

THE NETHERLANDS

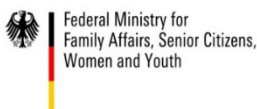
Key Contextual Data

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

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC system type and auspices

The system of early childhood education and care in the Netherlands comprises two separate and partly overlapping sectors (childcare and education), for which two ministries share responsibility. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid - SZW*) has the overall responsibility for ECEC settings for under-4-year olds, out-of-school care arrangements for 4- to 13-year olds and also family day care services. Since 2010, both private childcare centres for 0- to 3-year olds and publicly funded playgroups for 2- to 4-year olds are governed by the same legislation.

Provision for under-4-year olds at risk of language disadvantage and the early education of 4- to 5-year olds in primary schools¹ (*Basisschool*) come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap - OCW*).

An underpinning policy principle of the ECEC system in the Netherlands is to provide local access to services and freedom of choice for parents. Provision for the under-fours has a demand-driven structure, whereas a supply-side structure is in place for children in provision under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

Municipal authorities are responsible for the inspection and monitoring of childcare provision in terms of compliance with regulations and legislation. Both the municipalities and the schools inspectorate are responsible for the administration and management of schools. Whereas the municipal authorities are responsible for compliance with legislation and budget allocation, the schools inspectorate is responsible for the ongoing operation of schools (funding, curriculum, staff). This is the case both for public and private schools.

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016.
Eurydice 2016.
Fukkink, R. 2017.
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2017.

General objectives and legislative framework

The overarching objective of early childhood education and care is to guarantee continuity in terms of learning and support over a longer period of time. The underpinning principle is that of lifelong learning, starting at an early age to enable individuals to reach their fullest potential and to react to changes in a flexible way.

In recent years a considerable transformation has taken place in terms of the overall conceptualisation of ECEC in the Netherlands, and the sector has been experiencing dynamic changes which are still ongoing. As part of the implementation of the Dutch Child Care Act (*Wet Kinderopvang 2005*), all ECEC settings are required to work according to certain pre-defined general pedagogical goals: to provide children with a safe and caring environment, to support the development of their personal and social competencies and to transmit norms and values; they are also required to establish a parents' board. A new Child Care Act is currently under preparation.

¹ The Netherlands have a long tradition of children attending primary school at age 4 before the start of compulsory schooling at age 5.

The relevant legislation for primary schools, which admit 4-year olds in the year preceding compulsory school entry, is the Primary Education Act (*Wet op Primair Onderwijs 1998*). The legislation sets out not only the relevant areas of learning, but also requirements relating to the quality of education and funding modalities.

The Child Care Act (2005, amended in 2016) sets out requirements for various forms of ECEC provision for children aged 6 weeks and older, in particular regarding safety regulations. Since 2010, childcare centres (*dagopvang in kinderdagverblijf*) and playgroups (*peuterspeelzaal*) for under-4-year olds are subject to the same Education and Quality Act (*Wet ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie, OKE*). Additional relevant legislation for playgroups is the Law on Child Care and Quality Requirements for Playgroups (*Wet kinderopvang en kwaliteitseisen peuterspeelzalen, WKO 2010*).

Sources: Eurydice 2016.
Fukkink, R. 2017.
Kinderopvang totaal 2016.
Naumann, I. et al. 2013.

ECEC entitlement and compulsory enrolment age

Children in the Netherlands are not entitled to a place in an ECEC setting before compulsory schooling begins at age 5. However, local authorities have a duty to provide a place for children from 4 years of age if needed, particularly in the case of children from disadvantaged milieus.

Statutory schooling begins in the school year following the child's fifth birthday.

Source: OECD 2015.

Main types of provision

Childcare centres (*kinderdagverblijf*) admit children from 6 to 8 weeks up to age 4. Although they are mostly used on a part-time basis, and by dual-earner families, they may be open for up to 11 hours a day for 50 weeks a year, with morning and afternoon shifts.

Publicly funded **playgroups** (*peuterspeelzalen*) are in principle open for all children from age 2-2½ up to 4 years of age. However, in reality they are mostly attended by children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or by children with imminent disabilities or potential developmental delays. They are generally open only for a half day.

Regulated **family day care** services (*gastouderopvang*) take in children from the age of 6 weeks.

Once children are 4 years old they attend a **primary school** (*basisschool*) – often starting in the two months before they reach their fourth birthday. The groups for 4-year olds are required to be open on four half days for at least 2½ hours per day. The preferred daily opening times are decided by the school or the provider organisation. They are usually closed on Wednesday afternoons. The official school year begins on the 1st October and ends on the 30th September.

Municipalities are obliged (against payment of a fee) to provide 4-year olds who attend a primary school with a **midday** or **afternoon care** arrangement (*buitenschoolse opvang*) if their parents so wish.

Sources Akgündüz, Y.E. and I. Plantenga 2015.
 Eurydice 2016.
 European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015.
 *Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2016.
 Naumann, I. et al. 2013.

Provider structures

Whereas **playgroups** are publicly subsidised, **childcare centres** for under-4-year olds are run by private for-profit or non-profit agencies. In 2010, only 30% of provision was operated by non-profit organisations, whereas in 2003 the proportion was 60%. In other words, provision is currently largely market-driven and for-profit, reflecting a demand-driven financing system. The providers of childcare services also often offer out-of-school services. Since ECEC for under-4-year olds is organised at the municipality level, there are no accurate data at the national level regarding the relevant share of childcare centres and playgroups. In 2013, only around one third of primary schools, where the large majority of 4-year olds are enrolled, were state maintained. Church-affiliated organisations operated 60% of primary schools (split equally between Catholic and Protestant agencies), and 8% were run by other private providers.

Sources: Akgündüz, Y.E. and I. Plantenga 2015.
 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2016.
 Naumann, I. et al. 2013.

Participation rates in regulated provision

According to Eurostat data (see *Table 1*), fewer than half of under-3-year olds (46.4%) were attending ECEC provision in 2015, a slight fall since 2010 (50%). In terms of the 3- to 5-year olds, just over 90% were enrolled in some form of centre-based provision. This proportion has remained more or less constant since 2005.

Table 1

The Netherlands: Participation rates in ECEC centre-based settings according to age and duration of attendance, 2005-2015*

Year	Weekly attendance rate	Under 3-year olds, in %	3 years to statutory school age, in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	36	82
	Over 30 hours	4	7
	No attendance	60	11
2010	1 to 29 hours	44	76
	Over 30 hours	6	15
	No attendance	50	9
2015	1 to 29 hours	41.1	77.5
	Over 30 hours	5.3	13.2
	No attendance	53.7	9.3

Slight deviations from 100% due to roundings.

It is difficult to find age-disaggregated data on ECEC participation. According to recently compiled structural indicators***, but without reference to a particular year, 90% of 3-year old children and 100% of children aged 4 and older in the Netherlands are enrolled in ECEC provision. According to

our own calculations based on Eurostat-Data for 2015, 82.7% of 3-year olds and 96% of 4-year olds attend some form of ECEC provision (see *Table 2*).

Table 2

The Netherlands: Participation rates and number of children in centre-based settings according to age, 2015**

Age	Number of children	Proportion of age-group
Under 2 years	n.d.	
2-year olds	n.d.	
3-year olds	149.345	82,7
4-year olds	177.777	96,0
5-year olds	184.457	99,2
3- to under 5-year olds	327.122	89,5⁺

*own calculations on the basis of Eurostat data from 2015

Sources: European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015.
 ***European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016, 9.
 *Eurostat 2015d.
 **Eurostat 2017h, 2017i.
 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2016.

Financing and costs for parents

Following the introduction of the Dutch Child Care Act in 2005, the financing of ECEC, particularly of the **childcare centres**, changed from a supply-financing system to one of demand-financing, meaning that centres compete with one another in a free market according to consumer preferences. Private services are not subsidised by the government. However, parents whose child attends private ECEC provision or a regulated family day care setting are granted tax compensations for childcare fees.

Since 2007, employers are obliged to transfer a specified proportion (2011: 0.34%) of the wages of all employees (including those without children) to the government, which is used to cover the costs of childcare. Moreover, employers reimburse a third of childcare costs for each of their employees with children.

The municipalities, or the individual EC centres, are free to decide on the level of parental fees in **playgroups**, and this leads to regional variations. Fees are usually income-related.

Primary schools are financed through municipal budgets allocated by the national government. They receive a lump sum from the municipalities to cover staffing and running costs. Additional basic subsidies are provided for equipment and the maintenance of buildings. Since 2012, schools receive additional funding for specific activities such as language tuition or providing natural science topics, and for the professional development of staff. Since 2014, financial resources for children with special educational needs are no longer reserved for individual children, as was the case previously; instead they are distributed to the relevant settings over a regional funding pool. Admission to schools is free of charge for the parents of 4-year olds, who nevertheless often donate money for excursions or cultural activities. Schools may also be supported by sponsors.

Sources: Akgündüz, Y.E. and I. Plantenga 2015.
 European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2015.
 Eurydice 2014.
 Naumann, I. et al. 2013.

Staff-child ratios

The staff-child ratios differ considerably in playgroups and childcare centres. The maximum group size requirements in **childcare centres** are:

- 12 in groups for children under 1 year of age;
- 16 in groups for children up to 4 years of age, with no more than 8 under-1-year olds.

One qualified member of staff is responsible for

- 4 under-1-year olds
- 5 one- to 2-year olds
- 6 two- to 3-year olds
- 8 three-to 4-year olds

In some municipalities there are also requirements for **playgroups**. After the introduction of a new law in 2010 (Law on Child Care and Quality Requirements for Playgroups - *Wet OKE*), day-care groups and playgroups are increasingly subject to the same regulations. In small settings with only one qualified member of staff there must be at least one other person employed to give support.

For **primary schools** there are no minimum or maximum requirements in terms of group size. However, regulations do exist regarding the total number of children in the building (usually 3.5 square metres per child). In general, each school comprises eight grades, with grades one to four covering children between 4 and 8 years of age. Schools decide themselves about the way the children are grouped. In most cases they are organised according to the children's age, but some schools choose a mixed-age group policy, or also group children according to their competence level. Special schools have a smaller number of children on roll, and sometimes they organise the children in mixed-age groups according to their level of development.

Source: Eurydice 2016.

Curricular Frameworks

There is no national curricular framework for the work in **childcare centres** and **playgroups** for under-4-year olds. Service providers have a duty to ensure that each centre develops its own programme. A centre-specific strategy for the children's development and learning is created in co-operation with the parents' committee. Key aspects include interactions between staff and children, caregiving procedures, age-distribution in the groups, transmission of norms and values and indoor and outdoor play activities. Play is viewed as the main vehicle for learning. A range of different programmes is used to promote specific areas of development. These programmes have to fulfil strict requirements in order to be authorised by the Accreditation Commission for Intervention Programmes (*Erkenningscommissie Interventies*) or by the Welfare and Development Stimulation Panel (*Panel Welzijn en Ontwikkelingsstimulering*). Five approved programmes are currently in use: *Piramide*, *Kaleidoscoop*, *Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling*, *KO Totaal* and *Sporen*.

Mostly within the context of **playgroups**, which are often used by lower-income and minority background families, specific programmes for children at risk of language disadvantage are offered and subsidised by the Ministry of Education. Such programmes (so-called VVE - Early Childhood Education - programmes) may be available for roughly 15 hours per week, i.e. for about three or four mornings or afternoons. The municipalities have a duty to ensure that this provision is available if needed.

According to the Primary School Act, **schools** are required to cover the following areas of learning, starting in the classes for 4-year olds: (1) sensory coordination and physical movement; (2) the Dutch language; (3) arithmetic and maths; (4) the English language; (5) Optional subjects such as geography, history, religion; (6) expression; (7) self-confidence; (8) healthy living. The required number of hours for each learning area is not prescribed. Schools may choose their own learning

approaches and resources. However, the government has set out certain goals to be achieved by the end of the children's time in primary school. The Ministry of Education has commissioned the National Institute for Curriculum Development (*Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling*) to develop further learning goals combined with detailed content and related activities.

Special schools have their own set of curricular regulations in a document on the "Main goals for special education" (*Kerdoelen in het speciaal onderwijs*).

Sources: Akgündüz, Y.E. and I. Plantenga 2015.
European Commission, EACEA, and Eurydice 2016.
Eurydice 2016.

Inclusion agenda

Children with special educational needs and disabilities

In **childcare settings** young children, particularly those from a socially disadvantaged background, are given the chance to experience a variety of cultural and social activities. The municipalities decide on the implementation of various projects and programmes (e.g. *Piramide, Kaleidoscoop*). Since 2015, they have been supporting specific programmes which focus in particular on improving children's language skills and thus reducing language disadvantages; further programmes aim to increase participation in sports activities. Foundations and other cultural organisations (e.g. *Jeugdcultuurfonds* or *Stichting Leergeld*) receive government subsidies for this.

Since 1991, there has been a general policy of integrating children with disabilities and special educational needs into mainstream settings and since 2014, schools must ensure that these children receive the support they need. For this they receive subsidies for individual children, based on their specific needs. Parents can register their disabled child at the school of their choice, and it is the responsibility of the school to guarantee the appropriate support.

The Law on Competence Centres for Special Education (*Wet op de Expertisecentra 1998*) refers to four types of special school: (1) for visually impaired children; (2) for hard-of-hearing children and children with communication difficulties; (3) for physically and/or intellectually impaired children; and (4) for children with mental and behavioural disorders.

Children with a background of migration

In 2016, 5.3% of the population in the Netherlands had a non-Dutch background. Roughly half of these (50.9%) came from other EU countries. The relevant proportions for children under 5 years of age were similar (5.4% in total, 48% from other EU states)**. The largest group of persons seeking asylum was from Syria; in terms of the subsequent immigration of family members, most came from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan*.

Sources: *CBS 2016.
**Eurostat 2017g.
Eurydice 2012, 2014.
EPIC 2016.

Monitoring – Evaluation – Research

The Education Inspectorate (*Inspectie van het Onderwijs*) is responsible for monitoring quality in ECEC (often with a special focus on children from disadvantaged backgrounds) and schools². In-

² Law on Quality in Education – *Wet ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie 2010* and Law on Supervising Education – *Wet op het onderwijstoezicht 2002*.

pections are usually carried out at least once a year. They focus on seven areas: parental involvement; staffing; health and safety; buildings and equipment; group size and staff/child ratios; pedagogical approach and practices; and complaint management. The results are made public.

External evaluations

Two relevant frameworks exist for the external evaluation of **childcare centres** for the under-4-year olds. One is to monitor the quality of all childcare settings in the Netherlands; the other is for the monitoring of settings where quality improvement strategies are considered necessary. The municipal health services (*Gemeentelijke Gezondheidsdienst, GGD*) inspect aspects such as health and safety, the choice of programme, group size, and the number and qualifications of the staff. Questionnaires, check lists, observations and interviews are utilised for this purpose. If shortcomings are found, the Education Inspectorate is informed. The inspection visits by the GGD are made unannounced, and the evaluation reports are made public.

For the external evaluation of **schools** the Education Inspectorate works according to a framework document (2012). This describes the assessment instruments and the criteria and standards to be evaluated. It is a useful orientation document for schools and the inspectorate. The Education Inspectorate ensures that schools are complying with current legislation and also focuses on the quality of teaching. Although, since 2007, annual checks take place to identify schools which are not fulfilling the required standards, a complete inspection is conducted only once every four years. The results of inspections, which also include self-evaluations, are recorded in the so-called School Monitoring Card, together with suggestions for supervision and advisory support. Since 2010, the Education Inspectorate publishes an annual report on the Quality of Schools (*toezichtkaart*) on its internet website.

Self-evaluation procedures

Childcare centres are required to assess the quality of their work through an annual self-evaluation procedure. The following aspects are assessed: parental participation; programme quality; knowledge and skills of the staff; learning environment; and responding to individual needs. The Dutch Consortium for Childcare (*Nederlands Consortium Kinderopvang Onderzoek, NCKO*) has developed a self-evaluation instrument termed “quality monitor” (*Kwaliteitsmonitor*) which helps childcare centres to assess their quality, strengths and limitations more effectively.

Schools decide themselves about their standards and the preferred assessment instruments. Since 1998 they are required to develop a school plan which includes a description of the steps to be taken in terms of quality improvement. The school plan has to be updated every four years. The school plan is the basis for an annual brochure which keeps both parents and pupils informed. These two documents, together with the general outcomes of the self-evaluation procedures, provide a basis for the annual checks made by the Education Inspectorate (see above).

Child-related assessments

In the **childcare sector**, children are assessed by the centre staff through observations and check-lists. A range of developmental areas are usually assessed three times a year. This information is passed on to other members of staff, discussed with the parents and, in a summarised form, handed over to the primary school the child will be attending.

The research project „Pre-COOL“, commissioned by the Dutch Scientific Research Organisation (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO*) and the Ministry of Education, tracks the progress of around 5,000 children aged 2 to 5 years every two years. Since 2010 this has provided a basis for observing the short-term and long-term effects of different kinds of childcare on the children’s development and school achievements.

In the **education sector**, schools are required to document each child’s progress three times a year. Parents are invited to discuss their child’s progress and achievements. Some schools rely on school grades or marks for this, others prefer written assessments. Since 2014/15, schools are required to use a specific monitoring system. All primary schools are connected to an education data

bank administered by the national Education Agency (*Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, DUO*). Each pupil has an individual citizenship and education number. Information on each pupil is regularly fed into the data bank. In general, each child's progress is documented through observational assessments and tests. However, except for a final test at the end of the time in primary school, tests are not obligatory.

Sources: Eurydice 2013.
Fukkink, R. 2017.
OECD 2011.
OECD 2015.

Parental leave arrangements

Statutory **maternity leave** (*zwangerschaps- en bevallingsverlof*) lasts 16 weeks. Four of these must be taken before the expected birth date, with the possibility of extension up to six weeks. Maternity leave is fully paid up to a maximum amount of 202.17€ per day.

Fathers are granted two days of **paternity leave** (*kraamverlof*) which are fully compensated by their employer. They must be taken within four weeks after the child's birth.

Parental leave (*ouderschapsverlof*) is calculated as being 26 times as long as the number of weekly working hours of each parent and can be taken up to the child's eighth birthday. For a total of 38 weekly working hours, this means that parental leave would be granted for 988 hours, i.e. 26 weeks. Parental leave is granted on a part-time basis; only in exceptional cases is it possible to take it in one block period. This makes it possible for both parents to take parental leave at the same time. However, since 2014, parental leave is unpaid. Following the Law on Flexible Working Hours (2016), parents can apply for a change in their working hours or, in some cases, for permission to work from home.

In 2013, around 57% of mothers took leave for 10 hours a week over the period of one year, 23% took 8 hours a week over 16 months. The proportion of men who took parental leave was only 23% during the same year. In general, mothers and fathers with a higher level of education are more likely to utilise the possibility of parental leave.

Parents also receive an income-independent child allowance up to the child's 18th birthday. Families with a low or modest income are granted an additional child subsidy. A childcare allowance may be granted if parents make use of a childcare setting.

Sources: den Dulk, L. 2017.
EPIC 2016.

Historical highlights and shifts

1850	Increasing maternal employment leads to the establishment of the first institutions for the care of children from the age of 2½ years
During the following decades	Childcare institutions are gradually followed by kindergartens based on the pedagogical approaches of Pestalozzi and Froebel – and later, Montessori
1950s and 1960s	Childcare/nursery settings and playgroups are founded
1985	Kindergartens are integrated into the primary school system
Up to 1986	Significant increase in the number of playgroups for 2- to 4-year olds
1990-1996	Expansion of childcare/nursery settings

Since 1991	Decision to primarily provide for the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream settings
1996	First national assessment of quality of childcare
1998	First Chair in Childcare established at the University of Amsterdam
2002	Childcare settings for under 4-year olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs
2005	The Child Care Act comes into force
2007	Childcare settings for disadvantaged under 4-year olds come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education
Since 2010	Both childcare centres and playgroups come under the same legislation
2011	Peak year in Dutch childcare (835,000 children on roll)

Sources: Fukkink, R. 2017.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.

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

Country expert assessment by Elly Singer³

A central issue and challenge for the ECEC system in the Netherlands are the remains of the split-up between care and education in childcare provision for 0- to 4-year olds. There is a growing consensus about the importance of early childhood education. Ideally, this would be organized as a unified system with regulations for settings for 0- to 5-year olds and would guarantee good quality provisions for all. Stakeholders of early childhood care and education in the Netherlands – local and national authorities, the primary school system, services for care and education, parent organisations, and experts all agree on this. However, there is a huge gap between dream and reality.

Some of the main obstacles are the following:

1. Different regulations in the care system for children of working parents on the one hand and in the education system for children in play groups and preschool classes for 2- and 3-year olds on the other. The childcare system comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment while the education system for young children is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The education system is publicly subsidised, while private profit and non-profit agencies organise the care system. Regulations differ, for example for parental financial contributions; for the pedagogue-child ratio; for staff salaries and qualifications; for opening hours. There are different rules for the admission of children. For example, there is special funding for preschools for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and only working parents are financially supported to use childcare centres. A strong political will and significant investments in a unified education system for young children are needed to overcome such bureaucratic obstacles (Taskforce 2017).
2. Studies of the pedagogic and educational quality of childcare centres show large differences in quality, especially with regard to the educational skills of the pedagogical workers for stimulating development, fostering positive peer interactions and verbal communication. One of the reasons might be the privatised system. During the last 15 years several childcare organisations with more than 100 locations have been purchased by multinationals that are primarily focussed on profit (Lloyd and Penn 2010; Plantenga 2012; Postma 2018). Only a few, very small organisations with one or two centres are still active; in times of financial drawbacks, as during the economic crisis after 2008, such small organisations turned out to be very vulnera-

³ Formerly: Department of Developmental Psychology, University of Utrecht

ble with consequences for the educational quality. Besides that, small organisations cannot afford their own pedagogical counsellor or pedagogical manager.

3. The Dutch government has refrained as yet from establishing a national curriculum for childcare centres. The government only provides a broad framework that has to be followed by the childcare companies, i.e. the service providers. Parents get financial support from the government through tax credits, so they can choose services that meet their standards and demands. Consequently the childcare organisations offer ‘content’ that meets the demand of the parents. Parents’ lack of knowledge and experience often leads to a prioritisation of the economic values of the (profit) organisation above pedagogical values. Two examples: Both non-profit and profit organisations compete with each other. Recently there has been a surplus in childcare places and many companies have been doing all they can to attract parents: They offer long and flexible opening hours to meet the parents’ demands in relation to their working hours and even sell childcare on an hourly basis. This has a negative impact on the stability of the group composition and the stability of the child-pedagogue relationships. Also because of financial reasons, many childcare organisations have mixed age groups (0- to 4-year olds in one group). Mixed-age groups are easier to fill to the minimum (and maximum) number of children per group than same-age groups; and full groups guarantee a better income for the organisation, notwithstanding that recent research in the Netherlands has suggested that mixed-age groups tend to be of lower pedagogical quality than same-age groups (Slot et al. 2017).
4. In theory, parents have a powerful role in the childcare system: they are the consumers who can spend the money. But research about the position of parents is needed. It is not known if parents in general are aware of the big differences in quality of childcare centres.
5. In the Netherlands there is no organisation or governmental agency that has a leading role in innovation and supervision. Innovation and quality assurance are steered by market forces. Universities compete for government grants, and academics at the Dutch universities are forced to publish in international (English) peer-reviewed journals. Publications in Dutch, for a broader public, are not counted as scientific products. This has a negative impact on collaborative research between practitioners and academics (Singer and Wong 2018).

Continuing professional development for practitioners and innovations are offered by larger and smaller organisations that are also steered by the market system. They have to compete in getting assignments. Some of the big non-profit childcare companies do invest substantially in quality evaluation and the coaching of pedagogical workers (see below). But it is not the prime task of these companies to invest in the improvement of pedagogical quality of childcare centres in general. For example, no company ever pays for their pedagogical counsellors to participate in international conferences. Dutch representatives of the early education and childcare sectors rarely participate in international organisations like OMEP (*Organisation Mondiale pour l’Éducation Préscolaire*) or international conferences such as EECERA (European Early Childhood Education Research Association).

Among many professionals – caregivers, pedagogues, teachers, counsellors, academics – however, a strong need is felt for discussions and sharing of expertise. In 2008, the National Platform of Pedagogues in Childcare Centres managed to get a subsidy from the Ministry of Social Affairs for a project that resulted in *Pedagogisch kader kindercentra 0-4 jaar* (Pedagogical framework for childcare centres 0-4; Singer and Kleerekoper 2009). Professionals, policy makers and researchers from all over the country participated in discussion groups. Later, pedagogical frameworks for after-school care (Schreuder et al. 2011), childminding (Boogaard et al. 2013) and diversity (van Keulen and Singer 2012) were published. The Ministry of Social Affairs supported the implementation of the pedagogical frameworks by subsidising the Dutch National Bureau for Quality in Childcare (*Bureau Kwaliteit Kinderopvang; BKK*) up to 2013. Then there was a change in government, BKK had to reorganise, and the support for the pedagogical frameworks stopped.

6. In the Netherlands, like in any other country, there is an abundance of pedagogical potential; many parents and professionals are passionately involved in early childhood education and

care. There are many examples of excellence. In 2016, companies for (non-profit) childcare established the Sector Association for Socially Responsible Childcare (*Branchevereniging voor maatschappelijk Kinderopvang*; BMK 2016). The aim of this association is to promote sustainability, innovation and high quality in childcare that meets the needs of parents and children in general; the associated companies thus surpass their own (direct) interest. There are also initiatives at the local and the national level for cooperation between schools and the childcare organisations. The current challenge for the early education and care system in the Netherlands is to coordinate these initiatives, to promote cooperation between practitioners, academics, managers and social politicians, and to mobilise the pedagogical potential in discussions and constructive dialogues. Both Dutch politicians and the broader public have to be convinced that the main purpose of early childhood education is the well-being of young children and their parents - and also the well-being of the pedagogues, who deserve respect and salaries that are comparable with other sectors in education and social welfare.

Sources: Boogaard, M. Et al. 2013.
 BMK 2016.
 Lloyd, E. and H. Penn 2010.
 Plantenga, J. 2012.
 Postma, L. 2018.
 Schreuder, L. et al. 2011.
 Singer, E. and L. Kleerekoper 2009.
 Singer, E. and S. Wong 2018.
 Slot, P. et al. 2017.
 Taskforce samenwerking onderwijs en kinderopvang 2017.
 van Keulen, A. and E. Singer 2012.

Demographic data

Total population

In 2016, a total of nearly 17 million persons (16,979,120) lived in the Netherlands. The population has been increasing steadily over the past two decades, although in recent years the increase in numbers has slowed down somewhat (1995: 15,424,122 and 2005: 16,305,526).

Children under 5 years of age

Since compulsory schooling begins at age 5 in the Netherlands and relevant statistical data are available, this section focuses on children up to age 5. In the other sections of the demographic data, the data focus on children up to age 6.

In 2016, 3.1% of the total population in the Netherlands were children under 3 years of age and 5.2% children under 5 years of age. These proportions are very similar to the EU28 average, although during previous years they were consistently higher.

Table 3

The Netherlands: Children under 5 years of age, 2016

Age	Number of children
Under age 1	170.341
1-year olds	175.721
2-year olds	172.395
Under age 3 total	518.457

Age	Number of children
3-year olds	177.204
4-year olds	181.193
3- to under-5-year olds, total	358.397
0- to under-5-year olds, total	876.854

Table 4

The Netherlands: Children under 5 years of age – share in total population compared with EU average, 1995 to 2015, in %⁺

Age	1995	Ø EU15 ⁴	2005	Ø EU25	2015	Ø EU28
Under 3-year olds	3.4	3.3	3.7	3.1	3.1	3.0
3- to under 5-year olds	2.8	2.3	2.5	2.1	2.1	2.1
0- to under 5-year olds	6.4	5.7	6.2	5.2	5.2	5.2

⁺ own calculations, deviations due to roundings

Source: Eurostat 2017a.

Single households with children under age 6

The large majority of households (91.2%) in 2015 with children under 6 years of age were couple households. Single households accounted for 4.3%; almost all of these were single mother households (4.0%).

Table 5

The Netherlands: Households with children under age 6, 2015

Household type	Total households	Total households in per cent ⁺
Households – total	1,555,500	
Couple households	1,418,500	91.2
Other types of households	70,000	4.5
Single households, total	67,000	4.3
Single households, women	62,600	4.0
Single households, men	4,400	0.3

⁺ Own calculations

Source: Eurostat 2017e.

Employment rates of parents with children under age 6

In 2015, the employment rate of men in the Netherlands aged 15 to 64 was 79.0%, that of women 69.2%. In 2012, more than three-quarters of employed women were working on a part-time basis*.

⁴ The 1995 data are for the EU15 countries at the time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, F, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK); the 2005 data (EU25) also include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2014 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR.

In the same year, three-quarters of all women with children under 6 years of age participated in the labour force, compared with 92.7% of men with children of the same age. Both rates are significantly higher than the EU average and among the highest in the EU28.

Table 5

The Netherlands: Employment rates of parents with children under age 6 compared with other EU states, 2005-2015[†]

	Year	Mothers in per cent	Fathers in per cent
The Netherlands	2005	69.7	93.0
	2010	77.3	93.5
	2015	69.7	93.0
European Union	EU15 – 2005	77.3	93.5
	EU27 – 2010	75.2	92.7
	EU28 – 2015	56.2	90.0
Highest rate of employment	2005	Slovenia – 76.8	Cyprus – 95.3
	2010	Slovenia – 76.7	Netherlands – 93.5
	2015	Sweden --78.9	Malta/Czech Republic - 93.0
Lowest rate of employment	2005	Malta – 29.3	Bulgaria – 72.4
	2010	Hungary – 32.7	Latvia – 74.8
	2015	Hungary – 38.8	Bulgaria – 77.3

[†]own calculations

Sources: Eurostat 2017b.
Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010.
Plantenga, J. et al. 2012.

Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁵

In 2015, 14.1% of children under 6 years of age were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This represents the lowest proportion in the EU28 (average = 24.7%). The total share of persons in the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the Netherlands was 16.4%, representing the second lowest rate in the EU28 states.

Source: Eurostat 2017d.

⁵ 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity.

(<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc100&plugin=1>)

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