

GREECE

ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report author

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1. ECEC governance

A split-sector system

The Greek system of early childhood education and care for 0- to 6-year olds is a split-sector system with partly parallel responsibilities for children aged 4–6 years. Both public and private kindergartens (*nipiagogeia*) for 4- to 6-year olds are part of the education sector and come under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (*Ypourgeío Paideías, Érevnaskai Thriskevμάτων*, MERR), whereas municipal and private day nurseries for 0- to 3-year olds (*vrefiki stathmi*) and childcare centres either for children aged 3 months to 6 years (*vrefonipiaki stathmi*) or for 2½- to 6-year olds (*pediki stathmi*), formerly under the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, now fall under the control of local government authorities. Indirectly, the Ministry of the Interior (*Ypourgeío Esoterikónkai Dioikitikís Anasynkrótisis*) is responsible for public childcare provision and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (*Ypourgeío Apaschólisis*) for private provision.

2. Who belongs to the ECEC workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

The early childhood education and care system in Greece (kindergartens, day nurseries and childcare centres) employs three main staff categories: (1) Kindergarten Teacher (*nipiagogos*); (2) Nursery and Childcare Teacher (*vrefonipiagogos/vrefonipiokomos*); and (3) Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant (*voithos vrefonipiagogou*).

Table 1 gives an overview of the staff in regular daily contact with children in ECEC centre-based provision, both in the education sector and the childcare sector. It also categorises the core practitioners (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 following Table 1).

Table 1
Greece: Regular contact staff in ECEC 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 ¹ level
<i>Nipiagogos</i> Kindergarten Teacher <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary Education Professional	<i>Nipiagogeio</i> Kindergarten (public, private) 4–6 years May also work in public and private childcare centres with 4- to 6-year olds.	Core practitioner with group responsibility Kindergarten principal <i>Proistamenos</i>	4–6 years	University degree Early Childhood Education (4 years) ECTS points: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6

¹UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012, 2014.

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 ¹ level
Vrefonipiagogos/ Vrefonipiokomos Nursery and Childcare Teacher <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedag- ogy Professional	<i>Vrefikos stathmos</i> Day nursery 6 months–2 years <i>Pedikos stathmos</i> Childcare centre 2½–6 years	Core practition- er with group responsibility Centre head <i>Diefthintis</i>	0–6 years	University of Applied Science degree (4 years) ECTS points: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2013-F: 0112 ISCED 2011: 6
Voithos vrefonipiagogou Nurse- ry and Childcare Teach- ing Assistant	<i>Vrefikos stathmos</i> Day nursery 6 months–2 years <i>Pedikos stathmos</i> Childcare centre 2½–6 years May work as a self- employed family day carer (also in: mater- nity clinics, summer camps, family plan- ning centres)	Qualified co- worker	0–6 years	Certificate / Diploma as nursery / childcare teach- ing assistant (3 years) ECTS points: n/a ² EQF level: 4/5 ISCED 2013-F: 0922 ISCED 2011: 3/4

Box 1

SEEPRO professional profile categories for core practitioners (adapted from Oberhuemer, P., I. Schreyer, and M.J. Neuman 2010)

- *Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional* (specialist focus, 0– 6/7 years)
- *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* (broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- *Social Care/Health Care Professional* (sometimes focus on early childhood, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

In public and private kindergartens, the workforce comprises mainly fully qualified **Kindergarten Teachers** who are responsible for a group of children or who, based on certain criteria and subject to an evaluation process (Law 4327/2015), may be appointed to the post of kindergarten principal. It should be noted that principals have a dual role. They are not only teachers with full responsibility for a class, but also managers and supervisors of the kindergarten unit with considerable administrative duties. The qualifying route for a Kindergarten Teacher is eight semesters (four years) of study at one of the nine University Departments of Early Childhood Education in Greece, earning at least 240 credits (ECTS points). On completion of the degree, Kindergarten Teachers may work in public and private kindergartens and in municipal and private childcare centres with children aged 4 to 6 years old. They are also authorised to work in numerous other fields (see *section 3.3*).

The workforce in private and public day nurseries and childcare centres for children aged 2 months to 6 years comprises **Nursery and Childcare Teachers** as core practitioners and Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants in an auxiliary role. The nursery and childcare centres may also employ some or all of the following: a cook; an assistant cook; cleaning staff; a social worker who contributes to the prevention or addressing of specific child- and family-related

² n/a = not applicable

problems within the centre; a contracted paediatrician; a psychologist, if available, to offer counselling services in matters of psychological support of children and parents in close collaboration with the paediatrician, social worker and educational staff; a driver who undertakes the safe transport of the children to and from the centre; and an administrative employee responsible for the administrative and financial duties (Ministerial Decision 16065/2002). A few nursery and childcare centres may also employ childminders (*pedokomi*) or nurses (*nosokomes*), but this is unusual. The qualification requirement for a Nursery and Childcare Teacher is a four-year degree completed at a Technological Educational Institute (University of Applied Sciences). Their professional studies are structured according to the ECTS-points system and comprise course work corresponding to 240 credits.

The **Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants** work in municipal and private nursery and childcare centres as qualified auxiliary staff. They have to complete a course at either a public or private Vocational Training Institution (*Institouto Epagelmatikis Katartisis*) or Vocational High School (*Epagelmatiko Lykeio* - 10th, 11th and 12th grade), and are authorised to work with children aged 2 months to 6 years. Their qualification does not correspond to the ECTS-points credit system.

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

The Hellenic Statistical Authority publishes annual statistics regarding the workforce in public and private kindergartens in Greece. However, no data are published on the workforce in day nurseries and childcare centres.

The educational workforce of public kindergartens (which account for 89.5% of all kindergartens nationwide) comprises mainly women (98.6%). Of the entire kindergarten workforce, 55.7% are group/class teachers and 41.5% kindergarten principals. Only 1.4% of the total kindergarten workforce is male and only 1.7% of the kindergarten principals.

Table 2 gives details of the structural composition of the workforce in ECEC provision. In a number of cases, no national data are available.

Table 2

Greece: Structural composition of workforce in ECEC provision

Staff categories	Comments
Education sector (kindergartens)	
Staff with specialist higher education degree	2014: All core practitioners have a specialist degree in early childhood education. Nearly half also have either a degree in another field (23.5%), or a Master's (20.5%) or doctoral degree (1.8%) in early childhood education.
Staff with non-specialist higher education degree	2014: 23.5% hold an <i>additional</i> , non-specialist higher education degree
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	n/a
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	n/a
Staff with non-specialist qualification	No national data available
Staff with no formal initial professional studies	No national data available
Specialist support staff (contracted social workers, psychologists)	No national data available
Male staff	2014: 1.4% (teachers); 1.7% (principals)
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data

Staff categories	Comments
Childcare sector (nursery and childcare centres)	
Staff with specialist higher education degree	All core practitioners have a specialist degree in early childhood education and care.
Staff with non-specialist higher education degree	No national data available
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (post-secondary)	No national data available
Staff with specialist vocational qualification (upper secondary)	No national data available
Staff with non-specialist qualification	2011: 12% (internal transfers of staff from municipal social services)
Staff without formal initial professional studies	No national data available
Specialist support staff (contracted social workers, paediatricians, psychologists)	No national data available
Male staff	No national data available
Staff with a background of migration	No systematically compiled national data.

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority 2013 (Data from end of school year 2013/14)

Approximately half the Kindergarten Teachers (54.2%) employed in public kindergartens have followed some kind of additional studies in Greece or abroad, while the remainder (45.8%) have either a second University degree in some other field or a Master's or doctoral degree. Of those who have undergone further training, 49.6% completed this in Greece. Of those educators who hold an additional degree, near one quarter (23.5%) hold a Master's degree in some other field; 20.5% have a second University degree and 1.8% have a doctoral degree (*Table 3*).

Table 3

Greece: Kindergarten Teachers with additional graduate or other advanced studies, 2014

School Year 2013-2014 (Data from end of school year)	Total number of Kindergarten Teachers	Graduate studies			Degrees held		
		In Greece		Abroad	Degree from other higher education institutions	Master's Degree	Doctoral degree
		Marasleio Primary Education School	Primary Education Teachers' Training School				
General Total	3,708	1,839	82	89	761	872	65
		49.6%	2.2%	2.4%	20.5%	23.5%	1.8%

Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority 2013

There are no auxiliary staff in public kindergartens who work in the group/class on a daily basis. However, there are cleaning staff and those who cook and serve food and these are mostly women (87.3%). Of these, 31% are employed full-time and 68.9% part-time. Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants are not employed in public kindergartens (Hellenic Statistical Authority 2013). No data are compiled at the national level on specialised auxiliary staff (e.g. social workers, psychologists), nor on educators who originate from minority groups.

According to a nationwide study on day nurseries and childcare centres conducted by the Pan-Hellenic Association of Early Childhood Educators, in 2002–2004 the permanent workforce of municipal childcare centres stands at 68%, and all types of contractual or temporary employees at 32%. According to the same study, 48% of childcare centres operate with shortages of educators and auxiliary staff and 12% of these with non-specialist staff transferred from centralised services of municipalities (Pan-Hellenic Association of Early Childhood Educators 2011).

3. Initial professional studies

3.1 Initial qualifying routes of main contact staff

Tables 4, 5 and 6 summarise the main features of the initial professional study routes for the three main ECEC staff categories working in kindergartens, day nurseries and childcare centres.

In 2014, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance presented a Report on Correspondence of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). According to the report, the degrees obtained by Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers are classified at Level 6 EQF and those of nursery and childcare assistant teachers at Level 5 or Level 4, depending on whether they have a qualification from a Vocational Training Institution or a Vocational High School.

In terms of the International Standard Classification of Education 2011 (ISCED) (UNESCO 2011), both Kindergarten Teachers and Nursery and Childcare Teachers have a qualification placed at Level 6, whereas the education of the Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants is placed either at ISCED 4 (post-secondary qualification route in a Vocational Training Institution) or ISCED 3 (Vocational High School route).

Table 4

Greece: Kindergarten Teacher

Job title in Greek: <i>Nipiagogos</i> Profile: Pre-primary Education Professional
<p><i>Since 1984</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate (<i>lykeio</i>); national entry examination (<i>genikes exetaseis</i>) for university candidates (General Pan-Hellenic Exam)</p> <p>Professional studies: Four years University, Department of Early Childhood Education, specialising in pre-primary education</p> <p>Award: University degree in Early Childhood Education (there are no Bachelor awards in Greece)</p> <p>ECTS points: 240</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0112</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Kindergarten (4–6 years)</p>

Table 5

Greece: Nursery and Childcare Teacher

Job title in Greek: <i>Vrefonipiagogos/Vrefonipiokomos</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
<p><i>Since 2001:</i></p> <p>Entry requirements: Higher school leaving certificate (<i>lykeio</i>) or vocational certificate; entry examination set by the individual Higher Technological Education Institute (University of Applied Sciences)</p> <p>Professional studies: Four years Technological Educational Institute (TEI) specialising in early childhood education and care</p> <p>Award: Degree/University of Applied Sciences (there are no Bachelor awards in Greece)</p> <p>ECTS points: 240</p> <p>EQF level: 6</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0112</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 6</p> <p>Main ECEC workplace: Day nursery (0–3 years) or Childcare centre (0–6 years or 2½–6 years)</p>

Table 6

Greece: Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant

Job title in Greek: Voithos Vrefonipiagogou
<p>Entry requirements: Completion of first year of Lyceum (high school)</p> <p><i>Route 1</i></p> <p>Professional studies: Three years Vocational High School, starting in second year of high school and specialising in early childhood education and care</p> <p>Award: Certificate as Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant</p> <p>ECTS points: not applicable</p> <p>EQF level: 4</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0922</p> <p>ISCED 3</p> <p><i>Route 2</i></p> <p>Professional studies: 2 years Vocational Training Institution, following successful completion of the Certificate course above. Specialisation in early childhood education and care</p> <p>Award: Diploma as Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant</p> <p>ECTS points: not applicable</p> <p>EQF level: 5</p> <p>ISCED 2013-F: 0922</p> <p>ISCED 2011: 4</p> <p>Main ECEC workplaces: Day nursery (0–3 years) or Childcare centre (0–6 years or 2½–6 years)</p>

Kindergarten Teachers (*Nipiagogos*)

The qualification requirement for professional work in both public and private kindergartens is a degree from one of the nine University Departments of Early Childhood Education in Greece³. To be accepted for a degree course, students must have completed their high school diploma and have gained the required number of points in the General Pan-Hellenic Examinations (held annually in June). Each student is required to complete eight semesters (four years) of coursework and to accumulate 240 credits (ECTS points). A full academic year corresponds to 60 credits and a full semester to 30 credits. The number of ECTS points represents the workload required by the student for the completion of the course, laboratory, tutorials, practical training, etc. The University degree is placed at Level 6 of the EQF and Level 6 of ISCED.

Each university department develops its own curriculum. This includes mandatory, elective mandatory and elective courses. Course content is compiled by a committee of teaching and research staff, put forward for approval to the General Assembly of the Department and the Dean of Faculty, and finally for approval by the Dean of the University. Learning goals and competencies are defined for the overall curriculum and for each course unit (seminar, project, workplace-based learning etc.). The credits and level of skills correspond with those of the National Qualifications Framework of Lifelong Learning and the European Qualifications Framework of Higher Education (Eurydice 2015a).

³ Early Childhood Education Departments at: University of Ioannina (Ioannina), University of Western Macedonia (Florina), University of Thessaly (Volos), University of Crete (Rethymnon), National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Athens), Aegean University (Rhodes), University of Patra (Patra), Democritus University of Thrace (Alexandroupoli).

Nursery and Childcare Teachers (*Vrefonipiagogos/Vrefonipiokomos*)

The qualification requirement for Nursery and Childcare Teachers is the completion of a degree from one of the three Departments of Early Childhood Education at a Technological Education Institute (TEI) in Greece. Entry requirements are a high school diploma and the required number of points in the General Pan-Hellenic Examination. The curricula of the Early Childhood Education Departments are compiled by a special committee of faculty set up by the head of the department. The content is approved by the General Assembly of each department and in turn by the President of the Institution (Eurydice 2015a).

The courses of study include mandatory and elective classes. Educational activities correspond to 30 credits per semester and 240 credits (ECTS points) overall. During the first seven semesters, students attend theoretical classes and learning workshops at the Departments. During the eighth semester, they perform their practical, workplace-based training and prepare a thesis (see the study guides for Technological Educational Institutes, Departments of Early Childhood Education). The Technological Educational Institute degree is placed at Level 6 of the EQF and Level 6 of ISCED.

Graduates are qualified to work either in municipal or private day nurseries and childcare centres or to be self-employed as home-based carers of children aged from a few months old up to their enrolment in primary school. Furthermore, they may set up and operate nursery or childcare centres, as well as practise any other professional activity associated with their educational qualifications, including the entire range of administrative posts related to their field of expertise (Government Gazette 203/1/23.12.1991).

Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants (*Voithos Vrefonipiagogou*)

Vocational High Schools (*Epagelmatiko Lykeio*) offer a specialisation to become a Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant which starts during the second year of high school. The duration of studies is three years (Law 3475/2006). The specialised qualification (certificate) awarded by Vocational High Schools corresponds to Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (National Qualifications Framework Registry 2015). The certificate also corresponds to a general school leaving certificate for admission to tertiary education through the process of the General Pan-Hellenic Examination. In addition, those with a Vocational High School award are authorised to enrol in a Vocational Training Institution (*Institouto Epagelmatikis Katartisis*) in a course related to the specialism of their leaving certificate. The diploma they receive falls under Level 5 of the EQF and Level 4 of ISCED (National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance 2014). The course of study is determined either at the central level by legislation for Vocational High Schools or by the Vocational Training Institution itself and is accredited by a central authority such as the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (Eurydice 2015a).

Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants are provided with knowledge and skills in:

- Advising expectant mothers regarding their pregnancy and the care of their newborn;
- Care of infants and toddlers;
- Providing appropriate nutrition and hygiene as well as helping infants and toddlers progress in their walking, movement and speech;
- Maintaining the daily programme of the nursery and childcare centre by contributing to the cognitive, physical and linguistic development of the children;
- Informing and counselling parents regarding the appropriate care of their children.

Students who complete this specialism are authorised to work as auxiliary staff in nursery and day care centres, maternity clinics, summer camps, family planning centres, and as self-employed family day carers in a home-based setting (Ministry of Education 2009; Educational Scale).

3.2 Competences and curricula in IPS programmes for core practitioners

Kindergarten Teachers (*Nipiagogos*)

Prospective Kindergarten Teachers experience a range of approaches during their initial professional studies. These include theory-based seminars, workplace-based learning, tutorials, practical assignments, written reports, and the use of university-based learning workshops. With respect to the skills and knowledge relating to the administration of a kindergarten unit, these are not offered as part of IPS but comprise a subject of graduate coursework for already practising educators. The award granted by the Departments of Early Childhood Education is uniform, i.e. a university degree. However, there is considerable divergence in course emphasis.

Examples of taught modules are listed in summary below and, as already stated, may vary from university to university. Some examples:

- a) *Pedagogy*: introduction to educational science; pedagogy of integration; introduction to environmental education; current teaching approaches; current trends in early childhood education;
- b) *Psychology*: social, developmental, educational psychology; child development and addressing preschool children's problems; developmental disorders; introduction to special education; education of children with sensory impairments;
- c) *Sociology*: introduction to sociology; introduction to the sociology of education; education and the state; educational policy;
- d) *Methodology*: research methodology in social sciences; methodology in human sciences (statistics, ethnographic research methods);
- e) *Education in the sciences*: information and communication technologies in education and learning; teaching of biology and bioethics; history and philosophy of mathematics; materials and activities in teaching mathematics; teaching of physics;
- f) *Theatre education applications and art-related learning*: museum education; creative musical teaching; psychomotor and rhythmic education; making musical instruments; creative musical activities; teaching of crafts; introduction to puppetry, theatre education;
- g) *Language, literature, social sciences*: modern Greek language, history of children's literature; modern Greek history; multiculturalism; bilingualism and education;
- h) *Foreign languages*: English, French, German, Turkish.

It is mandatory for all students of University Departments of Early Childhood Education to undergo workplace-based education/training (see *Section 4*). Writing a thesis is optional for all universities except for the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Crete where it is mandatory. In most Departments specialist learning centres provide experience in areas such as applied technologies; teaching of sciences and mathematics; crafts, theatre education and music (see University Study Guides 2015).

Nursery and Childcare Teachers (*Vrefonipiagogos/Vrefonipiokomos*)

The professional education/training of Nursery and Childcare Teacher candidates at the Technological Educational Institutes (Universities of Applied Sciences) includes one or more of the following formats: theory-based seminars, workshops, tutorials and laboratory assignments, as well as individual or group projects and educational fieldtrips.

The basic subjects of the Departments of Early Childhood Education of the Technological Educational Institutes have common foundations with the modules taught at the Universities. They comprise four different categories:

- *General foundation courses*, which offer general knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, sociology and medicine, e.g. education sciences, basic principles of psychology, research methodology in education sciences;
- *Special foundation courses*, which offer basic knowledge regarding various subjects, e.g. musical-psychomotor education; theatre education; ICT;
- *Specialised courses*, offering required knowledge for practical implementation, e.g. infant education; children and play; organisational principles of pedagogical practice; daily education and care;
- *Administration, management, legislation and human studies* courses required for the organisation and administration of the workplace related to the specific specialisation, e.g. economic data and management of childcare centres; legal data and legislation (see Technological Educational Institutes Study Guides 2015).

Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants (*Voithos Vrefonipiagogou*)

The education of Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistant candidates at the Vocational High Schools includes the following areas of learning:

- Creative methods and technical teaching aids;
- Early childhood education;
- Musical and musical-psychomotor education;
- General and developmental psychology;
- Aesthetic education – theatre education;
- Early childhood literature;
- Organisation of nursery and childcare activities;
- Anatomy/physiological knowledge.

Beyond these basic course requirements, students are trained under the supervision of a qualified Nursery and Childcare Teacher:

- to offer holistic care to preschool aged children;
- to support their all-round development (physical, cognitive, linguistic and psychomotor) through appropriate pedagogical methods;
- to care for children with special needs;
- to take measures to prevent accidents in all physical spaces, to apply first aid where necessary, and to react appropriately in emergencies;
- to fill out the children’s personal cards and to keep records;
- to give advice to parents or guardians (Ministry of Education 2009).

3.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

In Greece, there are no alternative pathways of entry into the ECEC occupations apart from the three previously mentioned formal professional education/training routes. There are also no predominantly workplace-based training routes. However, in terms of ‘system permeability’, all three main ECEC personnel types may work in a variety of additional fields.

Qualified **Kindergarten Teachers** are additionally authorised to work in a wide range of social institutions and foundations. These include:

- Special education kindergartens and assimilation centres for people with disabilities;
- Children’s hospitals;
- Summer camps;
- Children’s play areas in malls, airports, etc.;
- Museums;

- Educational book publishers;
- Radio and television stations for children’s programmes;
- Municipal and local government services and/or training programmes concerning education;
- Children’s shelters;
- Creativity centres;
- Child welfare institutions;
- Music and art learning workshops
- Foreign language learning centres;
- Athletic centres;
- Services, organisations and institutions concerned with education;
- Professional training institutions;
- Educational administrative and supervisory centres;
- Educational science research centres (University Study Guides 2015, University of Crete).

In addition, they may work as teacher educators in secondary or tertiary education, responsible for the theoretical and practical teaching of early childhood education classes.

Nursery and Childcare Teachers may also be employed as:

- Managers of research, organisation and operation of nursery and childcare centres;
- Supervisors/principals of operational units (directorates, departments, offices) in nursery and childcare centres of local government bodies;
- Teacher educators in secondary and tertiary education responsible for the theoretical and practical teaching in early childhood education course classes (Presidential Decree 523/24.12.91; TEI Study Guides 2015, Athens Technological Educational Institute).

For staff of municipal nursery and childcare centres, the posting of an employee of one Local Government Body (LGB) to another LGB is possible subsequent to a petition filed by the employee and subsequent to the approval of the originating body with a decision of the person responsible for appointments of the receiving LGB. The posting is for two years and may be extended for one extra year (Law 4257/2014).

The formal opportunities for moving up the system are available only at the vertical level (i.e. starting with a specialist first degree and moving on to take a master’s degree or a doctoral degree). There are no specifically horizontal qualifying options for side entries by career changers with non-specialist qualifications, i.e. no specifically defined career pathways with diverse entry points at different levels and a clear progression route.

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

Kindergarten Teachers (*Nipiagogos*)

Workplace-based learning constitutes an integral and mandatory part of the IPS of Kindergarten Teachers (Androusou and Avgitidou 2013). The organisation, structuring and focus given to workplace-based learning vary from university to university. This diversity includes the duration (from a few days to a few months in total, in some or all of the years of study); the location (public, private kindergartens and childcare centres; university locations; other locations where preschool aged children are taught, e.g. the Greek Children’s Museum); the way they are incorporated into the course of study (as part of one or some applied classes, as a separate course with additional lectures, graded or not graded; as a differentiated learning activity); and

the importance of this segment of IPS for gaining the degree (covering a large or small part of the credits required for graduation) (Doliopoulou 2005).

Despite these differences, the goal of practical training is similar across the nine University Departments of Early Childhood Education, that is, to create the greatest possible connection for students with the educational process and classroom management (Economides 2007). However, the goal of the practicum is not limited to acquiring practical experience in the work place but is associated with acquiring and using theoretical knowledge, research evidence and reflective abilities with a view to critically approaching not only their own personal work as an educator but also the way other educators work (Androusou and Avgitidou 2013).

In all universities, the work placement programme is established and enacted under the supervision of a committee comprising both members of the faculty and external experts:

- The participating **faculty members** who are responsible for theory-based seminars provide oral and written instructions for the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational activities in the kindergarten group/class and visit the classes in which the students are placed, in order to monitor their work and offer systematic support (supervision). Furthermore, they draft evaluation sheets for the students' work and discuss these in meetings attended by all those involved in the workplace-based element of the degree course. Also, they collaborate with all parties involved in the grading of students.
- Members of the **special research and teaching faculty** plan the organisational structure of the practical training and assign the students to kindergartens or other placement locations. In addition, they attend meetings with the participating teachers, monitor the theoretical courses related to the practical training programme, participate in these and organise support learning workshops for the candidates. They also collaborate with the members of the faculty throughout the duration of the planning, implementation and evaluation of the practical training and inform them (and the practical training committee) of all issues that arise. In general, they act as coordinators and counsellors and organise meetings with the students so as to enhance the processing of what they have observed or undertaken in the kindergartens. They also discuss and if necessary modify the proposed daily schedule of activities and/or programmes of each student. They visit the classrooms where the students undergo practical training, with a view to observing their teaching, discussing potential points for improvement with them and the Kindergarten Teachers and offering them systematic support (supervision). They draw up observation sheets of the students' teaching during their supervision and submit these to the collaborating faculty members and the practical training committee. Finally, they collaborate with the members of the faculty for the grading of the students' practical training.
- The **Kindergarten Teachers posted at the University** observe and participate in the theoretical classes regarding practical training, collaborate with the students, serve as coordinators and counsellors, visit classrooms where students are undergoing practical training and observe their teaching, discuss potential issues with them and with the Kindergarten Teachers and offer systematic support (supervision). They also draw up observation sheets of the students' activities during their supervision and inform the members of the faculty and members of the Special, Research and Teaching Faculty regarding any arising issues.
- **Kindergarten Teachers in the co-operating kindergartens** are present in their classes but do not intervene in the daily programme of the students except when their assistance is requested or a need arises. They assist the students in the organisation of scheduled visits or festivals as well as in the provision of teaching materials. They inform the parents of the children about the practical training of the students and inform the students about the children in the classroom and the preferred pedagogical approaches. Finally, they collaborate with the special research staff, the posted Kindergarten Teachers and faculty members in addressing potential problems (see study guides, University Departments of Early Childhood Education).

Since, as already pointed out, the practical component of IPS varies in many ways, this report will refer briefly and indicatively to the practicum procedures at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (see Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Department of Preschool Education Sciences and Training, University Study Guides 2015). At this university, the practical element is carried out in the sixth and seventh semesters on dedicated days and weeks. Each student has to earn 48 ECTS points through the practical component of IPS.

Each student receives a 'practical training booklet' at the beginning of the sixth and seventh semester which he or she must fill in during the placements according to guidance given by the responsible professors. The attendance of the students at discussion meetings, seminars, feedback sessions and in kindergarten classrooms, as defined by each semester's practical training, is mandatory. Practical training is conducted in public kindergartens, and its total duration, each semester, is 13 weeks, of which approximately eight include the presence of the student in a kindergarten classroom. The daily programme of the practical training is approved by the practical training committee and the General Assembly of the Department.

Within the placement framework, specialised meetings, seminars and feedback sessions with the responsible professors are provided, which supplement the students' knowledge. The specific practical training programme aims to enhance the research-based training of prospective Kindergarten Teachers according to the following eight focal points: 1. Diversity among children and families; 2. Learning environments; 3. Learning areas; 4. Teaching strategies; 5. Evaluation; 6. Collaboration and communication; 7. Reflection; 8. Professional development. It also includes familiarisation with the current institutional framework of the Greek kindergarten (operative features, curricula, etc.).

In the practical training of the sixth semester, students undertake a gradually more active role in the following: observation of classroom activities and the children; group management; planning and conducting activities; and creating trusting relationships with the children and their families, the class teacher and their colleagues. Emphasis is placed on pedagogical practices in which the diversity among children is foregrounded and the development and learning of all children promoted. In addition, in all phases, emphasis is placed on the professional development of the future educators. At the same time, students attend mandatory seminars and laboratories at the university, which relate to the knowledge topics of each phase and support the students' activities in the workplace.

In some cases, students may submit a petition for the financing of their practical training through a relevant Partnership Agreement, whereby they are insured and paid by the university (the amount received is dependent upon the total amount available) (Unknown, 2016a). In addition, prospective Kindergarten Teachers may submit a petition requesting that their practical training take place in another country through participation in the LLP/Erasmus programme. This programme provides a monthly stipend for students who have been chosen to be relocated with a view to covering discretionary expenses associated with their practical training abroad, including their travel expenses. The amount of this monthly stipend is determined by the national group of the LLP/Erasmus and depends upon the cost of living in the destination country (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Department of European Educational Programmes 2012).

Nursery and Childcare Teachers (*Vrefonipiagogos/Vrefonipiokomos*)

The practicum component for prospective Nursery and Childcare Teachers at the Technological Educational Institutes takes place in the form of learning workshops in various semesters (the duration of which varies from institution to institution). Like their Kindergarten Teacher counterparts, prospective Nursery and Childcare Teachers undertake a gradually increasing active role in observation of classroom activities and the children; group management; planning and

conducting activities; and creating trusting relationships with the children and their families, the class teacher and their colleagues.

During the final semester at the Technological Education Institutes, a practicum of 24 consecutive weeks takes place, which is supervised and evaluated by a special committee (Presidential Decree P.D. 174/85, Government Gazette 59/A'/29.03.1985).

The workplace sites where students are trained are obliged, within the framework of their social mission, to participate in the best possible way towards supporting the students. To this end, a graduate of either a Technological Educational Institute or a University or other tertiary school of related specialisation to that of the students and with sufficient experience in the workplace is appointed to: a) supervise the work and performance of the Nursery and Child-care Teacher candidates, b) offer proposals to the principal of the practical training site for the improvement of working conditions and student support, c) collaborate with the supervising educator at the Technological Educational Institute to ensure effective training procedures. The tutors to whom the training of the students has been assigned visit the sites, inform the students about their field of expertise, monitor their performance and collaborate in solving their problems, both with the students themselves and with the person in charge of the site.

The six month practicum is mandatory for the degree award and corresponds to 10 ECTS points. Students must have successfully completed all the specialised classes and learning workshops of the practical training.

The workplace-based component is carried out for three months in sites for infants and toddlers and for three months in sites for older preschool children. Workplace sites may include public day nurseries and childcare centres which, with a ministerial announcement in the Government Gazette, are classified as 'centres of professional practical training'; private nursery and day care centres; public services nursery centres; and workers' organisations nursery centres (see TEI Study Guides 2015).

The training comprises a simulation of the working conditions which the students will encounter later, since they follow the full time schedule of the educators at the respective sites and undertake the same responsibilities. Throughout the duration, students are supervised by a practical training officer who is appointed by the training site and must be a graduate of a Department of Early Childhood Education of a Technological Educational Institute, in conjunction with the practical training committee members of the Department (see TEI Study Guides 2015).

For example, at the Athens Technological Educational Institute, Department of Early Childhood Education, the students are counselled with respect to their choice of practical training site and are checked on the appropriateness of their choice. At this site, they carry out, on a daily basis, its educational programme, by following the planning, implementation and evaluation found in their practical training book, in which they must record their daily work.

Halfway through the six-month practical training, a meeting takes place between the students and the practical training committee members and supervisors, with a view to encouraging, evaluating and self-evaluating so that, if necessary, the goals of the practical training may be redefined. At the end of the training, each student presents his or her diary with two reports (one for the nursery/childcare site and one for the preschool/kindergarten site) to the members of the committee who evaluate his/her work (Athens Technological Educational Institute, Department of Early Childhood Education).

According to a Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Education and Employment, practical training at the Technological Educational Institutes is conducted via a contract with the employer and the students are paid (Government Gazette 453/tB' 16.07.1986, E5 4825/16.06.1986). Public services and organisations, public legal entities as well as enterprises, are obliged to employ higher education students who wish to carry out the practical training of their profession. Aside from the right to compensation and insurance, they cannot acquire any other employment or pension right. It is worthwhile to mention that the students, during their

practical training, are insured by the Social Insurance Institution in the case of accident or illness.

Some students may apply through a Partnership Agreement programme for the financing and insurance of their practical training by the Technological Educational Institute. In addition, the Technological Educational Institutes, through the Erasmus program, compensate students of all departments who wish to carry out their practical training abroad (Athens Technological Educational Institute, Department of Early Childhood Education).

5. Continuing professional development (CPD)

Kindergarten Teachers (*Nipiagogos*)

In various university departments, there are a number of post-graduate and doctoral programmes related to current research trends and recent preschool education approaches. These programmes may be completed either in one department or in collaboration with other departments of universities, either in Greece or in another country.

Over the last few decades, the continuing professional development of teachers in Greece has comprised both compulsory and elective activities. The types of mandatory education, as defined by Presidential Decree 250/92, Article 1, are the following:

- Introductory training for newly qualified Early Childhood Education Teachers who are applying for a post;
- Each academic year Kindergarten Teachers with a permanent post have the opportunity to participate in periodic trainings in two educational cycles, lasting up to three months;
- Short special training programmes, lasting 10 to 100 hours, for all active Kindergarten Teachers and up to 200 hours for Kindergarten Teachers serving in special education units (Doukas et al. 2008).

The annual induction courses carried out by the Regional Education Centres in Greece are obligatory for all newly appointed early childhood, elementary and secondary education teachers and substitutes (P.D. 45/1999). This programme's main goal is to facilitate the teachers' smooth introduction into the educational system by offering the tools needed for the work they undertake.

The training programme includes 100 hours of lectures and is structured according to three phases – cognitive, practical and reflective (Teachers Training Organisation 2010). The body mainly responsible for implementing this programme is the Institute of Educational Policy and falls under the Service Programme "Training and Lifelong Learning". The specific programme aims at: sensitising educators to new educational needs and challenges; utilising information and communication technologies in education; cooperating with families and the local community; linking the educational institution to current social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions; and encouraging the active participation of the educators in the continuing improvement of education. Some of the approaches include: project work, tutorials, case studies, work plans, role play simulations, debates, and education through the arts. The training programme combines all methods (both face-to-face and distance learning) and includes consecutive seminars. Some programmes focus on a specific topic such as special educational needs or the utilisation and implementation of ICT in educational settings.

In addition, training seminars and workshops are run with a view to informing and qualifying Kindergarten Teachers for participation in the eTwinning platform, which is part of ERASMUS+, an EU-funded programme which offers staff working in public and private schools the oppor-

tunity to teach abroad. Participants are able to improve their knowledge, their professional and linguistic skills and abilities, as well as to come into contact with a new culture and develop a sense of European identity (State Scholarship Foundation n.d.).

Furthermore, a number of optional seminars, workshops and conferences (across Greece, in Europe, in international contexts) are offered to address identified needs of educators, such as environmental education; health education; traffic education; gender, multicultural and bilingual education; bullying. These types of training are carried out by the Institute of Educational Policy, the Universities, the Technological Educational Institutes, school groups, school counsellors, professional educator associations or local expert groups of international organisations such as the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and others (Eurydice 2015b).

The Government has proceeded to legislative regulations which grant time off for participation in continuing professional development activities within a specific programme framework. According to a Ministry of Education circular (Employee Code article 59 of Law 3528/2007, Official Government Gazette 26A'/9-2-2007), short-term and longer-term leaves are granted for scientific or educational purposes. Thus, leave for taking part in conferences, meetings, seminars and all types of scientific gatherings in Greece or internationally is granted if participation is considered advantageous for the public education system. Leave is also granted to educators who participate in scholarship competitions or who wish to enrol in the National School of Public Administration and the National School of Local Government, or who wish to enrol in post-graduate studies. Leave for scientific or educational purposes is granted by the Director of Education.

In the past, longer term leave lasted for the duration of the post-graduate studies, plus one year, and those participating would receive earnings increased by 20-40%. However, due to the economic crisis in Greece, the granting and extension of long-term post-graduate study leave has been suspended (Law 4210/2013). Taking into consideration the difficulty in replacing educators in their teaching duties, due to the shortage of available staff, the granting or renewing of service leave with earnings is allowed only for fellows of the State Scholarships Foundation. Also, with the provisions of Law 4093/2013, the planned rise in earnings of those granted service leave for education abroad, was repealed. Furthermore, all types of educational expenses are now to be covered by the interested person, except for the introductory training expenses (see above) which are covered by the State. In the private sector, some employers grant leave for CPD activities if this is considered necessary.

However, despite the fact that educational leave opportunities are few, and the budgets of kindergartens are limited, Kindergarten Teachers – although earning less now - nevertheless seek training, both to remain informed and up-to-date regarding educational trends, and to enable them to be promoted to a post as kindergarten principal, school counsellor, etc.

Specifically, attendance of training and post-graduate study programmes, as stated earlier, results in qualifications which are awarded points and count toward the professional advancement of Kindergarten Teachers, kindergarten principals, school directors and school counsellors.

In the case of **Kindergarten Principals**, they have to have had eight years of work experience and points-awarded selection criteria which include: a) the scientific-educational background and training of the candidate (e.g. doctoral degree, post-graduate title, second University or TEI degree, verification or certification of training, certified training in ICT or knowledge of a foreign language); b) the service and administrative experience of the candidate, and c) their contribution to the field and their general personality and constitution (Ministry of Education Circular, F.361.22/27/80025/E3/19.05.2015). This final criterion is measured through a confidential vote of the school teachers' association of the candidate's choice. The confidential vote evaluates the candidate's abilities as well as personality traits exhibited during the school's daily routine, e.g. ethos, integrity, sense of justice, democratic behaviour, professional development and consistency. Required competencies include, indicatively, the ability to communi-

cate and collaborate; to undertake initiatives and to problem solve, especially with respect to teaching, administrative, organisational and operational issues and the ability to create an appropriate, inspiring environment for the kindergarten staff. Also taken into consideration are the points awarded from the relevant Regional Primary Education Service Council, as well as other supportive information such as: studies in a different field; training and retraining; organisation of educational conferences, seminars and training programmes, including participation as group rapporteur, member of the scientific team or as a trainer; published and research work; initiatives in education; carrying out educational programmes and implementing innovations; administrative or instructional experience; participation in councils, committees or work groups; social and union action; participation in administrative bodies of scientific and educational organizations or in local participation bodies and official awards.

The candidates are evaluated based on the points they are awarded according to the above criteria. The relevant Educational Directorate is then responsible for compiling a final list of candidates per school/kindergarten, based on the sum of the points awarded for scientific-pedagogical background, staff training and administrative experience, as well as the points awarded from the confidential ballot of the school teachers' association. The regional educational director proceeds to the appointment of kindergarten principals and school directors (Ministerial Decision Bulletin F.361.22/26/79840/E3/19.05.2015, Government Gazette 915/20.05.2015), whose term of office last two years.

It should be noted that for kindergarten principals there are no required training programmes either before or after taking up their appointment to this position and their continuing professional and educational development is not mandatory.

An introductory training (induction) for newly qualified **Nursery and Childcare Teachers** and their qualified co-workers employed in public childcare settings is mandatory. This is carried out during the first two years of their appointment and aims at familiarising them with their duties. The responsible authorities are obliged to budget for the necessary certifications for the specific training. An employee is not promoted if he or she has not successfully completed the basic introductory training (Law 3584/2007).

Continuing professional education is optional, but efforts are being made to offer incentives for participation. This training is offered in the form of Ministry-approved programmes carried out by various educational bodies (Eurydice 2015c).

CPD opportunities for Nursery and Childcare Teachers have been growing rapidly in recent years. The main bodies which undertake this training are the Pan-Hellenic Association of Early Childhood Educators, the Technological Educational Institutes, the Universities, scientific associations of educators, and country-specific units of international organisations such as OMEP. The Pan-Hellenic Association of Early Childhood Educators organises conferences (across Greece, across Europe, internationally), learning workshops, and focus groups in which educators are trained in small groups in various current ECEC topics on a regular basis.

With respect to leave for educational purposes, as well as respective CPD courses, the same legislative regulations and restrictions apply for the leave granted to Kindergarten Teachers.

Only a graduate of a Department of Early Childhood Education of a University or Technological Educational Institute may be appointed as director of a nursery or day care centre, upon the decision of the Service Council. In case the Service Council has not appointed someone, the directorship is undertaken by the most senior employee in terms of age/experience who is a graduate of a University Department of Early Childhood Education or of a Technological Educational Institute (Government Gazette 546/B/02.08.1988).

6. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to ECEC staffing

There have not been any amendments or changes concerning the workforce of early childhood education in nursery and childcare centres during the last five years. With respect to teachers working in public kindergartens, a number of reform initiatives have been introduced which concern not just pre-primary teachers, but also primary and secondary school teachers. These include the following two reforms:

Recent CPD options

As already stated, significant changes have been made regarding the continuing education of teachers. Their intra-service training focuses on:

- Introductory training of newly appointed and substitute teachers;
- Introductory training in the use and implementation of ICT in teaching;
- New study programmes (e.g. teaching methods and evaluation);
- Ways of organising and implementing reforms and new programmes;
- Specialised training in information and communication technologies, theatre, music, the arts and multicultural education;

In addition, Kindergarten Teachers receive training in:

1. Implementation of the new curriculum;
2. Working in all-day kindergartens;
3. Use of new technologies;
4. Obtaining certification in administrative competence.

All ECEC school counsellors (see *Section 8.3*) are trained in instructional competence (Eurydice 2016).

Salary adjustments for Primary Education Teachers (Law 4354/2015)

Educators serving in primary education have been reclassified, effective 01.01.2016, according to a new salary scale, which will result in changes in their salary (Law 4354, 2015). A detailed breakdown of this reform is presented below (see *Section 8.1*).

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

In recent years, no national surveys have been published relating to early childhood education professionalisation and staffing issues.

8. General workforce issues

8.1 Remuneration

Kindergarten Teachers' salaries were adequate before the onset of the severe economic crisis in Greece. In 2011, there was a large-scale reduction in salaries, when the uniform pay scale for all public employees (including educators) was implemented (Law 4024, 2011). This large

reduction was mainly related to the former extra-curricular allowance (so-called non-contact time, see below).

In December 2015, Parliament voted on a new pay scale for public employees (including the salaries of kindergarten and school educators) (Law 4354, Government Gazette 176/16.12.2015). Specifically, educators, like all public employees, who hold a University or Technological Educational Institute degree, advance, regardless of their rank, along a pay scale ranging from 1 to 19. Employees belonging to the same category and the same pay scale are entitled to the corresponding basic salary, regardless of the field to which their position belongs. In order to advance from a lower pay level to a higher one, early childhood educators must first complete two years of service at the lower levels. Post-graduate and doctoral degree holders are awarded promotions to higher levels by 2 and 6 levels respectively. Allowances for the position as kindergarten principal or school director, including the family allowance given to eligible persons, have not changed. Despite the fact that the new pay scale has been in effect since 01.01.2016, salary increases will be paid within a four year horizon. In other words, one quarter of the increase in the basic salary will be paid each year for the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. For example, the basic salary of an employee who should receive an annual increase of 60€ will be increased by 15€ a year for the next four years (Eurydice 2016; Unknown 2016b).

This salaries reform does not result in significant changes for Kindergarten Teachers and teachers in primary schools, for which the starting salary for a newly appointed teacher is 1092€ per month (gross). On an incremental pay scale, educators move up to the next level and his or her salary is automatically increased by around 15-20€. Of course, the allowances paid in addition to the salary should be mentioned, e.g. for service in remote or frontier regions (approximately 100€); family allowance (50€ per child), and the allowance for a supervisory position (100€) (Bratis 2015).

Thus, a newly appointed educator in a large city like Athens or Thessaloniki, without any other income, finds it difficult to survive. Rents are expensive and the cost of living in these cities is high, resulting often in retired parents having to assist their children or in the young professionals living at home with their parents.

The salaries of Nursery and Childcare Teachers are currently subject to considerable fluctuation.

8.2 Full-time and part-time employment

All staff are employed full-time. The mandatory working hours for publicly employed educators, either with or without administrative duties (such as for principals), may not exceed six hours daily and 30 hours per week. Specifically, the teaching hours of Kindergarten Teachers are 25 hours a week and this decreases with years of service to 24 hours for up to 10 years of service, to 23 hours for 10-15 years of service, to 22 hours for 15-20 years of service and to 21 hours for more than 20 years of service (Law 4115/2013).

For the permanent staff of day nurseries and childcare centres of local government organisations, the working week is 30 hours throughout their employment. This is the case for Nursery and Childcare Teachers, Kindergarten Teachers who work in these settings, as well as related occupational roles such as social workers, Nursery and Childcare Teaching Assistants, carers and nurses (Unknown, 2016c; Law 4368/2016).

8.3 Staff support measures in the workplace

Newly appointed **Kindergarten Teachers** serve as educators on a probationary basis for two years, in order to become familiarised with the educational environment as a follow up to their introductory training. After two years they automatically become permanent employees. A law

passed in 2010 (Law 3848) aimed to support newly appointed staff by providing for a mentor whose role was to assist and advise new Kindergarten Teachers. However, this decree has not been implemented.

Significant sources of support for Kindergarten Teachers are the Centres for Differential Diagnosis and Support. These centres fall under the Ministry of Education but operate locally in many municipalities. Parents may be referred to a centre by the educator, when significant learning or other difficulties relating to their child are observed. The centres assess and diagnose the problem and then collaborate both with the parents and the teachers, in order to help the children in addressing or resolving it. Thus, their responsibility is to investigate the type and degree of difficulties of children with special educational needs - ranging from serious health problems to special learning difficulties such as dyslexia or complex cognitive, emotional or social difficulties - as well as to offer counselling support and information to educators.

The main source of support comes from the early childhood education **School Counsellors**, who are responsible for the scientific and professional guidance and support of the Kindergarten Teachers in a region determined by the Ministry of Education. They encourage scientific research in the field of education and participate in the evaluation of educational work, including that of the Kindergarten Teachers in their region. They collaborate with kindergarten and school educators in their area, individually or in groups, to facilitate the smooth progression of the pedagogical and educational practice as well as the promotion of current teaching methods. They assist and encourage teachers to undertake initiatives and activities for addressing problems in their work, for enriching school life and for improving the quality of the education offered (Government Gazette 1340, 2002).

Similar support measures are not offered for **Nursery and Childcare Teachers**.

8.4 Non-contact time

As stated above, the extra-curricular allowance concerning time spent by the educator for preparation at home or after school was abolished a few years ago, with the implementation of uniform salaries for public employees. Thus, salaries were significantly reduced.

With respect to their collaboration with parents, Kindergarten Teachers seek contact on a daily basis, not only when the children are brought to school or picked up, but also through frequent exchanges outside school hours, mostly in the evenings. This contact and effort to communicate, however, depends upon the good will of the educator who does not receive any additional financial reward. The same applies to other activities of Kindergarten Teachers, e.g. their collaboration with local bodies, or the organisation of seminars for parents held by specialists.

8.5 Staff shortages and recruitment strategies

In recent years, the problem of staff shortages in **kindergartens** has become visible at the start of each kindergarten year. There are not enough permanent Kindergarten Teachers to fill the positions available since many have reached retirement age and no new educators are being appointed because of the recession.

In 2010, an objective appointment process for educators was introduced (Law 3848, 2010). The permanent appointment of kindergarten (and school) teachers is conducted through: (a) ranking tables compiled after successful completion of the Supreme Council for Civil Service Personnel Selection exam; (b) academic qualifications and social criteria and (c) prior teaching experience in public (as substitutes) or private schools (Eurydice 2015d). Despite the existence of this law, permanent appointments are no longer made and for this reason, the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection exam has not taken place since 2008.

In order to fill vacancies in kindergartens, temporary substitute Kindergarten Teachers are hired under a limited-time, private employment contract.

Nursery and childcare centres also face staff shortages. In fact, some municipalities have resorted to volunteers in order to address shortages at the centres. For example, in Athens, the municipal authority requested in writing, from all employees of the municipality in administrative positions or others (security, catering, cleaning), to volunteer to work at the municipal childcare centres during their work day, for a specific time period, until new contracted teachers could be hired. Such a request is not only unacceptable for the children, who would lack benefitting from a specialised educational workforce, but also because the volunteers could, at any moment, decide to stop volunteering.

The Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece, instead of seeking funding from the state in order to meet its needs (especially now that funding has been greatly reduced from year to year due to the crisis), has adopted the government's position of searching for alternative means of funding. Thus, it adopted the creation of Social Cooperative Enterprises which are essentially urban cooperatives with a social purpose, although they have a commercial status by law. Their purpose is to provide 'care' and social welfare services to specific population groups including infants and children. Enterprises offering infant/child care are staffed by unemployed Nursery and Childcare Teachers, cleaners and other persons required for operating a childcare centre, and may include parents (Social Policy Committee, Federation of Greek Women n.d.).

9. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

Impact of the crisis

A significant challenge for early childhood educators in Greece is the large reduction in their salaries (European Commission 2014) and the multi-faceted difficulties that have arisen from the economic crisis which concern education. In the case of early childhood education, less money is available and the attendance rate of children aged 4–6 years remains relatively low (84.0% compared to 94.3% in EU28 countries in 2014), mainly because the existing facilities are insufficient to cover the increased needs. Also, participation in public nursery provision remains consistently lower in Greece than in other EU countries (UNICEF 2014). At the same time, group size is increasing both as a result of the hiring freeze and through the merging and closing of nursery and childcare units as well as the fact that new units are no longer being established. They are also facing reductions in school expenses for meals; hiring of specialists (e.g. psychologists); tutoring; assimilation classes; reception classes for children with a background of migration; school libraries, etc. (Unknown 2013; Papakonstantinou 2013; UNICEF 2014).

Support for parents

Another challenge faced by early childhood educators is the support they are called upon to offer parents of impoverished children in their classes who find themselves at a dead-end after losing their jobs, and consider themselves to be poor role models for their children, or who need to work many hours to cover their needs and feel that they are neglecting their children. The economic crisis has exhausted them psychologically and emotionally, since they are constantly trying to make ends meet, resulting in negative effects on the education of their children and their relationship with them (Barajas, Philipsen and Brooks-Gunn 2007). This support may take on various forms from listening to the problems they face to helping them through

special food programmes or suggesting activities that they can do with their children in order to spend quality time with them at no cost (Ridge 2009).

Additional challenges

Alongside the previously mentioned problems, early childhood educators in Greece face some of the same challenges experienced by their colleagues in other Western countries. For example, the prevention, intervention and timely addressing of domestic violence and bullying in preschool settings, two issues which have developed into serious social problems of our time (Ioannou 2008; Athanasiadou and Psalti 2012; Konstantinou and Psalti 2012), as their consequences are negative both in the short and long term.

Across Western societies, as in Greece, time and places for play are on the decline, despite the fact that both contribute to children's healthy, all-round development. Free time has been reduced due to children's multiple commitments and playgrounds, parks, athletic centres, etc., especially in large cities, are at risk of disappearing. Furthermore, computer games, tablets, mobile phones and television have noticeably reduced children's involvement in unstructured play (Rogers and Sawyers 1990; Papageorgiou-Tsikoudi 2004; Levin 1998, 2008; Pappa 2008). The above conditions may result in children not knowing how to play, despite the fact that it is the basic means of learning in the first years of life. Thus, their last chance for high quality play may be in kindergarten. Early childhood educators are obliged to offer it to them, something which comprises an extra challenge for them.

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