

GERMANY

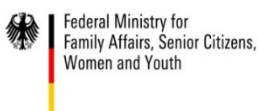
Key Contextual Data

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Sources are outlined at the end of each section. Full details of all sources are to be found in the references section at the end of the key contextual data profile. Individual statistical data used in tables are indicated by an asterisk*, both in the table and in the sources.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC system type and auspices

In Germany, early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from birth up to school entry age is not part of the education system. Instead, as part of the child and youth welfare system, it comprises not only ECEC settings for 0- to 6-year olds, but also home-based family day care and out-of-school provision. Federalism and subsidiarity are key political and organisational concepts underpinning the legislation, regulation and funding of these different types of setting.

In a system of multi-level governance, responsibility is shared between the federal government, the 16 state-level parliaments and local government bodies. These local authorities work in partnership with a wide range of non-governmental agencies and service providers. In other words, Germany has a strongly decentralised system of early education and childcare. This can lead to considerable variance in funding, provision and regulatory procedures at the local level.

At the **federal level** (*Bund*), the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is the main public body with responsibility and 'stimulatory competence' (*Anregungskompetenz*) for ECEC. At the **regional level** (*Länder*), the 16 Ministries of Youth Affairs (usually located as a unit within the Ministry of Social Affairs or the Ministry of Education) provide a framework for ECEC service provision and financing based on the main principles of the federal-level legislation and regulate certain issues not specified by federal law. At the **local level**, the *Kommunen* (municipalities - districts, towns, boroughs) are in charge of organising and securing funding for early education and childcare provision in co-operation with church affiliated and non-church affiliated provider organisations.

Sources: Diskowski, D. 2006.
Oberhuemer, P. 2014.

General objectives and legislative framework

Book Eight of the Social Code – Services for Children and Young People (*Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB VIII – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe*), commonly referred to as the Child and Youth Services Act 1990 (with amendments), sets out the general objectives. These include supporting children to become responsible members of the community; complementing family upbringing practices; and assisting parents to combine employment and raising children. The overall approach integrates three dimensions: education (*Bildung*), socialisation/enculturation (*Erziehung*) and care (*Betreuung*). According to the law, early childhood provision, which in Germany includes centre-based settings (*Kindertageseinrichtungen*) and home-based settings (*Kindertagespflege*), is to be adapted to the needs of children and their families, both from a pedagogical and an organisational point of view. Parents are to be included in key decision-making processes in the early childhood setting.

The 1990 Child and Youth Services Act and subsequent amendments provide the federal-level, mandatory framework of general principles and requirements. These are adapted by the parliaments in the 16 *Bundesländer* (federal states, or *Länder*) into state-level legislation and implemented by the *Länder* ministries and authorities. A significant amendment was the 1996 federal level legal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision for children from age three up to school entry. A number of *Länder* had already introduced entitlement by that time, sometimes for a wider age-

range. Further amendments to the 1990 Act include the 2005 Day Care Expansion Act (TAG), the 2005 Children and Young People Development Act (KICK), and the 2009 Childcare Funding Act (*Kinderförderungsgesetz*).

Sources: BMFSFJ 2014.
ICEC 2017.
Oberhuemer, P. 2014.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

All children in Germany from age one up to compulsory schooling (1–6) are legally entitled to a place in either a centre-based or a home-based setting. When children from 3 years up to compulsory schooling age were first granted this right through federal-level legislation in 1996, the guaranteed ‘place’ was not defined in terms of the number of hours of daily attendance. In the meantime, ten of the 16 *Länder* have specifications which range from a guaranteed four hours of daily attendance up to 10 hours, the higher levels being in the eastern *Länder**. Six *Länder* still have no specifications, five of them in the western part of the country. Legal entitlement was extended to 1- and 2-year olds in August 2013.

There is no statutory requirement for attending ECEC provision. However, some *Länder* have introduced compulsory language screening tests and in some cases require attendance before starting school (s. *Monitoring*).

Statutory schooling begins at age 6.

Sources: BMFSFJ 2015.
*Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017, 302.
Oberhuemer, P. 2014.

Types of provision

ECEC centres (*Kindertageseinrichtungen*, commonly abbreviated to *Kitas* – literally ‘day centres for children’) is an umbrella term for a broad spectrum of institutions, *mostly* for children before entry into school (but *also* for school-age children). Alongside the classical types – kindergartens and day nurseries (see below) or *Kinderhorte* for school-age children – many other kinds of provision exist. Some examples are age-integrated centres for 0- to 6-year olds or 0- to 12-year olds, parent-child-groups in varying forms, employer-based childcare, co-operative models between ECEC centres and other neighbourhood services, or foreign-language kindergartens. Many *Kitas* also offer out-of-school provision for school-age children, either integrated with other age-groups or as a separate unit (*Kinderhort*) which may be located in or closely affiliated to a specific school.

Kindergartens (*Kindergärten*) were traditionally the classical and predominant form of centre-based settings admitting children from age 3 up to school entry. In the western federal states, 2-year olds have been increasingly included, and in the former German Democratic Republic kindergartens and day nurseries were integrated into so-called *Kinderkombinationen*. Some kindergartens also provide after-school services for young school-age children, and some have a multi-age grouping format for children from 0-6 years. In 2015, opening and closing times varied between 7:00-7:30 and 16:30-18:00.*

Day nurseries (*Kinderkrippen*), or **infant/toddler centres**, generally admit children from a few months old up to age 3. Differences in levels of provision between the western and eastern parts of Germany are still distinct in this section of early childhood services, although a heavy expansion drive in the western regions has led to an evening out of disparities (see *Participation rates in regulated provision*).

Centres for children and families (known mostly as *Kinder- und Familienzentren* or *Eltern-Kind-Zentren*) providing both education/care services for children and family support for parents are a fairly new form of provision in Germany – one which has been expanding over recent years, particularly in North-Rhine Westphalia. Profiles vary considerably, depending on the area in which the centres are located. However, a key aim across centres is to provide easily accessible services for families and to network with relevant agencies and organisations in the community.

Delayed school-entry provision known as *Schulkindergarten* or *Vorklasse* is available in some *Länder* as a specific type of institutional setting provided for 6 year old children considered not yet ready for school. In some federal states these come under the auspices of the education sector, in others under the child and youth welfare sector.

Home-based ECEC provision (*Kindertagespflege*) is an integral part of the child and youth welfare services for young children and has the same legal status at the federal level as centre-based ECEC provision. Four main forms are available: (1) as a service in the parents' own home; the parents are the employers, and no operational license is required; (2) as a service in the family child carer's house: up to five children are allowed to participate at the same time (regulations differ in some *Bundesländer*); the Childcare Funding Act 2009 (*Kinderförderungsgesetz*) stipulates that if more than five children are enrolled, a pedagogical qualification is necessary. For this type of family day care a local authority license is required which has to be renewed every five years; (3) a service located in third-party rooms: local authorities decide on the room suitability; (4) as a family child care network: In some regions several family child carers may join up to provide a service for more than five children. In some cases there are specific regulations for this kind of service.

Sources: BMFSFJ 2015a.
 *Destatis 2016a.
 Eurydice 2016.
 Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.
 Rauschenbach, T. 2008.

Provider structures

Traditionally, provision for children and young people, including early childhood services, were provided by non-governmental organisations (mainly social welfare and church-affiliated organisations). Today they still play a predominant role in the provision of services, particularly in the western *Länder*. This structural responsibility is based on the subsidiarity principle, through which the public sector has the task of supporting the non-governmental agencies and only providing social services if the NGOs are not in a position to do so. In former East Germany, public and employer-based ECEC settings were the norm. However, this situation has changed in the meantime and the number of settings run by NGOs is increasing.

Federal-level statistics for 2016 indicate that roughly two thirds (36,763 of 54,871) of centre-based services (mostly ECEC provision, but also some centres for school-age children) are run by voluntary, non-profit child and youth welfare agencies (*Freie Träger der Jugendhilfe*). These include church-affiliated (32.9%) and non-church affiliated services (31.1%). Approximately 33% of services are currently managed by public local authorities. 2016 federal statistics (see *Table 1*) show that private, for-profit providers continue to have only a very small share of the market (3%).

Table 1

Germany: ECEC provider distribution, centre-based provision, 2016**

Provider type		Distribution in per cent	
Public			33.0
Church affiliated non-profit	Protestant (<i>Diakonie</i>)	15.9	32.9
	Catholic (<i>Caritas</i>)	17.0	

Provider type		Distribution in per cent	
Non-church affiliated non-profit	The <i>Paritätische</i> (non-governmental welfare association)	9.1	31.1
	Worker's Welfare Association	4.5	
	German Red Cross	2.7	
	Other non-profit	14.8	
For-profit			3.0

In 2016, 31% (190,263) of under 3-year olds and 34,7% (803,069) of children aged 3 up to school entry as well as 50% (240,124) of school children under age 14 were enrolled in public sector *Kitas*. By comparison, 69% (424,331) of under 3-year olds and 65,3% (1,509,145) of children aged 3 up to school entry, along with 50% (2240,259) of school children under age 14 were attending private, mainly publicly subsidised ECEC centres.

Sources: *Destatis 2016a; own calculations.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

Participation rates in regulated provision

In 2016, a total of 614,600 children under age 3 and 2,312,214 children between age 3 and school entry were enrolled in ECEC centres.

Table 2 shows the overall participation rates across the country broken down into single age-groups for 2015, whereas *Table 3* indicates the distribution patterns across the western and eastern *Länder*. There are still considerable differences in enrolment levels in centre-based settings in the western and eastern *Länder* for children up to age 3, participation rates even out for children aged 3 up to school entry.

Participation rates have risen steadily over the past few years, particularly in the case of children under age 3 where participation rates doubled between 2007 and 2016.

Table 2
Germany: Participation rates in regulated ECEC provision according to age, 2016*

Age group	Centre-based settings in per cent	Home-based settings in per cent
Under 1-year olds	1.8	0.7
1-year olds	28.9	7.2
2-year olds	54.1	6.5
3-year olds	87.8	1.3
4-year olds	95.3	0.4
5-year olds	97.0	0.2

In 2016, more than a third of children up to school entry age (38.6%) attended an ECEC centre for 25 to 35 hours per week. Almost half (48.2%) attended for more than 35 hours and 13.6% for less than 25 hours.*

Table 3
Germany: Participation rates in centre-based and home-based settings in per cent, 2007 - 2016**

Year	Regional distribution	Under 3 years	3 to under 6 years
2007	West	9.8	88.1
	East, including Berlin	40.7	93.6

	Germany	15.5	89.0
2010	West	17.3	91.6
	East, including Berlin	46.6	94.9
	Germany	23.0	92.2
2016	West	28.1	93.2
	East, including Berlin	51.8	95.2
	Germany	32.7	93.6

In 2016, more than one third of children from age 3 up to 6 years (37.8%) spent between 25 to 35 hours weekly in ECEC provision, nearly half (49%) spent more than 35 hours and 13.1% less than 25 hours. In the same year, 17.5% of under 3-year olds spent up to 24 hours, 28.4% between 25 and 35 hours and 54.2% more than 35 hours per week in an ECEC setting. For both age groups, the amount of time is markedly higher in the eastern federal states (including Berlin) than in the western part of the country: Of the children who spent over 45 hours in an ECEC centre, the respective proportions were 59.7% and 25.4% for the under 3-year olds and 61.3% and 26.4% for children from age 3 up to 6 years*.

Sources: * Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017, 286ff, 332f.
**Destatis 2016a.

Financing and costs for parents

The funding of ECEC provision is first and foremost a responsibility of the *Länder* and the municipalities and, in general parents pay towards costs. Since funding practices are regulated through regional-level legislation, these differ considerably across the country.

The amount of overall costs borne by parents also varies between the federal states. Whereas parental contributions account for 24.7% of the total financing of ECEC services in the eastern federal state Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in 2012, in the city state of Berlin they account for only 7.3% of overall funding. Parental fees are mostly income-related. However, fees can be highly variable and range between no costs at all for parents (fee exemptions) to fees of more than 200€ monthly.

The Federal Ministry of Family and Youth Affairs and to some extent the Federal Ministry of Education and Research – in their ‘stimulatory role’ – may provide incentives for reform initiatives of national priority. Up to 2014, federal level funding totalling 5.4 billion euros was made available for the investment in and running costs of provision for the under-threes.

The allocation of funding for ECEC services at the regional level (*Länder*) has risen steadily over recent years, although variations between the federal states are considerable. Whereas in 2011, Berlin net expenditure was 5,143€ for each child under six years of age, per capita funding in Schleswig-Holstein amounted to only 3,128€.

In recent years, 6 of the 16 *Länder* have abolished parental fees, either for the year before entering school (Hesse, Lower Saxony, North-Rhine Westphalia), or for at least three years (Berlin, Hamburg, Rheinland-Palatinate). In most cases the number of guaranteed hours of attendance is specified, ranging from 4 to 10 hours daily*.

Sources: *Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017, 303.
EPIC 2016.
Oberhuemer, P. 2014.

Staff-child ratios

On the basis of federal statistics, overall staffing ratios/formulas can be calculated by looking at the relationship between the total number of hours of employment of a full-time practitioner and the number of children in full-day provision¹. However, since working hours also include 'non-contact time', i.e. time spent on activities other than working directly with children, it is not possible to calculate an exact staff-child ratio or average group size in terms of everyday pedagogical work. An additional problem is the variety of centre-based formats (see *Types of provision*).

Variations in staffing formulas across the federal states are considerable. In 2016, in infant-toddler centres for the under-threes these ranged from a median of 3 children/educator in Baden Wuerttemberg up to 6.5 children/educator in Saxony – averaging at 4.3 for Germany overall. In kindergartens, the children/educator ratios ranged from 7.2 in Baden Wuerttemberg to 13.7 in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, averaging at 9.2 for Germany overall. These calculated averages regarding staff-child ratios are markedly higher in the eastern federal states (including Berlin) for both kinds of provision than in the western federal states. For infant-toddler centres the respective ratios were 6.0 (East) and 3.6 (West); for kindergartens 12.2 (East) and 8.5 (West).

Source: Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017, 308.

Curricular frameworks

In 2004, a *Common Framework for Early Education* was agreed upon and adopted by the 16 Ministers for Youth Affairs and the 16 Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. Although this framework is not mandatory, it reflects features of the curricular frameworks introduced by all 16 *Länder* between 2003 and 2008. Basic principles include a holistic approach towards learning; involving children in decision-making processes; intercultural pedagogy; gender-sensitive practices; specific support for at-risk children and children with (potential) disabilities; support for gifted children. Areas of learning include: language, literacy and communication; personal and social development, ethics and religion; mathematics, science and (information) technology; arts education/media: physical development, movement, health; nature and culture. These areas of learning are not understood as separate "subjects", but as part of a cross-disciplinary and integrated approach. A strong emphasis is placed on improving the transition from early childhood provision to school. A significant challenge for the future is to strengthen co-operative strategies at all levels: the steering level; the local and institutional level; and the curricular level.

Most of the state-level curricular documents are based on a view of children as agents of their own learning in a co-constructive process with adults and other children, and all are committed to the holistic approach of encompassing education, care and socialising processes. They do not set out 'learning goals to achieve', but are seen as a description of the main areas of early childhood education. The main differences are in the length, and whether or not the curriculum is mandatory. Whereas most are considered to be 'guidelines', in Bavaria, Berlin, Saxony and Thüringen early childhood centres are obliged by law to include the main principles, aims and areas of learning in their own centre-specific programmes, which are individually geared to local needs.

Whereas all curricular frameworks cover the age group 0-6, in some *Länder* (e.g. Baden-Württemberg, Brandenburg, Hesse, Thuringia) they have been extended to cover the age group 0-10, and in some (e.g. Hamburg, Rheinland-Palatinate) the age group up to 14 years.

¹ In order to achieve comparability between the data in the 16 *Länder*, the 2015 State-by-State Report by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Bock-Famulla et al. 2017, 309) has calculated "Full-day place equivalents" and "Full-time employment equivalents". This so-called "staff resources formula" can be used to estimate the number of children in full-day attendance per full-time member of staff.

Sources: *Deutscher Bildungsserver 2016a.
Jugendminister- und Kultusministerkonferenz 2004.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.
OECD 2015.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

The inclusion of children with special educational needs, developmental risks and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream ECEC settings has progressed steadily since the 1970s. In 2016, from an overall total of 54.871 *Kitas* in Germany, 19.209 (36%) were settings which worked with an integrative approach*, whereas the number of segregated *Kitas* specifically catering for children with SEND decreased from 691 in 1998 to 252 in 2016. In 2014, 76% of children up to school age with a disability or imminent disability attended so-called integrative ECEC centres, 7.5% a special *Kita*, and 16.5% a special unit attached to primary schools**. The distribution of these three institutional formats varies from federal state to federal state. According to the 2014 German Education Report, 3.6% of all 5-year old children with at least one specifically diagnosed disability are in receipt of a so-called 'integration allowance' (*Eingliederungshilfe*), aiming to improve their participation chances in society. The 16 regional (*Länder*) governments have all passed legislation regarding provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The UN (2006) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified in Germany in 2009, has given the discussion about inclusive education fresh impetus at the policy level. Pedagogical approaches in early childhood provision are increasingly located within a paradigm which emphasises recognition of diversity of all kinds, heterogeneity and inclusion.

A number of federally funded and state funded projects are currently focusing on the support of children with special educational needs. As from 2016, for example, ECEC centres with a large number of children needing language support are being granted extra resources within the context of the 'Language *Kitas*' (*Sprach-Kitas*) programme. The *KitaPlus* initiative, started in 2016, aims to assist parents who have support needs outside the regular opening hours of ECEC provision.

Children with a background of migration

Table 4 shows the distribution of children with a migration background (defined as having at least one parent of foreign origin) and those without a background of migration in early childhood provision.

Table 4

Germany: Participation rates of children with and without a migration background in early childhood provision according to age-groups and region*, 2016**

Region	Under 3-year olds			3 years up to school entry		
	Total	Percentage of these		Total	Percentage of these	
		with migration background	without migration background		with migration background	without migration background
Western <i>Länder</i>	413,929	25.4	74.6	1.841,405	33.7	66.3
Eastern <i>Länder</i>	200,671	10.4	89.6	477,165	14.2	85.8
Germany	614,600	20.5	79.5	2,318,570	29.7	70.3

Another specific challenge for ECEC centres since 2014 is the sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 745,545 new applications for asylum were lodged in 2016, and in January 2017, a further 17,964 followed. However, the number of asylum seekers is considerably higher. The largest groups of refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2016, almost one third (30.3%) of all asylum seekers were children under 16 years, 10.8% of whom were under 4 years old and 3.8% between 4 and 6 years, who are particularly likely to benefit from attendance at an ECEC centre.

Across the country there are considerable regional differences regarding the number of asylum seekers and also the procedures used to process applications. In principle, the entitlement to a place in ECEC provision also applies to the children of asylum seekers. According to the Benefits for Asylum Seekers Act, enrolment in ECEC provision is free of charge. However, the local authorities are faced with the problem of providing enough places and also support such as language courses or specific measures in early childhood settings, without knowing in advance how many children are likely to need these. There is also a growing need for specifically relevant professional development courses for early years educators.

In 2016, 10.5% of the population had a non-German background, of whom 43.9% came from other EU countries. In the age-group of the under-fives, these shares were 9.7% and 37.7% respectively ***.

Sources: Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2014; 2016.
BAMF 2016, 2017.
**Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017, 292f.
*Destatis 2016a.
DJI 2016.
EPIC 2016.
***Eurostat 2017g.
StMAS 2016.

Monitoring – Evaluation – Research

In Germany, there is no national system of inspection for ECEC provision. Any kind of external monitoring is carried out at the regional and municipal level. In general, specific control measures in terms of compliance with state-level regulations are low key and based mainly on agreements with the provider organisations. It is unusual for external evaluations or written reports to be required on an annual basis. The main responsibility for monitoring quality lies with the providers, i.e. mainly with non-governmental organisations, which have developed their own systems of quality management and pedagogical counselling. At the regional/local level there are also a number of guidelines both for external and self-evaluation procedures. External evaluations focus e.g. on the overall quality of the centres, on safety and hygiene, the staff/child ratio and on equipment and materials. Check-lists, observations and questionnaires are all used as evaluation instruments. Self-evaluations tend to focus also on the overall quality, teamwork, co-operating with parents, or the interpretation of the regional-level curricular framework. Apart from the city-state of Berlin, there are no recommendations as to how often evaluations should take place. Service providers decide whether the results of external and internal evaluations are to be made public.

Berlin has taken the most far-reaching steps in terms of monitoring quality on the basis of the Berlin Early Childhood Curriculum, the implementation of which is combined with prescribed evaluation procedures. An agreement with the service providers requires specific self-assessment and (every five years) external assessment procedures. A specialist institute – the Berlin Institute for Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Provision (BEKI - <http://www.beki-qualitaet.de/>) – is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the overall assessment procedures. The evaluation findings contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of early childhood. ECEC providers

finance the evaluation, are informed about the results and agreed measures, and are required to adapt their continuing professional development programmes accordingly.

Since 2008, the Bertelsmann Foundation has conducted an independent and detailed annual review of major structural characteristics of all 16 *Länder* in the German ECEC system, with an additional focus on key quality-related conditions. Major sources are federal-level statistics and a structured report provided by each of the federal states.

Monitoring children's progress and achievements is a fairly recent development in Germany, the main motivation being concerns (against the background of OECD-PISA study findings) about early language development in general and the language acquisition of children with a home language other than German in particular. Observations, tests or portfolios are some of the instruments used. In some *Länder*, specific instruments for language assessment are not only recommended but made compulsory, such as the Seldak instrument for 4- and 5-year olds in Bavaria.

A number of contextual factors have led to increased funding for research on topics related to early childhood education and care. In terms of government funded research, major projects in recent years have focused on the transition to primary school, children's language development and the professional development of early childhood educators. The increasing number of Bachelor and Master-level courses specialising in (early) childhood pedagogy (see *Germany: ECEC workforce profile*) has also helped to strengthen the research profile.

In 2009, the first *National Study on Education, Care and Upbringing in Early Childhood (NUBBEK)* was initiated. Data was gathered from a sample of approximately 2000 2- and 4-year olds across the country in centre-based and home-based settings and also in the home learning environment. Approximately one quarter of the children came from families with a Turkish or Russian background. The NUBBEK study assessed the quality of 403 centre-based settings and 164 family day care settings with widely-used rating scales. According to the instruments used, it was found that more than 80% of settings were judged to be 'mediocre' in terms of educational process quality. However, more recent research* critiques the validity of one of these scales. The NUBBEK study concluded suggesting that a systematic and ongoing monitoring of quality is necessary in order to provide service agencies, local authorities and *Länder* ministries with the information necessary for effective steering.

Federally funded research has focused in recent years mostly on the transition to school, but also on children's language development. One example is the BiKS project at the University of Bamberg focusing on 'Learning processes, competency development and selection processes at pre- and primary school age'. A number of publicly funded research projects are also looking at the professional development of early years staff. One example is the AKIPÄD project on the 'Academic studies for early childhood staff – between workplace relevance and professionalisation' at the University of Duisburg-Essen, as well as several university-based research projects within a nationwide professional development initiative known as WiFF (see *Germany: ECEC Workforce Profile*).

Over the past decade or so, research in the early childhood field has thus been experiencing a distinct surge. Alongside long-established research institutes such as the German Youth Institute (*Deutsches Jugendinstitut, DJI*) or the State Institute of Early Childhood Research in Munich (*Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik, IFP*), a number of new institutes have been founded with a strong research focus on early childhood, such as the 'Competence Centre for Early Childhood in Lower Saxony' (*Kompetenzzentrum Frühe Kindheit Niedersachsen*), established in 2007 at the University of Hildesheim.

Sources: Bock-Famulla, K., E. Strunz und A. Löhle 2017.
Deutscher Bildungsserver 2016b.
*Mayer, D. and K. Beckh 2016.
OECD 2015.
Prott, R. and C. Preissing 2006.
Tietze, W. et al. 2013.

Parental leave

Fully paid **maternity leave** (*Mutterschutz*) begins six weeks before the birth date and continues for up to eight weeks afterwards. These eight weeks are compulsory for all mothers.

There is no statutory entitlement to **paternity leave** (*Vaterschaftsurlaub*).

Parental leave (*Elternzeit*) is regulated through legislation at the federal level and can be taken up to the child's third birthday. This is an individual entitlement. 24 months can be taken up to the child's eighth birthday.

Parents who make use of parental leave either on a full-time or part-time basis can choose between two kinds of leave benefit, or they can combine both. These are (a) the Basic Parental Benefit (*Basiselterngeld*) and (b) the Bonus Parental Benefit (*ElterngeldPlus*). *Basiselterngeld* is paid for 12 months – since 2007 for 14 months if both parents take at least two months of leave. Parents with a child born after 1st July 2015 can choose between *Basiselterngeld* and *ElterngeldPlus*.

Basiselterngeld: Payment amounts to a minimum of 300€ per month and a maximum of 1.800€. Parents with previous monthly net earnings between 1,000€ and 1,240€ receive 67%, those with earnings over 1,240 receive 65% and those who earned less than 1,000€ receive a higher proportion. Parents may work up to 30 hours part time. *ElterngeldPlus* is paid for 24 (+four) months up to the child's second birthday as partial compensation for the loss of salary through working part time. Four additional months (*Partnerschaftsbonus*) are paid for at least four subsequent months if both parents work part time for between 25 and 30 hours per week. Payments are staggered according to income, as with the *Basiselterngeld* (65% or 67% of previous net earnings).

Both parents may take parental leave at the same time and both can take up to two leave intervals. During the fourth quarter of 2016, 77.3% of entitled parents made use of the *Basiselterngeld* whereas only 22.6% made use of the *ElterngeldPlus* benefit.

The parental leave reform introduced in 2007 aimed to increase the proportion of fathers taking leave. By 2014, 34.2% of entitled fathers were receiving leave payments (compared with 3.5% in 2006). However, on average fathers made use of only 3.1 months of leave compared with an average of 11.5 months in the case of mothers. This means that the reform initiated a rise in the number of fathers taking leave, but 78.9% failed to take more than the two individual months and only 6.1% made use of eleven to 12 months of leave.

In 2016, 24.9% of mothers with children aged 3 to 6 years made use of parental leave, but only 1.5% of fathers. Parents with children under 3 years of age make considerably more use of parental leave entitlements: 42.4% of mothers and 2.4% of fathers.*

Sources: *Destatis 2017.
EPIC 2016.
Reimer, T., D. Erler, and S. Blum 2017.

Historical highlights and shifts

1802	Establishment of the first charitable initiative for the custodial care of young children (<i>Kleinkindbewahranstalt</i>)
1840	Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) founds the first 'kindergarten' with a comprehensive approach towards early education and care.
1848	Public discussion of Froebel's proposal to integrate the kindergarten into the general education system
1851	Kindergartens are banned by the Prussian government until 1860
1922	Social welfare legislation coming into force following the 1920 conference of ministers (<i>Reichsschulkonferenz</i>) positions kindergartens within the child and youth welfare system

	and codifies the <i>subsidiarity principle</i> . This principle establishes the main rights and responsibilities of individuals, voluntary bodies and the State.
1933	With the onset of the Nazi regime, progressive education (<i>Reformpädagogik</i>) approaches in kindergartens come to an abrupt halt. Kindergartens are gradually appropriated by the National Socialist Welfare Organisation and come under the influence of Nazi ideology.
Post WWII – 1990	In the socialist and centralised <i>German Democratic Republic (GDR)</i> the participation of women in the labour market is a declared political goal, supported by the development of a system of full-day kindergartens and day nurseries, which both had an explicitly educational mission. The decentralised <i>Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)</i> follows a distinctly different policy agenda. Expansion is slow and remains so until the early 1970s. Provision levels are much lower than in the GDR and kindergartens for 3- to 6-year olds are open on a predominantly part-time basis.
1990	Following the unification of the two German states, a new federal-level law, the Child and Youth Services Act, comes into force (1990 in the eastern and 1991 in the western <i>Länder</i>).
1996	Legal entitlement to a kindergarten place for 3- to 6-year olds is introduced, leading to a steady expansion of kindergartens. The level of services for the under-threes improves only minimally during this time. By 2002, the overall level of provision has risen to 9 per cent, but differences between the eastern <i>Länder</i> (37 per cent) and the western <i>Länder</i> (3 per cent) remain significant.
2002	Early childhood education starts to move up the policy agenda. Two strategies in particular mark a significant change of direction in the history of early education and care in Germany. One is the decision to introduce official curricular guidelines for the early childhood sector, which are successively issued between 2003 and 2008 in all 16 <i>Länder</i> ; the other is a government commitment to expand places for the under-threes to provide for 35 per cent of this age group by 2013 and guaranteeing entitlement to a place for children aged 1 and 2 years.
2004	Inter-ministerial (Youth Affairs/Education) agreement at federal level on a (non-mandatory) <i>Common Framework for Early Education</i> .
2008-2013	An unprecedented funding boost from the federal government enables the responsible regional governments and municipalities to initiate rapid expansion drives at the local level. As a result of these concerted efforts, the number of places, primarily for under-threes, in subsidised centre-based and home-based settings rises from 286,905 in 2006 to a total of 695,239 in 2015, representing an unparalleled increase within only nine years.
2013	Implementation (in August) of the entitlement to a place in centre-based or home-based ECEC provision for 1- and 2-year olds.
2013/14	In 2012 (before entitlement), 472,176 3-year olds were attending centre-based settings, whereas by 2015 (after entitlement) this number had increased to 593,639 – a rise of 25%. The number of under-threes in home-based settings rose from 87,982 in 2012 to 101,600 in 2015, an increase of around 15%.*

Sources: BMFSFJ 2013.
 * Destatis 2015.
 Ebert, S. 2006.
 Heiland, H. 1993.
 Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.
 Rauschenbach, T. 2014.

Current challenges for the system of Early Childhood Education and Care in Germany

Country expert assessment by Detlef Diskowski²

Policy debates in Germany in recent years have centred on the expansion of ECEC provision – that is, on providing *more* places. This focus has currently been changing to one of agreeing on common standards, with the aim of improving the quality of learning processes and environments, thus making them *better*. However, the system of ECEC in Germany is faced with a number of challenges, and if the attempts to meet these remain at the level of *more* and *better*, it is unlikely that there will be sufficient funding resources available to achieve this. Moreover, such an approach could actually fail to address the needs of children and families in an appropriate way. In order to build up a sustainable system of early childhood education and care it is necessary to foreground the development of *other* and more customised forms of provision. If we wish to develop a vision for the future which is not only based on an XXL* version of the present, the current quality debates need to focus more on the *how*, thus overcoming the structurally conservative way of thinking predominantly in terms of *more* and *better*. Analysing current challenges at different levels of the system in terms of three main principles could provide an alternative: differentiation, needs-based focus and flexibility. Three examples follow.

1. Differentiation: Rethinking existing time structures

Mainstream centre-based settings for young children are widespread in Germany, and all children up to school age have an entitlement to a place in such a setting or in regulated home-based provision. However, utilisation of these settings varies considerably between East and West, between metropolitan and rural areas, and also according to the (educational) resources of families. It seems that very real problems of access exist which may be related to the still insufficient level of provision, but which also could suggest that standard formats do not always meet the diverse living conditions and needs of families. Existing disparities between parental wishes and current options are not only a matter of extending the opening hours of mainstream provision. The issue is not one of longer but of needs-related opening times.** The often rigid time structures in centre-based provision often fail to take into account the actual working hours of parents and thus their lived reality. The attempts to try and bundle different sets of needs in centralised provision is at most a solution for metropolitan areas. The need for thinking beyond such centralised options in terms of an inner differentiation is likely to increase, so that complementary home-based provision and organised neighbourhood networks can support small ECEC centres in meeting the varying needs of families. This is not only valid for the time structures of provision.

2. Needs-based focus: Reconsidering options for families with very young or school-age children

It is time to reconsider the general validity of the current ECEC paradigm which tends to interpret its task of *complementing* family practices with a pattern of partially *replacing* the family timewise. Not all parents want to leave their child somewhere when they are looking for support and social contacts. Seeing the role of ECEC settings predominantly as a means of contributing towards balancing family life and employment can lead to a narrowing perspective which interprets the children's entitlement to ECEC as something which only takes place without their parents. A broadening of this perspective through the involvement of parents who do not work full-time or have available time, especially those with very young children (and particularly in the case of children/parents with problematic experiences of separation), can lead to a meaningful enhancement of the work in ECEC centres in the way of family education and family support. Moreover, this engagement by the centre staff can have a two-fold influence: both on the children and on the parents.

² Up to 2016, head of unit for childcare, family support measures and child and youth law in the Brandenburg Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sport.

Through the recent policy focus on early childhood, provision for school-age children has tended to be neglected. Innovative options are also needed for these children, options which take into account their needs to develop rules and common values in the peer group, to experiment with self-efficacy, or to disengage from adults who were important in their earlier childhood. Neither the extension of school-like activities into the afternoon nor the continuation of a kindergarten pedagogy framework into later childhood can meet these needs effectively.

A needs-based focus for children and parents means taking perceived needs as a starting point and developing new approaches, and not merely relying on existing forms of provision.

3. Flexibility: Current challenges highlight new pressures

The fact that the children and families living in Germany are in many ways diverse has been recently further accentuated by the arrival in ECEC settings of refugee families with experiences of displacement. Differentiation, individualisation, inclusion... are not new topics, but they are increasing in visibility and urgency. The much-demonstrated ability of early childhood and school-age provision in Germany to signalise that new arrivals are welcome, to engage with the unknown, to cook and eat together instead of holding formal parents' evenings, has been remarkable and it demonstrates a readiness to question the familiar in the light of new circumstances. Strengthening this readiness and trust in one's own competences needs supporting if the challenges relating to the needs of children and families are to be met in appropriate ways.

Sources: **Bien, W., T. Rauschenbach und B. Riedel 2006.
*Diskowski, D. 2013.

Demographic data

Total population

In 2016, the population in Germany totalled over 82 million (82,175,684).

Between 1995 (81,538,603) and 2005 (82,500,849) there was a slight rise in the overall population, whereas up to 2011, numbers sank slightly (81,751,602) and have since then increased.

Children under age six

In 2016, 2.7% of the total population were children under 3 years of age, and 5.3% were children under age 6. These relative shares are significantly below the EU average (*Table 6*), as has been the case for the past 20 years.

Table 5

Germany: Children under 6 years of age, 2016*

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	741,721
1 year olds	740,078
2 year olds	715,608
Under age 3 total	2,200,407
3 year olds	713,757
4 year olds	699,382
5 year olds	716,863
3- to 6-year olds total	2,130,002
0- to 6-year olds total	4,330,409

Table 6

Germany: Children under 6 years of age – share in total population compared with EU average, 1995 to 2016, in %*

Age	1995	Ø EU15 ³	2005	Ø EU25	2016	Ø EU28
Under 3 years	2.9	3.3	2.6	3.1	2.7	3.0
3 to under 6 years	3.3	3.5	2.8	3.1	2.6	3.1
0 to under 6 years	6.3	6.9	5.4	6.2	5.3	6.2

*Own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Source: *Eurostat 2017a.

Single households with children under age six

In 2015, the greater majority of households with children under the age of 6 were couple households. Lone parent households accounted for 6.3% of the total. Most of these are single mother households; the relative share of single father households is very low at 0.3%.

Table 7

Germany: Households with children under age 6 in Germany, 2015

Household type	Total households	Total households in per cent*
Single and couple households	6,390,200	
Couple households	5,454,600	85.3
Single households, total	530,800	8.3
Single households, women	404,800	6.3
Single households, men	385,600	6.0

*Own calculations

Source: Eurostat 2017e.

Employment rates of parents with children under age six

In 2015, 78.0% of men in Germany (15 to 64 years) and 74.0% of women were employed. Almost all (91.4%) men with children under age 6 were employed whereas the portion of women with children under age 6 is considerably lower at 62.1%.

This positions Germany somewhat above the EU28 average both for mothers and fathers. Since 2005, maternal employment has increased significantly, no doubt partly due to the expansion of under-threes provision and possibly also because of the introduction of the parental benefit.

Table 8

Germany: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU states, 2005-2015

	Year	Mothers in per cent	Fathers in per cent
Germany	2005	46.7	86.9

³ The 1995 data are for the EU15 countries at the time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK); the 2005 data (EU25) also include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2014 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR.

	Year	Mothers in per cent	Fathers in per cent
	2010	54.6	90.0
	2015	62.1	91.4
European Union	EU15 – 2005	56.2	90.0
	EU27 – 2010	58.2	86.6
	EU28 – 2015	61.0	87.3
Highest rate of employment	2005	Slovenia – 76.8	Cyprus – 95.3
	2010	Slovenia – 76.7	Netherlands – 93.5
	2015	Sweden – 78.9	Malta/Czech Republic – 93.0
Lowest rate of employment	2005	Malta – 29.3	Bulgaria – 72.4
	2010	Hungary – 32.7	Latvia – 74.8
	2015	Hungary – 38.8	Bulgaria – 77.3

Source: Eurostat 2017b, 2017c.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁴

In 2015, 17.4% of children under 6 years of age were at risk of poverty or social inclusion. This positions Germany below the EU average (24.7%) for this age-group. The relative share of all persons in the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion was 20.0%.

Source: Eurostat 2017d.

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⁴ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))

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