

# ITALY

## ECEC Workforce Profile

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## 1. ECEC governance

### A split system

In Italy, the system of early childhood education and care for children up to statutory school age (6 years) comprises: (1) a variety of provision for 0- to 3-year olds such as infant-toddler centres/nurseries (*Nidi d'infanzia*), integrative settings for children and families, bridge classes, and (2) pre-primary education settings (*Scuole dell'infanzia*) for 3- to 6-year olds. Services for the under-threes are highly decentralised and managed directly by the local municipal authorities according to general criteria defined at the regional province level. At the national level, 0-3 policies and legislation currently comes under the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Office, with links to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. *Nidi* are not part of the national education system. The Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (*Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*) is responsible for the pre-primary settings, which are part of the national education system. Kindergartens/preschools may be state-run, municipal or private, whereas *Nidi* are managed by municipalities, cooperatives, companies or private agencies.

### Towards a unified system

Italy is currently in the process of moving towards implementing an important reform of the ECEC system. With the approval of Law 107/2015 (see *Section 6* for details), also known as *La Buona Scuola* ["The Good School"], the Italian government has introduced a set of guidelines for a comprehensive reform of the Italian school system at all levels (see *Section 6* for a detailed description of the law). Article 1 paragraph 181(e) is devoted to the integration of the ECEC system from birth to six years. This legislation is driving a process of integration between the two main sectors of ECEC (0-3, 3-6), both in terms of governance and educational continuity. In doing so, the reform envisages a process aimed at overcoming the split system between childcare (0-3) and early education (3-6) which has existed since the 1960s. With the recent approval of the Law implementation Decree no. 65/2017, Article 4 (e) – "Institution of the integrated system from birth to six years" (see *Section 6* for details), this transition is expected to take place during the coming years. The newly integrated 0–6 system will need to draw together the 0-3 and 3-6 sectors, while striking a balance between local flexibility and national regulations. From now on, vertical continuity will include the 0–3 sector and not just the pre-primary and primary stages. It is expected that additional government funding will be made available for sustaining the implementation of this integrated 0–6 system. The coming months will be crucial for understanding how the legislative guidelines will be implemented for the organisation of this new system (National Implementation Plan).

## 2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

### 2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The staff categories currently working directly with children in the Italian ECEC system are:

- **Educatori** (educators), who hold a professional qualification (secondary school diploma in an education/human sciences curriculum or, increasingly, a bachelor's degree in Educational Science), making them eligible to work in 0–3 settings;
- **Insegnanti** (teachers), who are qualified professionals working with 3- to 6-year olds in kindergartens/preschools. Their teaching qualification may be a secondary school diplo-

ma in education/human sciences awarded up to - and including - the academic year 2001/2002, or a five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-Primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) which makes them eligible to teach in both primary and pre-primary settings;

- **Insegnanti di sostegno** (special needs teachers), who hold a teaching qualification (secondary school diploma in education/human sciences awarded up to - and including - the academic year 2001/2002, or the five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education), plus an additional one year course (60 ECTS points = 1500-hour course) on inclusion and teaching methods and approaches for children with special needs and disabilities;
- **Ausiliari/operatori** (auxiliary staff) are responsible for cleaning, supporting educational or care staff, preparing lunch and providing practical backup for the teachers as necessary, for example, by clearing up materials and tidying the room. They are not ‘teaching assistants’ (there are no ‘assistant teachers’ in Italy) and therefore they do not assist teachers in delivering educational activities. Minimum qualification requirements for auxiliary staff are defined at the regional level, but usually include having successfully completed compulsory education (*diploma di scuola dell’obbligo*);
- **Dirigenti** and **coordinatori pedagogici** (setting heads or pedagogical coordinators) are trained professionals with educational and management responsibilities, whose role is to see that the quality of ECEC is maintained and improved. They are usually responsible for a number of different ECEC centres, according to regional regulations. They are key figures in the integrated 0–6 years approach to education that characterises many of the larger cities. At the national level, the professional training required by a ‘pedagogical coordinator of ECEC services’ has never been defined, while individual regions have generally required these persons to hold a university degree. In some cases, pedagogical coordinators or directors of preschools (or *istituti comprensivi* – groups of pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools under one head) are recruited from among former infant/toddler educators/preschool teachers who are eligible for this role.

Two examples: In the Lombardy Region (e.g. in the city of Milan), a pedagogical coordinator (*posizioni organizzative*) may hold a bachelor’s or master’s degree in education, psychology, sociology or social work, or a degree in primary and pre-primary education. It is also possible to work in this position with a lower-level qualification (*operatore socio-educativo in servizio*) with five years of prior work experience in infant/toddler centres. By way of contrast, in Emilia Romagna, the requirement for the post of pedagogical coordinator is a master’s degree in education.

The functions of the pedagogical coordinators may have local/regional specifics. In Reggio Emilia, for example, municipal preschools and infant/toddler centres are coordinated by a group of *pedagogisti*, or education graduates. Each *pedagogista* coordinates a group of preschools and infant/toddler centres, thus ensuring a consistent and unitary 0-6 education programme. The coordinating team is responsible for research and innovation, and thus for constantly reviewing and revising the values underlying the overall educational programme, as well as directing and guiding everyday educational activities (Murphy, Ridgway, Cuneen and Horgan, 2016).

*Table 1* outlines the profiles and minimum qualification requirements of professionals working directly with children (professional study routes).

With regard to the previous edition of this country profile in the original SEEPRO publication (Mantovani in Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010), there are key changes to report in relation to the following categories: Pre-primary Teachers (*Insegnanti di scuola dell’infanzia*) and Special Needs Teachers (*Insegnanti di sostegno*). Since 2010, both are required to hold the five-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Pri-*

maria), and, in the case of Special Needs Teachers, an additional one-year postgraduate course in special education.

For 0-3 Educators working in infant-toddler centres/nurseries and other forms of provision for very young children, changes are expected to be introduced in the light of the recent approval of the Law Decree no. 65/2017. From 2019/2020 onwards, a relevant university degree (Bachelor's degree in Educational Science with a specific focus on "early childhood education", or a 5-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education, plus a 60 ECTS points additional module in early childhood education) will become the mandatory requirement for working in a 0-3 ECEC-service (art. 4, letter e).

Core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) are categorised according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 below).

**Box 1**

**SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners** (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010).

- *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (specialist focus, 0–6/7years)
- *Pre-primary Education Professional* (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- *Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional* (focus on pre-primary and primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- *Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- *Social Care/Health Care Professional* (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus including adults)

**Table 1**

**Italy: ECEC staff in centre-based settings**

Job title and profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED <sup>1</sup> level
<p><i>Educatore/educatrice</i> <b>Educator</b></p> <p><i>Profile:</i> Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</p>	<p><i>Nido d'infanzia</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 0–3 years</p> <p><i>Servizi integrativi</i> <i>(Centri per bambini e famiglie, spazi gioco)</i></p> <p><b>Additional 0–3 services: centres for children and families, etc.</b></p> <p><i>Sezioni Primavera</i> <b>'Bridge'<sup>2</sup> classes</b> 2–3 years</p>	Core practitioner	All age groups, including 0–3 years	<p><i>Required:</i> Secondary school diploma in education/human sciences</p> <p>EQF: Level 4 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 45</p> <p><i>Optional (for the moment) and required as from 2019/2020:</i></p> <p>Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (<i>Scienze dell'educazione</i>) (L-19), with a specific focus on early childhood education</p> <p>ECTS points: 180</p>

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> 'Bridge' classes are transition classes for 2- to 3-year olds before attending a pre-primary setting (*scuola dell'infanzia*)

Job title and profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED <sup>1</sup> level
				EQF: Level 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 64  <b>or</b>  Five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education ( <i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i> ) (LM-85 bis), plus a 60 ECTS points post-graduate University module in early childhood education  ECTS points: 180/300 EQF: level 6 or 7 ISCED 2013-F: 0113 ISCED 2011: 64 or 74
<i>Ausiliari/operatori</i> <b>Auxiliary Staff</b>	<i>Nido d'infanzia</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 0–3 years  <i>Sezioni Primavera</i> <b>'Bridge' classes</b> 2–3 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	Not applicable	Not applicable  Compulsory school leaving certificate usually requirement for employment
<i>Coordinatori pedagogici</i> <b>Pedagogical Coordinators</b>  <i>Profile:</i> Depends on specialisation	<i>Nido d'infanzia</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 0–3 years	Centre Head  Regional Coordinator of several centres	0–6 years	Bachelor's or Master's degree in education, psychology, sociology, social work, or five-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education ( <i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i> )  ECTS points: 180/300 EQF: level 6 or 7 ISCED 2013-F: 0113 ISCED 2011: 64 or 74  <b>or</b> recruited from among former Pre-primary Teachers working in an infant-toddler centre for at least 5 years
<i>Insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia</i> <b>Pre-primary Education Teacher</b>  <i>Profile:</i> (pre 2010)	<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i> <b>Kindergarten/preschool</b> (‘Childhood school’) 3–6 years  <i>Sezioni Primavera</i>	Core practitioner (class teacher)	3–11 years	Five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education ( <i>Scienze della Formazione Primaria</i> )  ECTS points: 300

Job title and profile	Main ECEC workplace settings and age-range	Main position/s	Main age-range focus of IPS	Minimum qualification requirement and ECTS points/EQF level/ISCED <sup>1</sup> level
Pre-primary Education Professional (post 2010) Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	'Bridge' classes 2–3 years			EQF: Level 7 ISCED 2013-F: 0113 ISCED 2011: 7
<i>Insegnante di sostegno</i> <b>Special Needs Teacher</b>  <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional (special needs)	<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i> <b>Kindergarten/preschool</b> (‘Childhood school’) 3–6 years  <i>Scuola primaria</i> <b>Primary school</b> 6–11 years	Core practitioner (teacher/educator with an additional qualification for working with special needs children)	(3-) 6–11 years	Five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education ( <i>Scienze della Formazione Primaria</i> )  ECTS points: 300 EQF: Level 7 ISCED 2013-F: 0114 ISCED 2011: 7  <b>plus</b> an additional one-year course focused on inclusion and teaching methods for children with special needs and disabilities ECTS points: 60
<i>Dirigenti</i> <b>Directors, Centre Heads, Principals</b>  <i>Profile</i> (before 2010) Pre-primary Education Professional (after 2010) Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i> <b>Kindergarten/preschool</b> 3–6 years  <i>Scuola primaria e secondaria di primo grado</i> <b>Primary school and lower secondary school</b> 6–11 and 11–13 years	Centre head, also of several centres in one region	3–13 years	Master's degree ECTS points: 300 EQF: Level 7 ISCED 2013-F: 0111 ISCED 2011: 7  <b>or</b> recruited from among former preschool teachers with at least five years' teaching experience
<i>Ausiliari/operatori</i> <b>Auxiliary Staff</b>	<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i> <b>Kindergarten/preschool</b> 3–6 years  <i>Nido d'infanzia</i> <b>Infant-toddler centre</b> 0–3 years  <i>Sezioni Primavera</i> <b>'Bridge' classes</b> 2–3 years	Co-workers without specialist qualification	Not applicable	Not applicable  Compulsory school leaving certificate usually requirement for employment

## 2.2 Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

It is difficult to source data concerning the structural composition of the Italian ECEC workforce for a number of reasons. As stated above, at present the Italian ECEC system is not unitary in terms of its organisation (0-3 and 3-6 services) or governance (municipal, state, private). Furthermore, multiple institutions are involved in gathering data related to 0–3 and 3–6 services in the public (municipal and state) and private sectors. Data are thus fragmented and collected according to different criteria. The most reliable sources are the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), the *Istituto degli Innocenti* (the first secular institution dedicated to taking in children, studying children’s living conditions and promoting their rights and culture), the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, and city/town council websites.

Table 2

Italy: Structural composition of ECEC workforce in state-maintained ECEC provision - qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Staff category	Year/provision/proportion of workforce
Staff with specialist higher education degree	2013: State kindergarten/pre-primary setting (3–6): 15.8% 2011: Bridge classes (2–3): 24.5% 2016: Municipal 0-6 provision in Milan: 25%
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	2011: Bridge classes (2–3): 20.7%
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	2011: Bridge classes (2–3): 53% 2013: State kindergarten/pre-primary setting (3–6): 83.7%
Staff with non-specialist qualification (other qualification)	2011: Bridge classes (2–3): 1.8%
Unqualified staff	No data available
Specialist support staff (e.g. special needs teachers)	2013: State kindergarten/pre-primary setting (3-6): 11.4%
Male staff	2014: on average (taking into account all types of 0–6 services): approx.1% (data source OECD 2014 <i>Education at a glance</i> )
Staff with a background of migration	No data available

Data sources: Istituto degli Innocenti 2014; ISTAT 2014; MIUR 2011; MIUR 2013; IDI 2015; Municipal websites.

## 3. Initial professional studies (IPS)

### 3.1 Initial qualifying routes – higher education and vocational

#### Educators (*educatori*)

Minimum entry requirements for educators working in the 0 to 3 sector are still established at the regional level only. To date, either a school-leaving qualification from a high school offering an education/human sciences curriculum (*Liceo socio-psicopedagogico*, *Liceo delle scienze umane*) or a bachelor’s degree in education have been the usual requirements. In some cases, a shorter vocational course of studies (e.g. the three-year vocational school programmes entitled *tecnico dei servizi sociali* or *assistente di comunità infantile*) is still accepted, but this is becoming less common.

In line with the rest of Europe, the national trend is to encourage higher qualifications and give priority to candidates with a bachelor’s degree in education (ISCED 64; EQF: Level 6;



ECTS points: 180) or a high school (five-year) diploma with a focus on education (ISCED 45, EQF: Level 4).

Law Decree no. 65/2017 states that, as from 2019/2020, either a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science with a focus on early childhood education or a five-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education, supplemented by a 60 ECTS points module in early childhood education, will become mandatory requirements for working in a 0-3 ECEC setting.

### Pre-primary Education Teachers (*insegnanti*)

Entry requirements for teachers working in *scuole dell'infanzia* (kindergartens/pre-primary settings) are established at the national level. Since 2010 (DM 249/2010), teachers working in *scuola dell'infanzia* have been required to hold a five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*, L 85) that qualifies them for a post in both preschools (3-6 years) and primary schools (6-11 years). This course of studies is not organised consecutively with a bachelor's and master's degree, but is one unified course (ISCED 7, EQF: Level 7; ECTS points: 300). It is therefore termed a 'continuous cycle' degree. The universities chosen to provide this five-year course (one per region and two each in Lombardy and Lazio), the syllabus and the entry criteria (number of students and tests), are decided on each year by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR).

### Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

Candidates wishing to work as a Special Needs Teacher in pre-primary education settings have to complete the five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*, L 85; ISCED 7, EQF: Level 6, ECTS points: 300), plus a one-year postgraduate course (60 ECTS points) on 'inclusion and educational approaches' for work with children with special needs and disabilities (*diploma di specializzazione per l'attività di sostegno didattico agli alunni con disabilità*).

### Auxiliary Staff (*personale ausiliario*)

Minimum entry requirements for auxiliary staff working in 0-3 ECEC services and 3-6 kindergartens/preschools are set down at the regional level. Typically, auxiliary staff are required to have successfully completed compulsory education (i.e., lower secondary school prior to 2003; currently at least the first two years of upper secondary school, given that compulsory schooling now ends at the age of 16).

### Centre Heads (*coordinatori pedagogici e dirigenti*)

The profile and minimum qualification requirements for professionals with management-organisational responsibilities in ECEC settings (directors or pedagogical coordinators) are locally defined via regional legislation. Normally, a bachelor's or master's degree in education, psychology, sociology or social work, or the five-year degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della formazione primaria*; EQF: Level 6 or 7; ISCED 7) is required. Heads may also be recruited from among former infant/toddler educators or kindergarten/preschool teachers with at least five years' experience of working in ECEC.

State *scuole dell'infanzia* are often under the direction of the head teacher of the *istituto comprensivo* (group of preschools, primary and lower secondary schools) to which they belong. These heads are not required by regional laws to have specific ECEC training, but to

hold a relevant third level qualification (a five-year university degree/master's degree); in some cases, they are recruited from among former teachers with the relevant qualifications who have worked in a preschool or primary school for at least five years.

The following tables summarise the initial qualifying routes for ECEC staff.

Table 3

**Italy: Educator**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Educatrice/educatore</i></b> <b>Profile: Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional</b>
<p>The following qualification route is the current <i>requirement</i> for core practitioners (educators) in a 0-3 years ECEC service.</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Completion of compulsory education (<i>Scuola media</i>)</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 5-year upper secondary route with a focus on education (<i>Liceo delle scienze umane</i>) OR 3 years vocational secondary training for <i>Assistenti di comunità</i> OR any upper secondary diploma supplemented by specific education courses organised at the local or regional level.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Upper secondary school leaving certificate (<i>Diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore</i>)</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 4</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0922</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 45</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Infant-toddler centres 0–3 years; Bridge classes 2–3 years; Centres for children and families.</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> General university entrance qualification</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> 3-year university degree in education.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Bachelor's degree (<i>Laurea triennale</i>)</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 180</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 6</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0112</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 64</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Infant-toddler centres, 0–3 years; Bridge classes, 2–3 years.</p> <p><i>As from 2019/2020:</i></p> <p>The following requirements will become compulsory for core practitioners who wish to work in a 0-3 years ECEC service.</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> General university entrance qualification (<i>Diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore</i>).</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> A Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (<i>Scienze dell'educazione</i>, L-19) with a specific focus on early childhood education or a 5-year university route in Primary and Pre-primary Education (<i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i>, LM-85 bis) plus a 60 ECTS points module in early childhood education.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Bachelor's degree in Educational Science (<i>Laurea triennale in scienze dell'educazione</i>, L-19), with a specific focus on early childhood education, or a five-year university degree (<i>Diploma di laurea magistrale a ciclo unico per insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia e primaria</i>, LM 85 bis) plus a University specialisation (60 ECTS) for working with children between 0 and 3 years.</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 300 (degree in LM-85 bis), or 180 (degree in L-19)</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7 (degree in LM-85 bis), or 6 (degree in L-19)</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0113</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 74 (degree in LM-85 bis), or 64 (degree in L-19)</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Infant-toddler centres; Bridge classes, 2–3 years; Centres for families and children.</p>

Table 4

**Italy: Pre-primary Education Teacher**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia</i></b> <b>Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional</b>
<p><i>Since 2010:</i></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> General university entrance qualification (<i>Diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore</i>); individual university selection procedures. Criteria for access (number of students and tests) are decided each year by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR).</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Five-year university route in <i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i> (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education)</p> <p><b>Award:</b> 5-year university degree (<i>Diploma di laurea magistrale a ciclo unico per insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia e primaria</i>). This degree programme is defined as a 'continuous cycle', meaning that it is not split into a bachelor's and a master's degree, but is one unified degree course, ending with a master's degree.</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 300</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0113</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 74</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Kindergartens, 3–6 years; Infant-toddler centres, 0–3 years; Bridge classes, 2–3 years; Centres for children and families.</p>

Table 5

**Italy: Special Needs Teacher**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Insegnante di sostegno</i></b> <b>Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional (special needs)</b>
<p><i>Since 2010:</i></p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> 5-year university degree in <i>Scienze della Formazione Primaria</i> (degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education)</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> An additional 1-year post-graduate course in special education with a final examination.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> <i>Postgraduate diploma</i> in special needs education for the early years, <i>Insegnante di sostegno</i></p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 300</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0114</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 74</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Kindergartens/preschools, 3- to 6-year old children with disabilities</p>

Table 6

**Italy: Auxiliary Staff**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Ausiliari/operatori</i></b>
<p>The following qualification route is the usual <i>current</i> requirement for auxiliary staff in ECEC settings and may vary from municipality to municipality.</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> Completion of primary school</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Compulsory education: lower secondary school (before 2003), or (after 2003) at least the first 2 years of upper secondary school.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Compulsory school leaving certificate (<i>Diploma di scuola dell'obbligo</i>)</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> not applicable</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 2 or 3</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Kindergarten (<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i>), 3 to 6 years; Infant-toddler centre (<i>Nido d'infanzia</i>), 0-3; Bridge classes (<i>Sezioni primavera</i>) 2-3 years</p>

Table 7

**Italy: Centre Heads/Kindergarten (IPS)**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Dirigenti</i></b>
<b>Profile:</b> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
<p>The following qualification route is the usual current requirement for the role of kindergarten head. (They also can be recruited among former Pre-primary Teachers with at least five years' teaching experience.)</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> General university entrance examination (<i>diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore</i>); individual university selection procedures. Criteria for access (number of students and tests) are decided each year by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR).</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Five-year university degree in <i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i> (Primary and Pre-primary Education) or master's degree in education, psychology, etc.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Master's level degree (<i>Diploma di laurea magistrale a ciclo unico per insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia e primaria</i>). Qualified Teacher Status for pre-primary and primary education.</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 300</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0111</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 74</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplaces:</b> Primary and lower secondary school (<i>Scuola primaria e scuola secondaria di primo grado</i>), 6-13 years; Kindergarten (<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i>), 3-6 years; Infant-toddler centre (<i>Nido d'infanzia</i>), 0-3 years; Bridge classes (<i>Sezioni primavera</i>), 2-3 years</p>

Table 8

**Italy: Pedagogical Coordinators 0-3 sector**

<b>Job title in Italian: <i>Coordinatori pedagogici</i></b>
<b>Profile:</b> Depends on specialisation
<p>The following qualification route is the usual current requirement for the pedagogical coordinators of infant/toddler centres and other social and education services for under 3-year olds. They can also be recruited among former Pre-Primary Teachers who have worked in an infant/toddler centre for at least five years.</p> <p><b>Entry requirements:</b> General university entrance qualification (<i>diploma di istruzione secondaria superiore</i>); individual university selection procedures. Criteria for access (number of students and tests) are decided each year by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR).</p> <p><b>Professional studies:</b> Five-year university degree in <i>Scienze della formazione primaria</i> (Primary and Pre-primary Education) or Bachelor's/Master's degree in education, psychology, sociology, social work.</p> <p><b>Award:</b> Master's level university degree (<i>Diploma di laurea magistrale a ciclo unico per insegnante di scuola dell'infanzia e primaria</i>) or Bachelor's/Master's degree in education, psychology, sociology, social work</p> <p><b>ECTS points:</b> 180/300</p> <p><b>EQF level:</b> 6/7</p> <p><b>ISCED 2013-F:</b> 0113</p> <p><b>ISCED 2011:</b> 64/74</p> <p><b>Main ECEC workplace:</b> Primary and secondary school (<i>Scuola primaria e scuola secondaria di primo grado</i>), 6-13 years; Kindergarten (<i>Scuola dell'infanzia</i>), 3 to 6 years; Infant-toddler center (<i>Nido d'infanzia</i>), 0-3; Bridge classes (<i>Sezioni primavera</i>), 2-3 years</p>

### 3.2 Competencies and curricula in IPS programmes

#### Educators (*educatori*)

##### Five-year upper secondary education qualifying route

The core component of the programme offered by the *liceo delle scienze umane* – a secondary school specialising in the human sciences which, since 2010, has substituted the *liceo socio-psico-pedagogico/istituto magistrale* - is a range of human science disciplines (psychology, sociology, pedagogy and educational science, anthropology), with a focus on research in the areas of education, psychology and sociology/anthropology/history. Students with this

school-leaving qualification are eligible to work in early childhood settings or in general social and educational services (see Section 3.1).

**Curricular areas:** The curriculum also encompasses humanistic subjects (Italian, history, geography, philosophy, art history), science subjects (mathematics, physics, natural sciences) and languages (Latin and modern languages); one of the non-linguistic disciplines is taught through a modern language other than Italian (CLIL).

**Pedagogic-didactic approaches:** This course of studies is delivered via a combination of conventional classes, workshops and practical work/internship. The periods of internship/practical experience (in the third, fourth and fifth years) are designed to make students familiar with the educational and social services and institutions in the local area. Practical experience is viewed as a key component of the training of educators (see Section 4). Furthermore, the recently introduced Law 107/2015 (see Section 6 for a description of the law) mandates at least 200 hours of 'alternating training' (*alternanza scuola-lavoro*: periods of work experience in companies, other workplace settings, public services, etc. ...), to take place during the second two-year cycle (third and fourth years) and in the final year. Under this new law, internships have become compulsory for all students in the last three years of upper secondary education (at least 400 hours for students in vocational education and 200 hours for students in general education). These work placements may be carried out either in the private or in the public sector (internship is explained in depth in Section 4).

### **Three- to five-year vocational school route** (*Assistente di Comunità Infantili o Tecnico dei servizi sociali*)

**Curricular areas:** The curriculum offers human science and artistic disciplines (education, sociology, psychology, art, music), alongside humanistic (Italian, history, geography), scientific (science, mathematics) and linguistic (foreign languages) subjects.

**Pedagogic-didactic approaches:** Approximately half of the overall course time is allocated to the practical internship (practicum) component. However, there is variability among the different types of school (some offer three-year courses, others five-year courses...) and it is therefore difficult to define the average number of hours spent on internship. This course of studies is becoming rare and consequently there is a lack of information about common didactic approaches.

### **Three-year bachelor's degree in educational science** (*Laurea triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione*)

**Curricular areas:** This three-year course is mainly focused on the human sciences (education, psychology, sociology, philosophy, intercultural education, anthropology etc.), which are taught alongside the relevant curricular disciplines (languages, history, music, technology, etc.). Modules in special education and the psychology of disability and inclusion are also provided to specifically prepare educators for working with special needs children (0–3). A minimum level of competence in a foreign language (English, French, German, Spanish) is an obligatory entry requirement.

The course is aimed at developing students' knowledge and competence in the areas of: education methods/didactic approaches, teaching and learning processes, educational and communication dynamics within an educational service. Interdisciplinary activities and practical workshops are key coursework components (the workshops are designed to help students translate theory into practice). The basic goal underpinning the pre-service university training of ECEC practitioners is to foster the development of a professional profile that is capable of transferring a multidisciplinary approach into teaching practice that can be adapted to different contexts (Mantovani 2007).

This degree course provides students with the training, expertise and competence required to carry out educational work in non-school educational settings with people of all ages and

life stages, whether in conditions of ‘normality’, disadvantage, marginalisation, vulnerability or cultural diversity.

**Pedagogic-didactic approaches:** Coursework comprises lectures, workshops and practical training/internship aimed at integrating theory and practice. The practical work component (internship/*tirocinio*) is obligatory for all students and is carried out during the second and third year. The number of hours dedicated to practical work is established by the individual university (in general, around 9-10 ECTS points. 1 ECTS point=25 hours). For example, the degree course in Educational Science at the University of Milan-Bicocca has established a minimum of 250 hours for internship/practical work: 100 hours during the second year and 150 hours during the third year. The practical work may take place in a variety of ECEC settings, including day care, community centres and institutions. Each year an evaluation of the student’s placement is prepared by the supervisor which is based on the student’s reports and documentation. The aim of this coursework component is to give students direct experience of the type of organisation in which they may work in the future and the opportunity to bring a reflective approach to bear on this hands-on experience.

### Pre-primary Education Teachers (*insegnanti*)

#### Five-year university degree in Primary and Pre-primary Education (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*)

Since 2010, teachers in *scuole dell’infanzia* are obliged to hold a five-year university degree (*Scienze della Formazione Primaria*) (300 ECTS points) that makes them eligible to teach in either preschools (3–6 years) or primary schools (6–11 years). However, those who were awarded a high school diploma in education studies prior to and including 2001-2002 may still participate in national competitive exams to become preschool teachers.

**Curricular areas:** The curriculum balances the human sciences (education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, pedagogy) and relevant curricular disciplines (languages, history, geography, mathematics, sciences, art, music, etc.). It also requires participation in workshops and an internship/practicum. During the workshops (or lab work), students are split into small groups to share practical learning experiences and simulations of what they plan to do during their teaching practice internships. The internship begins in the second year, and lasts a total of 600 hours (equivalent to 24 ECTS points) divided between each year. The individual university decides how to distribute the hours over the years. For example, the University of Milan-Bicocca requires the following hours: 100 hours in the second year, 125 in the third, 175 in the fourth and 200 in the fifth.

As specified in the current legislation – see DM 249/2010 (pp. 24-25) – the following components are an integral part of teacher training:

- a) English language competence - at least Level B2 in the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” adopted in 1996 by the Council of Europe. In order to qualify as teachers, undergraduates must either sit an examination or present certificates to prove that they have attained the required level of proficiency;
- b) digital competence as outlined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 18 December 2006. It is particularly important that teachers possess the ability to use multimedia languages to represent and communicate knowledge and to create simulated environments and virtual laboratories;
- c) educational/didactic competence in fostering the inclusion of students with disabilities, in line with the provisions of Law 104, 5 February 1992 and its subsequent modifications and additions.

**Pedagogic-didactic approaches:** The professional study routes for student-teachers developed in recent decades are characterised by: a multidisciplinary approach; integration of theory and practice; partnerships with kindergartens/schools. Experienced practitioners



play an active part in the delivery of these studies. The overall goal is to promote the development of all-round knowledge of the curriculum for preschool and primary practitioners.

At the end of this university route, there is also a final exam, known as VIVA, which consists of a written dissertation and oral defence about a teaching project carried out in a host school. Successful completion of the VIVA exam means that candidates have earned Qualified Teacher Status for preschools and primary schools.

### Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

Teachers wishing to acquire a specialisation in special needs are required to complete a one-year postgraduate course in special needs education (for graduates of the five-year degree programme in Primary and Pre-primary Education, *Scienze della Formazione Primaria*).

**Curricular and pedagogic areas:** To work as a special needs teacher in kindergarten, graduates of the five-year degree course in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* [or teachers holding a secondary school diploma in social and educational studies awarded before year 2001/2002] are required to attend an additional one-year postgraduate course in special needs education. This course was officially launched in 2015. It may only be offered by a university, must account for at least 60 ECTS points and must include at least 300 hours of internship experience, for which 12 ECTS points are to be awarded. Course content is specific to either preschool or primary school education as relevant and is aimed at helping teachers to develop the educational competences required to foster the inclusion of students with disabilities. The course includes lectures (in, for example, the pedagogy of helping relationships; child neuropsychiatry; metacognitive and cooperative teaching methods), workshops/education laboratories (also focused on how to use new technologies in working with special needs children) and practical work/internship.

## 3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

### Alternative pathways

Until little over a decade ago, Italy was one of the few countries in the European Union that did not offer standard university-level pre-service training to teachers at all levels of the school system. Up to 2003, the basic training of preschool and primary school teachers was at upper secondary level, with a school-leaving diploma in an occupationally relevant area of study (diploma from a vocational secondary school specialising in primary teaching training – *Istituto Magistrale*; or in education/human sciences – *Liceo PsicoPedagogico*; *Liceo delle Scienze Umane*) was the only qualification required to teach at these levels.

With the introduction of Law 53/2003 *Delega del Governo per la definizione delle norme generali sull'istruzione e dei livelli essenziali delle prestazioni in materia di istruzione e formazione professionale* (Art. 5, Subsection 3), the Degree in Primary and Pre-primary became the entry-level qualification for teachers. This was offered as a four-year degree programme up to 2010, subsequently becoming a five-year programme. Teachers who already held permanent posts and had been teaching for several years prior to the change were offered alternative pathways to upgrade their knowledge and skills (predominantly workplace-based training routes).

A similar scenario will probably occur as a consequence of the recently approved Law Decree no. 65/2017 which will require those working in ECEC settings for 0–3 year olds to hold an occupationally relevant university degree for professional educators.

### Formal opportunities for moving up and across qualification frameworks

The only type of progression in the career path of a Pre-primary Education Teacher or an Educator in an infant-toddler centre is that determined by length of service. The only possi-

ble promotion available to these teachers is to participate in further competitive exams (on managerial, organisation and administrative topics) to become service coordinators. In some kindergartens, the teacher with the highest level of seniority may be appointed coordinator at the discretion of the school head.

#### 4. Workplace-based learning in the IPS of core practitioners

Internship (workplace-based learning) is viewed as a key component of the initial training of Italian practitioners and is meant to include observation, supervised practice, reflexivity, planning and documenting, assessment and experience in the sectors of education that are relevant to the given initial professional studies routes (educational settings, socio-educational contexts, kindergartens/preschools, ...).

Currently, this element of IPS is regulated at the national level. The number of hours devoted to internships is nationally defined for the five-year degree programme in *Scienze della Formazione primaria*, and varies locally for the Bachelor's Degree in Educational Science.

Since the introduction of Law 107/2015, it is a national requirement for students attending upper-secondary school (both general and vocational) to be actively involved in the *alternanza scuola-lavoro* (alternating training) project to help education and pre-service training better meet the needs of the labour market (universities also welcome secondary students on work placements). This traineeship is compulsory for students and starts in the third year. The law requires at least 400 hours of 'alternating' or 'dual' training for students in vocational education and 200 hours for students in general education. It may take place in either private or public sector settings.

The following describes the current situation concerning workplace-based learning in the IPS routes of ECEC core practitioners.

##### Educators (*educatori*)

#### Workplace-based learning within the five-year upper secondary qualifying route

Secondary students who choose an education-human sciences curriculum are obliged to complete 200 hours of internship experience (in Years 3–5), which must be workplace-based and must take place in social/educational services settings (residential care structures for minors, crèches, early childhood services, etc.) that students might potentially work in after completing their minimum initial training.

The internships are carried out under the supervision of (a) a teacher-tutor (usually the education and psychology tutor) who is responsible for monitoring the students' progress and development during the placement and (b) a representative of the host organisation (usually the coordinator), who is responsible for welcoming and supporting the student during his or her time in the field.

#### Workplace-based learning within the three- to five-year vocational school route (*Assistente di Comunità Infantili o Tecnico dei servizi sociali*)

The hours of internship work (which must be completed in a social or educational service setting) are approximately half the duration of the entire course of studies, although there is variability among schools (some offer three-year courses, others five-year courses and it is therefore difficult to define the average number of hours spent on internship). Law 107/2015 prescribes that for five-year vocational secondary school programmes, at least 400 hours must be spent in 'alternating' or 'dual' training between school and workplace (*alternanza*



*scuola-lavoro*) (in years 3-5). These internships are to be carried out under the supervision of a teacher from the student's own school and a representative of the host organisation (often the coordinator), who will act as the student's main point of contact during his or her time in alternating training.

### **Workplace-based learning within the three-year bachelor's degree in educational science – *Laurea triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione***

On the three-year degree course in educational sciences (L-19), practical work (usually referred to as *tirocinio*/internship) is obligatory for all students and carried out during the second and third year. It is the responsibility of individual universities to organise these work placements and the structure of the time blocks spent in the workplace can vary from one university to another.

The objectives of the internship are to: promote the integration of the theoretical knowledge that the student is gradually acquiring with hands-on experience of work-place settings; ensure a healthy balance between theory, practice and reflection on experience; train students in the use of observation instruments and documentation; provide students with a framework for reflecting about practice.

**Length of time spent in the workplace:** Each university establishes the number of hours that students must spend doing practical work. For example, the course in Educational Science at the University of Milan-Bicocca prescribes a minimum of 250 hours (10 ECTS points): 100 hours (4 ECTS points) during the second year and 150 hours (6 ECTS points) during the third year. The practical work takes place in a variety of ECEC settings, including day nurseries, community centres and settings. Each year, an evaluation of the practical work is prepared/produced by the supervisor, based on the students' reports and documentation.

**Structure of time blocks:** As stated above, the structure of time blocks varies across universities. The tendency is to combine direct and indirect activities. The indirect (or preparatory) activities include analysing the students' professional interests and aptitudes, identifying the setting in which they will carry out their internship, and setting up an agreement between the university and the host organisation. Direct activities are those actually carried out by the students in the workplace setting (under the guidance of their supervisor, who will meet them periodically to discuss how the work placement is proceeding and encourage them to analyse and reflect on the practical experience gained to date). During the internship, the students alternate observation, documentation and participation in the everyday functioning of the host organisation/service, with reflection and discussion with other students/interns and the supervisor. Each supervisor is responsible for a group of students whose number may vary from university to university (e.g., at the University of Milan-Bicocca each tutor is responsible for 20-25 students). Group sessions alternate with individual meetings between student and supervisor. Supervision focuses on the student's observations and documentation and on analysing the practices that he/she has implemented in the field.

**Self-evaluation and external evaluation:** The methods used to evaluate the internship are also at the discretion of the individual university. However, assessment is usually continuous and generally involves both 'external' evaluation provided by the supervisor and critical evaluation and analysis on the part of the student himself/herself (self-evaluation based on: analysis of learning outcomes, self-observation, own appraisal of practical teaching experience). This formative evaluation model (*valutazione formative*, Bondioli and Ferrari 2004) foregrounds the active involvement of the student.

**Supervisors/mentors:** Supervisors play a crucial role in the internship experience for all undergraduate students. For each degree programme, an internship board defines criteria for selecting and recruiting supervisors. No 'standard' criteria have been provided at the national or local levels, nor have any minimum requirements been established. These supervisors are recruited through a formal selection process. At Milan-Bicocca University, for example, su-

supervisors are selected on the basis of their prior experience in the field, as educators, coordinators, teacher trainers, etc.; of their prior experience of collaborating with the university; on their knowledge and skills in the area of education; and on their overall educational and professional profile. The number of supervisor contracts is decided annually depending on the intake of students on the degree programme in question. Supervisors do not receive a fixed salary. The post of supervisor is assigned annually on a contract basis via a public competitive selection procedure run by the university. The number of posts and relative compensation are decided on an annual basis.

### Pre-primary Education Teachers (*insegnanti*)

#### **Workplace-based learning within the five-year university degree course (*Laurea quinquennale a ciclo unico in Scienze della formazione primaria*)**

**Workplace-based learning and regulation:** Since 2010 (Ministerial Decree 249/2010, Art. 3), in the context of the overall redefining of teacher training requirements, the government has made practical work placements an obligatory part of the five-year degree in *Scienze della Formazione Primaria*.

**Duration:** Internship experience begins in Year 2, and lasts a total of 600 hours (corresponding to 24 ECTS points) over Years 2-5. National legislation requires that the placements be designed to earn a progressively higher number of ECTS points in each successive year up to final year. Each university decides how to distribute these hours over the years. For example, the University of Milan-Bicocca requires the following hours: 100 hours (4 ECTS points) in the second year, 125 hours (5 ECTS points) in the third, 175 hours (7 ECTS points) in the fourth and 200 hours (8 ECTS points) in the fifth.

**Structure:** Workplace-based learning comprises direct and indirect activities. Direct activities are carried out in preschools and student teachers are supervised by experienced pre-primary or primary school teachers. There is an orientation phase, an observation phase in schools, a phase for the preparation of a specific project and a final phase for implementation of the project. The host teacher in the kindergarten/preschool cooperates with the university tutor in supervising and evaluating the teaching practice. Thus, the curriculum is implemented in collaboration with schools: each university given responsibility by the Ministry of Education for providing primary education training is required to work with schools in the surrounding area. Schoolteachers and principals therefore work directly with students; they are assigned part-time or full-time to universities to supervise students in planning and carrying out their teaching practice assignments.

**Supervisors/mentors:** Supervisors are recruited via a selection process to work at the university for a few years. There is approximately one supervisor per 20-25 students. The relevant Decree Law distinguishes between three different tutorial positions (DM 8 November 2011): 1) ordinary tutors - *tutor dei tirocinanti*, 2) coordinating tutors - *tutor coordinatori* (with fewer hours of actual supervision) and 3) organising tutors - *tutor organizzatori* (with no hours of actual supervision). Article 11 of DM-249 2010 specifies that those appointed as 'supervisor-tutors' must have worked for at least five years as teachers or head teachers within the Italian national school system. The appointment (role) must be either reconfirmed or terminated each year by the board of the university department employing the tutor. The posts of organising and coordinating tutor may only be assigned for a four-year period, may not be immediately reassigned to the same person and may be extended for a maximum of one additional year. The university department employing the tutors is responsible for selecting and recruiting them. In the course of their everyday duties, tutors/supervisors report to the degree programme board.

The function of the regular tutor (*tutor dei tirocinanti*) is to monitor the students' teaching activities during their periods of teaching practice and to help them manage their teaching

processes. Co-ordinating tutors (*tutor coordinatori*) are responsible for guiding and managing the regular tutors, assigning the students to classes and schools, formally drawing up a teaching practice plan for each student, catering for the training needs of the group of students under their supervision, monitoring and assessing the teaching practice placements and guiding the student teachers in writing their final reports. Organising tutors (*tutor organizzatori*) organize and manage relations between the university, schools and school heads, and supervise all administrative procedures involving the coordinating tutors and the regional education authorities. They also have responsibility for assigning a group of students to each coordinating tutor.

In general – independent of a supervisor’s specific role – his or her job is to make sure that student teachers receive an adequate amount of feedback and guidance for carrying out their specific teaching practice assignments. Supervisors also help students to reflect on and organise their own knowledge, to appreciate the relationship between theory and practice, to apply formal learning to occupational roles, and to become familiar with the running of schools and the different activities and practices implemented in the classroom.

With regard to remuneration, tutors are subject to the contractual conditions laid down by the relevant national wage agreement (CCNL - *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale Di Lavoro*).

**Evaluation:** Evaluation and monitoring throughout the internship are the basis for intermediate and final assessments. At the end of each year of the internship, students turn in project documents, including teaching materials, and a final report.

### Special Needs Teachers (*insegnante di sostegno*)

The Decree Laws 249/2010 and DM 30 September 2011 define the *linee guida nazionali (Ministeriali)* [national Ministerial guidelines] for the teaching practice component of the one-year postgraduate course in special needs education (which may be completed by graduates in Primary and Pre-primary Education/*Scienze della Formazione Primaria* or by recognized primary teachers).

**Aims and goals of the internship:** The placement comprises both indirect and direct components. The indirect component involves critical analysis of the teaching practice experience by the student teachers themselves and the design of interactive teaching activities for implementation with pupils with disabilities. The practical activities include the application of digital technologies (ICT) to special needs education. The exact type of teaching experience provided can vary and is defined by the local university in collaboration with the host schools.

**Duration and time blocks:** Students must complete 300 hours of internship experience (for which they are awarded 12 ECTS). Individual universities are free to decide how these hours will be distributed, as long as they meet the national requirement for the teaching practice to take place in schools and over a period of no longer than five months.

During the direct activity phase of the placement, the student is supervised by an ordinary tutor (*tutor dei tirocinanti*), chosen from among the teaching staff of the host school, who must have at least seven years’ teaching experience.

**Evaluation:** Assessment of the teaching practice is both external and internal (self-evaluation). The former is based mainly on the tutor’s evaluation of the student’s performance/progress during the placement. This is followed by the student’s own critical assessment of his or her practical teaching experience at both the personal and professional levels.

## 5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

Although there is a shared interpretation of the link between in-service professional development and the provision of good quality ECEC, the framework for regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel varies both across the country and between the infant-toddler and pre-primary sector.

In brief:

**0–3 sector:** Until now, there has been no national framework regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel working in 0–3 settings in Italy. Some regional regulations existed, but varied for each region. With 21 different regional legislative frameworks (*sistemi legislativi regionali*), CPD opportunities for infant-toddler (0–3) Educators and Coordinators vary significantly across the country. With the approval of the Law Decree no. 65/2017, creating an integrated system will also be accompanied by changes on the ground regarding staff professionalisation. In relation to the mandatory Bachelor degree for Early Childhood Educators to be introduced in 2019, Article 5 of the Law Decree specifies that the State will provide specific measures for the continuing professional development of both Educators and Pre-primary Teachers and these will be set down in a National Plan for the 0-6 sector.

**3–6 sector:** A national framework and new national guidelines for the CDP of preschool and primary school teachers have recently been drawn up (Law 107/2015). In the National Curricular Guidelines (MIUR 2012), PD is mentioned in the following term: “collegiality, continuing professional development and reflection on practice are needed to enrich teachers’ professionalism” (MIUR 2012, 17).

Despite a lack of uniformity, the Italian early education system has built up its strength thanks to significant investment in continuing professional development (at both the local and the national levels).

Continuing professional development for ECEC practitioners is mainly funded at the local level, with significant variation across regions (there is a large gap between the Northern and Southern regions): a certain amount of professional development activities are usually planned on an annual basis, but there are no regulations requiring a minimum number of hours’ attendance. Local authorities fund PD, negotiating the contents and modes of organisation with local universities, research centres and private providers, or using internal resources. In recent years, the government has allocated very little funding to PD in state schools, apart from selected national or experimental projects. In the past years, no regular public funding was provided for continuing professional development by the Ministry of Education. Limited state funds were mainly assigned to special projects (e.g., *Sezioni Primavera* - a programme focussing on 2- and 3-year olds, Law 285/1997). Regions occasionally provided some funding and city/town councils struggle to find resources. For municipal schools or schools run by other providers, the situation is the same as for public infant/toddler centres.

By approving the new Law 107/2015 and its implementation Decree, the Italian government acknowledged – including in economic terms – its crucial role in promoting and sustaining CPD activities to ensure the full development of teaching staff across the 0-6 sector. The recently approved reform introduced an annual 500€ bonus for teachers, to be spent on accredited CPD activities.

### Aims of CPD

For all ECEC personnel, being actively engaged in the above-mentioned forms of CPD is viewed as both a ‘duty’ and a ‘right’. Indeed, expectations concerning the professionalism (and professional training) of the Italian ECEC workforce are high and include in-service professional development and continuous improvement of skills and competences.

CPD is viewed as making a key contribution to the quality of ECEC. Its core aim is defined as promoting critical reflection, rather than transmitting theoretical knowledge with no connection to practice, and encouraging shared learning and ‘learning by doing’ within communities of practice and of learners (Lave and Wenger 1991). Continuing professional development is conceptualised as a collegial process of observing, planning, documenting, reflecting, preparing and planning work with children and families (Rinaldi 2001; 2006) that requires reflexive and flexible methods and procedures based on the analysis and observation of practice and on practices of sharing. Teachers’ competences and their capacity to enhance their practices via lifelong development and learning are taken as given. “The professionalism of teachers”, as stated in the National Curricular Guidelines (drafted by the Ministry of Education in 2012) “is acknowledged to be a key aspect of quality”. Planning and guaranteeing continuing professional development in the context of such an extensive, fragmented and varied system is a challenge in terms of organisation, quality of trainers, and finding resources.

### Main forms of CPD for core practitioners and for qualified and non-qualified co-workers

The main forms of CPD for **core practitioners** (pedagogical coordinators, directors, teachers, educators) are: workshops, conferences, local seminars, documentation projects and research projects (action research, intervention research, participatory research, etc.). In general, CPD in the Italian ECEC system is aimed at fostering critical thinking and reflexive practices through teamwork, exchange programmes, documentation/observation, bottom-up experiences of evaluation, involving teachers in research projects, new digital technologies (video observation/video feedback, etc.). Collegiality is another defining feature of CPD in ECEC. In some cities (e.g. Reggio Emilia, Pistoia), professional development is based on the synergy between staff meetings at individual preschools and infant/toddler centres and broader training opportunities provided at the local, national, and international levels.

Official **co-workers** such as ‘teaching assistants’ or ‘pedagogical assistants’ do not exist in the Italian ECEC system, and therefore there are no CPD options available for them.

Despite the current lack of an overarching national framework, the Italian ECEC system has been investing in continuing professional development (*formazione permanente*) at the local level since the 1970/80s. Many city councils set up partnerships with universities or research institutes with a view to developing a consolidated set of professional development practices and action-research, or to conducting experiments characterized by teamwork, co-constructed project work, documentation, reflective work and a focus on working with families and community (*partecipazione*). In general, both bottom up/top down participatory processes and local university/research centre involvement have been key to fostering CPD. Some cities have developed a CPD system that involves pedagogical coordinators – viewed as key figures within integrated 0-6 ECEC systems –, links with universities or other research institutions and a bottom-up-participatory process involving multiple actors. Bottom-up networks have traditionally played a crucial role in the CPD of Italian ECEC staff (see Box 2).

#### Box 2

##### Italy: Example of an influential professional network

The *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi-Infanzia*, founded in 1980 as a bottom-up network including practitioners, researchers (academics), administrators and coordinators, and professional journals (*Bambini, Infanzia*, etc.), plus at a later stage, the National Documentation Centre unit, *Istituto degli Innocenti* and regional groups, has traditionally driven CPD programmes and disseminated the outcomes via conferences, local seminars, advocacy initiatives, publications and training institutes. Today this group is one of the most authoritative voices in the Italian ECEC sector.

In the municipal preschools of Reggio Emilia, one of the strategies implemented has been to give priority to professional development in the daily running of the service by encouraging reflective practices of observation and documentation, with the weekly staff meeting providing the main forum for in-depth reflection and sharing. In new centres, experienced staff mentor new staff on site during the start-up phase (for example, *Nido Bambini-Bicocca* <http://www.unimib.it/go/192950658/Home/Italiano/Vivere-luniversita/Vivere-IUniversita/Asilo-nido>)



This reflects the broader Italian discourse on in-service professional development (*formazione permanente*), which is particularly strong in municipal kindergartens/preschools. In Italy, the concept and the terms used for initial professional studies/teacher training are *formazione di base* (pre-service training) and *formazione in servizio* (continuing professional development). These terms convey a very different meaning from the English word ‘training’ (Nigris 2007, 1145). The concept *formazione* comes from *forma* (structure, shape) and means “taking rather than being given a form” (Nigris 2007, 1146). This requires investment at many levels, and a bottom-up/top-down participatory perspective on professional development as a dynamic, multimethod approach of reviewing practices within a community of learners.

### Leave entitlement specifications

Traditionally, in municipal ECEC provision, both pre-primary education teachers and infant/toddler educators (0–3) have been guaranteed an average of 40 to 50 hours per year for professional development, with the upper limit including teamwork (supervised by coordinators).

In *state* preschools (3–6) regulations allow for 20 to 40 hours per annum for teamwork and planning, work with parents and professional development. Regional Ministry offices may be more or less stringent in terms of monitoring how these hours are actually invested, allowing a lesser or greater proportion to be used for *auto-aggiornamento* (self-organised professional development) which teachers are not expected to document and – similarly to teachers at other levels of schooling – may include personal reading. A rough estimate of the time annually devoted to PD is between 12 and 15 hours.

Contracts with *non-public* providers are many and varied. The two leading providers (PAN, a consortium of social entrepreneurship networks), in the 0–3 sector and FISM (*Federazione Italiana Scuole Materne*) in the 3–6 sector guarantee a minimum of 12 hours per year, and more for teachers taking part in special projects. In some locations, characterised by a strong tradition of investment in ECEC, cooperatives to which ECEC services have been outsourced by city/town councils (referred to as externalized municipal services) guarantee 2 to 5 hours per week for continuing professional development.

When professional development takes place in the context of special projects, evaluation is required. In cases in which professional learning tends to be shared among the educational staff of ECEC centres (e.g. Pistoia, Parma, Reggio Emilia etc.), **auxiliary staff** benefit from the same professional development initiatives as their colleagues with a qualification in education, and share a culture of reflection.

### Main providers of CPD

**0-3 sector:** Local authorities (city/town councils) or external agencies are the main providers of CPD activities. In areas in which ECEC is strong, councils and training providers often engage in partnerships with universities or research centres, but funding is scarce. At the local level, some city/town councils (e.g., Reggio Emilia, San Miniato, Pistoia, Modena) have set up other types of institution (e.g., documentation centres, etc.) that provide professional development activities for educators.

**3-6 sector:** The Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), (through funds allocated to state kindergartens and schools), local authorities and external training agencies are the main providers. However, the funding to schools is not earmarked for professional development and has been steadily decreasing in recent years. Prior to the approval of Law 107/2015, preschool teachers enjoyed an average of roughly 12-15 hours of paid professional development per year, including individual study.

Since 1998, with the progressive development of pre-service education and the economic crisis, investment in continuing professional development has declined in terms of dedicated time and resources (and this is particularly true of the state-run services, while municipal services and FISM continue to invest in PD). Some ‘creative’ solutions have been found at the

local level and in general there is a stimulus to find new, sustainable approaches that capitalise on the knowledge of experienced staff (see also CARE European Project <http://ecec-care.org/>, WP3: Jensen et al. 2015; Bove et al. 2016).

Under the terms of the Law 107/2015, new funds are to be allocated by the Ministry of Education and new guidelines provided for the CPD of all school staff including teachers, principals and co-workers. When the law is fully implemented, many things will change and new pathways for CPD will be introduced into schools of all levels. The development of a national system of continuing PD for all school staff will be viewed as a 'national/public responsibility', and all teachers will be required to participate in 'courses' to enhance their professional competence.

### Formally recognised participation in specific forms of CPD

At present, participation in specific forms of CPD is not 'formally recognised' in terms of career advancement. However, over the next few years, this situation is likely to change, given the forthcoming approval of the new laws (see Section 6).

### Specific qualification requirements for heads of ECEC provision

As already described under Section 2, a well-defined study route for the professional profile of pedagogical coordinator (*coordinatore pedagogico/pedagogista*) does not exist at the national level. The qualifications required by heads of ECEC services are set at the regional level and generally include a five/four-year university degree. In some cases, pedagogical coordinators or heads of preschools (or *istituti comprensivi*) are recruited from among suitably qualified former infant/toddler educators/preschool teachers.

Variations in qualification requirements exist at the regional level. However, the professional role of *heads/coordinators* is similar across regions and consists in orienting and monitoring educational practices, coordinating services in the same area (nursery schools and preschools), orienting and planning CPD for teachers and educators, and so on. State *scuole dell'infanzia* are often under the direction of the head of the primary school or *istituto comprensivo* (3-14) to which they are attached, who is likely to have no specific training in ECEC. Some regions (Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria) have established a stable and official network of coordinators.

The current draft law 2443/2016 (still under discussion) specifies that to work as a *pedagogista* it will be obligatory to hold a master's degree. This can be one of the following:

- LM 85, Educational Sciences (*Laurea Magistrale in Scienze Pedagogiche*);
- LM 50, Planning and Management of Educational Services (*Laurea Magistrale in Programmazione e Gestione dei Servizi Educativi*);
- LM 57, Adult Education and Lifelong Learning (*Laurea Magistrale in Scienze dell'Educazione degli Adulti e della Formazione Continua*) (see section 6 for further details on the new draft law 2443/2016).

#### Box 3

##### Italy: The role of the *pedagogista* in the ECEC system

To fully illustrate the variety of the Italian system, we provide two examples:

- In Milan, a large and cosmopolitan city with over 330 ECEC services directly under the management of the city council, pedagogical coordinators (called *posizioni organizzative*) play a crucial role as trained professionals with education and management responsibilities. They work to improve the quality of ECEC and are each responsible for three-four ECEC services in one of the city's nine zones. At present, 80 pedagogical coordinators are employed by the ECEC services of the City of Milan. They are key figures within the integrated 0-6 approach that characterises the city's early education system.  
<https://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/en>
- In Reggio Emilia, *pedagogisti* also play a crucial role within the integrated system; they work together and learn from each other and through exchanges with teachers and among different services. The role of the *pedagogista* in Reggio Emilia is embedded in a system of relationships with teachers, other school staff,

parents, citizens, administrators, public officials, and external audiences. In 2016, there were 13 *pedagogisti* in the Pedagogical Coordinating Team who form their own collaborative working group and also interface with the teams (teachers, *atelieristi*, mentor teachers, auxiliaries, cooks, and other staff) at individual schools; as well as with administrators, officials, and public bodies who are stakeholders in the Reggio Emilia early childhood education system. Additionally, 10 'direct' *pedagogisti* coordinate the municipal infant/toddler centres and preschools. <http://www.reggiochildren.it/?lang=en>

### Specialist courses/modules for other specified posts

Specialist courses exist, particularly for the role of *language support coach*, but we do not have exhaustive information regarding these figures due to the variability characterising the Italian ECEC system. In general, there are two professional posts for working as a language support coach for immigrant children: (a) linguistic mediators and (b) cultural mediators. At the preschool level, language support coaches are almost exclusively engaged in teaching Italian as an additional language to immigrant children (L2). Language support coaching for children with learning disorders usually becomes more systematic in primary school: learning disabilities are usually diagnosed at the end of the preschool or during the first year of primary school (at the age of 6). This reflects the holistic educational approach which has traditionally characterized the Italian early education system. Special needs teachers in pre-primary education act as 'support teachers' for all the children in a class.

### Options for supplementary/additional study routes

Teachers (3-6) and educators (0-3) who decide to pursue supplementary study routes or courses are required to pay for these courses themselves. Paid study-leave (*diritto allo studio* - right to education) does exist, and the amount of paid-time available for further education and training depends on the contract of employment (public versus private, etc.). Despite differences, this option usually corresponds to an average of 150 paid hours per year. All employed teachers and educators have the right to benefit from this opportunity, pending formal approval by the school-head/coordinator. Recognised further study routes include PhD programmes, master's degree programmes, etc.

### Research projects on the CPD activities of ECEC personnel

At the national level, no large-scale research projects on the CPD of ECEC staff have received funding over the past five years.

However, there has been funding of local projects, such as the well-known case study conducted in Pistoia (Musatti, Picchio, and Mayer 2016) and presented in the context of the CoRe report (Urban, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, Lazzari, and Van Laere 2011).

An interesting example of investment at the local level is a citywide CPD project for ECEC personnel conducted in Milan, the administrative capital and first city of the Lombardy Region. This project – entitled "*Milano Bambini* (MIBA project)" (2011-2013) – was designed in 2011 to respond to an official call from Milan City Council (under the terms of Law 285/1997) for a CPD project to enhance practitioners' competences and better equip them to face the challenges of working in increasingly diverse ECEC settings. It was developed in the context of a formal partnership between Milan City Council (Dr. Beatrice Arcari) and the Catholic University of Milan (P.I. Prof. Milena Santerini) in collaboration with the University of Milano-Bicocca (P.I. Prof. Susanna Mantovani). *Milano Bambini* was developed in continuity with an earlier PD project ("*Infanzia Insieme*", 2008-2009 – P.I. Prof. Pier Cesare Rivoltella, Catholic University) and had a subsequent extension in the current/ongoing project *Didattica Inclusiva e flessibilità* (2016-2017; P.I. Prof. Susanna Mantovani, University of Milano-Bicocca, in collaboration with the Catholic University of Milan). These projects represent a novel development in the allocation of resources for PD (the Catholic University of Milan was project leader). In particular, *Milano Bambini* – which is the specific focus of this paragraph – was financed via funds distributed yearly to cities by the Ministry of Social Affairs (as provided for by Law 285/1997), for the purposes of promoting children's wellbeing and innova-



tive/supplementary ECEC services. These funds cannot be used exclusively for PD and funds must be allocated via an official public selection process. This constraint means that the proposed PD projects must directly involve parents and children.

Box 4

**Italy: Brief description of the Milano-Bambini project**

The PD project *Milano-Bambini* (MIBA) was assigned via a public competitive process to two universities (Catholic University of Milan: P.I. Prof. Milena Santerini; Università Milan-Bicocca: P.I. Prof. Susanna Mantovani). A joint proposal was submitted which went beyond the traditional forms of ECEC PD in Milan to include laboratories/workshops that were piloted and implemented in schools and open to families, as well as other forms of innovation such as the production of materials and the activation of participatory processes with the involvement of parents and children. Five sub-projects were funded within the city's ECEC settings over the years of the programme (2011-2013). Each covered the need for CPD of a significant number of ECEC practitioners and produced a wide range of documentation, which is of ongoing value at a number of levels.

The programme involved 36 municipal ECEC services (*asili nido, scuole dell'infanzia, servizi integrativi*) spread across the city of Milan, 300 ECEC practitioners and 12 education coordinators, plus an additional 252 educators who took part in seminars conducted during the second year. The main actors in the project were Milano City Council (0-6 system), the Catholic University of Milan and Milan-Bicocca University and ECEC practitioners. Families and children were involved in the workshop phase of the project, based on experiential learning.

The innovative features of the MIBA programme included development of a PD model and documented workshop projects in selected schools which would later act as professional development hubs (*poli di sperimentazione*) for other schools, as well as the provision of opportunities for community involvement, both aspects of strong research interest. It is interesting to note that the project was evaluated at the city level and further developed under the leadership of Milan-Bicocca University in collaboration with the Catholic University of Milan in the context of a new project *Didattica inclusiva e flessibilità* (currently ongoing).

In-depth analysis of the MIBA project and its innovative features is provided in the Italian Case Study, which is part of the CARE European project (2016) and presented in the CARE Report (Bove, Mantovani, Jensen, Karwowska-Struczyk and Wysłowska 2016 – See Section 7 of this Report for more details).

### Current reforms/trends/debates regarding the CPD of staff in ECEC provision

Current trends/debates regarding the continuing professional development of staff in ECEC provision include:

- (1) The need to identify new sources of funding and new resources in light of the ongoing economic crisis; only then can a good, consistent and sustainable standard of CPD opportunities for ECEC personnel in all regions/cities be guaranteed. This would be in keeping with the strong tradition of investment in CPD as a key component of ECEC quality that has characterised the Italian early education system since the 1970s;
- (2) The need to strike an optimum balance between pre-service and in-service training, seeking to reduce the gap between newly-recruited teachers or educators and senior teachers or educators and to smooth over the intergenerational gap by promoting a perspective of educational continuity.
- (3) The need for establishing educational continuity across the ECEC sector, integrating ECEC services both horizontally and vertically, reforming the pre-service training of core practitioners and redefining roles and responsibilities at the national (central) and local (regional and municipal) levels are all issues currently under strong debate in relation to the Draft Law 1260/2014, and have also been addressed under the now approved Law 107/2015 (see Section 6).
- (4) A new topic under discussion is therefore the need to address the current mode of training for 3-6 teachers (less focused on young children and more focused on curricular contents and didactics) and the need to upgrade training for 0-3 educators in line with Law 107/2015 and Law Decree no. 65/2017. Most of the large and medium-sized cities in Northern and Central Italy (Reggio Emilia, Milan, Turin, Genoa, Pistoia, Trento, Firenze, Bologna, Parma, Modena, etc.) well known both nationally and internationally for their ECEC services have a tradition of continuity of practice between 0-3 and 3-6 ECEC. How-

ever, the present training requirements for ECEC practitioners work against rather than fostering this continuity;

- (5) The need to introduce new contents/topics into the training of ECEC practitioners, both to provide them with a high level of professional competence and to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse, complex and intercultural society which requires inclusive practices, all within a perspective of educational continuity across the early childhood sector.

In sum, the challenges and discourses today are about finding ways to guarantee systematic and sustainable continuing education for ECEC personnel that is informed by research and innovation, and to strike a new balance between tradition and innovation (Lisbon Strategy 2000). The lack of resources is beginning to stimulate alternative forms of professional development (innovative approaches) and new ways of evaluating PD, at the municipal and regional levels. A key step in the development of a monitoring system is the setting up of a *network of coordinators*, which currently only exists in some regions: Tuscany, Emilia Romagna.

## 6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

We provide a brief description of three national policy reforms relating to ECEC staffing:

- Provisions for a new framework for the education and training system (Law 107/2015) and the implementation of an integrated system of education 0-6 years (Law Decree 65/2017)
- Regulating the professions of Educator and *Pedagogista* (Draft Law 2443/2016) – still under discussion in Parliament, and
- Redefining the requirements and approaches regarding the initial professional studies of education professionals at all levels of the education system (Ministerial Decree 249/2010).

### (1) Law 107/2015 and Law Decree 65/2017

As anticipated in previous paragraphs of this report, the national Law 107/2015, approved by the Italian Parliament on July 13<sup>th</sup> 2015, introduces a set of guidelines for a comprehensive reform of the Italian school education system at all levels (pre-primary, primary, middle, high school). The main points of the reform concern: *Introduction of merit-based components for teacher salaries; Teacher recruitment (on a permanent basis); School autonomy; Curriculum; Digital and language skills; Work-based learning; Continuing professional development; Integrated system of education and training from the birth to six years* (European Commission Document 2015, 5-6).

Among the above listed issues, two points are particularly relevant for the ECEC-sector: (a) the need to guarantee ‘compulsory, permanent and structural’ continuing professional development for teachers at all school levels, thus ensuring CPD opportunities for ECEC staff in the integrated 0-6 system, and (b) the development of an integrated system of education and training from birth to six years. Teacher’s professionalism is taken seriously, and new funds will be allocated to support the CPD of all teachers across the education system.

Moreover, the law foresees a new regulation concerning the integrated system of education and training from birth to six years (Law 107/2015, Article 1, para. 181), aimed at overcoming the split system between the childcare sector and the education sector. In relation to the recent approval of the Law Decree no. 65/2017, which legislates the “Institution of an inte-

grated system of education from birth to six years”, this process is expected to happen during the coming years. The main points of this decree are summarised in the following box:

Box 5

**Italy: Law Decree no. 65/2017: “Institution of an integrated system of education from birth to six years”**

- (1) Ensuring equal educational opportunities, overcoming economic and cultural barriers to access (Decree, Art.1, 3.b), encouraging inclusion (Art. 1, 1), and in general ensuring more accessible services for all families, especially the most vulnerable ones;
- (2) Encouraging educational continuity between 0-3 and 3-6 educational programmes (Art. 1, 3.a);
- (3) Enhancing the quality of educational services, by ensuring adequate initial professional training (specific university-level training will be a minimum entry requirement for ECEC teachers and educators) (Art. 1.g). [Either a bachelor’s degree in educational science (early childhood education curriculum), or a five-year degree in primary and pre-primary education, supplemented by a 60-ECTS points module in early childhood education, will become mandatory requirements for working in a 0-3 years ECEC service];
- (4) Ensuring continuing professional development opportunities for ECEC staff (Art. 1, 3.g) and delivering targeted training programmes for ECEC staff working within the integrated 0-6 years system (Art. 5, 1.b);
- (5) Defining criteria for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the educational programmes offered within the Integrated System (Art. 5, 1.d);
- (6) Ensuring “pedagogical coordination” of ECEC services at the local level (Art. 1, 3.g);
- (7) Developing high quality integrated centres for the education of children aged 0-6 years (*Poli per l’infanzia*), ensuring full access for all children and encouraging training programmes that involve both 0-3 educators and 3-6 teachers (Art. 3, 1);
- (8) Consolidating, expanding and improving access to ECEC services, with the objective of covering 75% of Italian Municipalities (Art. 4, 1.b) and introducing the integrated 0-6 years system in all parts of the country (Art. 5, 1.a);
- (9) Developing a national system for monitoring and evaluating quality in the integrated system (Art. 5, 1.d);
- (10) Defining National Guidelines for the 0-6 integrated system (that are in line with the existing national curricular guideline document for 3-6 years education: *Indicazioni Nazionali per il curricolo 2012*). The guidelines will be drawn up by an expert committee, appointed by the Ministry of Education, University and Research (Art. 5, 1.f);
- (11) Establishing a multiyear national action plan defining the distribution of the available financial resources for consolidating, expanding and enhancing the integrated ECEC system (Art. 8, 2);
- (12) Setting up a National Fund for the development of the integrated system, via investment in the construction, renovation, and maintenance of ECEC centres (Art. 12, 2.a), and investment in the CPD of ECEC staff across the integrated system (Art. 12, 2.c);
- (13) Delegating to the regional authorities responsibility for: programming and developing the integrated 0-6 years education system (Art. 6.a); defining regional professional development programmes for ECEC staff (Art. 6.b); setting up local pedagogical coordination structures (Art. 6.c); and defining structural, organisational and quality standards for ECEC services;
- (14) Defining an “upper limit” to the contribution that may be asked of families to cover the cost of running ECEC services (Art. 9.1) and providing for the local authorities to offer reduced fees, fee exemptions and economic incentives (“day care vouchers”) with a view to encouraging families to enroll children aged between 3 months and 3 years at ECEC centres (Art. 9, 2 and 3).

The goal is to set up an integrated system of education for children from birth to six years, which will involve integrating current early childhood education services (0–3) and kindergartens (3–6) (not only state-run, but also municipal and recognized private schools). This will not be a matter of insisting on identical management across the sector, which historically has seen the involvement of diverse actors and organisational models, but of bringing all these entities into an integrated system unified by shared standards of acceptability in terms of infrastructure, organisation and quality. The law provides for the redefinition of roles and responsibilities among the regional and local authorities, the setting up of ‘hubs for 0–6 year olds’ (*poli per l’infanzia 0–6*), and the setting up of a new financing system based on co-funding by State, regional and local authorities (Gruppo Nazionale Nidi Infanzia 2016, 18-19). Moreover, in line with most European countries, the Decree introduces – for the first time at the National level - the upgrading of pre-service education to a relevant University Degree for

0-3 Educators. Additionally, the legislative guidelines sustain the development of a more inclusive system of early childhood and education, thus providing a framework for more equal educational opportunities for all children and families, enhancing the quality of educational services by encouraging higher initial professional studies for teachers and educators, consolidating the ECEC service across the country and developing a system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the ECEC system. The next months will be crucial to understanding how these legislative guidelines will be effectively implemented across the country.

## (2) Draft Law 2443/2016 (DDL Law - under examination)

The proposed Draft Law 2443/2016, which has been approved by the lower house (*Camera*) of the Italian parliament and is currently being debated in the Senate, arises from the need to define, in line with European and international standards, the occupations of *educatore* (not only in ECEC services) and *pedagogista*. In the meantime, the profile and minimum requirements for educators working in the 0-3 sector have been regulated through Law Decree no. 65/2017. If definitively approved, the Draft Law would require a three-year degree qualification to become a Professional Educator, not only in the ECEC sector, but also in other social and care sectors.

The Draft Law bill clearly and unambiguously defines the professional identity, academic qualifications and lines of work of both *educatore* and *pedagogisti*.

The knowledge, skills and competences of the **Professional Educator** correspond to EQF Level 6. More specifically, the proposed law provides for two different types of Professional Educator: (1) Professional Educator - healthcare sector (*educatore professionale "socio-sanitario"*), who is eligible to work in healthcare contexts; and (2) Professional Educator – social services and education sector (*educatore professionale "socio-pedagogico"*), who is eligible to work in education and care services, residential care for minors and social services. The former must hold a bachelor's degree (three years' full-time study) in the area of health and healthcare (L/SNT 2); the latter a bachelor's degree (three years' full-time study) in education and socialisation (L19). Should the law be approved, these qualifications will become obligatory for those who wish to do social/educational work.

The proposed new legislation also specifies the qualification requirements for work as a **pedagogista** (see *Section 5* of this report). The knowledge, skills and competences of the *pedagogista* correspond to EQF Level 7. His or her role is to design, plan, organise and coordinate educational services, to manage, monitor, evaluate, and supervise the educational quality of public and private education and training systems and services. Within ECEC, the *pedagogista* generally has responsibility for coordinating and supervising the educational work. They are trained in educational theory and methods, as well as in the philosophical, sociological and psychological disciplines. Approval of this bill would make a master's degree in educational science the minimum entry-level qualification for this type of work.

Thus, the new legislation will provide a national framework of reference for the professional classification of educators and *pedagogisti* – occupational categories that are currently not officially defined. It will also be possible to classify the academic qualifications and competences of Italian educators and *pedagogisti* in terms of the EQF. Finally, in order to protect those who are already doing excellent educational work but do not hold a degree, time will be allowed and special pathways provided for them to obtain their qualification, in part by awarding credits for their previous work experience.

## (3) [DM] Ministerial Decree 249/2010

Ministerial Decree [DM] 249/2010 laid down new requirements in terms of the qualifications required to enter the teaching profession at all levels of schooling. This law emphasized the fact that the teaching function is the same across all levels of education, invariably requiring sufficient disciplinary, educational, methodological, organisational and relational competence to help students to achieve the learning outcomes specified in the national curriculum.

For preschool and primary school teachers, the 2010 reform established the five-year degree course in Primary and Pre-primary Education. This course of studies differs from that prescribed by the previous 1998 reform, first because of the increase in length (from four years to five), and second because there are now no longer two different streams for pre-primary and primary teaching. The new course – the so called *laurea quinquennale a ciclo unico* in Primary and Pre-primary Education - in fact, makes it possible to obtain a qualification for both preschool and primary school teaching. The most recent reform also confirms the key role of the teaching practice internship, scheduled to begin in the second year and running until the end of the fifth year of the degree programme, and implemented in close collaboration with schools (see also Section 4). The aims of the teacher training provided are in line with those of previous educational pathways, with some subtle but significant changes. The first one is the common professional profile of teachers at all levels of schooling, as earlier discussed; second, there is a broader focus on *cross-skills*, especially, those related to information technology, English (ESL B2 Level) and the inclusion of pupils with disabilities.

Apart from defining the ‘prototypical framework’ of basic competences required by teachers at the different levels of school, the Decree Law identifies innovative ‘roles within schools’ (*profili istituzionali*) such as that of the special needs teacher. To qualify for this role, it is mandatory to have completed a one-year postgraduate course in special education (as already explained above, see Sections 3.1). Only those who are already qualified teachers are eligible to take this course, or those with a school-leaving diploma obtained before the 2001/2002 academic year from a school specialising in education/human science studies. The programme of the postgraduate course in special needs education, which lasts one year and is worth 60 ECTS points (of which 12 are awarded for teaching practice), varies in line with the level of school in which the teacher will work (preschool, primary, lower and upper secondary).

The course is delivered by academic staff with proven expertise in the field of special education. Course contents and format are defined in keeping with the university’s internal standards and with the criteria laid down by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research.

## 7. Recent country-specific research relating to ECEC professionalisation and staffing issues

### Reconceptualising professionalism in ECEC

**Source:** Lazzari, A. 2012. “Reconceptualising professionalism in ECE: insights from a study carried out in Bologna”. *Early Years*, 32 (3): 1-14.

**Aims:** This study aimed to explore, from a ground-up and socio-cultural perspective, the issue of early childhood professionalism. The goal was twofold: (1) to explore how pre-school teachers conceptualize their professionalism, starting from the ways in which they define the work carried out every day in early childhood institutions; (2) to highlight what teachers’ views on their professionalism tell us in terms of needs that must be taken into account for supporting their professional development.

**Procedure:** The research - an empirical study, recently carried out within a concluded PhD project - adopted a phenomenographic approach (Marton 1988; Svensson 1997) to study in depth teachers’ perceptions on their professionalism. It involved 60 teachers (invited to take part in the study on a voluntary basis) working in state, municipal and private (mostly Catholic) pre-schools (for children aged from 3 to 6 years) located in Bologna province. The sample was composed as follows: 24 teachers working in centres run by Municipalities; 19 working in private centres (Catholic pre-school, FISM); 17 working in state pre-schools. Six focus groups



(two per each type of ECEC institution) were conducted, asking teachers to go through their professional history, highlighting specific episodes or situations in which their professionalism had been enhanced. The transcripts were analysed within the methodological framework of hermeneutic phenomenography and coded/categorized with the support of the qualitative data-analysis software N-Vivo, which facilitated a multidimensional analysis of empirical materials.

**Findings:** Findings – based on the analysis of the teachers’ statements - highlight a complex conceptualisation of professionalism, challenged by recent neo-liberal influences.

### Sustaining ECEC quality through continuing professional development

**Source:** Lazzari, A., M. Picchio, and T. Musatti. 2013. “Sustaining ECEC quality through continuing professional development: systemic approaches to practitioners’ professionalisation in the Italian context”. *Early Years*, 33 (2): 2–13.

**Aims:** This study aims to illustrate and critically analyse – on the basis of documentary sources and interviews with local experts - relevant CPD initiatives that have been implemented within municipal early childhood services in the Italian context. Final (long-term) objectives of this analysis were: to enhance educational practices in Italian ECEC centres; to implement a coherent CPD system in large cities (as Rome); to improve and extend PD programs focused on peer-learning and among practitioners; to enhance and expand the role of documentation centres (such as one in Ferrara) in improving practitioners’ CPD at a local level.

**Procedures:** The authors carried out an analysis of good CPD practices in early childhood settings in Italy. They interwove documentary sources (coming from literature, documentation and previous research) and new data, represented by interviews with local experts. The process of data analysis combined key-elements/findings of the documentary sources and the analysis of some CPD initiatives, highlighting how the elements emerging from the literature and previous studies (i.e. collegiality, documentation, inter-agency etc.) can also inspire experiences that enhance the quality of ECEC services.

**Findings:** This study highlights how good practices of CPD are already active in some Italian ECEC settings (i.e. in Rome, Ferrara, Reggio Emilia, Pistoia, Palermo). Important projects for a qualified system of ECEC services, carried out in some Italian cities, deserve to be analysed in order to identifying quality elements and strenght points to be enhanced and expanded in a systematic way.

Summing up, this research highlights how municipal continuous investments in PD acted as a major driving force in enhancing the quality of education and care practices. The investments include both in-service professional initiatives and also the promotion of workplace conditions that support practitioners’ professional growth. The analysis of specific PD initiatives illustrates how the same qualifying elements can be implemented at different systemic levels, going beyond single ECEC settings, reaching a metropolitan area, or even a regional area.

### Italian case study on Innovative PD practices in the ECEC services in Europe – European CARE project

**Source:** Bove, C., S. Mantovani, B. Jensen, M. Karwowska-Struczyk, and O. Wystowska. 2016. D 3.3 613318. CARE. Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC CARE. Instrument: Collaborative project. Call Identifier: FP7-SSH-2013-2. D3.3: Report on “good” practice case studies of professional development in three countries (Appendix B – Italy).

**Aims:** The Italian Case Study in ‘*innovative practices in the in-service professional development of ECEC practitioners*’ is part of the Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European Education and Care project (CARE), funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme. The Italian case study was part of the work package on

*Professional Development: Impact and Innovation* (Bove, Mantovani et al., 2016) and involved in-depth exploration and analysis of two innovative approaches to professional development at the city level, which could act as models for PD at the national level: these were the cases of “Reggio Emilia: a model of *diffused* pedagogy” (Giudici and Castagnetti 2016) and “Milano: fostering innovation in a big city. Continuity and change” (Mantovani, Bove, Cescato, and Braga 2016).

More specifically, the aims of the study were to: describe how innovative frameworks for the in-service professional development of ECEC practitioners at the macro (city) level, typical of both the selected case studies, are transferred and further implemented at the micro (school) level; explore which types of professional development are most effective in enhancing the quality of ECEC; analyse how practitioners perceive and interpret the impact of innovation on their educational practices and on ECEC quality; investigate teachers’ perceptions, views, ideas, and beliefs about developing their professional competence within a qualitative-ethnographic framework.

**Procedures:** The case study was designed as a ‘Holistic Case Study’ (Yin, 2009) with embedded subcases at both sites. After a preliminary narrative review of the concepts of ‘innovation’ and ‘innovative PD practices in Early Childhood Education and Care’ (Mantovani, Bove, and Cescato 2015), the case study was conducted by combining multiple and diverse sources of data. Existing/documentary data and new/empirical data were both viewed as key to contextualising and analysing in depth the two cases and their embedded subcases. In Milan, three subcases were involved: two infant/toddler centres and a preschool; in Reggio Emilia two subcases: an infant/toddler centre and a preschool.

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of informants (stakeholders, educators, teachers, education coordinators, researchers). In addition, three focus group discussions were conducted in Milan with educators from the ECEC services for under-threes involved in the study.

Interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and entirely transcribed. Data were analysed qualitatively using content analysis methodology (see Berg and Lune 2012), combining categories drawn from the literature with “bottom-up categories”. Documentary sources (PhD and Master’s theses, publications, documentation etc.) on the history of the ECEC settings and their staff’s in-service PD, were analysed and compared with the interview data.

**Findings:** The results suggested a high level of consistency between the macro- and micro-levels, represented by the existing/documentary sources and the interviews with participants, respectively. More specifically, continuous professional development was not conceptualized as an optional extra, but as “embedded in the services/in place”. Teachers’/educators’, coordinators’ and stakeholders’ accounts all reflected a shared perception of how innovation occurs in practice. Key themes concerning innovation and efficacy in PD are: a good balance between theory and practice; the connection between research and PD; impact (of PD) as ‘change in action’; the importance of workshops and opportunities for ‘learning by doing’; the need for reflexivity and opportunities for shared learning/teamwork; the key role of the education coordinator as a ‘driver of innovation’; use of the new technologies (ICT) as a component of innovation.

In addition, there was widespread interpretation of innovation in PD as a *participatory* process, which not only includes workshops, action-research, analysis of practice, and video observations, but also involves parents and children where possible. As a “catalyst for adults to meet” (New, Mallory, and Mantovani 2001), CPD is viewed as a key means of developing a shared vision of early years education.

The study contributes to developing insights/perspectives for the future: the need for a better balance between pre-service and in-service PD practices; the need to reduce both intergenerational differences among staff and the rigid use of human and financial resources that is typical of the Italian public administration system; the need to bridge multiple

perspectives within ECEC (by creating and combining real and virtual communities of learners); the need to invest in the training of key figures as *multipliers of innovation*; the need to promote collaboration between policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and parents in order to develop a common understanding of PD. In a word, the need to keep the rights of children in view, as the compass ultimately directing our action.

[The Final Draft of the Report was submitted to the EU Commitee on 30 June 2016. Final submission to the EU was in October 2016.]

## 8. General workforce issues

### 8.1 Remuneration and working hours

Teachers working in public *scuole dell'infanzia* enjoy equal status with their colleagues in public primary schools, but there is no parity of pay (or working conditions) between – or among – core practitioners working in kindergartens/preschools and infant/toddler centres.

#### Pre-primary Education Teachers 3–6

Teachers in state preschools – who are in the direct employment of the Ministry of Education – earn more than educators in municipal infant/toddler centres and work with their pupils for a shorter number of hours per day. 0-3 educators work 35-40 hours a week, while state preschool teachers work 25 hours a week. The starting annual salary for preschool teachers working in public institutions is 25,099€ and for teachers at top of the scale is 36,900€ (OECD 2014, 467). Teachers working in private kindergartens are generally less well paid than their counterparts in public preschools (whether state-run or municipal) and work longer hours (31-38 hours/week).

#### Educators 0–3

The salary of educators working in infant/toddler centres is subject to wide variations. Salaries vary by provider type (municipal, public service outsourced to a cooperative, private...) and working hours (e.g., full-time work varies between 31 and 38 hours per week). Differences not only arise among different categories of provider, but also within the public sector itself: the remuneration of educators at publicly funded infant/toddler centres varies across cities/towns and across regions, as a function of 'local' wage agreements. In general, the infant/toddler educator falls under the C1 category of worker (under the terms of the National Wage Agreement/regional and local authorities division - *Contratto Collettivo Nazionale di Lavoro/comparto regioni e autonomie locali*), and is entitled to an annual salary of 19,454€.

Italian teachers' statutory salary levels are lower than the OECD average at every career stage (European Commission 2015). The maximum salary may only be reached after 35 years of service, while the OECD average is 25 years (OECD 2014).

Coordinators of infant/toddler centres receive higher salaries than ordinary educators/teachers. Infant/toddler centre coordinators earn between 20,000 and 25,000€ per annum, depending on the provider type, the contractual conditions applied, and the number of hours worked per week. Head teachers at state preschools earn about 43,000€ per annum.

It is difficult to say in 'absolute and general terms' whether it is possible to live on the salary of an educator/teacher in Italy today. The relationship between salary and standard of living is influenced by many factors (such as the average cost of living in one's city or region of residence, family circumstances, age, children, etc.). In general, the salary of an infant/toddler centre educator or a teacher is viewed as 'average/good' and as sufficient to live on without other sources of income. Educators/teachers employed in the public sector enjoy long-term economic security, and this contributes to these occupations being perceived as of a good



level compared to others. This is especially the case at the present time, in which the long-term jobs and permanent contracts previously aspired to by young people just out of college have become extremely difficult to attain. Most employment is fixed-term and discontinuous, providing little security. Indeed, educators working in private early childhood education centres not only face more variable conditions but also enjoy less job security over the long term.

## 8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

### Teachers 3–6

With regard to state preschools, the number of hours and the percentage of part-time posts is established at the national level, while for the other categories (municipal or state-approved private preschools, educators at private and public infant/toddler centres), both working hours and the proportion of part-time posts are extremely variable and there is not enough reliable data to estimate average figures. In state-run kindergartens in 2016, 25% of staff had a part-time post (12.5 hours/week).

### Educators 0–3

The proportion of staff with part-time posts is highly variable. Working hours can range from a minimum of 15 hours to a maximum of 28/30 hours. The percentages vary from region to region, by type of service (public, private, etc.) and by the contract applied.

## 8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

The induction of newly qualified teachers/educators is currently the subject of lively debate in Italy, in light of the recent introduction of ‘alternating training’ in upper secondary and third level education and in the wake of the new law on education (Law 107/2015). Induction measures were already in place for all early childhood education staff (both 0–3 and 3–6). These usually include a probationary period for the ‘newly qualified teacher’, the assigning of a teacher-tutor and a qualitative assessment at the end of probation.

During the current school year (2015-2016), teachers newly recruited to permanent posts in state preschools were offered a full year of induction (with 20 hours’ training, development of a professional portfolio, seminars, workshops, group work/peer-tutoring).

The situation to date has been that “after appointment to a permanent teaching position, teachers must go through a trial period. The trial period corresponds to one year of training. [...] It is actually an induction period, which foresees the guidance and support of a tutor selected by the Teachers’ Assembly and appointed by the school manager. It foresees formative activities to gain an in-depth knowledge of the typical aspects of teaching profession (methodological, psycho-pedagogical, relational etc.). [...] These activities should be carried out through specific and contextualized projects” (EACEA, 2009-2010).

The recent Ministerial Note 850/2015 has more clearly defined the figure of the teacher-tutor, who is asked to play an active and specific role in the induction process, not only at the end of the induction period by providing the final evaluation (which has to be submitted to the head teacher), but throughout the entire school year. The functions of the teacher-tutor are to: welcome, support, tutor and supervise the new teacher, as well as making an inventory of and evaluating his/her competences. Thus, the probation period continues to be viewed as part of the newly qualified teacher’s ongoing training and professional development.

In light of the introduction of Law 107/2015, there are likely to be changes to these induction measures – particularly in relation to preschool, primary and secondary teachers. It is probable, for example, that in the near future the induction period will be extended to three years. Induction programmes also exist for educators at public infant/toddler centres (0-3) but these measures vary from city to city. For example, in municipal infant/toddler centres in Milan, newly recruited educators must complete a six-month probation period before being definitively hired (as established by the National Wage Agreement). During these six months, the aspiring educator works alongside the existing educational staff and his/her work is ob-

served. At the end of the probation period, the centre coordinator is required to produce a full evaluation report.

As stated above (see Section 5), there is no single national framework regulating the CPD of ECEC personnel in Italy. A new national framework and guidelines for the CPD of primary and pre-primary teachers have been recently established (Law 107/2015), while – in the case of infant/toddler centres - regional regulations exist but vary in relation to provisions for educators' and coordinators' professional development (at both the pre-service and in-service levels). In Emilia Romagna, for example, a key contribution of the regional government, "has been to encourage networking among 0-6 ECECs' pedagogical coordinators at different levels (municipal, provincial and regional level): this has allowed a progressive shift of focus from the work carried out within each setting, toward a more systemic perspective" (Moss 2013).

Recent training programmes implemented in municipal infant/toddler centres and pre-schools (e.g., MIBA, in the case of Milan, described in the D3.3 CARE Report, and in particular in Mantovani, Bove, Cescato, and Braga 2016) are examples of innovative forms of *on-site training* that alternate in-service training with in-service supervision.

At the national level, for preschools – and probably over the coming years also for infant/toddler centres (with the introduction of the *Sistema Integrato* / Integrated System) – Law 107/2015 is leading to stimulating changes in terms of a greater emphasis on *on-site mentoring*. The decrees about 'training for trainers' (*formazione dei formatori*) specifically concern the new category of 'mentor-teachers' (chosen by the school's internal evaluation committee), who are required to conduct evaluations, coordinate training and peer tutoring, supervise the training of their colleagues and provide support to interns. In relation to the support measures in place for newly recruited staff (*misure di accompagnamento*), see the earlier paragraph on induction measures.

#### 8.4 Non-contact time

Practitioners in *municipal* ECEC services, both nursery schools (0-3) and preschools (3-6) are paid for between 120 and 200 hours per annum of activities that do not involve direct contact with children, such as planning, documenting, staff meetings, meetings with parents and in-service professional development. Providers other than city/town councils usually offer far fewer hours for financial reasons.

In *state* preschools (3-6) regulations allow for 20 to 40 hours non-contact time per year. Different Regional Ministry offices have stricter or looser policies concerning how these paid hours, which are additional to the 25 hours per week contact time with the children, may be put to use.

For practitioners working in settings managed by *non-public* providers, contractual conditions vary greatly. The two most important providers (the PAN consortium of cooperatives in the 0-3 sector and FISM in the 3-6 segment) guarantee a minimum of 12 hours per year, an allowance that may be increased in the case of teachers participating in special projects.

#### 8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

During the past decade, the Italian ECEC system has faced a major turnover in staff, and it will face a similar upheaval over the coming decade, due to the retirement of professionals who entered the 0-6 system during its years of maximum expansion. (This also poses a further challenge for professional development.)

The Ministry of the Interior statistics on the number of teachers/educators employed in municipal infant/toddler centres (0-3) and preschools (3-6), show that – between 2007 and 2011 – the percentage of children enrolled in early childhood education rose, and that there was a corresponding rise in teaching staff (Quaderno TFIEY 2013, 27). However, these estimates reflect the overall situation in Italy (i.e., they are an aggregate of the statistics for individual cities and regions), whereas at the local level, in some areas more than others (e.g., Rome),

there were significant decreases in spending on educational staff in the early childhood services over the same period. Conversely, even when the number of children enrolled at a given infant/toddler centre drops, arrangements are often made at the administrative level to merge different early childhood services and thereby protect the jobs of all the educators/teachers currently in service.

## 9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

In a context of increasingly constrained financial resources, several factors are currently driving a process of change and integration of the two main sectors of ECEC (0-3, 3-6) in terms of governance, educational continuity and workforce qualification. These include the newly introduced Law 107/2015; the proposed upgrade of the initial professional studies for 0-3 Educators to a relevant University degree (Law Decree no. 65/2017); and the development of new induction measures for the trial period of new teachers

Over the coming years, many things at the workforce level will probably change. Italian ECEC professionals are under great pressure regarding the high expectations of increasingly diverse parents and stakeholders and the increasing awareness of the link between professionalism and ECEC quality. Parents expect ECEC settings to promote their children's well-being and learning; policy makers have come to consider professionalism a key factor in ECECs and are looking for effective and sustainable ways to provide PD to promote quality and inclusion. Continuing professional development is increasingly becoming an essential component of the development of any good quality ECEC system.

Among the workforce challenges both in the near future and in a longer-term perspective are:

- Developing an **updated professional profile** which maps out the work of Educators and Teachers within a more flexible and **integrated 0-6 system**, qualified through a relevant University degree with a specific focus on early childhood education;
- reviewing the **University curricula for the Bachelor degree L-19** and the additional module (60 ECTS points) in early childhood education required after the five-year university degree in primary and pre-primary education, mandatory for entering the 0-3 profession;
- closing the traditional gap between the professional profiles of 0–3 educators and 3–6 teachers in order to **promote a more integrated 0–6 system**; at present, Italian educators and teachers have different professional profiles and identities, and sometimes they show feelings of ambivalence and reciprocal mistrust. The challenge today is to maintain the professional competencies developed in the tradition of Early Childhood Education and, at the same time, to promote/support the development of a professional profile capable of working within a more flexible and integrated 0–6 system. This implies the need to design new policies for the ECE workforce, new organisational paths and new – integrated – opportunities of professional development;
- developing **new tools for systematically monitoring ECE quality** within a qualitative and culturally sensitive framework and in consistency with the educational goals of the ECEC system;
- striking an **optimum balance between pre-service and in-service training** – as already anticipated in *Section 5* - in order to reduce the gap between newly-recruited teachers or educators and senior teachers or educators, and to smooth over the intergenerational gap by promoting a perspective of educational continuity;
- **updating teachers' basic competences** at the pre-service level and encouraging the development of soft skills within CPD practices; updating professional competences on de-

velopmental issues (children's needs at different stages of their development and the capacity to observe, recognise and address them), language issues, scientific and outdoor education, technological education, intercultural competence, inclusion, relational competence (in working with children and especially with families);

- **addressing strategic themes** around the core of the discussion on teachers' professionalism and ECEC quality in contemporary Italy: digital and language skills; linguistic competences; inclusion; disability; citizenship; basic competences; evaluation. In the next years, a system of monitoring quality and impact of these CPD initiatives will be developed at a national level and this will surely introduce challenges for the ECEC workforce and new issues;
- **reinforcing teachers' intercultural competences** to promote inclusion at all levels and to fill the gap in the basic-preparation of the majority of the educators working in the field as far as intercultural issues are concerned;
- promoting the use and abilities to use **digital technologies** to promote children's and teachers' learning;
- encouraging the **creation of real and virtual communities of learners**;
- connecting pre-service with in-service learning experiences also developing new innovative ways of *alternanza scuola-lavoro* (alternating training);
- reducing the large differences between regions: huge disparities exist between Northern and Southern Regions as far as professional support and teachers' CPD is concerned. Some professional support is usually planned on an annual basis, but there are no regulations requiring a minimum number of hours per attendance;
- encouraging a balance between knowledge-based and experiential-based PD to reduce the gap between generations and promote shared goals and meanings;
- investing in the professional development of key figures (such as pedagogical coordinators)
- linking research and CPD;
- designing new integrated opportunities of CPD (according to Law 107/2015) for the ECEC workforce through a strong commitment by Universities and local agencies.

On the one hand, the above-mentioned challenges are at the core of current debates both in Italy and in other European countries. On the other hand, the Italian early childhood education system arguably is in a position to sustain a high quality ECEC system if its tradition of strong links between ECEC services, universities and local communities can be improved and developed further. The participatory nature of the Italian ECE system is a 'cultural trait and a resource' to face the increasing complexity of the sectors and the connected challenges in the next years.

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