



Professionalisation of Childcare Assistants in
Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC):
Pathways towards Qualification

NESET II AR1/2016 Analytical Report



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CONTENTS

CONTENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
Key findings.....	6
Key policy implications and recommendations.....	7
FR EXEC. SUMMARY	10
DE EXEC. SUMMARY	16
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	22
1.1. The crucial role of the workforce in providing quality early childhood education and care	22
1.2. Key definitions.....	24
1.3. Holistic approach.....	24
1.4. Assistants in ECEC.....	25
1.5. Aims and research questions	27
1.6. Method.....	27
CHAPTER 2: PROFILES OF ASSISTANTS IN ECEC IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: AN OVERVIEW	30
2.1. Share of assistants in the ECEC workforce	30
2.2. Qualification	31
2.3. Professional and training competence profiles	33
2.4. Continuous professional development	38
2.5. Diversity within the workforce.....	39
2.6. Discussion.....	41
CHAPTER 3: GOOD PRACTICES: EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PATHWAYS TOWARDS QUALIFICATION AND CPD FOR ASSISTANTS	43
3.1. Opportunities for assistants in some European Countries.....	43
3.2. Examples of pathways towards qualification and continuous professional development.....	43
3.2.1. Denmark: measures for the initial qualification	43
3.2.2. Slovenia: a growing path for the whole team through continuous professional development	46
3.2.3. France: investing in initial qualification for low qualified professionals.....	49
3.3. Conclusions.....	52
CHAPTER 4: KEY POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	53
REFERENCES	57
ANNEXES	63

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a broad consensus among researchers, organizations and policy makers that the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC), and ultimately the outcomes for children and families, depends on well-educated and competent staff. At the European level, the importance of a qualified workforce is acknowledged in the revised priorities for the strategic cooperation in the field of education and training (European Commission, 2015a); it identifies professionalisation of staff as one of the key issues for further work in ECEC. Several studies and reports have underlined that quality in ECEC is dependent upon competent staff who are capable of working within a holistic framework, that understand the concepts of 'care' and 'education' to be interdependent and on equal footing (UNESCO, 2010; European Commission, 2011; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) (see the section 'Holistic approach' in the Introduction).

The European Quality Framework for ECEC (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014) underlines the contribution the ECEC workforce makes towards enhancing the pedagogical quality of services for young children. The European Quality Framework for ECEC is the consensus of representatives from 25 EU Member States, plus Turkey and Norway, the Eurydice Network, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and the OECD. It states that 'recognizing the ECEC workforce as professionals is key. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children's outcomes. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.), helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality' (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014, 9).

As pointed out by the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011; Vandenbroeck et al., 2016), individual competences alone are insufficient to ensure quality. A 'competent system' is needed, which includes collaborations between individuals, teams and institutions, and which has competent governance at policy level. Moreover, a competent system is described as one that builds upon staff's initial good education with continuous professional development, which includes providing staff with regular opportunities to co-reflect with their team members on their ideas and practices.

Creating competent systems continues to be a challenge in the EU: the requirements and competences for ECEC workers differ between countries, the qualifications of ECEC staff in Europe remain low (see 2.2., Table 2), and generally there is too little investment in strong systems of continuous professional development (see 2.4.).

In many countries, part of the workforce is represented by low qualified ECEC assistants. In the CoRe study, assistants are defined as 'invisible workers', meaning that their presence is usually not taken into account in policy documents, and that they have far fewer possibilities of qualification and of professional development than core practitioners do. Data from the last Eurydice report shows that ECEC attendance among children under 3 is very low across Europe (European commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). The same report underlines that for about 30 % of parents, the low quality of ECEC services represents a barrier to use them. Improving the competences of all staff (core practitioners and assistants) would improve the services' quality, which would in turn attract parents to ECEC services.

Investing in the professionalization of assistants represents a key element for ECEC quality improvement, especially since in a number of countries the share of assistants in the services is rapidly growing (see 2.1., Table 1). This growth needs to be accompanied by a strong investment in competent systems that value the contributions of all staff, and involve the whole workforce in continuous professional development. Otherwise, in response to budget constraints or if reforms are too hurried, assistants may be hired over their more qualified colleagues and this could lead to a "deprofessionalisation" of ECEC staff.

Building on the findings of the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011; Vandebroek et al., 2016), we review the profiles of ECEC assistants in 15 European countries¹ and their professionalization opportunities. We then make recommendations on how to develop coherent pathways towards qualification and continuous professional development (CPD) for assistants. In addition, we present examples of successful pathways towards qualification and CPD in three selected European countries (Denmark, France, Slovenia).

Key findings

The first part of our report gives an overview on the situation concerning assistants in the 15 Member States involved in the study.

The data indicates that:

- The ‘invisibility’ of the ECEC assistants in research and policy documents stands in sharp contrast to the number of assistants working in ECEC services, which in some countries can be quite high (40-50 % of the workforce) (for a close look on the share of assistants in each country, see 2.1., Table 1).
- Assistants often have low or no qualification (see 2.2., Table 2) and there are few opportunities for them to start a path towards the same qualification as that of a core practitioner. We suggest that assistants don’t necessarily need to have a specific initial qualification for the job as assistant, but once they are hired, there needs to be a strong investment in competent systems which respect and reward the work of all staff (including assistants). We also suggest that assistants can be given job mobility opportunities by investing in adapted pathways towards qualification (see 3.2.1. and 3.2.3.).
- Assistants have fewer opportunities of continuous professional development than core practitioners do (see 2.4.). Time to plan and reflect together as team with core practitioners is also lacking. Most European countries still do not fund non-contact time for staff, and when this time is allocated, it is usually to core practitioners alone, not assistants. However, our study describes some notable exceptions where countries allocated time to all staff, including assistants, for co-reflection and continuous in-service training (see 2.4. and 3.2.2.).
- Generally speaking, assistants do not have official competence profiles, either for their profession or for their training. The descriptions of competences in countries that do happen to have them are often described and framed as technical or ‘caring’ tasks. Even when the position and competences of assistants are recognised by national regulations or in individual settings, assistants are at risk of being perceived as merely technical workers. This division of labour between core practitioners and assistants may reinforce a hierarchy between education and care, one that reduces education to cognitive development (Van Laere et al., 2012). This perspective impedes a holistic approach to education and care, one that recognises the educative role of caring and the caring role of education (Hayes, 2007; 2008).
- The countries included in this study do not collect statistics about the socio-economic or cultural background of assistants in their respective ECEC sectors. However, according to the national experts consulted in this study, the share of practitioners with ethnic minority background may indeed be higher among assistants than among core practitioners. The presence of assistants within the ECEC workforce contributes to its diversity, which may increase the ability of staff to effectively engage with the diversities and commonalities amongst children and families. In order to improve these aspects, a

¹ The countries analyzed in this study are: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands.

strong path of CPD, during which practitioners reflect on their pedagogical practice under the supervision of pedagogical guidance, is needed.

The examples from the three selected countries show how it can be possible to invest in:

- 1) specific adapted pathways that give assistants the possibility of raising their qualification, making it possible to combine working and studying. This can happen by: a) creating specific quota systems in which a certain number of places on a bachelor training course is reserved for experienced but unqualified workers; b) building-bridge courses for people with ethnic minority background and low socio-economic status; c) recognizing previously acquired competences; d) repeatedly relating theory to practice during the studies; e) supporting the team that the assistant works with to help them all cope with the change of professional identity the assistant-student may experience over the course of the training (see recommendation n. 3).
- 2) opportunities of continuous professional development for all staff, including assistants. This requires investment in a) child-free hours for core practitioners and assistants; b) meetings to reflect together on their pedagogical practice; c) a system of pedagogical guidance or coaching; d) a system of monitoring that guarantees that assistants get the opportunity to follow the established CPD (see recommendations).

Specifically, Denmark gives an example concerning adapted pathways towards qualification; France provides a specific qualifying initial training for low qualified professionals who wish to combine work and study; Slovenia gives an interesting example concerning the investment in continuous professional development for the whole staff.

Key policy implications and recommendations

Our study recommends several strategies that address the condition of assistants in the ECEC sector. Policy experimentation in EU Member States should combine these strategies, beginning with small scale experimentations.

The main conclusions and recommendations of this report are:

- A hierarchical division between education and care exists in both split and unitary systems, which is reinforced when distinctions are drawn between the roles of core practitioners and assistants. In contrast, a holistic view of education and care, in which cognitive, emotional, and social aspects are assigned the same value and are seen to be interdependent – advises that such distinctions be downplayed.

Recommendations

Policies towards ECEC should be focused on the **integration of care and education** across institutional, regional and national levels.

Assistants, together with the other ECEC stakeholders (practitioners, parents, local communities, schools, training institutions, local, regional, and national governments, and European policy-makers), should be **involved** in the development of a holistic view of education. This **holistic view should be integrated throughout curricula, competence profiles, initial training and continuous professional development.**

- Assistants remain ‘invisible workers’, meaning that their presence is usually not taken into account in policy documents. Data on assistants in European countries, their educational and socio-cultural background, competences, gender and other socio-demographic characteristics are insufficient.

Recommendations

Policy makers should make this group visible by collecting nationwide data about the number of assistants, their gender and socio-cultural background.

Assistants should be mentioned and included in all policy documents that refer to staff in the ECEC sector.

At an international level (OECD’s, TALIS for ECEC...), data collection concerning staff in the ECEC sector should include data on assistants.

- Assistants have fewer possibilities to raise their qualification. There is a need to develop adapted pathways to qualification for assistants. Assistants should not necessarily need to have a specific initial qualification when they start working, but once they are hired, there ought to be opportunities of job mobility for them, through adapted pathways towards qualification. This does not mean that all assistants need to enter a path towards a qualification. It simply means that a competent system should attract those who want a qualification towards one, and facilitate their path.

Recommendations

Policy makers need to create pathways to the same level of qualification as the core practitioners, with specific attention to: 1) recognizing assistants’ working experience and previously acquired competences; 2) linking theory and practice by methods of group reflections on practice; 3) foreseeing pedagogical guidance in the service; 4) supporting students with an ethnic minority background and with low socio-economic status.

- The employment of assistants is an important tool to attract more male educators, which benefit from being put in contact with networks of other male practitioners during their pathway towards qualification.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should create pathways to qualification designed to attract **male assistants**, and place male assistants into networks with other male educators.

Employment offices should act to attract **young males** to the profession of assistant, then guide them towards a qualification as core practitioners.

- Several experts underline that a high number of assistants, especially in larger cities, have an ethnic-minority background or low socio-economic status. Their qualifications, language, gender, and socio-cultural background, lend diversity to the ECEC workforce.

Recommendations

Member States should invest in hiring a diverse workforce in ECEC services in terms of language, gender, socio-cultural background. This diverse workforce needs to be accompanied by pedagogical guidance.

- The individual competences of the ECEC workforce should be placed within ‘competent systems’, in which a good initial training for core practitioners, and adapted pathways to qualification for assistants, is followed up with continuous professional development activities for all staff.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should invest in establishing **continuous professional development for all staff**,

including assistants. In order to deliver, there must be:

- **Child-free hours** for core practitioners and assistants: contracts should guarantee an amount of paid hours without children during which core practitioners and assistants can reflect on their practice;
- **Meetings** to reflect together on pedagogical practice: planning, observations and documentation. These meetings should include all member of the team;
- A system of **pedagogical guidance or coaching** that supports the team in their reflection;
- A system of **monitoring of the CPD** that guarantees that assistants are able to follow the established CPD opportunities.

- The competences and experiences used for the job as assistant are rarely valued or articulated as part of a distinctive professional profile; there are only rarely official professional and training competence profiles for assistants.

Recommendations

Member states need to develop **professional competences profiles and training competences profiles for assistants** that are defined in **broad terms** and are based on a holistic view of children's educational needs.

- Considering the diverse society we live in, ECEC staff (core professionals and assistants) needs complex broad competences to become able to dialogue, to negotiate and to reflect on practice.

Recommendations

Initial training and continuous professional development both need to focus on **broad socio-pedagogical competences** to prepare staff for a diverse workplace.

- More research is needed in this sector to know what roles assistants develop in ECEC, how assistants perceive their role, and whether the presence of assistants widens the gap between care and education.

Recommendations

Policy makers and research centres should finance further research in this field, with specific attention to exploring the different roles of assistants.

FR EXEC. SUMMARY

Il existe un large consensus parmi les chercheurs, les organisations et les décideurs politiques pour dire que la qualité de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance, et en définitive les résultats pour les enfants et leurs familles, dépendent de la formation et des compétences du personnel. Au niveau européen, l'importance de disposer d'un personnel qualifié est reconnue parmi les nouvelles priorités pour la coopération stratégique dans le domaine de l'éducation et de la formation (Commission européenne, 2015a) ; la professionnalisation du personnel est identifiée comme l'une des problématiques clés pour la poursuite du travail en matière d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance. De nombreux rapports et études soulignent que la qualité de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance requiert un personnel compétent capable de travailler dans un cadre holistique et qui comprend que les concepts d'« accueil » et d'« éducation » sont interdépendants et sur un pied d'égalité (UNESCO, 2010 ; Commission européenne, 2011 ; Commission européenne/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) (voir la section « Approche holistique » dans l'introduction).

Le cadre de qualité européen pour l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance (groupe thématique de la Commission européenne sur l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance, 2014) souligne la contribution du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance dans l'amélioration de la qualité pédagogique des services proposés aux jeunes enfants. Le cadre de qualité européen pour l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance fait l'objet d'un consensus entre les représentants de 25 États membres de l'UE, plus la Turquie et la Norvège, du réseau Eurydice, du Comité Syndical Européen de l'Éducation (CSEE) et de l'OCDE. Il affirme que « la reconnaissance du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance en tant que professionnels est la clé. Le développement professionnel a un énorme impact sur la qualité de la pédagogie et sur le développement des enfants. Le développement de programmes d'éducation et de formation communs pour l'ensemble du personnel travaillant dans le contexte de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance (par ex. enseignants du préscolaire, assistants, éducateurs, assistants maternels, etc.) aide à créer un agenda partagé et une compréhension commune de la qualité » (groupe thématique de la Commission européenne sur l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance, 2014, 9).

Comme le montre l'étude CoRe (Urban et al., 2011 ; Vandebroek et al., 2016), les compétences individuelles seules sont insuffisantes pour garantir la qualité. Il est nécessaire de mettre en place un « système compétent » qui inclut une collaboration entre les individus, les équipes et les institutions et qui dispose d'une gouvernance compétente au niveau politique. De plus, pour être compétent, un système doit être basé sur une bonne formation initiale du personnel et sur un développement permanent de la formation continue des professionnels, ce qui implique de proposer aux équipes des opportunités régulières de co-réflexion sur les idées et pratiques mises en œuvre.

La création de systèmes compétents reste un défi dans l'UE : les exigences et compétences requises pour le personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance diffèrent d'un pays à l'autre, le niveau de qualification du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance reste bas en Europe (voir 2.2., tableau 2) et, de manière générale, l'investissement conséquent dans des systèmes de développement de la formation continue des professionnels est trop faible (voir 2.4.).

Dans de nombreux pays, une partie du personnel est composée d'assistants d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance peu qualifiés. Dans l'étude CoRe, les assistants sont définis comme des « travailleurs invisibles », ce qui signifie que leur présence n'est habituellement pas prise en compte dans les

documents politiques et qu'ils possèdent nettement moins de possibilités de qualification et de développement professionnel que les travailleurs principaux². Les données du dernier rapport Eurydice montrent que la fréquentation de structures d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance par les enfants de moins de 3 ans est très faible en Europe (Commission européenne/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). Le même rapport souligne que pour environ 30 % des parents, la faible qualité des services d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance représente une barrière à leur utilisation. L'amélioration des compétences de l'ensemble du personnel (travailleurs principaux et assistants) améliorerait la qualité des services, ce qui amènerait en conséquence les parents à y faire davantage appel.

L'investissement dans la professionnalisation du personnel assistant représente un élément clé dans l'amélioration de la qualité des services d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance, en particulier du fait que dans de nombreux pays le recours à des assistants pour ce type de services est en forte augmentation (voir 2.1., tableau 1). Cette augmentation doit être accompagnée d'un fort investissement dans des systèmes compétents qui valorisent les contributions de tout le personnel et impliquent l'ensemble des forces actives dans un développement professionnel continu. Faute de quoi, en réponse à des contraintes budgétaires ou en cas de réformes précipitées, les assistants risquent d'être engagés en lieu et place de leurs collègues davantage qualifiés, ce qui pourrait entraîner une « dé-professionnalisation » du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance.

Sur base des constats de l'étude CoRe (Urban et al., 2011 ; Vandebroek et al., 2016), nous passons en revue les profils des assistants d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance dans 15 pays européens³ de même que leurs opportunités de professionnalisation. Nous faisons ensuite des recommandations sur la façon de développer des parcours de qualification cohérents et un développement professionnel continu (DPC) pour les assistants. Nous présentons en outre des exemples de parcours de qualification et de DPC couronnés de succès dans trois pays européens sélectionnés (Danemark, France, Slovaquie).

Principaux constats

La première partie de notre rapport propose une vue d'ensemble de la situation concernant le personnel assistant dans les 15 États membres concernés par l'étude.

Les données indiquent que :

- L'« invisibilité » des assistants d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance dans la recherche et les documents politiques contraste fortement avec le nombre d'assistants travaillant dans ces types de services, ce nombre pouvant être très élevé dans certains pays (40-50 % du personnel) (pour plus de détails sur le recours aux assistants dans chaque pays, voir 2.1., tableau 1).
- Les assistants ne possèdent souvent qu'une faible qualification voire pas de qualification du tout (voir 2.2., tableau 2) et n'ont que peu d'opportunités de s'engager dans un parcours qui leur permette d'obtenir les mêmes qualifications qu'un travailleur principal. Nous suggérons que les assistants n'ont pas nécessairement besoin d'une qualification initiale spécifique pour travailler en tant qu'assistants, mais qu'une fois qu'ils ont été embauchés, il est nécessaire de réaliser un fort investissement dans des systèmes compétents qui respectent et récompensent le travail de l'ensemble du personnel (assistants y compris). Nous suggérons également qu'il est possible de faire bénéficier les assistants

²Travailleur principal correspond à une qualification de niveau bachelor ou master

³Les pays analysés dans cette étude sont les suivants : l'Allemagne, la Belgique, le Danemark, l'Espagne, la France, la Grèce, l'Irlande, la Lituanie, les Pays-Bas, la Pologne, la Roumanie, le Royaume-Uni, la Serbie, la Slovaquie, la Suède.

d'opportunités de mobilité professionnelle en investissant dans des parcours de qualification adaptés (voir 3.2.1. et 3.2.3.).

- Les assistants ont moins d'opportunités de développement professionnel continu que les travailleurs principaux (voir 2.4.). Le temps alloué à la réflexion commune en tant qu'équipe avec les travailleurs principaux fait également défaut. La plupart des pays européens ne finance toujours pas le temps sans contact avec les enfants pour le personnel, et lorsque ce temps est alloué, il s'adresse en général uniquement aux travailleurs principaux et non aux assistants. Cependant, notre étude décrit quelques exceptions notables de pays qui allouent du temps à l'ensemble du personnel, y compris aux assistants, pour la co-réflexion et la formation continue (voir 2.4. et 3.2.2.).
- De manière générale, les assistants ne présentent pas de profils de compétences officiels, tant en ce qui concerne leur profession que leur formation. La description des compétences dans les pays où elle existe se limite souvent à des tâches dites techniques ou d'« accueil ». Même lorsque le poste et les compétences des assistants sont reconnus par les réglementations nationales ou sur le plan individuel, les assistants risquent toujours d'être perçus comme de simples techniciens. Cette division du travail entre travailleurs principaux et assistants est susceptible de renforcer une certaine hiérarchie entre éducation et accueil, qui réduit l'éducation au développement cognitif (Van Laere et al., 2012). Cette perspective entrave l'approche holistique de l'éducation et de l'accueil, qui reconnaît le rôle éducatif de l'accueil et le rôle d'accueil de l'éducation (Hayes, 2007 ; 2008).
- Les pays considérés dans cette étude ne collectent pas de données statistiques concernant le contexte socio-économique ou culturel des assistants dans leurs secteurs respectifs d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance. Toutefois, selon les experts nationaux consultés dans le cadre de cette étude, le recours à du personnel issu de minorités ethniques semble effectivement plus répandu parmi les assistants que parmi les travailleurs principaux. La présence d'assistants au sein du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance contribue à sa diversité, ce qui peut accroître la capacité du personnel à composer avec les éléments de diversité et de communauté existant parmi les enfants et leurs familles. Afin d'améliorer ces aspects, il est nécessaire de disposer d'un parcours de DPC solide dans le cadre duquel les travailleurs peuvent réfléchir sur leurs pratiques pédagogiques de façon guidée et supervisée.

Les exemples issus des trois pays sélectionnés démontrent de quelle manière il est possible d'investir dans :

- 1) des parcours adaptés spécifiques qui offrent aux assistants la possibilité d'augmenter leurs qualifications, en leur permettant de combiner travail et études. Ceci est possible en : a) créant des systèmes de quotas spécifiques consistant à réserver un certain nombre de places dans un cours de formation de niveau de bachelor pour les travailleurs avec de l'expérience mais sans qualification ; b) créant des cours passerelles pour les personnes issues de minorités ethniques et présentant un statut socio-économique bas ; c) reconnaissant les compétences acquises au préalable ; d) faisant régulièrement le lien entre théorie et pratique au cours des études ; e) soutenant l'équipe avec laquelle travaille l'assistant pour l'aider à faire face au changement d'identité professionnelle auquel l'assistant-étudiant risque d'être confronté tout au long de sa formation (voir la recommandation n° 3).
- 2) des opportunités de développement professionnel continu pour l'ensemble du personnel, y compris les assistants. Ceci implique des investissements dans a) des heures hors de la présence des enfants pour les travailleurs principaux et les assistants ; b) des réunions pour réfléchir ensemble sur les pratiques pédagogiques ; c) un système de suivi ou de coaching pédagogique ; d) un système de surveillance qui garantit que les assistants ont l'opportunité de suivre le DPC établi (voir les recommandations).

Plus spécifiquement, le Danemark constitue un exemple en matière de parcours de qualification adaptés ; la France propose une formation initiale spécifique pour les professionnels peu qualifiés qui souhaitent combiner travail et études ; la Slovénie constitue un exemple intéressant en matière d'investissement dans le développement professionnel continu pour l'ensemble du personnel.

Implications et recommandations politiques clés

Notre étude recommande plusieurs stratégies portant sur le statut des assistants dans le secteur de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance. L'expérimentation politique dans les États membres de l'UE doit combiner ces stratégies, en commençant à petite échelle.

Les principales conclusions et recommandations de ce rapport sont les suivantes :

- La division hiérarchique entre éducation et accueil existe à la fois dans les systèmes séparés et unitaires et est renforcée lorsque des distinctions sont faites entre les rôles de travailleurs principaux et d'assistants. Au contraire, une vision holistique de l'éducation et de l'accueil, dans laquelle les aspects cognitifs, émotionnels et sociaux ont la même valeur et sont considérés comme interdépendants, préconise de minimiser de telles distinctions.

Recommandations

Les politiques en matière d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance doivent être ciblées sur **l'intégration de l'accueil et de l'éducation** aux niveaux institutionnels, régionaux et nationaux.

Les assistants, ainsi que les autres parties prenantes de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance (travailleurs principaux, parents, communautés locales, écoles, centres de formations, administrations locales, régionales et nationales, et décideurs politiques européens), doivent être **impliqués** dans le développement d'une vision holistique de l'éducation. Cette **vision holistique doit être totalement intégrée dans les programmes d'études, les profils de compétences, les formations initiales et le développement professionnel continu.**

- Les assistants restent des « travailleurs invisibles », ce qui signifie que leur présence n'est habituellement pas prise en compte dans les documents politiques. Les données sur les assistants dans les pays européens (profil éducatif et socio-culturel, compétences, sexe et autres caractéristiques démographiques) sont insuffisantes.

Recommandations

Les décideurs politiques doivent redonner de la visibilité à ce groupe en collectant au niveau national des données sur leur nombre, leur sexe et leur profil socio-culturel.

Les assistants doivent être mentionnés et inclus dans tous les documents politiques faisant référence au personnel du secteur de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance.

Au niveau international (OCDE, enquête TALIS...), la collecte de données portant sur le personnel du secteur de l'éducation et de l'accueil de la petite enfance doit inclure des données sur les assistants.

- Les assistants ont moins de possibilités d'augmenter leurs qualifications. Il existe un besoin de parcours adaptés pour la qualification des assistants. Les assistants n'ont pas nécessairement besoin de posséder une qualification initiale spécifique lorsqu'ils commencent à travailler, mais une fois qu'ils sont embauchés, il doit exister des opportunités de mobilité professionnelle pour eux, par le biais de parcours de qualification adaptés. Cela ne signifie pas que tous les assistants doivent s'engager dans un parcours de qualification, mais qu'un système compétent doit être capable d'attirer ceux qui souhaitent augmenter leurs qualifications et faciliter leur parcours.

Recommandations

Les décideurs politiques doivent créer des parcours permettant d'atteindre le même niveau de qualification que les travailleurs principaux, en veillant plus particulièrement à : 1) reconnaître l'expérience professionnelle de l'assistant et les compétences qu'il a précédemment acquises ; 2) faire le lien entre théorie et pratique par des méthodes de réflexion en groupe sur la pratique ; 3) prévoir un suivi pédagogique dans le service ; 4) soutenir les étudiants issus de minorités ethniques et présentant un statut socio-économique bas.

- L'emploi d'assistants constitue un outil important pour attirer davantage d'hommes parmi les éducateurs, qui bénéficient de la mise en contact avec un réseau d'autres travailleurs hommes durant leur parcours de qualification.

Recommandations

Les décideurs politiques des États membres doivent créer des parcours de qualification conçus pour attirer les **assistants hommes** et placer des assistants hommes dans des réseaux comprenant d'autres éducateurs hommes.

Les bureaux de placement doivent agir dans l'optique d'attirer de **jeunes hommes** vers la profession d'assistant, puis les guider vers une qualification de travailleurs principaux.

- Plusieurs experts soulignent qu'un grand nombre d'assistants, en particulier dans les grandes villes, sont issus de minorités ethniques ou présentent un statut socio-économique bas. Leurs qualifications, leur langue, leur sexe et leur profil socio-culturel confèrent de la diversité au personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance.

Recommandations

Les États membres doivent investir dans l'embauche d'une diversité de personnel dans les services d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance, en termes de langue, de sexe et de profil socio-culturel. Cette diversité nécessite d'être accompagnée par un suivi pédagogique.

- Les compétences individuelles du personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance doivent être placées dans le cadre de « systèmes compétents », consistant à fournir une bonne formation initiale aux travailleurs principaux et des parcours de qualification adaptés aux assistants, avec des activités de développement professionnel continu pour l'ensemble du personnel.

Recommandations

Les décideurs politiques des États membres doivent investir dans l'établissement d'un **développement professionnel continu pour l'ensemble du personnel**, y compris les assistants. Dans ce but, il convient de prévoir :

- **des heures sans contact avec les enfants** pour les travailleurs principaux et les assistants : les contrats doivent garantir une quantité d'heures payées sans enfants au cours desquelles les travailleurs principaux et les assistants peuvent réfléchir sur leurs pratiques ;
- **des réunions** pour réfléchir ensemble aux pratiques pédagogiques : planification, observations et documentation. Ces réunions doivent inclure tous les membres de l'équipe ;
- un système de **suivi pédagogique ou de coaching** qui soutient l'équipe dans ses réflexions ;
- un **système de surveillance du DPC** qui garantit aux assistants la possibilité de bénéficier des opportunités de DPC établies.

- Les compétences et expériences nécessaires pour le travail d'assistant sont rarement estimées ou formulées comme faisant partie d'un profil professionnel particulier ; il n'existe que rarement des profils de compétences professionnelles et de formation officiels pour les assistants.

Recommandations

Les États membres doivent développer des **profils de compétences professionnelles et des profils de compétences de formation pour les assistants**, qui soient définis **dans des termes généraux** et basés sur une vision holistique des besoins éducatifs de l'enfant.

- Compte tenu de la diversité de la société dans laquelle nous vivons, le personnel d'éducation et d'accueil de la petite enfance (travailleurs principaux et assistants) doit présenter des compétences élargies et complexes pour être en mesure de dialoguer, négocier et réfléchir sur les pratiques.

Recommandations

La formation initiale et le développement professionnel continu doivent tous deux mettre l'accent sur de **larges compétences socio-pédagogiques** afin de préparer le personnel à un milieu de travail diversifié.

- De nouvelles recherches sont nécessaires dans ce secteur pour savoir quels sont les rôles développés par les assistants dans l'éducation et l'accueil de la petite enfance, comment les assistants perçoivent leur rôle et si la présence des assistants accroît l'écart entre accueil et éducation.

Recommandations

Les décideurs politiques et les centres de recherche doivent financer de nouvelles recherches dans ce domaine, dans l'optique spécifique d'explorer les différents rôles des assistants.

DE EXEC. SUMMARY

In Wissenschaft, Organisationen und Politik herrscht breiter Konsens darüber, dass die Qualität der frühkindlichen Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung (FBBE) und letzten Endes der Erfolg von Kindern und Familien von gut ausgebildeten und kompetenten Pädagogen abhängt. Auf europäischer Ebene wird die Wichtigkeit qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte in den neuen Prioritäten für die strategische Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung (Europäische Kommission, 2015a) anerkannt, in denen die Professionalisierung des Personals zu den Schwerpunkten der weiteren Arbeit im Bereich FBBE gezählt wird. Wie zahlreiche Studien und Berichte betonen, hängt die Qualität der FBBE von kompetentem Personal ab, das in der Lage ist, in einem ganzheitlichen Rahmen zu arbeiten, und weiß, dass „Betreuung“, „Bildung“ und „Erziehung“ ineinander greifen und gleichwertig sind (UNESCO, 2010; Europäische Kommission, 2011; Europäische Kommission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) (siehe auch den Abschnitt „ganzheitlicher Rahmen“ in der Einleitung).

Der Europäische Qualifikationsrahmen für die FBBE (Thematische Arbeitsgruppe der Europäischen Kommission zur FBBE, 2014) unterstreicht, welchen wichtigen Beitrag das Personal im Bereich FBBE dabei leistet, die pädagogische Qualität der Angebote für Kleinkinder zu verbessern. Der Europäische Qualifikationsrahmen für die FBBE repräsentiert den Konsens von Vertretern der 25 EU-Mitgliedstaaten plus der Türkei und Norwegen, dem Eurydice-Netz, dem European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) und der OECD. Dort heißt es: „Professionelle Anerkennung für das Personal in der FBBE ist entscheidend. Die berufliche Entwicklung hat einen immensen Einfluss auf das pädagogische Können des Personals und auf die Erziehungsergebnisse bei den Kindern. Die Entwicklung einheitlicher Aus- und Weiterbildungsprogramme für alle Berufsgruppen, die in der FBBE arbeiten (z. B. KindergärtnerInnen, AssistentInnen, ErzieherInnen, Tagesmütter usw.), trägt dazu bei, eine gemeinsame Agenda und einen einheitlichen Qualitätsbegriff zu schaffen.“ (Thematische Arbeitsgruppe der EK zur FBBE, 2014, 9).

Wie bereits in der CoRe-Studie (Urban u. a., 2011; Vandenbroeck u. a., 2016) festgestellt wurde, reichen individuelle Kompetenzen allein nicht aus, um Qualität zu gewährleisten. Man braucht ein „kompetentes System“, in dem einzelne Mitarbeiter, Teams und Institutionen zusammenarbeiten und von der politischen Ebene kompetent gesteuert werden. Außerdem gehört zu einem kompetenten System, dass die gute Ausbildung des Personals durch ständige Fortbildung weiter ausgebaut wird, wobei die Mitarbeiter außerdem regelmäßig die Möglichkeit haben, gemeinsam mit ihren Teamkollegen eigene Ideen und Verfahren kritisch zu hinterfragen.

Die Schaffung kompetenter Systeme ist in der EU jedoch weiterhin ein Problem. Die Anforderungen an und die Ausbildung von FBBE-Personal sind in jedem Land anders, die Qualifikation von FBBE-Personal bleibt gering (siehe 2.2, Tabelle 2), und es wird überall zu wenig in stabile Systeme für die fortlaufende berufliche Weiterbildung investiert (siehe 2.4).

In vielen Ländern stellen gering qualifizierte pädagogische Ergänzungskräfte einen Teil des Erziehungspersonals. In der CoRe-Studie werden Ergänzungskräfte als „unsichtbare Arbeitskräfte“ bezeichnet, weil sie in politischen Dokumenten oft nicht berücksichtigt werden und über weit weniger Möglichkeiten zur Qualifizierung und beruflichen Weiterbildung verfügen als pädagogische Fachkräfte. Die Daten des letzten Eurydice-Berichts zeigen, dass in Europa nur ein kleiner Teil der Kinder unter drei Jahren an der FBBE teilhat (Europäische Kommission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). In dem Bericht wird auch betont, dass rund 30 % der Eltern entsprechende Angebote aufgrund der schlechten Qualität nicht in Anspruch nehmen möchten. Eine Erhöhung der Qualifikation aller Mitarbeiter (Fach- und Ergänzungskräfte) würde die Qualität der Angebote verbessern und dadurch gleichzeitig die FBBE für Eltern attraktiver machen.

Die Investition in eine Professionalisierung der Ergänzungskräfte stellt ein wichtiges Element zur Verbesserung der FBBE-Qualität dar, insbesondere weil in einigen Ländern der Anteil der Ergänzungskräfte am gesamten FBBE-Angebot rapide zunimmt (siehe 2.1, Tabelle 1). Diese Zunahme muss von umfassenden Investitionen in kompetente Systeme begleitet werden, die den Beitrag aller Mitarbeiter anerkennen und allen Arbeitskräften eine ständige berufliche Weiterbildung ermöglichen. Andernfalls werden möglicherweise aufgrund von Haushaltszwängen oder übereilten Reformen mehr Ergänzungskräfte als Fachkräfte eingestellt und das FBBE-Personal damit „deprofessionalisiert“.

Anhand der Ergebnisse der CoRe-Studie (Urban u. a., 2011; Vandenbroeck u. a., 2016) haben wir das Berufsprofil von pädagogischen Ergänzungskräften in der FBBE⁴ und ihre Chancen zur Professionalisierung in 15 europäischen Ländern untersucht. Auf dieser Grundlage haben wir Empfehlungen für die Entwicklung einheitlicher Wege der Qualifikation und der fortlaufenden beruflichen Weiterbildung für Ergänzungskräfte erarbeitet. Außerdem stellen wir beispielhaft erfolgreiche Wege der Qualifikation und Weiterbildung für pädagogische Ergänzungskräfte aus drei ausgewählten europäischen Ländern (Dänemark, Frankreich, Slowenien) vor.

Wichtige Ergebnisse

Der erste Teil unseres Berichts bietet einen Überblick über den aktuellen Stand im Bereich der pädagogischen Ergänzungskräfte in den 15 untersuchten Mitgliedstaaten.

Dies sind die wichtigsten Ergebnisse:

- Die „Unsichtbarkeit“ von Ergänzungskräften der FBBE in wissenschaftlichen und politischen Dokumenten steht in scharfem Kontrast zur großen Zahl der Ergänzungskräfte, die FBBE-Dienstleistungen erbringen. Ihr Anteil ist in manchen Ländern sehr hoch (40-50 % aller Beschäftigten). (Detaillierte Zahlen zum Anteil der Ergänzungskräfte in den einzelnen Ländern finden sich im Abschnitt 2.1, Tabelle 1.)
- Ergänzungskräfte sind oft nicht oder nur gering qualifiziert (siehe 2.2, Tabelle 2), und es gibt für sie nur wenig Wege zu einer Qualifikation, die derjenigen von Fachkräften entspricht. Unserer Einschätzung nach müssen Ergänzungskräfte für ihre Stelle nicht unbedingt eine Anfangsqualifikation aufweisen. Sobald sie jedoch eingestellt sind, sollte umfassend in kompetente Systeme investiert werden, die die Arbeit aller Mitarbeiter (einschließlich der Ergänzungskräfte) respektiert und belohnt. Außerdem schlagen wir vor, dass Ergänzungskräfte mehr Chancen zur beruflichen Mobilität erhalten, indem ihnen angepasste Bildungswege zur Qualifikation angeboten werden (siehe 3.2.1. und 3.2.3.).
- Ergänzungskräfte haben weniger Möglichkeiten zur fortlaufenden beruflichen Weiterbildung als pädagogische Fachkräfte (siehe 2.4). Außerdem fehlt ihnen die Zeit, um ihre Arbeit gemeinsam mit den Fachkräften als Team zu planen und zu überdenken. In den meisten Ländern werden pädagogischen Kräften nur die reinen Betreuungszeiten vergütet, und wenn Stunden für andere Aufgaben vorgesehen sind, gilt dies in der Regel nur für Fachkräfte, nicht jedoch für Ergänzungskräfte. Allerdings beschreibt unsere Studie auch einige bemerkenswerte Ausnahmen, bei denen Länder dem gesamten Personal, einschließlich der Ergänzungskräfte, Stunden für gemeinsame Überlegungen und eine fortlaufende berufsbegleitende Weiterbildung zugestehen (siehe 2.4 und 3.2.2.).
- Im Allgemeinen haben Ergänzungskräfte kein offizielles Kompetenzprofil für ihren Beruf oder ihre Ausbildung. In Ländern, in denen ihre Kompetenzen definiert sind, werden häufig vor allem technische

⁴Für diese Studie wurden die folgenden Länder analysiert: Belgien, Dänemark, Deutschland, Griechenland, Großbritannien, Frankreich, Irland, Litauen, Polen, Rumänien, Serbien, Slowenien, Spanien, Schweden und die Niederlande.

oder „pflegende“ Aufgaben beschrieben oder formuliert. Auch wenn Stellung und Kompetenzen von Ergänzungskräften durch nationale Rechtsvorschriften oder individuelle Vereinbarungen anerkannt sind, werden diese oft als rein technische Hilfskräfte wahrgenommen. Diese Arbeitsteilung zwischen Fach- und Ergänzungskräften kann die Hierarchie zwischen Bildung und Betreuung verfestigen, die die Bildung auf die kognitive Entwicklung reduziert (Van Laere u. a., 2012). Diese Perspektive behindert ein ganzheitliches Verständnis von Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung, das die erzieherische Rolle der Betreuung und die betreuende Rolle der Bildung anerkennt (Hayes, 2007; 2008).

- Die für diese Studie untersuchten Länder erheben keine statistischen Daten über den sozioökonomischen oder kulturellen Hintergrund von Ergänzungskräften in der jeweiligen FBBE. Allerdings dürfte nach Ansicht der für diese Studie befragten nationalen ExpertInnen der Anteil von Menschen, die einer ethnischen Minderheit angehören, bei den Ergänzungskräften höher liegen als bei den Fachkräften. Das heißt, die Ergänzungskräfte tragen zur Diversität des FBBE-Personals und dessen Fähigkeit bei, angemessen mit der Diversität und den Eigenheiten von Kindern und deren Familien umzugehen. Um diese Aspekte zu fördern, braucht es stabile Verfahren der fortlaufenden beruflichen Weiterbildung, bei der die Ergänzungskräfte ihre pädagogische Praxis unter der Anleitung pädagogischer Fachkräfte reflektieren.

Die Fallbeispiele aus den drei ausgewählten Ländern zeigen, dass Investitionen in die folgenden Bereiche sinnvoll sind:

- 1) Speziell angepasste Bildungswege, mit denen Ergänzungskräfte ihre Qualifikation verbessern und dabei Arbeit und Ausbildung verbinden können. Dazu gibt es viele Modelle: a) Einführung eines speziellen Quotensystems, bei dem ein Teil der Studienplätze eines entsprechend Bachelor-Studiengangs für gering qualifizierte Arbeitnehmer mit Berufserfahrung reserviert sind; b) Brückenschlag-Kurse für Menschen, die einer ethnischen Minderheit oder Gruppen mit geringem sozioökonomischen Status angehören; c) Anerkennung bereits erworbener Kompetenzen; d) ständige Verknüpfung von Theorie und Praxis in der Ausbildung; e) Unterstützung für Teams, in denen Ergänzungskräfte arbeiten, damit das Team den Übergang der Ergänzungskraft zu einer neuen beruflichen Rolle im Verlauf der Ausbildung besser begleiten kann (siehe Empfehlung Nr. 3).
- 2) Möglichkeiten der fortlaufenden beruflichen Weiterbildung für alle pädagogischen Kräfte, einschließlich der Ergänzungskräfte. Dazu sind Investitionen in den folgenden Bereichen notwendig: a) kinderfreie Stunden für pädagogische Fach- und Ergänzungskräfte; b) Besprechungen zur gemeinsamen Auswertung der pädagogischen Praxis; c) ein System der pädagogischen Anleitung und Beratung; d) ein Kontrollsystem, das gewährleistet, dass Ergänzungskräfte die bestehenden Angebote zur beruflichen Weiterbildung nutzen können (siehe Empfehlungen).

Die drei Fallbeispiele beschreiben angepasste Bildungswege zur Qualifizierung in Dänemark, eine spezielle qualifizierende Grundausbildung für gering qualifizierte Kräfte, die Arbeit und Ausbildung verbinden möchten, in Frankreich sowie, besonders interessant, Investitionen in die fortlaufende berufliche Weiterbildung für das gesamte pädagogische Personal in Slowenien.

Wichtige politische Folgerungen und Empfehlungen

In unserer Studie werden mehrere Strategien, die sich auf die Verbesserung der Bedingungen von Ergänzungskräften beziehen, für die FBBE empfohlen. Die EU-Mitgliedstaaten sollten diese Strategien mit Hilfe kleinerer Pilotprojekte politisch erproben.

Dies sind die wichtigsten Schlussfolgerungen und Empfehlungen des Berichts:

- › Sowohl in durchgängigen als auch in nach Alter gegliederten Systemen besteht eine hierarchische Aufteilung, die noch verstärkt wird, wenn die Rollen von Fachkräften und Ergänzungskräften unterschiedlich definiert sind. Für eine ganzheitliche Perspektive auf Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung, in der kognitive, emotionale und soziale Aspekte als gleichwertig und voneinander abhängig gesehen werden, sollte diese Hierarchie aufgeweicht werden.

Empfehlungen

Politische Initiativen im Bereich FBBE sollten auf die **Integration von Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung** auf regionaler und nationaler Ebene und in den einzelnen Bildungsinstitutionen ausgerichtet sein.

Pädagogische Ergänzungskräfte sollten gemeinsam mit anderen Akteuren der FBBE (Erziehern, Eltern, Kommunen, Schulen, Ausbildungsinstitutionen, lokalen, regionalen und nationalen Regierungen und europäischen Politikern) an der Entwicklung eines ganzheitlichen Begriffs von Bildung **beteiligt** werden. Diese **ganzheitliche Perspektive sollte sich in Lehrplänen, Kompetenzprofilen sowie in der Aus- und Weiterbildung widerspiegeln**.

- › Ergänzungskräfte sind weiterhin „unsichtbare Arbeitskräfte“, weil sie in politischen Dokumenten in der Regel nicht berücksichtigt werden. In den europäischen Ländern gibt es nicht genügend Daten über die pädagogischen Ergänzungskräfte sowie deren Ausbildung und soziokulturellen Hintergrund, Kompetenzen, Geschlecht und andere soziodemografische Merkmale.

Empfehlungen

Politische Entscheidungsträger sollten diese Gruppe durch eine landesweite Erfassung von Daten über die Zahl der Ergänzungskräfte, deren Geschlecht und soziokulturellen Hintergrund sichtbar machen.

Ergänzungskräfte sollten in allen politischen Dokumenten über das Personal in der FBBE erwähnt und berücksichtigt werden.

Auf internationaler Ebene (OECD, TALIS für die FBBE...) sollten bei der Erhebung von Daten über Arbeitskräfte im Bereich der FBBE auch Daten über Ergänzungskräfte erhoben werden.

- › Ergänzungskräfte haben weniger Möglichkeiten, zusätzliche Qualifikationen zu erwerben. Deshalb müssen angepasste Bildungswege zur Qualifizierung von Ergänzungskräften geschaffen werden. Ergänzungskräfte müssen bei Antritt ihrer Stelle nicht unbedingt eine Anfangsqualifikation aufweisen. Sobald sie jedoch eingestellt sind, sollte ihnen durch angepasste Wege zur Qualifikation die Chance zur beruflichen Mobilität geboten werden. Das heißt nicht, dass sich alle pädagogischen Ergänzungskräfte weiter qualifizieren müssen. Es sollte aber mit Hilfe eines kompetenten Systems gewährleistet sein, dass diejenigen, die sich qualifizieren möchten, einen passenden Bildungsweg finden und diesen auch nutzen können.

Empfehlungen

Politische Entscheidungsträger sollten Wege zu einem Qualifikationsniveau schaffen, der demjenigen von Fachkräften entspricht, wobei besonders die folgenden Aspekte zu berücksichtigen sind: 1) Anerkennung der Berufserfahrung und der bereits erworbenen Kompetenzen von Ergänzungskräften; 2) Verbindung von Theorie und Praxis durch Verfahren zur gemeinsamen Bewertung von pädagogischen Verfahren; 3) pädagogische Anleitung in der Praxis; 4) besondere Unterstützung von Anwärtern, die einer ethnischen Minderheit oder einer Gruppe mit geringem sozioökonomischen Status angehören.

- › Die Beschäftigung von Ergänzungskräften ist ein wichtiges Instrument, um mehr männliche Erzieher für den Beruf zu interessieren. Diese würden davon profitieren, wenn sie sich auf ihrem Bildungsweg mit anderen männlichen Erziehern, die sich in Netzwerken zusammengeschlossen haben, austauschen könnten.

Empfehlungen

Politische Entscheidungsträger in den Mitgliedstaaten sollten Bildungswege schaffen, die insbesondere für **männliche Ergänzungskräfte** attraktiv sind, und diese mit Netzwerken männlicher Erzieher in Kontakt bringen.

Berufsberatungsstellen sollten versuchen, **junge Männer** für den Beruf einer pädagogischen Ergänzungskraft zu interessieren und sie später zu einer Qualifizierung als pädagogische Fachkraft zu ermutigen.

- Mehrere Experten haben betont, dass zahlreiche Ergänzungskräfte, insbesondere in Großstädten, einer ethnischen Minderheit oder einer sozioökonomisch benachteiligten Gruppe angehören. Ihre Qualifikation, Sprache, ihr Geschlecht und soziokultureller Hintergrund erhöhen die Diversität der Arbeitskräfte im Bereich der FBBE.

Empfehlungen

Die Mitgliedstaaten sollten in die Einstellung von Arbeitskräften investieren, die zu einer stärkeren Vielfalt in Bezug auf Sprache, Geschlecht und soziokulturelle Herkunft in der FBBE beitragen. Dieses vielfältige Personal muss durch pädagogische Anleitung begleitet werden.

- Die individuellen Kompetenzen des FBBE-Personals müssen in ein „kompetentes System“ integriert werden, in dem eine gute Ausbildung von pädagogischen Fachkräften sowie angepasste Bildungswege für Ergänzungskräfte durch eine fortlaufende berufliche Weiterbildung für alle Mitarbeiter ergänzt werden.

Empfehlungen

Politische Entscheidungsträger in den Mitgliedstaaten sollten in die **fortlaufende berufliche Weiterbildung aller pädagogischen Arbeitskräfte**, einschließlich der Ergänzungskräfte, investieren. Diese muss die folgenden Elemente enthalten:

- **Kinderfreie Stunden** für Fach- und Ergänzungskräfte: Arbeitsverträge sollten eine bestimmte Stundenzahl ohne Kinder garantieren, in denen die Fach- und Ergänzungskräfte gemeinsam ihre pädagogische Praxis bewerten und überdenken können.
- **Besprechungen** zur Analyse der pädagogischen Praxis: Planung, Beobachtungen und Dokumentation. An diesen Besprechungen sollten alle Teammitglieder teilnehmen.
- Ein System der **pädagogischen Anleitung oder Beratung**, das das Team bei seiner Analyse unterstützt.
- Ein System zur **Überwachung der beruflichen Weiterbildung**, mit dem gewährleistet wird, dass auch Ergänzungskräfte die vorhandenen Weiterbildungsangebote nutzen können.

- Die Kompetenzen und Erfahrungen, die in den Beruf einer pädagogischen Ergänzungskraft einfließen, werden selten im Rahmen eines eigenständigen beruflichen Profils anerkannt oder formuliert; es gibt nur wenige offizielle Kompetenzprofile für die Aus- und Weiterbildung von Ergänzungskräften.

Empfehlungen

Die Mitgliedstaaten müssen **Kompetenzprofile für den Beruf und die Ausbildung als pädagogische Ergänzungskraft entwickeln**, die sehr **weit gefasst** sind und auf einem ganzheitlichen Verständnis der Bildungsbedürfnisse von Kleinkindern beruhen.

- In unseren modernen und vielfältigen Gesellschaften brauchen auch Arbeitskräfte im Bereich der FBBE (Fach- und Ergänzungskräfte) komplexe und umfassende Kompetenzen, um mit allen Akteuren in Dialog und Verhandlungen treten und die eigene Praxis reflektieren zu können.

Empfehlungen

Sowohl Ausbildung als auch fortlaufende berufliche Weiterbildung müssen sich auf **umfassende soziopädagogische Kompetenzen konzentrieren**, die die Arbeitskräfte in ihrem vielfältigen Arbeitsumfeld benötigen.

- In diesem Bereich ist weitere Forschung erforderlich, um zu analysieren, welche Rolle die pädagogische Ergänzungskraft in der FBBE einnimmt, wie sie ihre Rolle wahrnimmt und ob die Beschäftigung von Ergänzungskräften die Kluft zwischen Betreuung einerseits und Bildung und Erziehung andererseits vergrößert.

Empfehlungen

Politische Entscheidungsträger und Forschungseinrichtungen sollten die weitere Forschung auf diesem Gebiet finanzieren, wobei insbesondere die unterschiedlichen Rollen pädagogischer Ergänzungskräfte analysiert werden sollten.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The European Commission has recently recommended that Member States ‘revise and strengthen the professional profile of all teaching professions and prepare teachers for social diversity’ (European Commission, 2013b). This reflects and reinforces the broad consensus that already exists among researchers and international organisations (OECD, 2006; UNICEF, 2008) that the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) depends on well-educated and competent staff.

The need to provide strong support for educators is also emphasized in the ET2020 Joint Report, which states that: ‘Many Member States report measures for enhancing teacher training and emphasize that initial education and the continuing professional development of teachers and trainers should be fit for purpose, combining subject matter, pedagogy and practice. Educators should be trained to deal with the growing diversity of learners, prevent ESL and use innovative pedagogies and ICT tools in an optimal manner, while enjoying induction support early in their careers’ (European Commission, 2015a, p. 5).

Despite this agreement amongst researchers, organisations and policy makers, the qualification of ECEC staff in Europe, especially for the 0-3 sector, remains rather low (see 2.2., Table 2). Related to this, in many countries, part of the ECEC workforce comprises low or unqualified ECEC assistants, which in some cases can represent 40 % or 50 % of the staff (see 2.2., Table 2).

This study aims to analyse the situation concerning the professionalization of ECEC assistants in Europe, in order to give recommendations on how to develop coherent pathways towards their qualification and continuous professional development.

1.1. The crucial role of the workforce in providing quality early childhood education and care

European policies: consensus on quality

Despite the prominence of access related issues in the European agenda from the early 1990s⁵, the quality of ECEC, including the support for the professional development of ECEC workforce, started to gradually receive more attention after 2000s (Milotay, 2016).

The need to ensure the accessible provision and quality of ECEC was repeatedly recognised in a number of policy documents, beginning with the Council conclusions (2006) on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems. These conclusions acknowledged the important role of ECEC services, especially for groups with a disadvantaged background⁶ (European Commission, 2006).

Increased political attention to this issue prompted calls for evidence based information, which led to a thorough review of the existing policy and practice of Member States’ ECEC service provision⁷ (Urban et al., 2011; European Commission, 2013c; European Commission, 2014a; 2014b; Akgündüz et al., 2015;

⁵ The issues related to early childhood education and care first appeared in the EU agenda more than two decades ago in the context of increasing the number of ECEC places. Member States’ commitment to increasing access to ECEC was often linked with the aim of bringing more women into the workforce (Vandenbroeck et al., 2016; Milotay, 2016).

⁶ Research reveals that socioeconomic status of children’s parents has a big influence on children’s cognitive, social and emotional development (Aikens and Barbarin, 2008; Ballas et al., 2012; Blanden et al., 2005; Kaylor and Flores, 2008; Morgan et al., 2009). The effects are already apparent between children by the age of 3, and they tend to become even more pronounced by the age of 5 (European Commission, 2011, EQUALSOC Network, 2011).

⁷ Work carried out by the Thematic working group on ECEC, involving experts representing all Member States, as well as Norway and Turkey; dialogue with stakeholder group composed of 55 European stakeholder organisations.

Vandenbroeck et al., 2016). This review, initiated by the EC and carried out between 2012 and 2014, resulted in the development of a proposal for a quality framework in early childhood education and care (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014), which created a consensus in Europe about what constitutes quality in ECEC. In the quality framework, a well-qualified workforce is considered particularly important when it comes to defining the quality of ECEC. At the same time, it is recognised that initial training and continuous professional development can have a huge impact on both the ‘quality of staff pedagogy and children’s outcomes’ (*Ibid*, p. 9).

The revised priorities for strategic cooperation in the field of education and training⁸ subsequently defined the professionalisation of staff as one of the key issues requiring further work in ECEC (European Commission, 2015a). It calls for strong support of practitioners/teachers and emphasises the need to enhance their training by ensuring that both initial education and continuous professional development (CPD) are well established and combine subject matter, socio-pedagogy and practice (*Ibid*, p. 5). Investing in reflexivity is recognized as a fundamental part of this approach, especially when it means co-reflecting on practice in-group, with the support of pedagogical guidance (Lazzari et al., 2013; Peeters et al., 2015b). Co-reflection is also seen as a way to empower educational staff in dealing with the growing diversity of children and families and in highlighting the importance of taking into account diverse backgrounds and experiences when it comes to recruiting educational staff, since the different backgrounds among the staff would support negotiation. All these aspects are emphasized in the revised priorities (*Ibid*, p. 6).

Co-reflection is an approach through which assistants can make an important contribution to raising the overall quality of ECEC. Assistants, especially in large cities, tend to have an ethnic-minority background or a lower socio-economic position in society, and their inclusion in ECEC adds diversity to their teams. Staff members of diverse teams are given more opportunities to experiment with negotiation and democracy, and gain insight into how best to work with diverse groups of children and families. As stated in the European Quality Framework (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014, p. 22): ‘services that [...] are committed to the recruitment and training of personnel from minority groups are found to be more successful in fostering participation of children from diverse background to ECEC’.

Creating competent systems: the framework of the CoRe study

The above mentioned priorities are also the focus of the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011; Vandenbroeck, 2016), commissioned by the DG for Education and Culture, and carried out in 15 European Member States by the University of Gent and the University of East London.

According to the CoRe study, ECEC quality is strongly linked to a professionally competent workforce. But a competent workforce has to take shape in a ‘competent system’, which includes collaboration between individuals, teams and institutions, and which has competent governance at policy level. A competent system needs to invest in initial training and continuous professional development for all staff. ‘This conceptualisation extends the traditional understanding of competence as an individual property to the institutional and governance domain. Hence, our understanding of competence moves beyond the acquisition of knowledge and training of skills to embrace reflectiveness as its core’ (Urban et al., 2012, p. 516).

Within this framework, the CoRe study revealed the presence of assistants in the ECEC field, and simultaneously raised the ‘issue’ of their professionalization. In the CoRe study, assistants are identified as ‘invisible workers’ since their presence is usually not taken into account in policy documents, and they have far fewer possibilities for qualification or professional development than do core practitioners.

⁸ Other key issues listed in the revised framework include: the improvement of access, focusing on disadvantaged, efficient governance, funding and monitoring systems (European Commission, 2015).

Young non-qualified people seemingly intend to use the job as an entry into the labour market (Urban et al., 2011) but are rarely recognised with either a qualification or a promotion to the profession. Many consequently become demotivated, leave the job, and are at a high risk of unemployment (Jensen and Kjeldsen, 2012; Jensen and Kjeldsen, 2015).

Our study relies in large part on the findings of the CoRe study, which revealed some of the main issues regarding the professional development of assistants. Since its publication, assistants have largely remained 'invisible' in international and national reports (Urban et al. 2011). This study contributes to an improved understanding of the ECEC workforce by describing the main challenges facing it, and provides policy recommendations on how to strengthen the professionalisation of ECEC assistants.

1.2. Key definitions

This report relies on the following definitions used in the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011):

- **Core practitioners** work directly with young children and families, usually as the main responsible of a children's group (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).
- **Assistants** support core practitioners in working directly with children and families; assistants usually hold a lower qualification than those held by core practitioners⁹.

1.3. Holistic approach

Many research studies and reports underline how quality in ECEC should encompass a broad, holistic view of learning, caring, upbringing and social support for children, and point to the fact that the concept of 'care' and 'education' are intertwined: it is neither possible to divide them nor appropriate to rank one superior to the other (European Commission, 2011; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014; UNESCO, 2010). As recommended by the European Quality Framework (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014), ECEC professionals, whatever their profile, should aim towards achieving quality as more accurately signified by this holistic understanding.

This study analyses the roles and professionalization of assistants within this framework, and accordingly maintains that the signification of quality services requires that the concepts 'care' and 'education' be understood as inseparable (Van Laere et al., 2012). In response to the debate about the 'schoolification' of the early years and the priority that it gives to 'cognitive' aspects of education, this study argues that the divided roles between assistants and core practitioners (in which assistants are seen as the ones that 'take care' and core practitioners as the ones that 'educate') might reinforce the division between care and education; this does not facilitate the holistic approach that we advocate.

As stated by Van Laere, Peeters and Vandebroek (2012, p. 534-535), 'one could argue that this division of tasks does not necessarily jeopardise a holistic view of education where both caring and learning are addressed'. Nevertheless, while it may not necessarily jeopardise it, it does present an obstacle: since a higher status professional is largely responsible for one task, and a lower status professional responsible for another, a perceived hierarchy has emerged between the tasks themselves, between education and care. The concept of 'education' seems to have been narrowed to denote merely teaching and learning, which excludes and is considered superior to 'caring' (Isaksen et al., 2008; Twigg et al., 2011; Wolkowitz,

⁹ It should be noted that core practitioners do not have a higher qualification than assistants do in every country.; we are referring to a general trend.

2006). This hinders a holistic conceptualisation of education in its broadest sense; under a holistic conceptualisation, care and education must be valued equally (Van Laere et al., 2012).

A holistic approach means adopting a systemic/integrated view on education and care, which has implications concerning the roles and competences of the staff. To reflect and respond to society's diversity, ECEC professionals require complex competences. Relational and reflective competences have become essential skills (Catarsi, 2003), and the ECEC workforce need to be able to negotiate, to deal with uncertainty (Urban, 2008), and to reflect on the meanings of what they think and do (Schön, 1983). This also extends to the relational competences practitioners need to develop in their relationships with parents. Under a holistic view these competences, as stated in the CoRe study (2011; 2016), require the support of 'competent systems', systems that offer both initial qualification and continuous professional development opportunities for all staff to reflect on their practices. To achieve this, time must be allocated (in terms of non-contact hours) and staff given clear guidance on how to optimally use the allocated time to improve quality through co-reflection.

1.4. Assistants in ECEC

Qualifications

Although researchers, practitioners and policy makers in Member States agree on the importance of the professional development of ECEC staff, the requirements and competences for ECEC workers continue to vary between countries. The European Commission (2011) stressed that ensuring high competences in Europe for ECEC staff was a challenge, especially in balancing the curriculum between cognitive and non-cognitive elements (such as motivation or ability to interact with others), and in finding a reconciliation between education and care to ensure the continuity in the individual child's educational trajectory.

In many Member States, the qualification of the ECEC workforce remains rather low (OECD, 2006; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). The trend is influenced by the fact that there are differences in qualification between core practitioners and their assistants. In some countries, the minimum level of initial qualification required for assistants is upper secondary; in others, no formal qualification is needed (see 2.2., Table 2) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014).

The 'issue' concerning assistants is particularly related to the fact that there are few possibilities for them to start a path towards qualification, taking into account their experience and background. Not having possibilities to start a qualification path lowers job mobility and advancement, which may demotivate assistants during their career.

Possible roles

Whereas the role of core practitioner is generally perceived to primarily involve 'teaching', assistants are generally perceived to assume a more 'caring' role. This division is predominately seen in pre-schools for children between three to six in split systems, yet it is present even in some unitary systems, despite notable exceptions. In services for the under-threes in split systems, there is less of a division, since the core practitioners, mostly women, share a caring profile with their assistants.

Since the functions of care in ECEC services are usually performed by low qualified assistants (EACEA, 2009; European Commission, 2011; 2013a; Urban et al., 2011; Van Laere et al., 2012), their very presence in a particular system indicates that there is a hierarchic division between 'education' and 'care' in that system, in which care is likely seen merely as an instrument to support learning (Van Laere et al., 2012).

Additionally, 'care' fails to capture the entirety of the role assistants perform. In a follow up study to CoRe, Van Laere et al. (2012) identify three distinct roles taken by assistants:

- Teaching role: these assistants mainly contribute to better academic performance of children and help with their learning processes (Farrell et al., 2010; Ratcliff et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2004). Yet the substantial increase in the number of assistants in recent years in the UK and in the US, where this role appears, has not led to the expected improved learning outcomes and pro-social behaviour of children (Blatchford et al., 2007, 2009; Finn and Pannoizzo, 2004; Gerber et al., 2001; Hughes and Westgate, 1997; Sosinsky and Gilliam, 2011);
- Bridging role: some assistants or ‘paraprofessionals’, for example in the US, are asked to raise children’s educational attainment, especially in Afro- American children, by serving as role models and bridging the gap between schools and families and communities (Abbate-Vaughn and Paugh, 2009; Manz et al., 2010; Villegas and Clewell, 1998);
- Caring role: these assistants are responsible for children’s hygiene, protection and emotional well-being so that their teacher can focus on the learning process (Garnier, 2009, 2010, 2011; Vasse, 2008). Barkham (2008), Dyer (1996) and Garnier (2010) point out the gendered nature of the job; according to Barkham (2008, p. 851), assistants are ‘those whose perceived primary role is that of ‘housewife and mother’ and who subordinate their needs to those of the children and class teachers’.

Despite the critical importance of the caring role in children’s lives, it is less addressed in policy documents. The teaching and bridging roles are usually emphasised over the caring role, and assistants are primarily expected to raise the (pre-) academic achievements of children, consistent with the schoolification of ECEC. By putting the focus on children’s cognitive and language development, their social and emotional development is given lower priority, reflecting a non-holistic approach. This is especially true in pre-schools (for 3–6-year-olds) that are increasingly perceived as a preparation to compulsory school.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

This report is meaningful for the European policy process of Life Long Learning towards the development of an advanced knowledge society in accordance with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy (1720/2006/EC). Several recent proposals of European Union institutions have promoted professional development at the political level for all ECEC workers. For instance, the European Council (2011) promotes the professionalisation of ECEC staff and enhancement of the prestige of the profession. The recent European Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care (2014) stresses that ECEC workforce has to be recognised as professional. The European Commission has stated that quality in ECEC services should be created by ‘developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.)’ (European Commission, 2014, p. 9).

A recent systematic review on the impact of professional development, published by Eurofound (Peeters et al., 2015b), points out success factors for continuous professional development initiatives:

- A coherent pedagogical framework or learning curriculum that builds upon research and addresses local needs;
- The active involvement of all professionals (core practitioners and assistants) in the process of improving educational practice enacted within their settings;
- A focus on practice-based learning taking place in constant dialogue with all colleagues, parents and local communities;
- The provision of enabling working conditions, such as the availability of paid hours for non-contact time and the presence of a mentor or coach who facilitates staff’s reflection in reference groups.

The case studies of CoRe show that in contexts in which pedagogical guidance is provided, childfree hours are scheduled and reflection paths are supported, the quality of the services increase with a direct effect on children and families (Vandenbroeck et al., 2016). These activities seem to be most effective when they are continuous and of a certain length (Peeters et al., 2015b), favouring the growth of the team in a coherent way.

The European Quality Framework (EC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014) proposes key principles to create ECEC services of high quality by involving different actors as individual practitioners, teams, training centres, local administrative institutions and non-governmental bodies. By taking good practice examples of EU Member States that have created effective initiatives by establishing a coherent pedagogical framework, the European Commission introduced possible forms of ECEC staff professionalisation, such as: exchange of good practices among centres; participatory action-research and peer learning opportunities; pedagogic guidance provided by specialised staff; training provision for ECEC centre coordinators/managers/directors (2014, p. 33). Although all these forms are strongly promoted at the European level, practical implementation of long-term professionalisation initiatives in Member States still needs to be investigated.

Within this framework, the position of assistants raises important questions, considering that, although assistants take part in many daily activities with children and families, they usually have few opportunities of CPD.

1.5. Aims and research questions

The main purpose of this report is to explore the professional profiles of assistants in European countries and to define possible pathways towards qualification and professional development for them. The research focuses on the following questions:

- What are the qualifications (or no qualifications) required in European Countries for the job of assistants in ECEC?
- Are there interesting paths of continuous professional development for assistants in European countries? Are these paths shared with the core practitioners? Are there systems in which assistants are valued by a competent system which considers their role inherently part of the educational community?
- Can these paths be adapted to other contexts?
- How can policy and practice make use of these paths?
- Is it correct to assume that a high percentage of assistants consist of people with ethnic-minority background or from lower socio-economic groups, and that this profession attracts a higher percentage of men compared with the job of core practitioners? How does this effect practice? Can the presence of assistants support the diversity of teams? Can it support the relationship with diverse groups of parents and children?

Considering the findings of the research, policy recommendations on the qualification and CPD for ECEC assistants will be given.

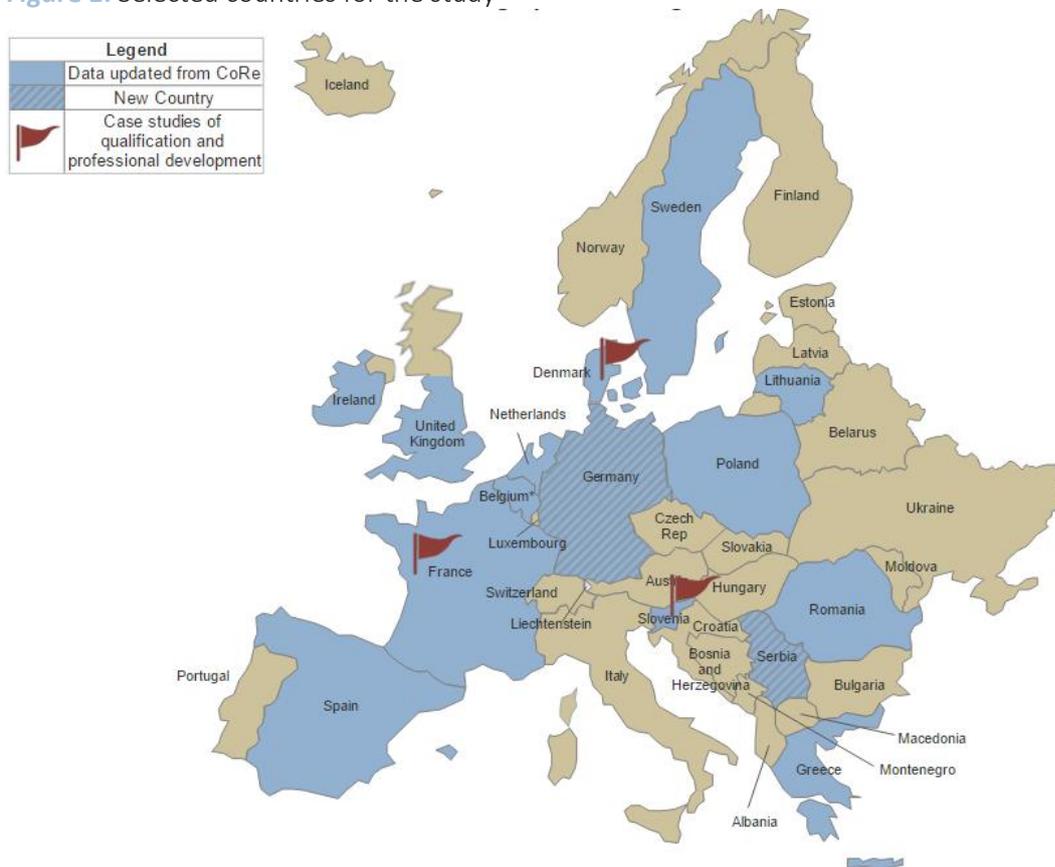
1.6. Method

This study is mainly based on secondary data; the situation of assistants has been updated (the data referred to core practitioners have not been updated). The profiles of assistants in ECEC have been drawn

from 15 countries: the 13 countries selected for the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011) that have assistants employed in ECEC services, and two additional countries (Germany and Serbia), still considering geographical balance.

The countries covered in this study are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Selected countries for the study



*Flemish and French speaking communities

Source: prepared by the authors.

The data on the profiles of assistants have been obtained through a semi-structured questionnaire sent to key contact experts in the 13 countries that were included in the CoRe study (Urban et al., 2011), in order to update the information. A similar but more detailed questionnaire has been sent to the two new countries chosen for this report. The experts have been selected for their long-standing expertise in the field and their previous contribution to other European studies. Additional information was received via email or skype calls when needed. The results of this survey are given in Chapter 2. We selected the most significant experiences of some of the countries, considering the path towards qualification and continuous professional development for assistants. These experiences have been analysed in a deeper way with assistance from the contact experts, and will be explained in Chapter 3. The questions refer to official regulations and national/regional policy documents. Local policies (at the municipal level, for instance) have not been included, although we are aware that in some countries great responsibility is given to the local level, and this can create considerable differences in the diverse context of a country.

Considering the aims of the study, our questionnaire has been focused on the following aspects:

- share of assistants within the ECEC workforce;
- qualification required;
- competence profiles for the training and for the profession;
- possibilities of continuous professional development;
- percentage of assistants with an ethnic-minority background.

The results obtained through the questionnaire (Chapter 2) are a combination of objective and subjective data: considering the fact that often official data were not available, in some cases we asked experts to provide estimates, for example in relation to the question about diversity.

The information on successful pathways towards qualification and continuous professional development for assistants was gathered from the seven case studies examined by the CoRe research team and recently updated by Vandenbroeck et al. (2016). From these case studies we selected three (France, Denmark, Slovenia) that revealed interesting practices relating to these themes, and analysed them with a focus on assistants. The information has been integrated with the help of the key contact experts of those specific countries (Chapter 3).

Chapter 2: Profiles of assistants in ECEC in European countries: an overview

This section provides an overview of the situation of ECEC assistants in Europe based on the results of our study. Considering the main points of our questionnaire, we will present results on the percentage of assistants, their qualification, the competence profiles for the training and for the profession, the opportunities for continuous professional development, and the percentage of assistants with an ethnic-minority background. The data about assistants have been updated from information provided by the national experts in each country. For the data about core practitioners we rely on the CoRe study (2011) and on the SEEPRO study (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

2.1. Share of assistants in the ECEC workforce

Research on assistants remains very limited and this part of the ECEC workforce remains largely invisible in much of the international literature. The topic's absence in research and reports stands in stark contrast to the high numbers of assistants working in ECEC services. Each country involved in this study have assistants employed in the ECEC field, but the gathered data indicate great variations in how assistants are employed. In France, Slovenia and Lithuania, for instance, assistants represent approximately 50% of the workforce. In Sweden there are no statistics available but the number of assistants in the ECEC sector is estimated to be quite high (more or less 50%). In Denmark 60% of the ECEC workforce is represented by social pedagogy professionals and 40% by assistants. In Romania approximately 28% of the workforce is made by assistants. In the UK the number of nursery assistants/teaching assistants has doubled over the last fifteen years (Urban et al., 2011; Van Laere et al., 2012). More broadly, the last Eurydice report states that: 'in almost half of European countries, ECEC institutions may employ auxiliary staff/assistants to provide support to qualified education and care staff both in settings for younger and older children' (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014, p. 96). In other countries, assistants constitute a smaller share of the ECEC staff. Further research is needed to better understand the reasons for these differences.

An overview of the number of assistants in the EU countries selected for our study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Share of assistants in the countries selected for the study

COUNTRY	Age group	% ASSISTANTS
1. Belgium		
▪ Flemish speaking part	2,5-6 years old	9,42 %
	0-2,5 years old	0,4 %
▪ French speaking part	2,5-6 years old	8,9 %
2. Denmark		40 %
3. France	0-2,5 years old	N.A
	2,5-6 years old	50 %
4. Greece		N.A.
5. Ireland		N.A.
6. Lithuania		50 %
7. The Netherlands	4-12 years old	2,76 %
	0-4 years old	N.A.

COUNTRY	Age group	% ASSISTANTS
8. Poland	2-6 years old	2 %
9. Romania	0-7 years old	28 %
10. Slovenia	0-7 years old	50 %
11. Spain		N.A.
12. Sweden		N.A.
13. UK		50 %
14. Serbia		0,22 %
15. Germany		11,1 % ¹⁰

Note: N.A. = not available

Source: Expert estimate.

Note that in several countries, statistical information regarding the percentage of assistants is not available; this conforms to our claim that that assistants are often ‘invisible’ in the sense that they do not appear in official documents.

2.2. Qualification

A good initial qualification of the workforce is one of the elements that can improve quality in ECEC, especially when focusing on the development of complex competences needed to work with children and families (European Commission, 2013b; Urban et al., 2011; Vandebroek et al., 2016).

To get information about the initial qualification required for assistants, we referred to the ISCED classification (*International Standard Classification of Education*, 2011)¹¹.

Table 2 compares the qualification required for assistants with the ones required for core practitioners. As we can see in the table, assistants often require no qualification, or require a lower qualification compared to the one required by core practitioners. More specifically, Belgium (for 2.5–6-year-olds), Greece, Spain, France, the Netherlands (but just for 4–12-year-olds), Slovenia, Sweden, Serbia and the UK have specific qualification requirements for assistants. Slovenia and Sweden are the only countries that require from three to four years of upper secondary vocational qualification. In Slovenia this is the case for assistants, but not for Roma assistants (see Chapter 3).

In Sweden, the *barnskötare* complete a three-year upper secondary vocational training in childcare and leisure-time studies (ISCED 3A), enabling them to work as support staff in early childhood centres (*förskolan*) for 1-5-year-olds and in school-age childcare facilities. In Slovenia, the pedagogical assistants complete a four-year upper secondary qualification (ISCED 3) with a pedagogical focus on work in early childhood centres for 1-6-year-olds (Urban et al., 2011; Van Laere et al., 2012).

¹⁰ The case of Germany is particularly complex because of differences between the federal states. Additionally, the percentage given in the table refers exclusively to assistants; ‘assistants’, however, are categorised by Germany as members of a broader ‘auxiliary and complementary staff’, which also includes people in vocational training who are permitted to work as an assistant under supervision, and staff without qualification. All together, auxiliary and complementary staff make up 38,5 % of the entire ECEC workforce.

¹¹ The ISCED scale is structured as follows: ISCED level 1 – primary education; ISCED level 2 – lower secondary education; ISCED level 3 – upper secondary education; ISCED level 4 – post-secondary non tertiary education; ISCED level 5 – short-cycle tertiary education; ISCED level 6 – Bachelor’s or equivalent level; ISCED level 7 – Master’s or equivalent level; ISCED level 8 – Doctoral or equivalent level.

It should be noted that in Ireland there are significant changes emerging throughout the ECEC system, including the qualification required for assistants.

Table 2. Qualifications required for core practitioners and assistants

COUNTRY	ASSISTANTS		CORE PRACTITIONERS	
	Age group	Qualification	Age group	Qualification
1. Belgium				
▪ Flemish speaking	2,5-6	ISCED 3B	2,5-6 0-3	ISCED 5B ISCED 3B
▪ French speaking	2,5-6 2,5-6	no qualification ISCED 3B	2,5-6 0-3	ISCED 5B ISCED 3B
2. Denmark	0-6	no qualification	0-6	ISCED 5A/B
3. France	0-3 + 2,5-6	ISCED 3B	2,5-6 0-6	ISCED 5A ISCED 5B
4. Greece	0-6	ISCED 3A	4-6 0-6	ISCED 5A ISCED 5A/B
5. Ireland	0-5	no qualification	0-3 3-5 4-6	n.q. (about to change) ISCED 4-5 ISCED 6
6. Lithuania	1-6	no qualification	1-6	ISCED 5A/B
7. The Netherlands	4-12 4-12 special education 0-4	ISCED 4A no qualification no qualification	4-12 0-4	ISCED 5A/B ISCED ¾
8. Poland	3-6	no qualification	3-6 0-3	ISCED 5A/B ISCED 4A/C and 5B
9. Romania	0-7	no qualification	3-7 0-3	ISCED 5A/B ISCED 3A
10. Slovenia	0-7	ISCED 3	0-7	ISCED 6
11. Spain	0-6	ISCED 3A	0-6 0-3	ISCED 5A ISCED 4A
12. Sweden	1-7	ISCED 3A	1-7	ISCED 5A
13. UK (England and Wales)	0-5	ISCED 2	3-5 0-5	ISCED 5A ISCED 3 / ISCED 5
14. Serbia	0-3 + 3-6	ISCED 2	0-3 3-6	ISCED 4 ISCED 6
15. Germany	0-6	ISCED 3B	0-6	ISCED 5A/5B

Note: where 'no qualification' is required it means that no specific qualification is needed to start the job as assistant.
Source: Expert Estimate.

The issue is that very often assistants stay in the same professional position during their whole career, also because of the few adapted pathways towards qualification that are offered to them (see Chapter 3). Our study suggests that assistants don't necessary need to have a specific initial qualification for the job as assistant, but once they are hired, there needs to be an investment in attracting them towards a qualification. In Chapter 3 some concrete examples are given on how to make this possible through adapted pathways.

2.3. Professional and training competence profiles

Whether or not a country has specific professional and training competence profiles¹² can be categorized into four possibilities: 1) a competence profile exists both for the profession and for the training; 2) a competence profile exists for the profession but not for the training; 3) a competence profile exists for the training but not for the profession; 4) there is no competence profile for the training nor for the profession.

A competence profile exists for the profession and for the training

COUNTRIES:

1. France: the *CAP petite enfance* (0-3) and the *ATSEM Agent territorial spécialisé des écoles maternelles* (2,5-6)
2. The Netherlands: the *Onderwijsondersteuner* (4-12)
3. Slovenia: the *Pomočnik vzgojitelja*
4. Germany: the *staatlich geprüfte KinderpflegerInnen*, the *staatlich geprüfte oder anerkannte AssistentInnen im Sozialwesen*, the *gesundheitspflegerInnen*

France, Germany, the Netherlands and Slovenia are the only European countries from the 15 of this study that have both professional and training profiles for assistants. In Slovenia, professional standards and competences are defined only for professions with vocational training, not for professions whose training is provided by universities. Consequently, core practitioners have no professional competence profile, whereas assistants do. France is the only European country that has professional and training profiles for both core practitioners and assistants.

A competence profile exists for the profession but not for training

COUNTRIES:

1. Belgium, FR: the *Assistant aux instituteurs préscolaires* (2,5-6)

A competence profile exists for the training but not for the profession

COUNTRIES:

1. Belgium: the *begeleider kinderopvang* and the *puéricultrice*
2. The Netherlands: *groepshulp* (0-4)

In 2001 the Flemish Ministry of Education in Belgium moved to make children's transition between childcare/home and pre-school institutions smoother. For the youngest children in pre-school (2.5-3 year-olds), and only for limited hours per week, early childhood teachers (*kleuterleider*) receive support from a qualified childcare worker (*begeleider kinderopvang*) trained to ISCED level 3B. Whereas these childcare workers have a professional profile related to the services they provide children from birth until three, they do not have a professional profile describing the specific responsibilities and required competences for their work in pre-schools. Accordingly, their tasks and positions vary, largely dependent on the school that they happen to work in. The same happens with the *puéricultrice* in francophone Belgium.

¹² By 'competence profiles for the training' we refer to official competence requirements for the initial training. By 'competence profiles for the profession' we refer to official competence requirements related to the job.

No competence profile for the profession and for the training

COUNTRIES:

1. Belgium, FL: the *doelgroepwerknemer*
2. Denmark: the *Pædagogmedhjælper*
3. Greece: the *Voithos nipiorefokomou / voithos pedagogou*
4. Ireland: the *Community Worker – Community Employment Scheme*
5. Lithuania: the *Auklėtojos padėjėja*
6. Poland: the *Pomoc nauczyciela*
7. Romania: the *Ingrijitoare*
8. Spain: the *Técnico/técnica Educador o Asistente en educación infantil*
9. Sweden: the *Barnskötare*
10. United Kingdom (England and Wales): the *Nursery assistants/teaching assistants*
11. Serbia: the *Asistenti*

As we can see, the majority of the countries involved in this study do not have a competence profile for either the profession or for the training for assistants¹³. Table 3 is a summary of the situation for assistants, compared with that for core practitioners. Clearly, core practitioners are much more likely to have a competence profile for their training and profession than will assistants.

Table 3. Competence and training profiles of assistants and core practitioners

COUNTRY Assistants	Competence Profile Profession Assistants	Competence Profile Training Assistants	COUNTRY Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Profession Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Training Core Practitioners
1. Belgium FL <i>Begeleider kinderopvang (2,5-6)</i>	/	X	1. Belgium FL	X	X
<i>Doelgroepdeelnemer (0-3)</i>	/	X			
FR <i>Puéricultrice (2,5-6)</i>	X	X		FR	X
<i>Assistant aux instituteurs préscolaire (2,5-6)</i>	X	/			
2. Denmark <i>Pædagogmedhjælper (0-6)</i>	/	/	2. Denmark	/	X
3. France <i>Aide-auxiliaire (CAP petite enfance)</i>	X	X	3. France	X	X
<i>ATSEM (agent territorial</i>	X	X			

¹³ It needs to be noted that in countries such as Ireland and the UK, there are significant changes occurring throughout the ECEC system that will, to some extent, impact assistants.

COUNTRY Assistants	Competence Profile Profession Assistants	Competence Profile Training Assistants	COUNTRY Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Profession Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Training Core Practitioners
<i>spécialisé des écoles maternelles (2,5-6)</i>					
4. Greece <i>Voithos nipiorefokomou/voithos pedagogou</i>	/	/	4. Greece	/	X
5. Ireland <i>Community Worker – Community Employment Scheme (0-5)</i>	/	/	5. Ireland	/	X
6. Lithuania <i>Auklėtojos padėjėja (1-6)</i>	/	/	6. Lithuania	X	X
7. The Netherlands <i>Onderwijsondersteuner (4-12) / Klassenassistent (4-12, special education) Groepshulp (0-4)</i>	X X /	X / /	7. The Netherlands	X	X
8. Poland <i>Pomoc nauczyciela (3-6)</i>	/	/	8. Poland <i>Nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego opiekunka dziecięca</i>	/	X /
9. Romania <i>Ingrijitoare (0-7)</i>	/	/	9. Romania <i>profesori pentru învățământul preșcolar și primar, institutori învățământ preșcolar, educatoare asistente de pediatrie</i>	X /	/
10. Slovenia <i>Pomočnik vzgojitelja (0-7)</i>	X	X	10. Slovenia	X	/
11. Spain <i>Técnico/técnica Educador o Asistente en educación</i>	/	/	11. Spain	X	X

COUNTRY Assistants	Competence Profile Profession Assistants	Competence Profile Training Assistants	COUNTRY Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Profession Core Practitioners	Competence Profile Training Core Practitioners
<i>infantil (0-6)</i>					
12. Sweden <i>Barnskötare (1-7)</i>	/	/	12. Sweden	/	X
13. UK <i>Nursery assistants/teaching assistants (0-5)</i>	/	/	13. UK	X	X
14. Serbia <i>Asistenti</i>	/	/	14. Serbia	X	X
15. Germany <i>Staatlich geprüfte KinderpflegerInnen/ Staatlich geprüfte oder anerkannte AssistentInnen im Sozialwesen/ GesundheitspflegerInnen</i>	X	X	15. Germany	X	X

Note: X = presence (of competence profiles)
/ = absence (of competence profiles)

Source: Expert Estimate

2.3.1. What kinds of 'tasks'?

In the analysed countries where official descriptions of competences are available, the competences are often framed as technical or 'caring' tasks.

As stated in the last Eurydice report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014, p. 96): 'assistants usually implement activity programmes designed for children, prepare craft materials and assist children to use them'. They may also arrange daily routines such as preparing and serving meals, organising changeovers such as lunch breaks and rest periods, and guide children in their activities'.

In Lithuania, for instance, teacher assistants (*Auklėtojos padėjėja*) are described as technical workers, who are in charge of cleaning facilities, feeding children and other routines. In Romanian childcare centres and pre-schools, 'caregivers' (*Ingrijitoare*) work as 'assistants' alongside specialised medical nurses or pre-primary professionals. The caring staff is responsible for cleaning, supervising children, napping, snacking, and taking children to the toilet. In Spain the assistants (*Técnico/técnica o Asistente en educación infantil*) help the other staff give personal attention to pre-primary education pupils, especially in relation to their hygiene, diet and general well-being. In Poland the teacher assistants (*Pomoc nauczyciela*) support pre-primary professionals (*Nauczyciel przedszkolny*) in providing hygienic routine, dressing children for the outdoors, etc. In England, a nursery assistant will usually work alongside and under the supervision of a core practitioner. One local authority website states that nursery assistants 'would be responsible for planning and organising educational, fun activities as well as taking care of children's personal needs – for example, meal times and rests' (Wigan Borough Council, 2010). However, an 'occupational summary sheet' published by the Children's Workforce Development Council, which claimed to describe 'all early years workers in day nurseries', only mentions assistants in passing, and describes the extent of their role as working on teams with nursery staff (CWDC, 2008). An educational assistant's job is to assist the teacher in terms of organising materials, delivering parts of the lesson to children with special educational needs, helping individual children, and helping with discipline. In some local governments in Greece,

assistants (*Voithos nipiorefokomou / voithos vrefonipiokomou / voithos pedagogou*) have a clear professional competence profile, yet their role remains less specified at a national level because the assistants are not yet established.

In Denmark, Slovenia and Sweden, both core practitioners and assistants have a social pedagogical role which includes caring and teaching. The fact that these countries have a unitary system can partly explain why staff share roles.

In some countries, like the Netherlands and France, assistants, besides taking a supportive role in technical and caring tasks, are also responsible for pedagogical-didactical tasks. With the presence of an assistant, more individual learning processes can be initiated in a class.

When we consider the three possible teaching, bridging and caring roles of assistants that we identified and distinguished between in the introduction (Van Laere et al., 2012), it becomes apparent that:

- 1) Within the countries analysed in this study, the caring role is always present (Urban et al., 2011). Under this role, assistants support pre-school teachers by assuming caring duties, freeing up the core professional to focus on what is perceived to be 'real education', as if, once again, education and care could be divided following a non-holistic approach.
- 2) In some countries, such as Denmark, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK, the teaching role is also present. In some cases, assistants have a supporting role in the learning process of individual children (including those with special learning needs), whereas core practitioners have a teaching responsibility for the whole group. In Scandinavian countries, core practitioners have a social pedagogical role which encompasses learning and caring dimensions. Danish and Swedish assistants have a social-pedagogical role under the supervision of core practitioners.
- 3) Some countries, such as Belgium (Fl), Serbia and Slovenia also have a bridging role. These assistants are largely from poor local communities or ethnic minority communities. They are tasked with introducing their institution to families and local communities, and with enhancing the accessibility of services for vulnerable families. In Slovenia, Roma teaching assistants are also employed to raise the educational attainment of Roma children; in such cases, the bridging role is closely linked to the teaching role.

Compared to the learning and bridging roles, the caring role is usually addressed less in policy documents, a consequence of the concept of schoolification of ECEC and the accompanying division between care and education.

In sum, developing a professional identity can be difficult for assistants. They see themselves as having a role in 'assisting' teachers, and although they often take care of many daily aspects concerning children and families, the competences and experiences used for this work are rarely valued or articulated as part of a distinctive professional profile (Van Laere et al., 2012). They are often perceived as 'technical' workers that deal with the 'caring' part of education, in order to allow to core practitioners to focus on 'teaching', which is seen as 'real education'. It should be noted that even in cases where regulations or workplace conditions give recognition to the position and competences of assistants, the risk remains that they may continue to be perceived as being simply technical workers.

This current framework would clearly benefit from a reorientation to the holistic view of education. That said, having a clear competence profile for assistants does seem to contribute to continuity of professional development and professional identity. On the other hand, the downside of continuity may be lack of innovation. Clarity may result in overly technical specifications, leaving little room for reflexivity. A clearly defined professional identity may lead to a closing off of the profession to outside influences.

Developing broad competence profiles, which leave enough room for local interpretations and adaptations, appears to be a valuable option for dealing with these dilemmas (Urban et al., 2011).

2.4. Continuous professional development

Although the initial education of the ECEC workforce is crucial, competent systems also give a high priority to continuous professional development. The competences of ECEC staff can be improved, not only by increasing the official entry level requirements of the job position, but by also providing existing staff with CPD opportunities (Urban et al., 2011; Vandebroek et al., 2016; Peeters et al., 2015b). Better yet, if these CPD opportunities expose staff to critical co-reflection, staff will develop new learning practices that meet the needs of each of their specific social contexts. To achieve this, investment must be placed in non-contact paid hours, to be used by staff for team meetings and co-reflection.

Many EU countries still do not fund non-contact time for staff, and when this time is scheduled, it usually involves just core practitioners, rarely assistants. In general, assistants have far fewer opportunities to engage in professional development activities, and they miss time (in terms of non-contact hours) to meet and plan together with core practitioners (Barkham, 2008). In fact, those with the lowest levels of initial qualification are likely to have the least chance of participating in professional development activities on a regular basis (Oberhuemer et al., 2010, p. 497).

For example, in Denmark, there are no national regulations that cover the professional development of all staff. When some local municipalities do have official regulations, the latter refer solely to core practitioners (*Pædagog*). Non-contact time for planning and pedagogical documentation is included in the agendas of core practitioners, who can count on a couple of hours each week to attend meetings and analyse documentation. However, non-contact time is not included in the agendas of assistants (*Pædagogmedhjælper*). In the same way, whereas most Spanish early childhood centres (*Escuela de educación infantil*) provide teachers (*Maestro/maestra especialista en educación infantil*) with non-contact time for planning and documentation, it is less usual for assistants (*Técnico/técnica o Asistente en educación infantil*), despite having the same working schedule. In Lithuania, teachers (*Auklėtojas/auklėtoja*) are allotted five days per year for professional development, whereas their assistants (*Auklėtojos padėjėjas/padėjėja*) are allotted none since they are not considered to be 'educational' staff. There is a similar tendency in Romania and Poland.

This is the general picture, yet there are notable exceptions. In the Netherlands and in France, all ECEC practitioners, irrespective of their profile, have the same opportunities and obligations regarding professional development, at least in theory. For instance, in the Netherlands, assistants (*Onderwijsondersteuner*) are offered the same training opportunities as teachers (*Leraar basisonderwijs*). However, it has been pointed out by some experts (e.g. Slovenia) that more effort needs to be made to ensure assistants take advantage of these opportunities: when practical problems or limited budgets force choices, priority tends to be given to the professional development of core practitioners.

The growing number of low qualified and low paid assistants may also jeopardise the professionalisation of the workforce in general, especially in times of budgetary restraints. In response to this challenge, some countries have emphasised the importance of systemic team aspects: such as collaboration between teachers and assistants, and shared training initiatives. Such a focus on teamwork exists, for example, in the profile for Slovenian early childhood assistants (*Pomočnik vzgojitelja*) and for Dutch assistants of the pre-primary professional (*Onderwijsondersteuner*). In Slovenia, teacher assistants participate in five mandatory days of training per year. Moreover, both teachers and assistants are entitled to extra time to jointly prepare, plan and evaluate activities. The effect of this kind of investment is underlined by a Canadian study (Gibson et al., 2012) that investigates the teaching structure of early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers in 'full-day early learning-kindergarten' classrooms. The

authors found that classrooms with equally shared responsibilities, compared with classrooms with a hierarchical relationship (in which one teacher acts as the lead teacher and the other takes on an assistant role), are of higher quality.

For some countries it is difficult to get a clear answer about the presence of CPD activities for assistants. In our sample, this is primarily due to several countries for which there are no relevant official national regulations, and in which local authorities autonomously decide whether to permit and require assistants to participate in CPD activities.

2.5. Diversity within the workforce

As stated in a recent report about diversity in the teaching profession (European Commission, 2015b, p. 1), 'schools and teachers are increasingly struggling to cope with the diverse needs of their multicultural learning population [...]. Increasing diversity within the teaching profession is one potential response to the evolving needs of learners'.

One of the questions of our study referred to the origins of assistants. More specifically, we asked the percentage of assistants with an ethnic-minority background, and if no statistics were available, we asked the experts involved if we could assume that many assistants have indeed this background or a low socio-economic position in society. The presence within the assistants of a high percentage of people with these kinds of background could have two interesting consequences:

- 1) Assistant is a profession that may 'attract' newcomers or people with a lower socio-economic status. This can represent a challenge in the European context, meaning that investing in assistants' professionalisation could mean investing in policy employment related to migrant population or to people with a low socio-economic status;
- 2) The mere presence of assistants on teams can increase their diversity. Such diversity should be encouraged, since it can allow ECEC teams to more successfully engage with diverse groups of children and parents. Working in a diverse team that is capable of celebrating the differences amongst themselves (in terms of qualifications, socio-cultural background, gender etc.) gives each team member the opportunity to experiment with negotiation and democracy. As mentioned earlier, pedagogical support/coaching, and in-service training of a sufficient intensity and length that involves the whole staff, can have big effects on this aspect, and thus on the quality of ECEC services (Lazzari et al., 2013; Peeters et al., 2015b).

Workers with a particular ethnic-cultural background can more effectively communicate with parents and children from the same background as their own (European Commission, 2015b). It is important, however, to avoid problems such as the ones noted by two small-scale studies on assistants with a bridging role (see 2.6.). Depoorter (2006) and Mihajlović and Trikić (2010). Both studies found that *Doelgroepwerknemers* ('employees from a socio-cultural target group') in Belgium (FL) and *Roma teaching assistants* in Slovenia were largely hired because of the problems that core practitioners encountered in communicating with families with an ethnic-minority background and with families living in poverty. But, their employment tended to reinforce the perceived obstacles to communication because to some extent the presence of assistants hardened the 'division' between between these families and core practitioners, and between these families and the other families (Van Laere et al., 2012). This is a compelling reason for investing in CPD for the whole staff. It is important to include all staff in continuous professional development, during which all participants are given opportunities to co-reflect on their roles. Practitioners and assistants need to follow their professional path together, in order to develop a coherent vision and coherent actions to meet the growing diversity of children and families.

None of the countries of our study collect data about the presence of assistants with an ethnic minority background in the ECEC sector. Some of the experts involved say that we could assume that the majority of assistants have an ethnic minority background. This trend seems to be particularly true in Greece, France, Slovenia, and Sweden, according to our experts. In France, this is true especially in big cities like Lyon, Marseille, Paris, Lille. In Serbia, nearly all ‘pedagogical assistants’ are Roma. In Sweden, the trend is mainly attributable to their need for multilingual staff, and to the shortage of qualified ECEC core practitioners.

Other experts assert that in cases where many children and families have an ethnic-minority background, both teachers and assistants are representative of that background: this happens for example in Lithuania, when the languages of the ECEC services are Russian and Polish.

In Poland, experts told us that people with ethnic-minority background don’t usually work in the education system, neither as practitioners nor as assistants.

For the other countries, experts were not confident enough to assume that assistants often have an ethnic-minority background or a lower socio-economic position in society.

The issue is complex. More research is certainly warranted, since experts claim that the presence of assistants support the diversity within teams and facilitate engagement with children and families. In some cases it also seems that families with a low socio-economic background feel more ‘at ease’ when talking to assistants (rather than to core practitioners); this is likely because they feel ‘closer’ to them. This sentiment was recorded by a Belgian study commissioned by the King Boudouin Foundation, conducted in francophone Belgium (Crépin, Neuberg, 2013). The study explored the relationship between ECEC services and families from a vulnerable background, and discovered that ‘some mothers – write the researchers – say that they prefer to have contacts with other people rather than with the core practitioners: the assistant, the cleaning staff [...]. The feeling of ‘being closer’ makes the contact easier’ (Crépin, Neuberg, 2013, p. 11).

As stated in the European Quality Framework (ECEC Thematic Group on ECEC, 2014, p. 33): ‘increasing the recruitment of staff from diverse backgrounds and, when required, helping them to progressively upgrade their qualifications (to secondary and tertiary levels) significantly benefits children, and particularly those from poor and migrant families’.

This theme needs to be better explored in European countries, beginning with gathering data about the socio-cultural background of assistants and about the type of interactions they have with families and children.

If diversity amongst staff is a key commitment for the ECEC system, gender diversity should also be taken into account. As stated in the last Eurydice report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014, p. 98): ‘the ECEC profession is still predominantly female according to national statistics. Many countries have estimated that nearly all ECEC staff working in direct contact with children are women. [...] Denmark is unique in having men in 23 % of assistant positions, and 15 % in teaching roles (Mehr Männer in Kitas)’.

Denmark¹⁴ gives notable examples in this direction; the training for core practitioners is based on a generalist approach that gives pedagogues the possibility of moving between different fields during their careers, which seems to better attract men compared with a profession specifically addressed to one

¹⁴ Although we do not analyze Norway, there is a similar trend there. Like in Denmark, in Norway the bachelor degree for pedagogues has a generalist approach. From Scotland, we know that it is important for male assistants to have contact with other male core practitioners during their pathway towards qualification. Therefore it is important to link them to networks of male educators or teachers (Spence, 2012; Peeters, 2013; Peeters et al., 2015a; 2015b).

sector. This training is also open to assistants through a particular bridge building course, and through a specific quota system for experienced but untrained workers (see 3.2.1.).

2.6. Discussion

Our study confirms the results of the CoRe study (2011; 2016), pointing out that assistants in the ECEC sector (0-6) generally have low or no qualification, no competence profile for the profession and for the training, less opportunities for continuous professional development than core practitioners, and insufficient time to plan and co-reflect in teams.

Our research into the socio-cultural background of assistants exposed the need for countries to start collecting relevant data. The views of our experts revealed an urgent need for a deeper understanding of the issue due to its impact on 1) employment policy for migrant populations and people with a low socio-economic status; and 2) the quality of the ECEC system in an increasingly diverse society. Taking into account gender diversity is also fundamentally important; men are underrepresented in the ECEC sector, and the assistant roles may present an opportunity to involve them. Studies also indicate that the diversity assistants bring to teams can support vulnerable families (Crépin and Neuberg, 2013). To promote and advance our knowledge of these issues, data on the background of assistants needs to be collected, especially related to their gender, their socio-economic background and their ethnic-cultural background.

We also confirmed that the role of assistant is primarily perceived of as concerning children's physical and emotional needs, as addressing the learning needs of children who differ from the 'average' (i.e. children with special needs or children with an ethnic minority background), and as connecting with parents. Each is a fundamental element of education/care, and they are at risk of becoming undervalued tasks when divided into a hierarchy between care and education (Catarsi and Freschi, 2013).

One could hypothesise that core practitioners do not feel competent to deal with these elements, and claim that assistants are therefore required to fill in the gaps. If this is the case, including relevant training for core practitioners during their initial qualification would help remedy this. Even more effectively, building strong paths of continuous professional development would enable whole teams to grow in their competences through co-reflection (Peeters et al., 2015b) (see recommendations n. 3 and 6).

The fact that assistants are predominantly viewed as technical workers with caring duties has two major and interconnected consequences. First, it means that caring tasks are considered to be of lower value than education (Ortlipp et al., 2011), and the educational value of these caring activities may even be denied. Second, it also implies that a narrow view of education (as 'formalised learning') prevails. This results in a separation of care and education (even in some 'integrated' or 'unitary' systems), and therefore undermines the holistic approach to young children's education. It seems that in several countries, assistants take care of the physical needs of children who are thought to distract other students from what is considered 'real learning', and interfering with the 'real' task of the teacher or educator. This decontextualized approach to learning may result in situations when during crucial moments—contact with parents, meal time, and free playtime among peers—low or unqualified assistants are solely responsible, thereby effectively downgrading the educational value of these moments. In other words, 'care' has come to be seen as a simple matter that 'women naturally do', and which does not require any specific training or professional development. Important interactions such as feeding, putting children to bed, and accompanying them to the toilet, are stripped of their educational value. These perceptions reduce education to cognitive development, leading to a lack of continuity in the child's care and education (Van Laere et al., 2012).

An investment in good initial education and a strong path of continuous professional development, accompanied by pedagogical guidance, could greatly advance the holistic approach of education and care that recognises the educative role of caring and the caring role of education (Hayes, 2007, 2008).

Chapter 3: Good practices: examples of successful pathways towards qualification and CPD for assistants

3.1. Opportunities for assistants in some European Countries

Despite the general picture, some countries have invested in: 1) specific pathways to give to assistants the possibility of raising their qualification; and 2) opportunities of continuous professional development for assistants.

In the following sections we will give a detailed overview of the measures taken in some EU countries concerning qualification and CPD for assistants. We will focus on three countries that showed particularly interesting practices in the cases they submitted for the CoRe study, which have been updated and recently republished in the book *Pathways to professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2016). The information obtained through the case studies has been further integrated with the help of the key contact people in each country.

The chosen countries are Denmark, Slovenia and France:

- Denmark gives an interesting example concerning the initial qualification;
- Slovenia, besides having quite a high initial qualification for assistants, is investing in CPD for all staff;
- France has built up an innovative path towards qualification for low qualified professionals who wish to connect work and study.

3.2. Examples of pathways towards qualification and continuous professional development

3.2.1. Denmark: measures for the initial qualification¹⁵

3.2.1.1. ECEC in Denmark: the context

As stated by Jensen (2016), Denmark has a unitary system of ministerial responsibility from birth to five years old under the auspices of the Ministry for Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs (returned to Social Affairs in 2013, following two years under Education). Early childhood services are provided for all children and now offer nearly universal coverage. Each child has the right to a place from the age of six months, if their parents wish it.

The staff of early childhood services consists of two occupational groups working in centre-based institutions: pedagogues and ‘pedagogical co-helpers’ (*pædagogmedhjælper*). There is no clear distinction between the tasks and functions of the two groups. Pedagogues, broadly speaking, have overall responsibility, including the right to delegate pedagogical learning processes to the co-helpers. Almost all heads/leaders of the centres are qualified pedagogues. It is considered a benefit that those leading the work are qualified in the profession.

¹⁵ This section is mainly based on the case study on Denmark reported by Jutte Juul Jensen in the book *Pathways to professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care*, edited by Michel Vandenbroeck, Mathias Urban and Jan Peeters (2016). The section has been supervised by Stig Lund (BUPL – Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators).

Since the 1970s, the decision-making structure in Danish early childhood centres has been flat and non-hierarchical. Recently, there has been some reversal in this characteristic of Danish centres as heads have been upgraded, partly because they are the group of pedagogues that have held the most master qualifications. The heads/leaders have also become more and more conscious of the difference between pedagogues and pedagogical co-helpers.

3.2.1.2. *The qualification of ECEC staff*

Denmark has provided a specific education for the profession of pedagogue (*pædagog*) since 1992. In 2001 it became a professional bachelor degree, and was last reformed in 2014. It is a three and a half year programme at higher education level (Jensen, 2016). In 1997 Denmark introduced an initial (optional) training for pedagogical assistants. From 2009 it was called the Pedagogical Assistant Training (*Pædagogisk Assistent Uddannelse, PAU*); it is a post-16 upper secondary vocational course.

There has been a continuous effort to raise the competence level of staff in early childhood centres and today 60 % of the staff are pedagogues with a bachelor degree – a high level compared to many countries in Europe (Oberhuemer et al., 2010). Furthermore, there has been a tradition of having a specific education separate from school teachers, with a generic pedagogue professional core that is applicable not only for working in early childhood centres and out of school care, but in many other welfare institutions.

The current Danish education of pedagogues is a mixture of generalist and specialist areas, and has its historical roots in three separate, specialized pedagogue educations: kindergarten pedagogue, leisure-time pedagogue and social pedagogue. In 1992 the three pedagogue educations merged into a single education. The generalist education gave pedagogues the possibility of moving between different pedagogical work fields during their careers. In addition, this generalist approach is one of the reasons why the pedagogue profession has attracted a relatively high number of men.

In 2001 the education of pedagogues was upgraded to bachelor level. A reform was made in 2007 re-introducing a mild degree of specialization. A reform in 2014 has taken this process further, turning towards a more specialized pedagogue education. The education today consists of two parts: a common part on basic professional competences (70 ECTS) and a specialization part (140 ECTS), so it combines a generalist first year with subsequent specialization into:

- 1) Early childhood pedagogy, aimed at pedagogical work with children aged from birth to five years;
- 2) School and leisure pedagogy, aimed at pedagogical work with school children and young people aged between six and 18 years;
- 3) Social and special pedagogy, aimed at pedagogical work with children and young people with special needs and people with physical or mental disabilities or social problems.

In the common part there is a placement period of 10 ECTS points. The specialization course also consists of an inter-professional course, a bachelor project and three placement periods.

The education takes place in University Colleges (*professionshøjskoler*) and the programmes are recognized and financed by the Ministry of Education and Research. The Ministry provides a subsidy to cover direct teaching costs, a so-called ‘taximeter subsidy’ per student laid down in the yearly Finance Act. The 2014 ministerial decree (*Bekendtgørelse*, 2014) on the study programme for the award of Bachelor in Social Education regulates the pedagogue education in Denmark and is supplemented by each University College’s specific course syllabus. Individual University Colleges, therefore, have significant freedom to develop local variations in their study programmes.

The pedagogue education is a popular choice and an attractive profession among young people in Denmark. Each year around 5,000 students are enrolled and many are rejected. In terms of numbers, it is the largest higher education sector in the country. There are no tuition fees for the course as is the case for most higher education in Denmark. During their studies the students receive from the central government a student grant of 791 EUR a month, which may be supplemented by a loan of 409 EUR a month (2015 sources).

Some University Colleges have a building-bridge course, which is an access or pre-course for people with ethnic minority backgrounds. Most of the students on these courses continue on to enter pedagogue education, which counts today 5 % of students with an ethnic minority background.

3.2.1.3. Possibilities for assistants

The above mentioned building-bridge course represents an interesting pathway towards qualification for assistants as well, especially when considering that they often have an ethnic minority background.

In Denmark, working as an assistant can also be seen as an important recruitment base for future pedagogue students. No formal professional education is required for assistants. Most of them are young people between 19 and 25 years old who want to spend a year or two working before beginning their studies. The job is quite popular with young people because it is quite well paid and is a responsible job with children (Jensen, 2016).

Some of the assistants begin pedagogue education afterwards. In fact, most pedagogue students have been pedagogue co-helpers before taking up their studies. In 2009 a survey concluded that work experience motivates people for education: a pedagogue co-helper is five times more likely to start pedagogue education than a person without work experience in an ECEC institution (Urban et al., 2011).

More specifically, in Denmark each year the Ministry of Education decides the number of pedagogue students to be recruited. The entry requirements are based on a quota system. The first quota takes in students with the highest grade in upper secondary examination. The second quota makes possible a variety of entry routes based on assessment of competences and qualifications. The third quota refers to the merit-based bachelor programme aimed at experienced but untrained workers. This offers to assistants (pedagogical co-helpers) a chance to become qualified pedagogues. It is equivalent to 150 ECTS credits, after achieving which students are awarded the title of pedagogue, having been credited for their previous practical experience with pedagogical work. Oberhuemer, Schreyer and Neuman (2010, p. 108) characterize this entry route as 'an inclusive approach, with flexible entry routes for mature students with prior learning and employment experience'.

Pedagogue students in Denmark differ widely in terms of age, sex and ethnicity. The education of pedagogues has been able to attract a relatively large number of male students, 25 % of the current total, the highest ever percentage. Male pedagogues do not work in large numbers in early childhood centres, preferring out-of-school facilities, clubs, residential care and services for adults with disabilities. The percentage of male workers in centres for children under three years is 7 %. In centres for three to six year old children and in age-integrated institutions for children from birth to six years old, it is a bit higher, at 11 % and 13 % respectively (*Danmarks Statistik*, 2010). Those percentages, however, also include pedagogue co-helpers, and many institutions prefer to employ young male workers in this role.

3.2.1.4. Risk of deprofessionalisation of the ECEC workforce

In Denmark a discussion goes on about the fact that the professionalisation of low- or non-qualified assistants may threaten the professionalisation of their more qualified colleagues. In 1997 Denmark introduced the previously mentioned initial training for pedagogical assistants, which from 2009 was called the Pedagogical Assistant Training (*Pædagogisk Assistent Uddannelse, PAU*) – post-16 upper

secondary vocational course. The Danish Trade Union of Pedagogues, BUPL, for example, states that the introduction of vocational training for pedagogue assistants is a threat because it is an inferior rival to pedagogue education. In Denmark, but also in France, there is a fear that budgetary measures could favour the influx of unskilled or low-skilled (and less costly) assistants, reducing the ratio of qualified workers.

3.2.1.5. *Strengths and critical points*

Strengths

In sum, the interesting measures taken in Denmark concerning possibilities of qualification for assistants are:

- A specific entry point for initial qualification reserved to experienced but untrained workers;
- A specific building-bridge course, which is an access or pre-course for people with ethnic minority backgrounds;
- A generalist approach, which seems to attract a good percentage of male students, which have often been previously employed as assistants.

Besides giving opportunities for initial qualification, these measures can support building diversity in the ECEC staff in gender, social and cultural terms.

Critical points

This potential for diversity needs to be supported by a well-designed plan of continuous professional development that can involve the whole staff in moments of common reflection, trainings, etc. This doesn't exist yet officially in Denmark.

3.2.2. Slovenia: a growing path for the whole team through continuous professional development¹⁶

3.2.2.1. *ECEC in Slovenia: the context*

As stated by Tatjana Vonta (2016), Slovenia has established an integrated system of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for children from one to six years old, combining education, play and care in preschool institutions. Preschools are established and financed by municipalities and parent contributions (from 0 to 80 %, depending on their income), from the national budget (for specific purposes, like transport of preschool children) and from donations and other sources. Preschool institutions are organised into first (one to three years old) and second age groups (three to six years old).

A preschool teacher and a preschool teacher's assistant make up the classroom staff. In a full-day programme, they work simultaneously in the classroom for at least four to six hours, depending on the age group. In a half-day programme, they work simultaneously in the classroom for two to three hours depending on the age group. A preschool teacher should work directly with children for 30 hours per week and a teacher's assistant for 35 hours per week. Preschool teachers should hold an advanced two-year studies qualification (ISCED level 5, abolished in 1992), a higher education degree (ISCED level 6) in preschool education (in place since 1995) or a university degree (ISCED level 7) in preschool education or some other field (pedagogy, humanities, sociology) with a specialisation in a program for advanced

¹⁶ This section is mainly based on the case study on Slovenia reported by Tatjana Vonta in the book *Pathways to professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care*, edited by Michel Vandebroek, Mathias Urban and Jan Peeters (2016). The section has been supervised by Tatjana Vonta and Jerneja Jager (Developmental Research Centre for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step, Educational Research Institute, Slovenia).

training in education. Preschool teachers can also teach children in the first grade of compulsory school together with a primary school teacher. The required qualification for a preschool teacher's assistant is an upper secondary vocational qualification in preschool education (ISCED 3) or general upper secondary school and pass a vocational course on working with preschool children (Državni zbor, 1996). Additionally, in environments with populations of Roma children, a Roma assistant should be involved in preschools and primary schools (Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, 2004b). The Roma assistant is not required to hold an ISCED level 3 qualification, but he/she needs to have specific qualification requirements: 1) finish at least the 9 years of compulsory elementary school; 2) 6 months of work experience with representatives of the Romani community; 3) oral and written knowledge of the Slovenian language; and 4) oral knowledge of Romani language/dialect. Usually Roma assistants obtain their competences to work in ECEC services within the framework of different projects, mostly financed by European Social Fund.

Concerning their roles, preschool teachers take on the role of having a broad awareness of what is going on in the classroom, while assistants take on responsibilities for individual children by meeting individual needs, encouraging and praising individual children, providing help and explanations for individual children, etc.

3.2.2.2. CPD (continuous professional development) for the whole staff

In Slovenia, according to the Collective agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia (Kolektivna pogodba, 1994), both teachers and teacher assistants are obliged to participate in five days of training per year or 15 days every three years. Moreover, assistants and teachers are entitled to non-contact time to enable them to prepare, plan and evaluate activities together. This measure gives a vital opportunity to the staff to grow together, taking into account the differences that exist in the staff itself (of qualification, of social and ethnic background, etc.). When time and support for common reflection is planned, staff have the opportunity to 'think' about its practice, to change it if necessary, to improve it through reflection. In Slovenia these opportunities are established, but the effective realization of them depends for a big part on each specific preschool, and more specifically on each head teacher. Some schools assign great value to this approach, and organize group-reflection meetings, observations in the classrooms which are discussed by the team afterwards, daily one-to-one meetings between the assistant and the teacher, etc. Sometimes the one-to-one meetings need to take place when children are resting, otherwise it would be difficult to replace the staff.

Through further continuous professional development (CPD), staff can gain additional points (if training is accredited), which are taken into account for advancement opportunities. Preschool teachers can be promoted to mentor, adviser and councillor. In order to achieve those titles, they collect points defined by the Collective agreement for the Education Sector (mostly for participation in training, projects, professional conferences, publishing articles, organising events with children, etc.). Unfortunately, the gained titles are permanent and to some extent influence only an increase of income but have no influence on working obligations. The fact that professional titles are permanent and unchangeable does not encourage CPD and needs to be changed. Furthermore, there is no promotional system for teachers' assistants (Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, 2002), and the salary of a preschool teacher is much higher than the salary of a teacher's assistant.

By law (Državni zbor, 1994), the head teacher is responsible for promoting the professional development of staff, observing their practice, monitoring and consulting them, and ensuring and monitoring quality through self-evaluation. Further education and training for staff is provided in accordance with the national Regulation (Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport, 2004a). The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport financially supports various courses like further training, professional training, thematic conferences, study groups, networks and computer literacy courses. Some of those courses are free of charge and some have to be paid for, in most cases by preschools and seldom by participants. Course providers

include higher education institutions, the National Education Institute, the Educational Research Institute, the School for Headmasters and non-profit and private organisations.

3.2.2.3. *Roma assistants: examples from a case study*

As mentioned before, in environments with Romani children, a Roma assistant should be involved in order to support the inclusion of Romani children into the preschool and primary school, to help them to overcome language difficulties, to facilitate the communication with the parents and to include the Roma culture and language into the curriculum.

To better understand the possible roles of a Roma assistant, we quote here part of the case study realized by the Slovenian colleagues for the CoRe study and recently republished. The case study has been reported by Tatjana Vonta (2016) and it refers to observations and interviews with the staff of a preschool in which a Roma assistant is employed: 'the Roma assistant was present in the classroom for four hours two days per week; on other days she was involved in similar activities in the primary classes. At the time when our study took place, the Slovenian Roma Association employed her at this school within the framework of European Social Found project, in which they offered Roma assistants training in psychology, didactics, pedagogy, standard Slovenian language, ICT, inclusion of children with special needs, etc. in order to introduce them into the school system. The working time of the Roma assistant is from 7 A.M. until 3 P.M. every day' (Vonta, 2016, p. 80). The case study also underlined that the teacher's assistant expressed a strong wish to join any kind of training. The professional education of the Roma assistant took place within the project provided by the Slovenian Roma Association. It is important to note that in this specific case, the preschool teacher and assistant did not take part in CPD together, because it was difficult to get a replacement for both of them at the same time. The Roma assistant took part in team meetings for the entire preschool staff, where mostly general issues were discussed, but she didn't take part in daily reflection moments' (Vonta, 2016).

The concrete opportunities and roles of Roma assistants vary according to the service/school where they work. In the above mentioned case, although the opportunities are there, since the assistant doesn't take part in daily reflection moments, there is a lack in the involvement of this specific assistant in a common reflection path with her colleagues. In other schools, where directors invest specifically in CPD, the situation can be very different.

3.2.2.4. *Strengths and critical points*

Strengths

The strengths in the Slovenian experience, concerning assistants are:

- A competence profile for the profession and the training;
- A promotional system for core practitioners, which needs to be adapted to assistants as well;
- Possibilities of continuous professional development for the whole staff, assistants included, which give the opportunity to reflect together and, by so doing, to valorise the diversity that exists within the team. As Tatjana Vonta underlines (2016, p. 82), 'work in early childhood classrooms is an integrated activity, and in the child's best interest we cannot separate it into education, care, health, eating, resting, etc. In order to implement all those activities in an integrated manner, staff have to have opportunities for analysing, discussing, negotiating, making agreements, planning and coordinating professional issues and the division of labour amongst themselves'.

Critical points

- Despite the fact that there are national regulations that promote professional development for the whole staff, there are large differences in terms of its implementation in practice. School management

entities play an extremely important role in this process. In some cases, the director chooses to send the teacher to seminars and not the assistant.

- In practice, time for critical reflection is often reserved in a haphazard way, for example when the children are resting, which can give the impression that this activity is not a priority. There should be enough childfree time planned and paid both for teachers and assistants.
- In many cases, Roma assistants are not sufficiently involved in CPD activities and in meetings with teachers.
- A strong system of pedagogical guidance is lacking. This system, made by pedagogical coordinators, would 'accompany' the staff in a common path of CPD, by supporting their reflection moments, with the aim of constantly connecting theory and practice.
- There is no promotional system for teachers' assistants.
- It should also be noted that involving staff with a specific ethnic minority background is a complex matter: on one hand it can increase the diversity of staff. On the other hand, as already mentioned in Chapter 2, when hiring assistants from ethnic minorities and/or poor backgrounds, programmes may reinforce the very communication gaps they were intended to eliminate (Depoorter, 2006). Also in this case, the presence of pedagogical guidance and of a common CPD path appears as fundamental.

3.2.3. France: investing in initial qualification for low qualified professionals¹⁷

3.2.3.1. ECEC in France: the context

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in France is organized in a split system (0 to 2,5 and 2,5 to 6). The system is characterised by a great variety of different professionals, each with a different training (Mony, 2002). In the last years, in childcare centres (*crèches*), there has been an increase in the number of unqualified or low-qualified workers (assistants: *aide auxiliaire CAP petite enfance - 0 to 3 - and ATSEM, agent territorial specialise des écoles maternelles*), expected to collaborate with qualified colleagues (core practitioners). More specifically, in childcare centres, the law mandates that 40% of staff must be qualified and 60% not. The *auxiliaire CAP petite enfance* belong to this last category.

Because of the increasing number of assistants, important investments are made to establish a shared culture among qualified and low-qualified workers, including a common body of knowledge on child development, a shared vision on parent participation and shared methods, such as observation.

3.2.3.2. Qualification roads for ECEC staff

As stated by Thollon Behar and Mony (2016), despite the heterogeneity of the workforce, and despite the prevailing discourses on lifelong learning, there are very limited possibilities for horizontal or vertical job mobility.

In 1988 the *Association des Collectifs Enfants Parents Professionnels* (ACEPP), a French national network of about 1.000 parent-led day care centres (*crèches parentales*), initiated a qualification process for its young employees without diploma: the EJE (*éducateur jeunes enfants*). From the start, the national network of ACEPP negotiated with policy makers on inclusive measures to enable youngsters who had previously dropped out to access higher education through the recognition of acquired competences. As a result, funding was made available for training and for inter-institutional coordination between all partners of this inclusive training project. This included eight training centres, the regional coordination centres of ACEPP, and the *Collège Cooperatif Rhône-Alpes* of Lyon, a training centre specialised in

¹⁷ This section is mainly based on the case study about France reported by Marie Paule Thollon Behar and Myriam Mony in the book *Pathways to professionalism in Early Childhood Education and Care*, edited by Michel Vandenberg, Mathias Urban and Jan Peeters (2016). The section has been supervised by Myriam Mony.

including workers with limited initial education and working in close cooperation with the *Ecole de Santé Sociale du Sud-Est* (ESSSE) to develop projects that alternate between work and training.

3.2.3.3. Possibilities for assistants

The *Ecole de Santé Sociale du Sud-Est* in Lyon (France) offers a special qualifying training, which enables professionals with low qualifications (for example, assistants) to enter a graduate course and obtain the diploma of *éducateur jeunes enfants* (EJE), a three-year long post-secondary school diploma, while remaining in their employment during the entire training period (salaried students). The EJE have a particular role in the childcare services. Often, they are in charge of the pedagogical dimension of the team. They can also be the managers of the team (Ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité, 2000). As a consequence, the EJE training for professionals with low qualifications enables them to access a more prestigious profession and attain higher salaries. In this case, because students remain paid and in full-time employment, there are particular opportunities and challenges in relating theory and practice, especially through the method of *analyse des pratiques* (analyses of daily practices), which enables students and professionals to share reflection moments on practice. ESSSE yearly serves 85 regular students and an additional 30 'salaried students', which are early years workers who alternate their work with the qualifying EJE training.

The employer and/or the state provides the funding. Students can enter the training through a competitive intake examination, which is the same for all future students. The salaried students stay together in a separate group and do not mix with the 'regular' students. They benefit from a specific pedagogy (Pueyo, 2004), as they alternate three weeks per month at work and one week in the training centre. Being in a separate group enables the teachers to devise the learning experience in relation with practice through group support, *analyses de pratiques* ('analysis of practices') and workshops on pedagogical practices. There are two additional groups for the salaried students: one to support writing capacities and one on computer use. Considering that some of the salaried students left school at an early age, these additional groups have the potential to significantly improve their academic skills.

During training, a 'tutor', who is an educator in the employer's team (and thus a colleague at the workplace), accompanies the student, and a 'reference trainer' supports the student in the training centre. At the end of the training, all students, whether regular or salaried, take the same state exam at the same time.

From the interviews with the students made for the CoRe case study and recently updated (Thollon Behar and Mony, 2016), the students unanimously agreed that the training makes it possible to link theory and practice and that the knowledge process becomes easier because it is based on a strong practice. But the process also includes a phase of destabilization, especially for salaried students. The challenge is that students need to acquire a diploma for their job mobility, while being salaried in their initial work. This means that their professional identity has to change over the three and half years, while in their practice, for their team and for both the colleagues and the employer, they keep the same professional position. It is a delicate balance for the person who undergoes these changes and it is often a source of internal, and inter-relational conflicts. In addition, the student needs to find the right place between being employed and being in training, since the workplace is used as a training place too (i.e. as an internship site).

As we said, *analyse de pratiques* ('analysis of practices') can be of a great help in this, because it is based on group reflection on practice, and the group itself can be a support. In practice, the reference groups meet each time they are back at the training centre, sharing experiences, guided by a psychologist.

From the CoRe case study it emerges that the whole team benefits from the training of one of its members, in terms of competence improvements. First, the team is involved in the questioning and reflection that forms the basis of the training process. Moreover, the team also integrates the reflection of the salaried student, including new ideas. The new light that the student sheds on the practices may help the team to take a critical distance from the usual experiences.

Group reflection moments are fundamental in order to make the whole team benefit from this situation, as well as the presence of pedagogical guidance.

3.2.3.4. *Analyse de pratiques*

Analyse de pratiques (analysis of practices) originated in the 1960s in France, on the initiative of Michael Balint, a Hungarian psychoanalyst who analysed general practice together with a group of doctors. He believed that a disease cannot always be cured by the proposed treatment, but that it rather depends on other factors that can be identified by means of group reflection. This approach later found its way into the broader social sector and came to be applied in a more systemic manner. In France, many professionals – groups of colleagues, student groups, etc. – in childcare and other domains work with *analyse de pratiques* (Fablet et al., 2004). For many, it has proven to be a tremendous asset in the workplace: the atmosphere in the workplace improves, people feel supported and valued in their job. In the childcare sector, *analyse de pratiques* is used as a method for group reflection, through which a team or group of students or practitioners come together on a regular basis (usually every four to six weeks) to discuss a concrete situation that occurred in their practice. In these sessions, daily practice is analysed, deconstructed and reconstructed. This kind of reflection on daily practice, when it happens on a regular basis and it becomes a shared path, makes change possible, which means making possible quality improvement. Through *analyse de pratiques* the different professionals in ECEC centres are encouraged to share the same professional language. The different points of view on the same situation are expressed and the whole team is accompanied into a reflection path on their practice. The low-qualified workers, however, experience some difficulties in fitting into this professional culture. The challenge for the years to come will be to integrate the low-qualified workers more fully into this professional culture.

In the pre-primary school (*école maternelle*) another challenge is apparent. The assistants (ATSEM) and teachers (*professeurs des écoles*) have different employers: teachers are employed by the education Ministry of Education, whereas the ATSEM are employed by the Municipality. That is one of the reasons why common training and sessions of analysis of practice are very difficult to organise between core practitioners and assistants.

3.2.3.5. *Strengths and critical points*

Strengths

- A competence profile exists for the profession and the training for assistants.
- There is a system to enable low qualified workers to get a higher qualification while continuing working, through the recognition of acquired competences.
- There is investment in the use of group reflection moments, based on the method *analyse de pratiques*, aimed at reflecting on daily practice in order to improve it. This method, and more in general all the group-reflection methods, build up teamwork, especially when dealing with different qualifications within the same team.

Critical points

- The initial qualification for assistants (*CAP petite enfance and ATSEM*) should be revised.
- The system needs more investment in organizing group reflection moments on a regular basis for the whole staff, including assistants. Core practitioners and assistants could benefit from this shared time.

- In preschool, the fact that assistants and teachers have different employers (the Ministry of Education and the Municipality) makes it very difficult to organize a common path of CPD.

3.3. Conclusions

The chosen examples show the importance of investing in adapted pathways towards initial qualification for assistants, and in the continuous professional development for all staff. Creating shared opportunities to reflect together, as underlined by several researches and international organizations (Oberhuemer et al., 2010; OECD, 2006; UNICEF, 2008) is crucial when talking about quality in the ECEC sector. On this matter, the recent systematic review conducted for Eurofound (Peeters et al., 2015b, ii) pointed out that 'long term CPD (continuous professional development) interventions integrated into practice, such as pedagogical guidance and coaching in reflection groups, have been proven effective in very different contexts: in countries with a well-established system of ECEC provisions and a high level of qualification requirements for the practitioners, but also in countries with scarcely subsidised ECEC systems and low qualification requirements. [...] By enhancing practitioners' reflectivity both at individual and at team level, CPD activities allow ECEC professionals to strengthen their capacities and address areas for improvement in everyday practices'.

Regarding assistants and their possibilities for qualification and CPS, the case studies display significant factors that include:

- Creating favourable conditions to 'attract' assistants towards a path to qualification, with specific attention to: 1) recognizing their working experience; 2) supporting students with an ethnic minority background and with low socio-economic status, if needed; 3) linking theory and practice;
- Investing in childfree hours to allow shared CPD opportunities for the whole staff;
- Investing in group reflection moments;
- Investing in a system of pedagogical coordination (pedagogical guidance) that supports staff in constantly linking theory and practice.

Chapter 4: Key policy implications and recommendations

The policy commitment to ECEC at European level is characterized by a recognition that the ECEC system has to be of high quality. The ECEC is clearly seen as deeply connected to a professional and competent workforce, inscribed into a ‘competent system’, which includes collaborations between individuals, teams and institutions, as well as competent governance at policy level (Urban et al., 2011; Vandebroek et al., 2016). As stated by researchers and policy documents (Moss, 2009; Peeters, 2008; Pourtois, Desmet, 2004; European Commission, 2015), our societies require a workforce capable of dealing with differences and commonalities by valorising them. In order to achieve higher quality in the educational system, we need professionals that are able to negotiate, to deal with uncertainty (Urban, 2008), to reflect on the meanings of what they think and do (Schön, 1983), and to question themselves.

Investment in this direction is lacking at European level. Despite international research showing the ability of well-trained and well-paid staff to ensure the quality of ECEC (Oberhuemer et al., 2010; Unicef Innocenti Research Centre, 2008), in many countries in Europe, staff is still under qualified. On one hand, there are low qualified practitioners (especially concerning the 0-3 years sector). On the other hand, there are low qualified employees that assist higher qualified ones. The explanation for assistants’ low qualification is, according to OECD, rooted in the fact that working with young children is often considered to be related ‘just’ to physical care. Despite its crucial importance in education, physical care is still too often perceived to be a task that women can perform without specific preparation (OECD, 2006). We adopt an opposing view. According to the holistic perspective, ‘care’ and ‘education’ are considered to be inseparable (European Commission, 2011; UNESCO, 2010), and care is held to be of critical educational value.

Our report analysed the profile of assistants at European level, and their opportunities for qualification and continuous professional development.

The main conclusions and recommendations of this study are:

- In split but also in unitary systems, a **hierarchy between care and education** often exists, in line with the concept of ‘schoolification’. We argue that this hierarchical division may be reinforced by the divided roles between core practitioners and assistants: core practitioners are thought to ‘educate’ (meaning that they focus on learning/cognitive activities), while assistants are thought to ‘take care’ of children (meaning that they focus on their physical well-being). When important caring interactions are considered to be the responsibility of low or unqualified assistants, it implicitly indicates that care is valued less than cognitive development. This threatens a holistic view of education and care, in which cognitive, emotional, and social aspects are all assigned the same value and are acknowledged to influence and reinforce each other. Accordingly, explicit caring tasks such as feeding or putting to bed are educational in nature. Just like playing, learning is also relational and supporting it requires a caring attitude. Cognitive learning is connected to the motor, emotional, social, and creative development of the child.

Recommendations

Policies towards ECEC should be focused on the **integration of care and education** across institutional, regional and national levels.

Assistants, together with the other ECEC stakeholders (practitioners, parents, local communities, schools, training institutions, local, regional, and national governments, and European policy-makers), should be **involved** in the development of a holistic view of education. This **holistic view should be integrated throughout curricula, competence profiles, initial training and continuous professional development.**

- Assistants are an **'invisible' part of the ECEC workforce**, meaning they often don't appear in official policy documents, although in some of the countries for which statistics are available, their number is quite high (40 to 50 % of the staff). Besides, none of the countries involved in the study has produced **statistics about the socio-cultural background and the gender of assistants**, although the case studies show that assistants are an important tool to diversify the workforce in ECEC.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should make this part of the workforce visible by:

- 1) Collecting data on the **number of assistants** in the ECEC workforce;
- 2) Collecting data on their **socio-cultural background and gender**;
- 3) **Including assistants in all policy documents** that refer to staff in the ECEC sector.
- 4) Including **data on assistants in all international reports and studies** (OECD's, TALIS for ECEC, etc.) that refer to ECEC staff.

- Assistants have low or no qualification and few possibilities of job mobility. There is a need to develop **adapted pathways to qualification** for assistants, making it possible to combine working and studying. Assistants don't necessarily need to have a specific initial qualification when they start working, but once they are hired, there needs to be opportunities of job mobility, through adapted pathways towards qualification. Not all assistants need to enter a path towards a qualification. However, a competent system should facilitate them in getting a qualification if they wish to. Specific quota systems in which a certain number of places of bachelor training is reserved for experienced but unqualified workers have proven to be successful in Denmark. Similarly, building-bridge courses for people with ethnic minority background and low socio-economic status are supportive. Language and literacy barriers should be taken into account since assistants often have an ethnic-minority background. In this pathway to qualification, the assistant-student should be able to benefit from the recognition of earlier acquired competences. Support from specialized mentors is crucial; mentors should help by vigilantly identifying links between theory and practice. The assistant-student, and the team in which the assistant works, need support to deal with the progressive change of the assistant's professional identity over the period of training.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should create **pathways to the same level of qualification as the core practitioners**, paying special attention to:

- 1) **Recognizing assistants' working experience** and previously acquired competences;
- 2) **Linking theory and practice** by methods of group reflections on practice;
- 3) **Foreseeing pedagogical guidance** in the service, for the student-assistant and for the whole team, during this pathway to qualification;
- 4) **Supporting students** with an ethnic minority background and with low socio-economic status.

- The job of assistant is also an important tool in the widespread effort to attract more **male educators**. From Scotland, we know that male trainees benefit from being in contact with male core practitioners. In Denmark (and also in Norway), attempts to motivate young male assistants to start training as a pedagogue have raised the number of male pedagogues. This is partly attributable to the generalist

approach of the Danish (and Norwegian) to pedagogue's initial training, which attracts more men because graduates of the course have more possibility of moving between different pedagogical work fields during their careers.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should create pathways to qualification designed to attract **male assistants**, and place male assistants into networks with other male educators.

Employment offices should act to attract **young males** to the profession of assistant, then guide them towards a qualification as core practitioners.

- Although concrete data about the ethnic-cultural background of assistants are lacking, some experts underline that a high number of assistants, especially in larger cities, have an ethnic-minority background or a low socio-economic status. Employing assistants can thus be an important **tool to increase the diversity of the ECEC workforce**. Assistants can also play an important role in connecting staff with vulnerable families or to families with an ethnic-minority background. Staff need to be aware that when hiring assistants from ethnic minorities and/or poor backgrounds specifically for the sake of dealing with families with the same background, the very communication gaps they wish to eliminate may become reinforced.

Recommendations

Member States should invest in hiring a **diverse workforce** in ECEC services, in terms of language, gender, and socio-cultural background. This diverse workforce needs to be accompanied by pedagogical guidance.

- There is a need for **competent systems** in which a good initial training for core practitioners and adapted pathways to qualification for assistants are combined with the possibility to constantly reflect on their practice. This can be best achieved via continuous professional development for all staff.

Recommendations

Policy makers in Member States should invest in establishing **continuous professional development for all staff**, including assistants. In order to deliver, there must be:

- 1) **Child-free hours** for core practitioners and assistants: contracts should guarantee an amount of paid hours without children during which core practitioners and assistants can reflect on their practice;
- 2) **Meetings** to reflect together on pedagogical practice: planning, observations and documentation. These meetings should include all member of the team;
- 3) A system of **pedagogical guidance or coaching** that supports the team in their reflection;
- 4) A system of **monitoring of the CPD** that guarantees that assistants are able to follow the established CPD opportunities.

- Assistants can have difficulty developing a professional identity: they often see themselves as 'assisting' teachers, and although they often perform necessary daily tasks for and with children and their families, the competences and experiences they draw upon are rarely valued, nor are they articulated as part of a distinctive professional profile. Indeed, it is often the case that assistants do not have a **professional and training competence profile**. While important to create, the profiles should not necessarily be too specific; overly detailed profiles might inhibit innovation and adaptation. Broad competence profiles need to be developed, therefore, leaving room for interpretation.

Recommendations

Member states need to develop **professional competences profiles and training competences profiles for assistants** that are defined in **broad terms** and are based on a holistic view of children's educational needs.

- ECEC professionals (core practitioners and assistants) need to have **complex socio-pedagogical competences**. ECEC quality cannot be seen as an achievable fixed point; rather, it should be interpreted as an on-going contextualized process formed by negotiation. EU countries need a workforce that is capable of dealing with differences and commonalities between people by valorising them. ECEC staff should become adept at reflecting on their practice in order to increase the quality of the services. Staff, both assistants and core professionals, require pedagogical guidance to effectively do so.

Recommendations

Initial training and continuous professional development both need to focus on **broad socio-pedagogical competences** to prepare staff for a diverse workplace.

- Our study points out the **need for more research on this sector, and** the following questions in particular warrant further study: how do assistants perceive of their role(s)? What roles do assistants take in children's early education? Does the presence of assistants widen the gap between care and education?

Recommendations

Policy makers and research centres should finance further research in this field, with specific attention to exploring the different roles of assistants.

In sum, ECEC quality is strongly linked to a competent and motivated staff, who need to be recognized and valorised. Assistants need to be 'visible', to grow in their competences with the help of their teams, and to have opportunities for qualification, job mobility and continuous professional development. This is what a **competent system driven by a holistic approach** requires in a context of increasing diversity.

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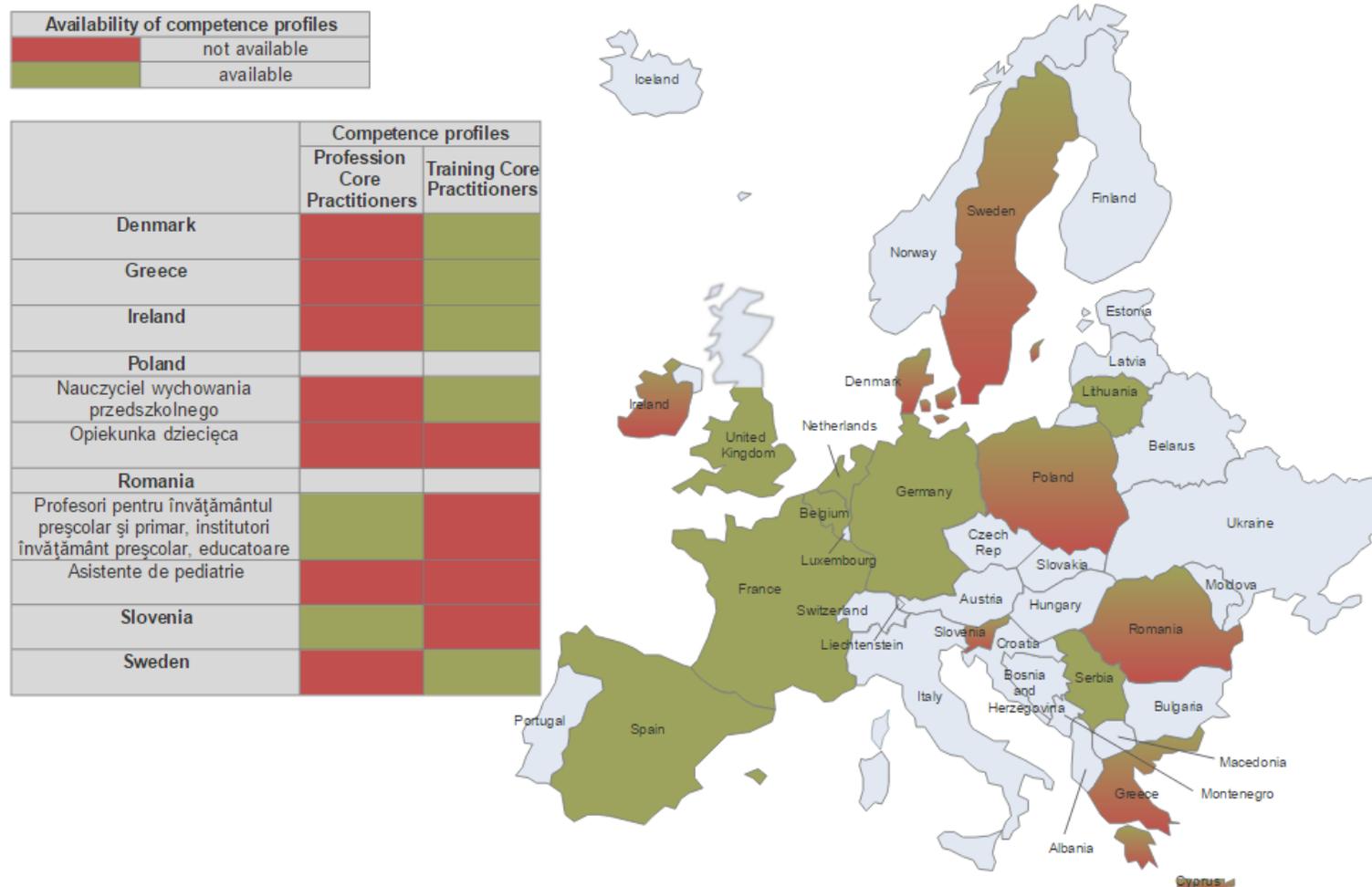
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Figure 3. Competence profiles of Core Practitioners



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