

Kathrin Bock-Famulla, Jens Lange, Eva Strunz

Länderreport Frühkindliche Bildungssysteme 2015

Abstract

For years, Germany's early childhood education and care (ECEC) facilities have focused on quantity. And while expanding the number of available slots and extending the hours that care is offered remain important goals, the issue of quality is becoming increasingly important. As a key location for living and learning, ECEC centers are now being attended by most children in Germany earlier in life and for longer periods of time than was true in the past. Yet ECEC centers must be of high quality if they are to offer children the conditions they need to develop and grow as they should. The 2015 State by State Report on ECEC systems shows that investments designed to increase the quality of ECEC centers have risen, as reflected in the staffing ratios in almost all German states. For example, in 2014 there was, on average, one educator for every 4.4 children under 3 years, and for every 9.5 children between 3 and under 6 years. In 2012, the figures were 4.8 and 9.8, respectively.

Despite this positive trend, the staffing ratios in use are not always child-oriented or pedagogically effective. Each state is responsible for setting its own framework, which results in considerable differences in staffing levels at ECEC facilities – and therefore gives rise to noticeable differences in quality in practice.

As studies show, not only do unfavorable staffing ratios have an immediate impact on quality, they also result in increased burdens for educators. Moreover, the ratio is even less favorable in actual, everyday terms. After all, in addition to their interactions with children, educators require an increasing amount of time for activities that do not involve children, such as team meetings, conferences with parents, documentation and further education. In hardly any of the German states do clear, binding guidelines exist stating how much time should be made available for these tasks. Currently, 41 percent of ECEC staff work less than 32 hours a week. Those employed part time are particularly hard pressed to fulfill these duties – and face an increased risk of health problems as a result.

As the 2015 State by State Report also shows, expanding the number of available slots has led, overall, to a considerable increase in the number of educators at ECEC centers. Throughout Germany, the number of qualified personnel rose from almost 353,000 in 2006 to nearly 523,000 in 2014. Both the demand for additional personnel needed to improve quality and the existing lack of educators on the regional level highlight a further challenge: more attractive background conditions must be put in place, especially if younger educators are to be recruited and retained over the long term. It is therefore all the more surprising that, as our analysis shows, younger staff are much more likely to have a temporary position, with 41 percent of qualified ECEC personnel under the age of 25 lacking a permanent position and one-third of the staff responsible for inclusion making do with a contract of limited duration.

The enormous differences between states in the structural conditions for ECEC facilities, as seen in the 2015 State by State Report, clearly demonstrate that there is an increasingly pressing need for nationwide standards. The prerequisites for high-quality early childhood education and care are, therefore, pedagogically meaningful staffing ratios and, for educators, working conditions that are appropriate and stable.

The 2015 State by State Report provides policymakers, public administrators and the public with current facts and figures on the 16 German ECEC systems, which are discussed in profiles of each state. In addition, it presents findings from a survey of all state-level ministries responsible for early childhood education and care. The findings provide insight into a number of issues, including the requirements put in place by each state for evaluating educational practices and the way each state structures its educational advisory services. With that, the current publication lays an evidence-based foundation for a critically urgent undertaking: further developing the structural conditions that can ensure high-quality early childhood education and care throughout Germany.