



*Promoting Public Sector Education in an Age of Austerity*

# ETUCE Policy Paper on Early Childhood Education

*Submitted for adoption by the ETUCE Committee to the ETUCE Conference, the Regional Conference of Education International, meeting in Budapest on 26-28 November 2012,  
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## i. Preamble

1. Since the last EI Pan-European policy on early childhood education (ECE) adopted in 2006, numerous changes have affected the ECE sector, partly as a result of the increasing attention given to ECE at European and national level and the economic, financial, and political crises, which started in 2008. Accordingly, the purpose of the policy paper is to update previous EI Pan-European policies regarding ECE. This policy reflects the views of teacher trade unions in this field.
2. ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education, is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of teacher unions. It represents 135 Teacher Unions and 12.8 million teachers in Europe from all levels of the education sector. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation.

## ii. Early Childhood Education and ECE teacher

1. **Early Childhood Education** might be considered to be education which takes place before compulsory education. The term refers to education in its broadest sense, including childcare and development. This includes **early childhood services** provided in kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, child-care centres and other similar institutions. It goes beyond what some refer to as pre-school education, as it is an education in its own right, having not only the purpose of preparing children for school, but for life in the same way as all other parts of the education systems contribute to this process.
2. Accordingly, **ECE 'teacher'** is used in its generic form to refer to professional staff comparable to educated teachers in schools, and includes various categories of early childhood professionals, such as pre-school teachers, pedagogues and other professionals working in **various categories of ECE centres**, described above.

The policy paper therefore uses the terms **ECE teacher** or **early childhood teacher**.

## 1. Introduction

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1. Education is a human right and a public good; it must be publicly funded and accessible to all. ETUCE advocates for an ECE curriculum or framework that is holistic and designed to meet the educational, developmental, nutritional, health and individual needs of children. Such a curriculum should be flexible and put the child at the centre of the learning and developmental process, valuing all kinds of activities that contribute to physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social and affective development. High quality ECE provides the foundation for life-long learning. Children are active learners from birth, and the first years are especially vital.
2. Early childhood teachers prepare children for life and to respect their fellow human beings, and instil values that are at the core of contemporary Europe: democracy, equality, equal opportunities, the fight against racism, discrimination and violence. Thus, ECE should be recognised as a first step of basic education, as a fully integrated sector within national education systems. As such, provision should be universally accessible and free for all children, regardless of age, gender, origin, ethnicity or social background. Governments must fulfil their responsibility to ensure that no child is excluded from ECE.
3. Well-educated professionals are a prerequisite for high quality ECE, creating the best conditions for children's learning, being aware of the importance of play and creativity, ensuring the health and safety of the children, while nurturing positive relations with children, parents and one another. Early childhood teachers have the most essential role in complementing and supporting the parents and families in the early learning of the young children.
4. The focus on early childhood teachers, therefore, is of utmost importance: their initial training, in-service training and continuous professional development must be provided to the highest level; they should be guaranteed good working conditions, a rewarding salary, and optimum work-life balance. ECE teachers should be provided with the professional autonomy to decide on the most appropriate approach to best meet local conditions and individual needs of children within any curriculum framework.

## 2. Background

1. Despite its benefits and advantages, ECE has only been given better recognition in education policy and practice fairly recently. One of the targets of the Europe2020 Strategy<sup>1</sup> is to decrease the number of early school leavers in order to achieve the economic and social goals of the European Union (EU) by 2020. The Strategy and *Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)*<sup>2</sup> highlighted that "Early Childhood Education and Care"<sup>3</sup> is an essential foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability; therefore it is important to develop and invest in it. As a result, the *Communication from the Commission on Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our*

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<sup>1</sup> EUROPE 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

[http://europa.eu/press\\_room/pdf/complet\\_en\\_barroso\\_\\_\\_007\\_-\\_europe\\_2020\\_-\\_en\\_version.pdf](http://europa.eu/press_room/pdf/complet_en_barroso___007_-_europe_2020_-_en_version.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>

<sup>3</sup> ECE is used as Early Childhood Education and Care in the EU terminology.

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children with the best start for the world of tomorrow<sup>4</sup> followed by Council conclusions<sup>5</sup> invites the Member States to invest more in ECE, as this provides best returns. ETUCE strongly asserts in its statement that the EU should promote the enhancement of the attractiveness of the ECE profession by providing better working conditions and higher competence and qualification levels for the professionals. ETUCE welcomes the fact that the EU puts a strong emphasis on gender balance in this education sector.

2. ECE received higher attention also in light of the effort to enhance the integration of socio-economically disadvantaged children into society. The *European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* in 2010 and the *Council conclusions on Tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being* (2011)<sup>6</sup> underlined the importance of access to quality ECE. Following the Council of Europe initiatives<sup>7</sup>, the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union chose Roma integration as one of its priorities in 2011 by emphasising ECE<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, the European Union policy initiatives on integrating migrants<sup>9</sup> and third country nationals<sup>10</sup> highlighted the key role of ECE in this process and recommended to the Member States to improve ECE facilities.
3. For the OECD, ECE is a central issue: the *Starting Strong* reports<sup>11</sup> describe the social, economic, conceptual and research factors in 20 OECD countries that influence policy on ECE and offer many examples of new policy initiatives. The PISA results<sup>12</sup> indicate that children, who have participated in ECE, score significantly higher in mathematics and in language at age 15. A considerable positive effect remains after socio-economic background has been accounted for. PISA results are in accordance with existing research, where there is evidence that there is a correlation between quality ECE and the level of cognitive, as well as social development. The impact can be observed in children from all backgrounds, but seems to be most important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. The approach towards the ECE sector is very complex regarding the division of responsibility for ECE among ministries at national level. In numerous European countries, ECE centres are not

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/childhoodcom\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/childhoodcom_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09424.en11.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122878.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122878.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> DGIV/EDU/ROM(2007)4 UNESCO and Council of Europe "Towards quality education for Roma children: transition from early childhood to primary education", 2007

<sup>8</sup> Council conclusions on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (19 May 2011):

[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122100.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/122100.pdf);

Council of the European Union: Prevention policies to combat early school leaving aimed at children with socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma - Policy debate. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09043.en11.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Council conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the education of children with a migrant background (2009/C 301/07): "As well as laying the foundations for later schooling, early childhood education can play a crucial role in integrating children with a migrant background, particularly by placing a strong focus on language development. Efforts should therefore be stepped up to ensure that socially disadvantaged families have adequate access to quality childcare and pre-school facilities." <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:301:0005:0008:EN:PDF>

<sup>10</sup> Communication from the Commission: European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals {SEC(2011) 957 final}.

[http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/intro/docs/110720/1\\_EN\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v10.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/intro/docs/110720/1_EN_ACT_part1_v10.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care:

[http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_39263231\\_37416703\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/63/0,3746,en_2649_39263231_37416703_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>12</sup> PISA Results 2009: [http://www.oecd.org/document/61/0,3746,en\\_32252351\\_32235731\\_46567613\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/61/0,3746,en_32252351_32235731_46567613_1_1_1_1,00.html)

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accessible to all, either because they are under private governance, requiring high tuition fees, or because the government does not provide enough ECE centres.

5. Continuity and co-ordination with the rest of the education system is vital to facilitate monitoring of education and lifelong learning, and to smooth children's transition to the next phase of education. Most European countries have separate systems for early childhood and compulsory education or for different sectors of ECE. Indeed, ECE is usually divided between the auspices of education and social affairs ministries. For this to work well, close co-operation is important. Ideally, all sectors of the education service should be under the auspices of the Ministry of Education or its equivalent at national and regional level.
6. Given its dual nature of education and care, the provision of ECE in Europe has been closely connected to family and welfare policy systems, contributing to the different models of early childhood provision present in Europe today.
7. The aim of the EU, through its influence on national education policies, is to develop access to quality ECE, as the first choice for parents concerning the education of their children. Involvement of teacher trade unions in EU and national policy design, development and implementation has, to some extent, been achieved, but it still requires further progress. The current trends based on different economic and political interests underline the need for ETUCE and its members to actively participate in the debate on ECE in national, as well as international contexts.

### I. QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1. Education is a human right: children, regardless of their age must get the highest quality education service. Governments in Europe often concentrate their efforts exclusively on children over the age of three, while there is a tendency to exempt the youngest children from the inherent human right to education and life-long learning. The emphasis is on the labour market context, and private, for-profit initiatives, often lacking quality control. However, according to recent research, quality is often (mis)used by neoliberal politicians and interpreted as control and measurement, (for example PISA), rather than by trusting teachers as professionals.<sup>13</sup>
2. The 'care' component of systems that separate childcare from early education often have limited quality standards, the staff generally has low qualifications, and due to high costs, low-income families are often forced to choose low-quality care options in spite of their desire to provide the best for their children. The implication is that these governments are in breach of the key principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children.

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Moss: Markets and Democratic experimentalism. Two models for early childhood education and care. 2008

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3. Parents are, and should remain responsible for their children's upbringing, and they are central to their development. However, few would claim that the family loses its importance when children enter compulsory school, or that the vital role of the family – nuclear or otherwise – renders basic education meaningless. High quality education builds on and complements learning in the home.

### 1. Affordability and access

1. ECE should be accessible and free of charge for all. However, the financial, economic and political crises of Europe seriously affected the education budget of the governments, contributing, among other things, to closures and mergers of institutions, dismissal of teachers, cuts in teachers' salaries, worsened working conditions, unpaid overtime and cuts in the budgets used for maintaining and improving school infrastructure. Numerous European cases show that private schools, including ECE centres, were also hit hard as a result of the bankruptcy of the owners. At the same time, governments have been trying to support the private sector by providing more business opportunities for them at the expense of the public sector, while the crisis is still deepening.
2. Through social dialogue and other processes, European governments should be encouraged to invest in ECE and in favour of children, particularly the youngest age group, as this is undeniably the most critical stage of development.
3. It must be highlighted that access to ECE centres is often hindered by high tuition fees. Due to high levels of private provision in some countries, ECE is often only available to wealthier families. There are also numerous examples where publicly provided ECE is still partially financed by parents. Although accessibility has improved over the years, particularly for children age three or above, however, early childhood provision for children under three is still a major challenge.
4. The lack of commitment from some governments, resulting in this surge of commercial providers, contributes to further problems in the sector. Ideally, ECE should be fully provided and funded by public authorities. However, where highly privatised systems still exist these should meet the same demands on quality as those in the public sector. Quality should be defined by regulation and all providers must be obliged to comply with quality regulations. National and regional governments must invest more resources in this sector, and ensure that ECE programmes are staffed by appropriately trained and fully qualified early childhood teachers. Efforts must be made by European countries to ensure equality and inclusion for all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs.
5. Therefore, ETUCE is calling for the full implementation of the *Council Conclusions on early childhood education and care*, whereby the Ministers of Education of the EU agreed to promote "quality assurance with the participation of all key stakeholders, including families" and recommended that Member States "analyse and evaluate existing ECEC services at local,

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regional and national level in terms of their availability, affordability and quality, as outlined in these conclusions<sup>14</sup>

### 2. Quality evaluation

1. It is important to pay special attention to how ECE programmes cater for the needs of young children whose parents work long hours. The young child needs continuity and trust, which is best provided when the child's day is not divided into different structures for education and care.
2. ETUCE supports the core recommendation of the European Union to ensure high quality ECE. However, functioning inclusive quality assurance systems in ECE are still lacking in many European countries. Early childhood teachers need to be motivated and supported to engage in self-evaluation and self-improvement, and to require feedback from their colleagues and leaders. Thus, ensuring and maintain collegiality among early childhood teachers is very important.
3. Definitions of quality in ECE vary greatly and depend on factors such as cultural values and views of the child as well as different political systems. There are some aspects that should be recognised as vital to quality. Quality should be defined in the broadest sense, regulated, measured and evaluated in accordance with the principles agreed with ECE teachers and their unions.
4. Assessment and evaluation of early childhood provision should have the best interests of the child in mind, and be aimed at quality improvement. To be relevant and effective in this context, external evaluation needs to be based on the internal evaluation that is led by early childhood teachers and involves children and parents in the process of identifying areas for improvement. The frequent lack of systematic evaluation, and the very limited national and cross-national data and analyses, constitute hurdles for improving quality in ECE. Quality must be ensured by the governments securing the active participation of the teacher trade unions.

### 3. Qualified ECE leaders

1. Another important prerequisite for high quality ECE is qualified leaders, with a deep knowledge of early childhood education. ECE leaders are strategically positioned to ensure quality education by creating good learning environments in their institutions. ETUCE believes in democratic and collaborative leadership in ECE centres. Such distributed leadership should involve teachers and other education employees and seek to improve learning and development. Therefore, pedagogical and curriculum leadership is central.
2. ECE leaders and teachers should promote democracy, human rights and social justice and ensure safety and security for all children, early childhood teachers and other education

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<sup>14</sup> <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st09/st09424.en11.pdf>



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employees. ECE leaders should have a leadership qualification and be qualified as early childhood teachers, preferably at Masters level. Their qualifications should include both psychological and pedagogical knowledge. They should have an in-depth understanding of how children learn and develop. Thus, they can best ensure quality education and to promote accessibility to ECE by collaborating with local, regional and national governments, social services, social workers, and other stakeholders.

### **4. Infrastructure**

1. Quality learning for the children is best supported by good working conditions for early childhood teachers and the provision of the best infrastructure and tools in ECE centres. ECE centres are for development, creativity, learning and play. Good conditions and highest safety standards in the physical indoor and outdoor environment greatly contribute to the development of the children. Investment in play equipment, games, creative opportunities, maintenance and improvement of child-friendly facilities are essential in ECE.
2. Group sizes and child: teacher ratios are important conditions which are also known to have an impact on quality due to the nature of teacher-child interactions. In cross-national comparisons, it has been observed that well-educated and experienced early childhood teachers can, to a large extent, outweigh unfavourable conditions. ETUCE, therefore, strongly believes that group sizes should be such as to enable the teacher to meet the individual needs of children, recognising that a sufficient number of qualified early childhood teachers is a prerequisite for acceptable quality.

### **5. Curricula**

1. The concept of “curriculum” in early education should be viewed differently from the traditional understanding of the term, particularly with respect to primary or other levels of education. In the context of ECE, some countries prefer to talk about a general framework, rather than a specific rigid curriculum to be followed by the educators and the children.
2. ECE curricula should be holistic and designed to meet the educational, developmental, nutritional, health and individual needs of children. It should put the child at the centre of the learning and developmental process, valuing all kinds of activities that contribute to physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social and affective development. Play, creativity and exploration should be valued and promoted as important means of learning and development.
3. Any discourse on ECE standards and the curriculum should take into account various country contexts and the diversity of systems across Europe and avoid the risk of pushing countries, either directly or indirectly, towards a single model. ECE curricula should be developed, implemented and evaluated in close collaboration with teachers.

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### 6. Co-operation with parents

1. The family and the home environment are important factors in children's success in ECE and other levels of education. For example, the education level of the parents has great influence on the motivation, performance and future of their children. Good communication and co-operation with parents is necessary in order to gain a richer understanding of the child and to provide the best quality ECE.
2. Parental cooperation is fundamental to ECE, as it provides a basis for democracy when parents are participating in debates on values in the education of children at the ECE centres. Therefore, democratic structures including parents at the ECE centres should be established.

### II. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. Children that are at risk benefit particularly from ECE, as do children with special educational needs. Inclusive and accessible ECE of high quality provides the possibility of effectively identifying and preventing problems relating to learning and education of the children and compensates for some of the shortcomings in the environment of the child.
2. More investment in inclusive, high quality education accessible to the socio-economically disadvantaged poses many challenges: appropriate infrastructure, support for families, ensuring access to ECE centres especially in the rural areas.
3. Special attention must be paid to an inclusive education by continuing professional development for early childhood teachers, improvement of special teacher training materials, alternative learning methods, curricula design, training of mediators, setting up guidance and counselling, etc.

#### 1. Children with special needs

1. Children with disabilities need to be integrated appropriately into the general education system and provided with individual support as necessary. Quality ECE is especially important to children who lack a secure family environment. Early recognition, intervention, and educational support can give the child the opportunity of a richer life in early childhood and later on in life. Promotion of inclusive education and lifelong learning for children with disabilities is also highlighted in the *EU Disability Strategy*.<sup>15</sup>
2. In this context, initial and continuing professional development must prepare early childhood teachers to recognise and appropriately deal with the disadvantaged children and to facilitate their integration into society. Co-operation of teachers and leaders of ECE centres with other specialists, such as social workers, mediators and psychologists is essential. Early childhood teachers interact with children daily, and good links between education and fields such as

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<sup>15</sup> Commission Communication: European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 - A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:EN:PDF>





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health care, social and psychological services, improve the ability to meeting children's needs beyond education.

### **2. Children of ethnic minorities and immigrants**

1. ECE has a special importance for ethnic minority and immigrant children. It is a general tendency in Europe that some of these children do not perform well in compulsory education. ECE is, therefore, essential for minimising disadvantage, equalising opportunities and for promoting intercultural understanding and integration. Early childhood is the crucial period for language acquisition, including second-language acquisition. ECE that provides rich language experience and opportunities for learning will have life-long positive effects for second-language learners.
2. Thus, ECE leaders must create an inclusive multicultural learning environment and early childhood teachers should foster respect and understanding of different cultures. Therefore, the personal and professional competence development of teachers and ECE leaders is vital.

### **3. Roma children**

1. Inclusive policies and positive attitudes towards Roma children and families by governments, leaders and teachers of ECE centres are essential to enhance mutual understanding and participation in ECE. Educating the parents, providing family support to access ECE centres and the active participation of mediators and social workers are essential for higher attendance of Roma children in ECE.
2. Involvement of Roma parents in the learning process of their children, especially in early childhood education, can contribute to foster integration and a better relationship with teachers. Roma families are more supportive if adult learning and inter-generational learning promote the self-esteem of the adults by providing them with more than just classroom activities.
3. Significant investment in and involvement of Roma experts in education reforms is essential and so is the importance of employing Roma ECE teachers who, in addition to their expertise, can also act as role models. Inclusive, high quality education accessible to Roma poses many challenges. European governments should invest more in education, particularly in continuous teacher training, especial early childhood teachers' training, resources on Roma culture, socio-pedagogy, alternative learning methods, curricula design, training of school mediators, setting up guidance and counselling, etc.

## **III. QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

1. The most important prerequisite for education of high quality is the educators. Well-educated early childhood teachers, working under fair conditions, with access to continuous professional development, are as vital for achieving quality in ECE as teachers are in other sections of the

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school system. Improving the ECE profession cannot be done without raising the educational level and improving the working conditions of early childhood teachers.

2. At a time when the population of early childhood teachers is ageing, teachers are being dismissed or let go as a result of the economic crisis in many European countries. The workload of early childhood teachers is also increasing, characterised by an increase in teacher: child ratios. The salaries of ECE teachers are not sufficiently rewarding.
3. European countries, therefore, need to develop efficient and effective strategies to support the continuing professional development of ECE professionals, to provide rewarding salaries and appropriate working conditions.

### **1. Status of early childhood teachers**

1. The status of early childhood teachers, and the value placed on their education, must be on a par with other teachers, with equal rights and entitlements. Today, there is an all-too-common misconception that the demands and complexity of the teaching profession increase with the age of the students. Not only does this attitude undermine the work of early childhood teachers, it also serves as an obstacle to continuing development of the field of ECE.
2. Working conditions and salaries of teachers and other employees in the ECE sector need to be greatly improved. The salaries of ECE teachers should be on a par with teachers in other sectors. In order to attract highly qualified female and male teachers to the ECE centres, salaries must be rewarding and motivating.

### **2. Gender inequality**

1. Ensuring gender balance among the professionals in ECE is significant for the children. The overwhelming majority of early childhood teachers are women, making this an issue of gender inequality. Like in many other predominantly female professions, early childhood teachers are often underpaid. The fact that the status of early childhood teachers is generally lower than that of those teaching older pupils becomes especially noteworthy in light of the fact that there are fewer men in ECE than in later school years. An estimated more than 90% of staff in ECE is female.
2. There are numerous consequences for the children if there is teacher gender inequality in ECE. Children benefit from being exposed to both male and female ECE teachers, and therefore considerable attention should be given to recruitment strategies that are aimed at recruiting men into the profession. Such strategies should take into consideration that society's policies in relation to gender can have a significant influence on the decisions of male college students to opt for ECE teaching as a career.
3. While it must be emphasised that professional knowledge and skills of the early childhood teachers are more important than gender, efforts must be made to attract more men to the

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profession, but also to be aware of, and combat, the gender pay gap. Teacher education institutions can also promote and encourage male students to be engaged in ECE. ECE centres should also recruit male early childhood teachers in order to help the children to learn to appreciate gender equality.

4. It is important from a Trade Union perspective that young children learn to appreciate and understand gender equality as this is to the benefit of society generally.

### **3. Initial and continuous education**

1. All teachers, including early childhood teachers, should have Masters level initial teacher education, which includes study of psychology, pedagogy and didactics. In Europe today, there is no general qualification or educational level for early childhood teachers. Education for qualified early childhood teachers in several countries, usually those working with children over 3, is the same or the equivalent of qualifications in the early years of compulsory school. In these countries, salaries also tend to be higher.
2. In most European countries, staff with lower qualifications or even without qualifications can be employed as childcare workers or assistants. Where this is the case, it is vital that the qualified early childhood teachers have the main responsibility for the education of the children.
3. It is necessary for governments to invest adequately not only in initial teacher education, but also in continuous professional development. Initial and continuous teacher education should be based on and linked to research of significance to the early childhood teaching profession, something that also needs to be prioritised to the level where it reflects the importance of education, and the importance to society of well-educated and qualified early childhood teachers vis-à-vis other professions.
4. High-level life-long professional development such as in-service training must be also provided for early childhood teachers free of charge. Early childhood teachers must be prepared to cope with new demands. Replacement of teachers should be ensured while they are attending training courses.
5. Mobility opportunities for early childhood teachers for professional development are essential to provide better competences, to widen their horizons, to learn about other cultures and to create an inclusive learning environment. The European Union should also encourage the mobility of small children abroad, escorted by their parents and teachers.

### **4. Autonomy of early childhood teachers**

Autonomy of early childhood teachers enables ECE to better meet local conditions and individual needs. However, there must be equally high demands and expectations on quality, and appropriate conditions for children and teachers. Regardless of the theories on which a particular approach is based, early childhood teachers should continue to have autonomy to

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mediate all early childhood programmes according to their professional knowledge and research.

### **5. Working conditions**

1. Working conditions of early childhood teachers vary greatly across Europe, as well as within countries, and this is especially true in early childhood education. Hence, the conditions of early childhood teachers must be monitored and improved with particular attention to stress and its impact on the health of ECE teachers and other employees. This is especially the case as a result of the economic crisis, when education budgets were cut, early childhood teachers were dismissed or forced to work unpaid overtime. ECE teachers should have the same employment protection rights as teachers in other sectors. All ECE workers should have their employment rights protected, particularly in times of austerity.
2. Early childhood teachers should have appropriate support services available to them in order to avoid burnout. Sabbatical leave and other forms of professional refreshment opportunities should be provided to all ECE teachers.
3. Motivation contributes greatly to better performance. However, in many European countries the salaries of early childhood teachers are not sufficiently rewarding. There are also indications that early childhood teachers have fewer opportunities for professional development throughout their careers. Career opportunities for teachers in general and early childhood teachers in particular, are unacceptably limited. This is detrimental not only to teachers, but ultimately to the children. To fully develop the highly specialised knowledge required in education today, ECE and education in general must be organised in a way that allows for a variety of career opportunities within the education sector, a school or other ECE setting, such as practice-oriented research or various forms of leadership.

### **6. Research and data needs**

1. There is a need to further develop educational research with direct relevance to the ECE profession, in accordance with the best interests of the child. In particular, quality improvement requires practice-oriented research with focus on aspects relevant to the actual education process, such as early childhood teacher-child interaction, pedagogical methods, subject content and the curriculum. It must be the responsibility of governments to support and provide resources for such research.
2. While OECD, UNESCO and the EU have already undertaken relevant research touching upon ECE, further research must be undertaken at national and international level: higher education and research should be motivated to cooperate with ECE.



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### Conclusions

1. Providing high standards and safeguarding the best quality of ECE is the responsibility of governments, working in close collaboration with teacher trade unions. Fully acknowledging the important role of ECE and its status as a human right for every child means that there must be a systematic monitoring of the implementation of ECE policies and programmes. A lot still remains to be done before achieving that goal within and outside Europe.
2. It remains an important task for ETUCE to continue to facilitate the exchange of information between its affiliates on this issue, to promote expert knowledge on ECE and its beneficial effects on children and to seek proper terms and conditions of work for early childhood teachers. The aim is also to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experience among early childhood teachers, as well as provide possibilities for early childhood teachers to advance their own knowledge and the development of the teaching profession by engaging in doctoral education and research on ECE.

### Recommendations

#### Teacher trade unions in Europe should:

1. **be** active participants in, and initiators of, the debate on high quality ECE as an inherent part of basic education and thus every child's right.
2. **advocate** for ECE to be a major political concern and a priority on the policy agendas of local authorities, governments and intergovernmental bodies.
3. **promote** ECE that is publicly funded and universally accessible, although not compulsory.
4. **monitor** the rise of private sector provision in ECE in Europe and counteract the emergence of ECE as a commodity.
5. **advocate** the integration of ECE into education systems under the auspices of the Ministries of Education or their equivalents.
6. **counteract** the split between education and care that results in inequality, instability for children, and low quality provision and seek the integration of care and education of young children in all ECE policies
7. **advocate** high standards of Masters level initial teacher education of ECE teachers.
8. **work** to achieve pay and working conditions for early childhood teachers, which are on a par with the best available in the other sectors of the education system.
9. **seek** improved opportunities for continuous professional development.



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10. **seek** better career opportunities for early childhood teachers, particularly within the realm of educational research
11. **attract** men to early childhood education and to early childhood teacher education.
12. **advocate** increased resources nationally and cross-nationally for educational research with direct relevance for ECE.
13. **urge** governments to support ECE research on a national level, and encourage research and cross-national data collection on an international level, for the purpose of continued quality improvement.
14. **undertake** further research on ECE in order to have a strong knowledge-based position on its quality, relevance and equity, on the status of the teachers delivering ECE, and on the programmes being provided.
15. **facilitate** collaboration with other specialists.
16. **encourage** the strengthening of co-operation and communication with parents.
17. **pay** special attention to ECE developments for children under three, and ensure that they are always included in all the above recommendations.