b>  Under the income-related fee scale, parents with the lowest earnings (average earnings up to €221.46 (approximately £190) per person per month) pay no fees at all. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 8% of the average wage. <sup>b</sup>	<b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b>  None mentioned.
<b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b>  Early childhood teachers usually require a BA. Early Childhood TAs generally require a 4-year upper secondary/vocational qualification.	<b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Under three years old:</b> 1:7</li> <li>■ <b>Three – six years-olds:</b> 1:11 or 1:12</li> <li>■ Additionally in groups with under three-year olds, a teacher and TA must be simultaneously present for six hours per day. In groups of three – six year-olds, a teacher and TA must be simultaneously present for four hours per day, but this cannot include any nap time. The teacher usually accompanies the same group of children throughout their time in kindergarten.</li> </ul>
<b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE: OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice, Vonta and Jager (2017), and Schreyer and Oberhuemer (2017).</b> <sup>a</sup> As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a> . <sup>b</sup> Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a> .	

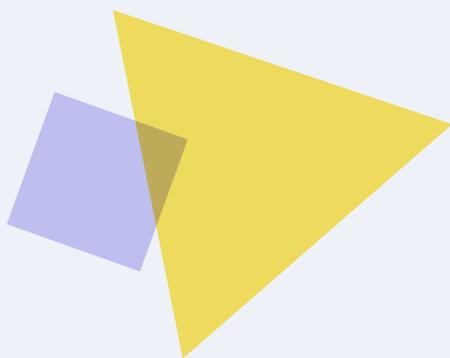


<b>Country Profile:</b>	 <b>SOUTH KOREA</b>	
<b>Types of Provision:</b>	<b>Early Years Funding:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: #4CAF50;">■</span> Care centre (0-2 years).</li> <li><span style="color: #4CAF50;">■</span> Kindergartens (3-5 years).</li> <li><span style="color: #4CAF50;">■</span> Child care centre (3-5 years).</li> <li><span style="color: #4CAF50;">■</span> In 2019, 79% of children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	All 3 – 5 year-olds are universally subsidised to attend ECEC	
<b>Ages Covered:</b>	<b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b>	
0 - 5 years	3 <sup>a</sup>	
<b>State Provision and Subsidy:</b>		
There is free state provision from the age of three to five and a half years within the ECEC sectors, or from age four – five years old in infant classes within schools. The ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) programme, introduced in 2010 and expanded in 2016 and 2018, ensures universal access to ECEC to children in the two years before starting primary school for 15 hours per week over 38 weeks of the year, starting from age two years and eight months or above.		
<b>Low-income Parents:</b>	<b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b>	
Low-income parents benefit both from childcare support and universal provision from age three. In 2021, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 5% of the average wage. <sup>b</sup>	None mentioned.	
<b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b>	<b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b>	
Teachers are required to have a tertiary qualification.	Not available.	
<b>NOTE:</b> Limited information is available for South Korea.		
<b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022). <sup>a</sup> As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a> . <sup>b</sup> Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a> .		



## SWEDEN

<p><b>Types of Provision:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Early childhood centres or 'preschools' (förskola).</li> <li>■ Preschool classes (förskoleklasser) – one-year transition class for 6 – 7 year olds within schools.</li> <li>■ Family day care (familjedaghem) – no curricular regulations or required professional qualifications.</li> <li>■ In 2019, almost 19% of children were enrolled in private institutions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Early Years Funding:</b></p> <p>The bulk of funding is provided by state and local authorities, with fees for parents capped at 1572 SEK (roughly £116) a month. Provision of the preschool class is provided entirely by the government. In 2018, expenditure on ECEC was 1.83% of GDP.</p>
<p><b>Ages Covered:</b></p> <p>1 – 6 years, with 6 – 7 in a pre-school year within the school.</p>	<p><b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b></p> <p>1<sup>a</sup></p>
<p><b>State Provision:</b></p> <p><b>Legal entitlement to ECEC:</b> local authorities must provide preschool services for all children aged one or above whose parents are working or studying, and for all children with SENs. Children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave must be provided a part-time place of at least 3 hours/day. All children are guaranteed a place in the preschool class in the year they turn six. All children are entitled to a free place for 525 hours per year (about 10 hours a week if equally split across the year).</p>	<p><b>State Subsidy:</b></p> <p>For provision above the free hours outlined, the maximum fee settings can charge is 3% of the parents' income, capped at a maximum of SEK 1572 per month in 2022 (approximately £116). Across municipalities, parents also pay less for subsequent children, for example in Stockholm fees for a second child are capped at 2% of income, a third child at 1%, and there are no charges for a fourth or any further children.</p>
<p><b>Low-income Parents:</b></p> <p>There is no specific additional support for low-income parents, but they also fall under the capped fee of 3% of parents' incomes. For instance, a cleaner in Sweden, who earned on average 24800 SEK (£1,820) a month in 2021, the maximum fee would be just 744 SEK (approximately £55) a month or 8982 SEK (approximately £655) a year. In 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 3% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<p><b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b></p> <p>Alongside the preschools, local authorities provide 'open preschools' (öppna förskolor), which are community drop-in and advisor centres for parents and children not in other forms of early year provision.</p>
<p><b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b></p> <p>Teachers and Leaders require a BA. Childcare assistants require an upper secondary vocational qualification (requiring a minimum of three years).</p>	<p><b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b></p> <p>No regulatory requirements for child-staff ratios. The national average staff-to-child ratio in preschools is 1:5.2</p>
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> OECD Education at a Glance (2021), OECD Education at a Glance (2022), Eurydice, Schreyer and Oberheumer (2017), Karlsson Lohmander (2017) and Avgifter för förskola (Fees for Preschool), Stockholm Municipality. <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	



 <b>USA</b>	
<b>Types of Provision:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Early Head Start and Head Start (public provision).</li> <li>■ Childcare centres.</li> <li>■ Family Childcare.</li> <li>■ PreKindergarten Programs.</li> </ul>	<b>Early Years Funding:</b> <p>Public provision (in the form of Head Start) and subsidies are available but vary by state.</p>
<b>Ages Covered:</b> <p>0 - 5 years</p>	<b>Number of Free and Compulsory Pre-primary Years:</b> <p>1<sup>a</sup></p>
<b>State Provision:</b> <p>Public provisions vary by state, but there are federally funded programmes for families with low-incomes, known as Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Eligibility criteria for Head Start varies by state. For instance, in New York, you would qualify for Head Start or Early Head Start if one of the following holds: you live in temporary housing, you receive cash assistance with living costs, you receive disability support for you or your child, the enrolling child is in foster care, or the family income falls below certain limits (limits vary based on size of household).</p>	<b>State Subsidy:</b> <p>Subsidies available vary by state. Nationwide, childcare tax credits are available.</p>
<b>Low-income Parents:</b> <p>Families on the lowest incomes generally qualify for Early Head Start and Head Start. Nevertheless, in 2022, the OECD calculated that the net cost of childcare for two children to a lone-parent, low-income household was 32% of the average wage.<sup>b</sup></p>	<b>Provision of Support within the Community:</b> <p>Head Start takes on a community-based role, linking children and families to other services in the community such as free medical and dental care services.</p>
<b>Staff Requirements – Qualifications:</b> <p>Staff requirements vary by state. Consider New York as an example: preschool teachers and centre directors should have a BA, preschool TAs should have a high school diploma and some further tertiary training or experience; infant and toddler teachers need associate diplomas (tertiary qualification) and infant and toddler TAs need a high school diploma and further tertiary training or experience.</p>	<b>Staff-to-child Ratio:</b> <p><b>Varies by state.</b>  <b>Example of New York state:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Less than 18 months:</b> 1:4</li> <li>■ <b>Three years old:</b> 1:7</li> <li>■ <b>Four years old:</b> 1:8</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOURCES USED IN THIS COUNTRY PROFILE:</b> <a href="#">OECD Education at a Glance (2021)</a>, <a href="#">OECD Education at a Glance (2022)</a>, <a href="#">New York City Government, New York Codes, Rules and Regulations</a>, <a href="#">City of New York</a> and the <a href="#">Office of Child Care</a>. <sup>a</sup>As defined by and measured by UNESCO, data available <a href="#">here</a>. <sup>b</sup>Single person with two children aged 2 and 3 earning 67% of the average wage; data can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	

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**The Sutton Trust**

9th Floor  
Millbank Tower  
21-24 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QP

**T: 020 7802 1660**

**F: 020 7802 1661**

**Web: [suttontrust.com](http://suttontrust.com)**

**Twitter: [@suttontrust](https://twitter.com/suttontrust)**



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