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Mapping of Supply and Demand for Formal and Non-formal Early Childhood Education and Care Services

For the project *"Developing a Comprehensive Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic"*

Mapping of Supply and Demand for Formal and Non-formal Early Childhood Education and Care Services



Jaroslava Simonová | Kamila Brožová | Jana Straková | Petra Holečková

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List of Acronyms

AA	Administrative area
ASM	Additional support measure
CCY	Centre for children and youth
CG	Children's group
CPC	Centre for preschool children
CSI	Czech School Inspectorate
CZSO	Czech Statistical Office
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EU	European Union
FC	Forest club
FEP	Framework educational programme
FEP PE	Framework educational programme for preschool education
FG	Focus group
FKG	Forest kindergarten
IHIS CR	Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic
II	Individual interview
IS CAS	Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences
KG	Kindergarten
MER	Municipalities with extended responsibilities
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MoIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PS	Primary school
RILSA	Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs
SEN	Special educational needs
SEP	School educational programme
SM	Support measure
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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1. Introduction

This report was produced as part of the “Developing a Comprehensive Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic” project led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) in close partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). The project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by UNICEF in cooperation with the European Commission.

The chief objective of this project is to support the Czech Republic in improving the quality of and equal access to early childhood education and care, particularly for children in the 0–3 age group. This will be achieved by developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation system and by providing technical support to municipalities in expanding access to ECEC services and increasing their quality, including those for the most vulnerable children (for more information see the TSI project brief: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/32756/file/TSI%20Brief%20for%20Czech%20Republic.pdf>).

The report is the first output of the project. The aim of the mapping of supply and demand is to provide a comprehensive picture of the current state and functioning of formal and non-formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children from 0 to 6 years of age throughout the Czech Republic, of the stakeholders’ views, of the methods and motivations for the selection of facilities for their children by parents, and of their attitudes towards supply, which point to the current trends in demand.

The report was produced by a team from the Institute for Research and Development in Education at the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, which is the main research partner for the project.

Contributions to the report were made by the members of the project's expert working group, which is composed of representatives from ministries, state institutions, local and regional government associations, umbrella organisations and platforms, professional associations, research institutions, academia and other actors and experts in the early childhood education and care area.

The report includes:

- an overview of the available ECEC institutions and services in the Czech Republic;
- a geographical representation of the use of ECEC services in the Czech Republic;
- the identification of deficiencies in the availability of services from a geographical and regional perspective;
- the identification of demand factors related to parents' needs, expectations, barriers to access and attitudes towards ECEC services, including those of vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families;
- the mapping of the roles and views of various stakeholders;
- the identification of the strengths and challenges of the ECEC system;
- recommendations for public policy on the mapping of supply and demand for ECEC services.

In some cases, this report uses masculine terms for the roles of educators, teachers, teaching assistants, etc., mainly when they are referred to as such in the legislation or where the use of both gendered terms could lead to reduced comprehensibility of the text. In all other cases, the effort has been made to use gender neutral language – neutral expressions or the use of both of the gendered terms.

To conclude the introduction, we would like to thank the members of the working group and other actors who readily shared their data and experiences with ECEC services and facilities with us. A complete list of resources obtained from the working group can be found in Annex 1. We also thank Vojtěch Úlehla from Charles University Faculty of Science for creating the cartograms.

2. Methodology

The report draws from three types of resources. Firstly, it provides an overview of the legislative documents which pertain to ECEC and the available analytical publications. Secondly, it analyses the available statistical data collected by the MoEYS, Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) and the Register of Children's Groups and constructs 15 indicators characterising the supply and demand for ECEC services on the basis of this analysis. Lastly, it uses data collected through qualitative research among various groups of parents and ECEC providers conducted as part of this project. These data were processed through open coding and used to supplement the information gained from the quantitative research in the previous step.

Annex 2 provides a detailed description of resource collection and the administrative data used in calculating the indicators in this report, as well as detailed information about the qualitative research undertaken and the respondents' characteristics.



3. Results

3.1 Overview of formal and non-formal ECEC types

This chapter presents an overview of the individual types of formal and non-formal education and care. For ease of reference, we have used a uniform structure of information as follows: for each type we provide a definition of the given type of facility and the legislation it is regulated in, as well as how it can be founded and how it is regulated, its operating conditions, the qualification requirements for its staff, the existing standards and funding. All the presented information has been simplified to some extent in order to keep the information on the individual types of facility as brief as possible while maintaining a reasonable degree of accuracy. Further information can be accessed in the resources provided for the individual facility types in case the reader wishes to explore them in more depth.

3.1.1 Formal ECEC facilities

Kindergartens (including kindergartens for children with special educational needs)



1. Definition. Kindergartens are institutions that provide preschool education, are funded by the state and are included in the Register of Schools administered by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The aim of preschool education is, according to Act No. 561/2004 Coll. (the Education Act)¹, to support the development of a child's personality, emotional, intellectual and physical development, and the acquisition of basic rules of behaviour and basic life values and interpersonal relationships (Section 33). Kindergartens provide education to children between the ages of 2 and usually 6, with a legal right to be admitted to a kindergarten from 3 years of age. From the beginning of the school year which follows the day when the child reaches the age of 5 to the beginning of compulsory schooling, at least four hours of preschool education per day are compulsory (Section 34 (1)).

Kindergartens can operate in a full-time, half-day or boarding mode. Forest kindergartens and kindergartens in healthcare facilities are specific types of kindergartens. A forest kindergarten is a school in which education takes place mainly in outdoor areas outside its facilities (Section 34 (9)). Special kindergartens and special classes in regular kindergartens are intended for children with special educational needs due to mental, physical, visual or hearing disability, severe speech impairment, severe developmental learning disabilities, severe developmental disabilities, multiple disabilities or autism (the conditions for the establishment of such schools or classes are described in Section 16 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.).



2. Legal framework. The establishment and conditions of operation of kindergartens are defined by Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (the Education Act) and the related regulations, in particular Decree No. 14/2005 Coll., on preschool education². The compulsory scope, content and conditions of education for kindergartens are contained in the **Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education**³ (FEP PE). The last revision of the FEP PE, which is valid from 14 July 2021, took place within the amendment of Decree No. 271/2021 Coll.⁴.

Education in kindergartens must be provided by teaching staff, according to Act No. 536/2004 Coll., on teaching staff, as amended⁵. The operating conditions and hygiene requirements of kindergartens are governed by Decree No. 410/2005 Coll.⁶. For kindergartens providing meals, the nutritional standards for children older than 3 years are defined by Decree No. 107/2005, on school meals⁷. Specific conditions for the facilities of forest kindergartens are outlined in Act No. 283/2021 Coll.⁸.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. The prerequisite for carrying out the function of a kindergarten is a record in the Register of Schools and School Facilities of the Ministry of Education. Kindergartens registered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities can be public (their founder is a region, a municipality or a union of municipalities), state (established directly by the MoEYS), church or private (Section 8 of the Education Act). As at 30 September 2023, 90% of the registered kindergartens were established by municipalities, with the second largest founder being the private sector (8%) (CSI, 2023). Private kindergartens which are registered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities are governed by the laws applicable to kindergartens when establishing and providing services.

As educational institutions, kindergartens fall under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). The evaluation of their activities and results is the responsibility of the Czech School Inspectorate and the regional authority (Section 12 of the Education Act). Aggregated data on kindergartens are included in the annual **Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic** published by the MoEYS, as well as in the relevant reports on the education systems in individual regions. Kindergartens are also included in the Czech School Inspectorate's annual reports.

Kindergartens' capacities / the minimum and maximum number of children admitted to one class are outlined in Decree No. 14/2005 Coll.⁹. The minimum number of children in a kindergarten class depends on the number of classes in said kindergarten and the situation in the municipality. If the municipality has only one kindergarten with one open class, such a class can have a minimum of 13 children. In all other cases the minimum number of children in a class is 15. Up to 24 children can be placed

² <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-14>

³ Available at: <https://www.edu.cz/rvp-ramcove-vzdelavaci-programy/ramcove-vzdelavaci-program-pro-predskolni-vzdelavani-rvp-pz/>

⁴ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-271>

⁵ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>; an older version of this Act in English can be accessed at <https://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/skolstvi-v-cr/act-no-563-the-act-on-pedagogical-staff?lang=2>

⁶ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-410>

⁷ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-107>

⁸ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-283>

⁹ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-14>

in one class in a regular kindergarten. The class of a forest kindergarten must have at least 15 children. The founder of a kindergarten may lower the minimum number of children in a class if the founder is willing to cover the increased education costs (Section 23 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.). Places in kindergartens can be shared by more children attending part-time.

The founder may increase the maximum number of children in a class by up to 4 children, making the maximum class size 28 children, provided that this does not cause a decrease in the quality of education and the health and safety conditions are adequate. The maximum number of children in a class is reduced when a child in the class has been granted a level 4 or 5 additional support measure (ASM) or a level 3 ASM as a result of a mental disability. In each case the maximum number of children in the class is reduced by 2 children for each enrolled child with such ASM. For each enrolled child granted a level 3 ASM (for reasons other than mental disability) the maximum possible number of children is reduced by one. The maximum number of children in a class can be reduced by up to 5 children for these reasons¹⁰. For each 2-year-old child in a class, the maximum number of children is reduced by 2 for a reduction of up to 6 children. The reduction does not occur if it would prevent the fulfilment of a child's compulsory preschool education.

The capacity of a kindergarten as a whole results from the number of classes in the given school, which depends on its founder's resources and the demand in the place where the school is located. The municipality must ensure the conditions for the pre-school education of children aged 3 and older who reside in its school district.



4. Conditions for operation. In order to be registered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, the kindergarten must meet hygiene conditions, conditions for fire safety and spatial conditions for teaching preschool children¹¹. The specific requirements can be found in Decree No. 410/2005 Coll., Act No. 258/2000 Coll., on the Protection of Public Health¹², and Decree No. 268/2009 Coll., on Technical Demands on Buildings¹³. The conditions for both the outdoor and the indoor premises of a kindergarten are defined in that legislation. Furthermore, it is necessary to provide suitable sanitary facilities, collection and disposal of waste, and provide premises that comply with the standards for the provision of school meals.

The premises of a kindergarten must allow for teaching, free play, rest, personal hygiene, physical exercise and the provision of meals unless these are provided in another catering establishment. The outdoor area for activities and play must be at least 4 m² per child.

¹⁰ According to § 16 of Act no. 561/2004 Coll. a child with special educational needs can be given accommodations based on the recommendation of an educational counselling facility with the aim of compensating for their special educational needs.

¹¹ A full list of the conditions necessary for inclusion in the Register of Schools and School Facilities can be found in Sections 142 to 152 of the Education Act.

¹² <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-258>

¹³ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2009-268>



5. Qualification conditions. Kindergarten staff members are teaching staff and, barring the exception according to Section 22 (10) of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.¹⁴, must hold a professional qualification for the profession. Such qualification can be obtained by studying for 4 years at a secondary vocational school with a teaching diploma, at post-secondary vocational schools, or in bachelor's and master's programmes run by faculties of education at universities (Act No. 563/2004 Coll., Section 6). Teachers in classrooms set up for children with special educational needs must have a professional qualification for this work as outlined in Section 6 (2) of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.

Qualified teaching assistants may also work in kindergartens. One can qualify for this position through the completion of secondary education aimed at teaching assistants, through the completion of primary or secondary education and a study course for teaching assistants, or studies at a secondary school of education completed by a graduation exam, among other options (Section 20 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.)¹⁵. In addition, a carer with a professional qualification as a nanny for children up to the start of compulsory education or a school assistant subsidised from the Jan Amos Komenský Operational Programme whose qualification allows them to perform the role of a nanny may also be present in classrooms where at least one child is younger than 3 years (they, however, do not hold a position of a teaching staff member).

In a regular kindergarten, two teachers are generally in charge of one classroom. Optimally, they should both be present in the classroom at least two and a half hours per day (Section 7.6 of the 2021 version of the FEP PE¹⁶). If there are more than 8 children in one class of a forest kindergarten, a non-teaching worker with professional qualifications¹⁷ must be present in addition to the educator. In practice, therefore, there may be up to 28 children per carer in a classroom when a teacher is alone in the classroom and the capacity of the classroom has been increased, but also only 6 children per carer in the event of the maximum possible reduction of the capacity and the presence of both teachers and a carer or a teaching assistant.



6. Standards. The standards for kindergarten education are provided for in the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* (FEP PE). This document outlines the specific objectives, form, duration and compulsory content of preschool education and the conditions under which it is to be offered. The School Educational Programmes (SEPs) of the individual kindergartens are created on the basis of and must comply with FEP PE. SEP specifies the educational programme of the school and its objectives, form, content and timetable so that they correspond to the specific conditions and focus of the individual schools. Both the FEP PE and individual SEPs also take account of the education of children with special educational needs (Section 5 of the Education Act).

14 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>; this exception allows teaching staff without the necessary qualifications to work in a registered school for the period of time necessary to find a qualified replacement for them.

15 A teaching assistant who carries out direct teaching activity in a class for children with special educational needs (SEN) or in a school which provides education through individual integration must have at least secondary education with a completed graduation exam and teaching education. A teaching assistant whose direct teaching activity is composed of auxiliary educational work at school, a school facility for leisure education, in a school educational and boarding facility, in a school facility for institutional or protective care or in a school facility for preventive educational care gains a qualification by achieving completed primary school education and completed teaching assistant studies.

16 Can be accessed from: <https://www.edu.cz/rvp-ramcove-vzdelavaci-programy/ramcove-vzdelavaci-program-pro-predskolni-vzdelavani-rvp-pz/> (in Czech).

17 These include professional qualification as a nurse, a paediatric nurse, a medical assistant, a midwife, an emergency medical technician, a kindergarten teacher, a warden or a nanny for children up to the start of compulsory education.

The current FEP PE contains five educational areas – the child and their body, the child and their psyche, the child and the others, the child and society, and the child and the world. The key educational objectives, educational programme, expected outcomes at the end of the preschool period and the risks threatening the success of educational plans in the area are determined for each of these areas. Furthermore, the FEP PE elaborates in more detail the basic conditions that must be observed in the education of children. Compliance with the standards in kindergartens is monitored by the Czech School Inspectorate. The monitoring is performed on the basis of its *Criteria for Evaluation of the Conditions, Course, and Results of Education*¹⁸ and with the help of a four-level evaluation scale. The criteria of the Czech School Inspectorate are approved annually by the MoEYS. The inspection of hygiene requirements falls under the responsibility of the individual Regional Public Health Authorities.



7. Financing. The direct costs of education in public kindergartens are covered from the state budget; the operating expenses are covered by the local government body which is the founder of the school. Since 2020, the financing of public schools is not tied to the number of pupils. Rather, it is calculated according to the real volume of teaching and the real level of tariff staff salaries¹⁹. The direct costs of education and the operating expenses of private schools are financed through normative financing depending on the individual contracts with regional authorities. Church kindergartens are financed directly by the MoEYS according to the same normative standards (Sections 160 to 163 of the Education Act). Direct and operational costs in private and church kindergartens exceeding the normative standards are covered by other resources (tuition, donations...).

There is no charge for attendance of a public kindergarten in the last preschool year when attendance is compulsory. An attendance fee may be charged for the attendance of children under 5 years of age at any kindergarten.

Starting in 2024, the public kindergarten fee is set by the kindergarten's founder; its maximum may not exceed 8% of the minimum monthly wage (CZK 1,512²⁰). Sirovátka et al. (2023) state that CZK 500–600 is the typical amount of the monthly fee in a public kindergarten. CSI (2023) reports that the highest average fees are being charged in Prague (CZK 836) and the lowest average fees are being charged in the Vysočina Region (CZK 264). The price of school meals is set by Decree No. 107/2005 Coll. on the basis of the child's age and frequency of attendance and averages between CZK 800 and 1,200 per month (Sirovátka et al., 2023). The monthly tuition fee for a private kindergarten ranges between CZK 1,000 (the Hradec Králové Region) and CZK 12,000 (Prague), according to CSI (2023) data.

Fees are waived for (a) legal guardians of a child receiving repeated assistance in material need benefits; (b) the legal guardian of a dependent child if the child is eligible for increased care allowance benefit; (c) a parent eligible for an increased care allowance benefit; (d) a physical person who personally cares for a child and is receiving foster care benefits for the child if this is proven to the kindergarten's principal (Section 6 of Decree No. 14/2005 Coll.).

18 Can be accessed at: <https://www.csicr.cz/cz/cz/DOKUMENTY/Kriteria-hodnoceni>

19 <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/ekonomika-skolstvi/reforma-financovani-regionalniho-skolstvi?lang=1; a>

20 As calculated from the 2024 monthly minimum wage, <https://www.mpsv.cz/minimalni-mzda>

Children's groups



1. Definition. Children's groups (CGs) provide regular childcare services to children starting at 6 months and up to the start of compulsory preschool education (children under 1 year of age can only be cared for in groups of up to 4 children under 4 years of age). The maximum capacity of a children's group is 24 children. This service is provided outside the child's household and is aimed at providing for the child's needs, education and the development of their abilities and cultural, hygienic and social habits. Children's groups must provide their services for at least 6 hours during the operating day; however, a recent RILSA study shows that most of them provide care for 8 to 10 hours a day (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023). The actual time spent by a child in an establishment depends on the agreement between the parent and the provider. One place in a children's group can be shared by more children if they attend part-time. The maximum capacity of a CG cannot be exceeded by children present at any given time but because of the sharing of places more children can be registered in one group than is the declared capacity. This form of ECEC was introduced in the Czech Republic in 2014.



2. Legal framework. In terms of legislation, the functioning of children's groups is regulated by Act No. 247/2014 Coll., on the provision of childcare services in children's groups²¹. In 2021, an amendment to this Act added what is known as micro-nurseries to this category. These were operated separately within the framework of the pilot programme of the same name run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs up to that point.

The quality standards of care for all children's groups and the operating conditions and hygiene requirements for the operation of a children's group of up to 12 children are set out in Decree No. 350/2021 Coll., on the implementation of certain provisions of the Act on the provision of childcare services in a children's group and on the amendment to the related laws²². The operating conditions and hygiene requirements for children's groups with more than 12 children are defined in Decree No. 410/2005, the same as for kindergartens²³. The nutritional standards for children aged 1 to 3 are included in Decree No. 350/2021; the nutritional standards for children older than 3 years are set out in Decree No. 107/2005^{24,25}.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. Children's groups fall under the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The MoLSA grants authorisation to operate children's groups once the legal conditions have been fulfilled and manages the register of active children's groups.

According to the legislation, the provider of a childcare service in a children's group is primarily the parent's employer. If it is not the employer, it must be one of the following types of entities: an institution; a legal entity registered under Act No. 2/2002

21 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2014-247>

22 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-350>

23 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-410>

24 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-107>

25 The provision of meals depends on the conditions of the contract between the provider and the parent. For a child between 6 and 12 months of age the food must always be prepared by the parent. Children's group providers must only comply with the stated nutritional standards if they are applying for a state subsidy for school meal costs.

Coll. (the Churches and Religious Societies Act); a local authority or a legal entity established by the authority; a charitable society; a foundation or foundation fund; a university; an association; a public research institution, or a carer providing a child care service in a children's group with a capacity of not more than 4 children (a micro-nursery) (Section 3 of Act No. 247/2014 Coll.). While the original intention of the Act was primarily the creation of children's groups by employers, studies (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023, and others) show that in reality only a very small number of CGs have been created in this manner (Paloncyová & Hohne report 9%). As at 16 December 2023, the vast majority (83%) of children's groups were operated by associations, institutions, public benevolent societies or endowment funds. 12.3% of CGs were run by public providers (a municipality, region or territorial self-governing entity) (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023).

The authorisation to provide childcare services in a children's group arises on the date of registration in the register of providers maintained by the Ministry of Labour and is always linked to a specific children's group. The capacity of a children's group and the age range of the children who are admitted are determined by the provider when applying for registration. The provider must then provide evidence of satisfactory conditions for its operation. Capacity in the case of children's groups means the maximum number of children present at a given point in time. Authorisation may be suspended by the MoLSA for a specified period during which the provider must remedy the deficiencies that have been identified. If this does not happen or if the provider no longer fulfils the conditions for registration in the register of providers, the MoLSA shall cancel the authorisation (Section 19 of Act No. 247/2014 Coll.).



4. Conditions for operation. The statutory conditions include: proof of ownership or other right to the building or premises, the opinion of the Regional Public Health Authority on the fulfilment of health safety requirements for catering, space and operation, fulfilment of fire safety requirements, liability insurance, proof of the provider's and carers' clean criminal record and a general description of the financial security and financing of the service provision (Section 16 of Act No. 247/2014 Coll.). Monitoring of the fulfilment of the obligations in the areas of health safety and the medical fitness of the carer is carried out by the Regional Public Health Authorities. Monitoring of compliance with the quality standards of care and financing through subsidies for operation of the children's group is carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The monitoring of compliance with the conditions and responsibilities according to Act No. 247/2014 is carried out by the State Labour Inspection Office and the regional inspectorates.



5. Qualification conditions. A carer in a children's group must be of age, have legal capacity, have a clean criminal record, and be professionally and medically competent to perform the service. The possible professional qualifications for a carer in a CG are outlined in Section 5 (4) of Act No. 247/2014 Coll. Carers may possess a qua-

lification in the healthcare²⁶, social services²⁷ or education²⁸ sector or a professional qualification as a nanny for children in a children's group or nanny for children up to the start of compulsory education. At least one carer with a healthcare sector qualification²⁹ or the qualification of a nanny for children in a children's group must always be present in a CG. At the same time, if there is at least one child in the children's group who is over the age of 3 as at 1 September, their education and care must be provided for by a person with a teaching qualification³⁰ for at least 20 hours per week.

The provider must provide all carers with further education in their field, with a minimum of 8 hours per calendar year. As part of such further education, each carer must attend a first aid course focusing on children at least once every 2 calendar years.

Furthermore, the law (Act No. 247/2014 Coll.) specifies the minimum number of carers present in a children's group, depending on the number of children in the group, namely "at least 1 carer per group of a maximum of 6 children, two carers for 7 to 12 children present, and 3 carers for 13 to 24 children". If there is a child in the children's group between the ages of 6 and 12 months, care must be provided only in a group with a maximum of 4 children under the age of 4 years (Section 7).



6. Standards. The amendment to Act No. 247/2014 Coll. in 2021 introduced standards of care in children's groups / extended the original standards, which contained only operational and health safety requirements, to include requirements related to quality in the area of childcare and meeting the child's needs.

The standards of quality of care are divided into three basic areas – childcare and meeting the child's needs, staff conditions and operational conditions. The criteria for assessing the quality in each of these areas, including the quality of the educational and care plan, are set by Decree No. 350/2021 Coll.³¹. The provider must create an education and care plan, inform the parents before the contract is signed and ensure fulfilment of the contract. The educational and care plan specifies the conditions and ways of ensuring the education of and care for the child, the development of their abilities and cultural and hygienic habits and support for the children's physical and psychological development in the given children's group.



7. Financing. The service of childcare provision in a children's group is defined by law as a non-profit-making activity. It is provided either without reimbursement of costs, or with partial or full reimbursement of costs.

The state subsidy to the provider for each child who is 3 years or older on 1 September of a given school year is equal to the MoEYS standardised subsidy amount per

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- 26 These include the professional qualification of a nurse, a paediatric nurse, a medical assistant, a midwife, an emergency medical technician, a social and medical worker, a doctor, a psychologist working in healthcare, or a clinical psychologist.
 - 27 These include the professional qualifications of a social worker or a worker in social services with a completed secondary education and a graduation exam.
 - 28 These include the professional qualification of a kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher, teaching assistant, a special educator, or a warden.
 - 29 These include the professional qualification of a nurse, a paediatric nurse, a medical assistant, a midwife, an emergency medical technician, a social and medical worker, a doctor, a psychologist working in healthcare, or a clinical psychologist.
 - 30 These include the professional qualification of a kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher, teaching assistant, a special educator, or a warden.
 - 31 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2021-350>

child in a private kindergarten and school canteen. For younger children, the state subsidy is 1.7 times this amount.

The CG operational cost subsidy for children's groups provides a long-term stable financial support for CGs by the state. It can be used to finance everyday costs which are connected to the provision of the service – salary costs, mandatory professional development costs, meal costs and other operational costs.

All providers entered in the register with a valid authorisation are entitled to the operational cost subsidy. However, the subsidy must be applied for and the number of occupied places must be documented. The conditions for obtaining the subsidy for a child include: the child's parent is employed, is studying in a full-time (daily) form of study, is registered with the employment office or has the status of a self-employed person. The operator of the children's group must provide proof of this status (a statutory declaration by the parent) in the application for the subsidy. The subsidy is paid to children's groups in advance for one third of the calendar year (Section 20 of Act No. 247/2014); however, the data about occupancy – which form the basis for subsidy calculations – must be provided on a monthly basis.

The parental fee is subject to agreement between the provider and the child's parents and is stated in the contract between them. By law, a maximum cap is applied to the parental fee if the children's group is applying for an operational cost subsidy for the child and the child belongs to the younger age category, i.e. until 31 August after the child's third birthday (Act No. 247/2014 Coll.). The maximum fee was set at CZK 4,000 for the first time in 2021, with the condition that if the aggregate consumer price index rises by at least 5% in the previous calendar year, it will be increased on 1 January according to the actual growth of this index. In 2023, the maximum amount rose to CZK 4,720. The amount is set at CZK 5,060 for 2024. For children in the older age group, the fee is not regulated by law (Section 6 of Act No. 247/2014 Coll.).

Preparatory classes; preparatory grades of primary schools



1. Definition. Preparatory classes in primary schools are part of the Czech school education system and provide preschool education. They are intended for children in their last, compulsory year of preschool education for whom it is expected that their inclusion in this class will equalise their development so that they can enter the first year of a regular primary school the following school year, and preferentially for children who have been granted a deferral of school starting age. The class size is set at 10 to 15 pupils.

The preparatory grade of a special primary school allows for the necessary preparation for education for children with a moderate and severe mental disability, children with multiple disabilities or autistic children. A child can be included in a preparatory grade class starting with the school year in which they reach 5 years of age and they can stay in the preparatory grade for up to 3 years. The capacity of one class in the preparatory grade is from 4 to 6 children (Section 48a of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.³²).

Enrolment in the preparatory class or preparatory grade class is one of the ways of fulfilling the requirement for compulsory preschool education (Section 34a of the Education Act).



2. Legal framework. Preparatory classes are defined in Section 47 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (the Education Act) and in Decree No. 48/2005 Coll., on primary education and certain elements of fulfilling the requirement for obligatory school attendance³³. The qualifications of teachers in the preparatory class are determined by Act No. 563/2004 Coll.³⁴.

The preparatory grade of a special primary school is defined in Section 48a of the Education Act. A child can be enrolled in the preparatory grade based on the decision of the principal on the basis of a request by their legal guardian and a written reference from a school counselling facility.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. Preparatory classes are established in primary schools in the event that there are at least 10 children who will enrol in them. The establishment of a preparatory class by a municipality, a union of municipalities or a region (i.e. at a public primary school) requires the regional authority's consent. For the establishment of a preparatory class at another type of primary school (church or private school), the consent of the MoEYS must be obtained.

The establisher of a special primary school may establish preparatory grade classes in that school with the regional authority's consent, except if the establisher is a church or a religious society, in which case the consent of the ministry is necessary.

As part of a primary school or a special primary school, preparatory classes and preparatory grade classes fall under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The evaluation and monitoring of their activities are carried out by the Czech School Inspectorate and regional authorities; the monitoring of health safety and operating conditions is carried out by the Regional Public Health Authorities.



4. Conditions for operation. The operating conditions and health safety requirements of schools are governed by Decree No. 410/2005 Coll.³⁵ and other laws. These determine, among other things, the specific conditions for the education of pupils with special educational needs, including pupils with disabilities. These conditions include, for example, a higher minimum classroom area per child and a higher number of sanitary facilities in proportion to the number of children.



5. Qualification conditions. Teachers in preparatory classes and preparatory grade classes are teaching staff and must meet the qualification according to Act No. 563/2004 Coll. A teacher in the preparatory class of a regular primary school must hold the professional qualifications of a kindergarten teacher (see above) or a primary school teacher. A teacher in the preparatory grade of a special primary school must have a professional qualification according to Section 7 (2) of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.

Teaching assistants may also work in preparatory classes and preparatory grade classes. The necessary qualifications for this position are outlined in the same law. The minimum qualification for teaching assistants working in these classes include the

33 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-48>
 34 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>
 35 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-410>

completion of secondary education with an education major concluded with a graduation exam, or secondary education in any field concluded with a graduation exam and the further study of teaching.



6. Standards. Although preparatory classes and preparatory grade classes are established in primary schools, education in them is governed by the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* (FEP PE)³⁶. The FEP PE does not contain any specific section that focuses on preparatory classes of ordinary primary schools; their curriculum should follow the general FEP PE. Preparatory grades of special primary schools should take into account the section of the FEP PE which focuses on the education of children with special educational needs when creating their school educational programme. The relative freedom that schools have in creating school educational programmes should allow the adaptation of the FEP PE for both preparatory classes and preparatory grade classes.

Compliance with standards in schools is monitored by the Czech School Inspectorate on the basis of the *Criteria for Evaluating the Conditions, Course and Results of Education* and with the help of a four-level evaluation scale. The oversight of health safety requirements falls under the responsibility of the individual Regional Public Health Authorities.



7. Financing. The basic conditions for financing primary schools and, by extension, preparatory classes are similar to the financing of kindergartens (see above). Additional support measures for children with special educational needs are financed from the state budget. The legislation lays down what is known as normative financial demands of each of the additional support measures and this sum then forms the basis for the provision of state funds to schools (Decree No. 27/2016 and its annex³⁷).

Attendance of a preparatory class or preparatory grade class of a public special school is free of charge, as it is always the fulfilment of the requirement for compulsory attendance.

Day and week care centres



1. Definition. Care centres are facilities providing social services for children with serious developmental problems, with mental or combined disabilities, or with autistic spectrum disorders. Their aim is to provide outpatient services to children who have reduced self-sufficiency as a result of disability and whose situation requires the regular assistance of a carer. This is mainly assistance with basic daily activities of care for oneself, personal hygiene or providing conditions for personal hygiene, the provision of meals, educational, developmental, and activation activities, mediation of contact with the social environment, social therapeutic activities and assistance in personal affairs.

36 Accessible from: <https://www.edu.cz/rvp-ramcove-vzdelavaci-programy/ramcovy-vzdelavaci-program-pro-predskolni-vzdelavani-rvp-pz/>

37 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2016-27>



2. Legal framework. Basic activities are provided according to Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, in particular Sections 46 to 47³⁸.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. The providers of social services are territorial self-governing entities and legal entities established by them, other legal entities, persons, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and organisational units of the state or state-subsidised organisations established by it which are legal entities. They fall under the responsibility of the MoLSA and are regulated in particular by Act No. 108/2006 Coll.



4. Conditions for operation. The conditions for the operation of social services are generally regulated by Sections 78 to 84 of Act No. 108/2006 Coll. The prerequisites for registration include professional qualification and a clean criminal record, the provision of personal, material and technical conditions appropriate for the social services offered, the provision of sanitary conditions, and the proof of ownership or other right to the building or premises in which the social services will be provided.



5. Qualification conditions. Qualification conditions are regulated by Act No. 108/2006 Coll. The prerequisites for the pursuit of the profession of a social worker are full legal capacity, a clean criminal record, medical fitness and professional competence. Professional competence is achieved through post-secondary education obtained by completing an educational programme in the fields of education focused on social work and social pedagogy, social and humanitarian work, social care, social legal activity, or charitable and social activity, or through university education obtained by studying in a bachelor's, master's or doctoral study programme focused on social work, social policy, social pedagogy, social care, social pathology, law or special education.



6. Standards. The standards of quality of social services are a set of criteria defining the level of quality of the provision of social services in the field of the staffing and operational conditions of social services and in the field of relations between the provider and persons. They are governed by Section 99 of Act No. 108/2006 Coll. The full version of the criteria for the standards can be found in Annex 2 to MoLSA Decree No. 505/2006 Coll., the implementing regulation to Act No. 108/2006 Coll., as amended³⁹. There are no criteria specific to child clients in the standards.



7. Financing. The financing of day and week care centres is regulated by Sections 101a to 105a of Act No. 108/2006 Coll.



Day rehabilitation centres



1. Definition. Day rehabilitation centres are healthcare facilities that provide care, rehabilitation and special educational care for children who require specialised healthcare or who cannot attend a regular kindergarten due to their health disability.



2. Legal framework. The activity of day rehabilitation centres is defined in Act No. 372/2011 Coll., on health services, and the related decrees⁴⁰. Day centre care is enshrined as one of the forms of regular outpatient care in the Act (Section 7).



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. The authorisation to provide medical services is given by the regional authority in whose administrative district the medical facility in which the services will be provided is located. More detailed conditions are determined by Act No. 372/2011 Coll. and the related decrees.



4. Conditions for operation. The conditions for the provision of healthcare services are regulated by Act No. 372/11 Coll. and the related decrees. The Act outlines the general conditions for staffing and the technical and material conditions of a medical facility. It does not set out any specific conditions for day rehabilitation centres for child patients.



5. Qualification conditions. Qualification conditions are regulated by Decree No. 99/2012 Coll., on the requirements for minimum staffing of medical services⁴¹. In accordance with the Act, outpatient care in rehabilitation and physical therapy is provided by a rehabilitation doctor, a general nurse qualified to practise without professional supervision, a physical therapist qualified to practise without professional supervision, an occupational therapist qualified to practise without professional supervision, an orderly, a clinical psychologist or a clinical speech therapist.



6. Standards. The evaluation of the quality and safety of health services is laid down in Act No. 372/2011 Coll., on health services and conditions for their provision, as amended. There are no criteria specific to patients who are children.



7. Financing. Special medical facilities, among which day centres belong, are usually state-funded organisations. Medical services provided in them are covered by reimbursement according to Decree No. 319/2023 Coll., on determining the point value, the fee amount for paid services and regulation restrictions for 2024⁴².

40 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2011-372>

41 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2012-99>

42 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2023-319>

3.1.2 Non-formal ECEC facilities

Non-formal ECEC facilities usually take the form of a non-governmental non-profit organisation, a state-funded organisation set up by a municipality (e.g. community centres), a business entity, or are not formally legislated for. Below is an overview of the most frequent ones, but this overview is far from exhaustive. The name of a non-formal facility often does not refer to its form, so an activity called an “adaptation programme” or “adaptation circle” can be organised by a registered association, a community centre that is a municipal contributory funded organisation, a limited liability company or an informal group of parents. Other forms of early childhood care are provided by various non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs), run by individuals or organisations. The names for non-formal ECEC services are not official; we use those which are most commonly used by their providers.

Forest clubs



1. Definition. Forest clubs are usually community projects launched by NGOs – registered associations in most cases. They provide outdoor education to children from the community in which they are located and are characterised by a high degree of voluntary work and a highly communal character; caring for children is supplemented by various cultural and educational events for the wider community. Unlike forest kindergartens, forest clubs are not a registered school or school facility and therefore are not subject to Act No. 561/2004 Coll.



2. Legal framework. Forest clubs are not specifically provided for by law; their functioning is governed by the general public law regulations (namely the Civil Code – Act No. 89/2012 Coll.⁴³ and Act No. 258/2000 Coll., on public health protection⁴⁴).

If children are to complete the compulsory year of preschool through attendance of a forest club, they must be enrolled in an individual education regime under Act No. 561/2004 Coll.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. Forest clubs are not subject to any regulation. The Association of Forest Kindergartens offers certification to member forest clubs that meet the organisation’s quality standards. The Association has its own Quality Group, an expert body that monitors compliance with these standards in its member organisations⁴⁵.



4. Conditions for operation. Since forest clubs are not subject to any specific legislation, there are no specific conditions set for their operation. Forest clubs certified by the Association of Forest Kindergartens implement their educational programme mostly outside in nature, most often in a forest, however, they do also have suitable heated facilities with a toilet and drinking water available on site⁴⁶.

⁴³ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2012-89>

⁴⁴ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2000-258>

⁴⁵ <https://www.lesnims.cz/asociace-lms/co-je-asociace-lesnich-ms.html>

⁴⁶ <https://www.lesnims.cz/lesni-ms/obsah-standardu-kvality.html>



5. Qualification conditions. There are no legal conditions for the qualifications of staff in forest clubs. In a forest club certified by the Association of Forest Kindergartens, at least one of the staff members must hold the qualification of an educator according to Act No. 563/2004 Coll.⁴⁷ or have completed or be attending an accredited educational course organised by the Association. All staff members should also complete a first aid course at least once every 2 years.



6. Standards. There are no legally binding standards. The already-mentioned standards on the basis of which the Association of Forest Kindergartens certifies forest clubs include, in addition to the above, conditions for documentation, having a set school educational plan, and other internal guidelines for operation, including a Teacher's Code of Ethics and School Regulations⁴⁸.



7. Financing. Forest clubs are generally financed exclusively through parental contributions.

Mother, family and community centres



1. Definition. Mother, family and community centres (family centres) are generally non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs) providing mostly services for children and parents, or for the wider public (senior clubs, etc.). The basic service provided by family centres includes leisure activities for families with children, especially preschool-aged children, in the form of both regular meetings and one-off events. However, family centres also offer a wide range of educational, social and preventive services for children, parents and other family members. Services for parents relatively often include the option of short-term babysitting of young children; many family centres also run their own children's groups (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023) or adaptation clubs for children, which are not formally registered as a children's group, but operate very similarly. Adaptation clubs generally provide care for children between the ages of 1.5 and 4 years in a group of up to 12 children, with some children attending them every day of the week, others just a few days of the week. Some family centres also run adaptation groups for preschool children of Ukrainian refugees.



2. Legal framework. A registered association is the legal form of family centres in most cases (79%) (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023). This form is regulated by Act No. 89/2012 Coll. (the Civil Code)⁴⁹, namely Sections 214 to 302, and Act No. 304/2013 Coll., on public registers of legal and natural persons⁵⁰. If a family centre operates a children's group, its operation is subject to the laws and regulations relating to children's groups (see above).



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. If a family centre is being established as a registered association, the law requires a minimum of 3 persons with a common interest who agree on the content of the association's Articles of Association. Legally,

47 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>
 48 <https://www.lesnims.cz/lesni-ms/standardy-kvality.html>
 49 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2012-89>
 50 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2013-304>

the association is formed by creating an entry in the Register of Associations, which is administered by the Ministry of Justice.

Since family centres are not subject to Act No. 561/2004 Coll. and do not fall under the social services system, they are not subject to regulation by either the MoEYS or the MoLSA. Monitoring and regulation can therefore only be carried out by the Regional Public Health Authorities, which monitor the provision of suitable conditions for the operation of activities for children. Regulation or monitoring may also be a condition for the inclusion of a given centre in one of the umbrella associations of similar organisations (e.g. in the form of joint statutes or a code of conduct).



4. Conditions for operation. The conditions for the premises on which leisure activities for children take place are defined in Section 7 of Decree No. 410/2005 Coll. The requirements for the equipment of sanitary facilities, depending on the number of children, are in the same Decree. There are no conditions specific to family centres laid down in legislation.



5. Qualification conditions. Because of the nature of family centres, there are no given staff positions or qualifications that the staff in family centres should possess. An exception is when a family centre establishes its own children's group, which must be staffed by qualified carers (as explained above).



6. Standards. Family centres whose legal form is a registered association must have Statutes / Articles of Association prepared and signed by their founders. According to the Civil Code, the Statutes should include the association's purpose and the members' rights and obligations, but this is a document that each association, i.e. each family centre, creates independently and which is overseen only by the registry court, which can approve or deny the creation of a registered association based on the law. There are overarching standards for certain family centre associations, such as the Network for the Family (*Síť pro rodinu*), the largest umbrella organisation for mother, family and community centres in the country. The network makes membership conditional on the adoption of its Statutes and compliance with the association's Code of Conduct (Network for Family, 2023).



7. Funding. The funding of the centres typically comes from multiple sources. According to a 2023 RILSA survey, family centres use on average 4.7 sources of funding. The most common sources tend to be contributions from parents, subsidies from the municipalities or regions in which the centres operate, and contributions from sponsors and donors. European funds or subsidy programmes of ministries have proved to be a potentially important source of funding for the centres. However, these depend on whether the centre is successful in applying for support and represent a less certain source of income than municipal subsidies or contributions from parents (Palonciová & Hohne, 2023).

Preschool clubs operated by social services



1. Definition. Preschool clubs are facilities that are usually set up as social services for people who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion. The main objective of a preschool club is to prepare the child and its parents for entry into mainstream kindergartens. Preschool clubs focus on improving preschool skills, adapting the child to joining a group of children, accepting adult authority, creating a daily routine, respecting rules, building vocabulary, creating positive experiences and broadening horizons. At the same time, they focus on working with parents to achieve timely and regular attendance and securing finances to pay for the kindergarten. Attending a preschool club also provides an opportunity for the early detection of potential behavioural and learning difficulties or special educational needs, arranging a visit to a educational counselling facility and providing a follow-up service.



2. Legal framework. The functioning of preschool clubs is not regulated by any specific law or decree. If they function as part of a specific type of organisation (i.e. a registered association), they are governed by the laws on that type of organisation. If they are directly operated by social services, they fall under Act No. 108/2006 Coll. (the Social Services Act)⁵¹.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. Preschool clubs are usually formed within non-governmental non-profit organisations providing social services. As their formation is not directly regulated by legislation, the establishment and regulation of a school club are governed by the legislation on the provision of the relevant social service.



4. Conditions for operation. Conditions for operation are governed by the legislation on the provision of the relevant social service.



5. Qualification conditions. Qualification conditions are governed by the legislation on the provision of the relevant social service.



6. Standards. Standards are governed by the legislation on the provision of the relevant social service.



7. Funding. The funding of preschool clubs tends to be secured from multiple sources. Generally, subsidies to finance the provision of the relevant social service are used (with the regional authority's permission), potentially complemented by funding from grants or donations.

Centres for Preschool Children (CPCs)



1. Definition. Centres for preschool children⁵² are designed as a service for parents and children offered by Centres for Children and Youth (CCYs). They provide a full-week morning programme of leisure education. Some of the centres can be visited occasionally, while others are to be attended regularly, in principle they function as a half-day kindergarten. There are generally 10 to 20 children in one group, usually 3 to 5 years of age. Some CCYs also organise groups for children aged 2 to 3 years. CPCs represent an effective use of spaces adapted for work with children which are empty in the morning hours, as the focus of their work lies in afternoon activities for school-aged children; moreover, they benefit from the qualified staff already present.



2. Legal framework. Centres for Children and Youth, which establish centres for preschool children, are educational facilities and are therefore governed by Act No. 561/2004 Coll.⁵³. The form of leisure education that takes place in them is defined by Decree No. 74/2005, on leisure education⁵⁴. The qualifications of the teaching staff in leisure facilities are defined in Section 17 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.⁵⁵. The centres for preschool children themselves are not named or regulated in any way in any of these documents and their form may thus differ from place to place⁵⁶. The document *Centres for Preschool Children (CPCs) Project of the Capital City of Prague* (Municipality of the Capital City of Prague, 2009) is the binding document for the operation of the centres for preschool children in the City of Prague, which was created as a basis for their establishment.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. CCYs may be founded by a municipality, a school authority, churches, or a private or other entity. In Prague, the centres for preschool children operate in the CCYs established by the Prague City Hall. The centres for preschool children were established mainly between 2009 and 2011 as part of a project launched by the Prague City Hall to address the shortage of kindergarten places.



4. Conditions for operation. The space and health safety conditions for the facilities for leisure education are defined in Section 7 of Decree No. 410/2005 Coll.⁵⁷. The CCYs must comply with these conditions regardless of whether they have a centre for preschool children or not – therefore, the establishment of a centre for preschool children needs no transformation of the facilities. However, building adaptations are usually undertaken to adapt the space to the stay of smaller children.

52 CPCs operate under this name in Prague. In other locations the name of the service varies, though its content remains the same.

53 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561>

54 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-74>

55 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-563>

56 There is no central registry for CPCs or activities provided by CCYs which are similar to what a kindergarten may offer. According to the information of the Chair of the Association of Workers in Centres for Children and Youth, it seems that CPCs are best established in Prague, but function in other parts of the country as well.

57 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-410>



5. Qualification conditions. Each centre for preschool education should have 2 qualified teaching staff members with the qualification of a preschool education teacher (i.e. a qualification for teaching in a kindergarten according to Act No. 563/2004 Coll.) throughout its operation.



6. Standards. The above-mentioned Prague City Hall project document refers to the FEP PE as the basis for a CPC's curriculum. It includes outlines for the various educational parts of the programme and a model timetable for the programme. The document does not set out any specific outcomes of attending a centre for preschool children or specific competencies that the educators who are present should develop in children. The project document does not specify any monitoring or evaluation methodology.

As school leisure facilities, CCYs are not obliged to create any educational plans; however, some CCYs do have one. All CCYs have an internal order that defines the participants' rights and obligations, the CCY's operation and regime, and the organisational conditions of its operation.



7. Financing. CCYs are state-funded organisations. According to the accompanying documents of the project of the Centre for Preschool Children, the finances for the operation of a CPC should be provided as earmarked funds for direct use by the CPC. Subsidies for the CPC are therefore not linked to the overall budget of the CCY within which the CPC operates. The parental fee set in the project document was CZK 100 per day / CZK 850 per month for regular daily attendance. In January 2024, the daily fee in Brno was CZK 350. Prague's CPCs are currently supported by the Prague City Hall, which compensates the CCY for the CPC staff wages. The City Hall contribution equals roughly the wages for 2 part-time employees. The annual parental fees vary, ranging from CZK 9,500 to CZK 20,000. Most CPCs have an annual fee set between CZK 12,000 and 16,000.

ECEC provided by holders of a trade licence



1. Definition. Care and education for children of preschool age can also be provided as part of several licensed occupations in the Czech Republic. These are two free licensed occupations – “Extra-school education and care, organisation of courses, training, including lecturing activities” and “Providing services for the family and household” and one regulated licensed occupation – “Caring for a child up to 3 years of age in a daily regime”. Of these, only the regulated licensed occupation allows the holders of the trade licence to perform childcare in a daily or weekly regime for children younger than 3 years of age.



2. Legal framework. The contents of the individual licensed occupations are defined in Government Decree No. 278/2008 Coll., on the content of individual licensed occupations⁵⁸. The required professional competence for carrying out the regulated licensed occupation “Caring for a child up to 3 years of age in a daily regime” is listed in Act No. 455/1991 Coll., on licensed occupations (the Trade Licensing Act)⁵⁹. The

Trade Licensing Act also specifies the general regulations for the creation, change and termination of licensed occupations and their monitoring.



3. Founder, regulator and regulation. A licensed occupation can be established by a legal or natural person through declaration at a Trade Licensing Office under the conditions of legal age, legal capacity, a clean criminal record, and, in the case of a regulated licensed occupation, meeting the qualification requirements. Like other licensed occupations, the caring occupations fall under the authority of the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic (MoIT). The MoIT maintains the Trade Register. The authorisation to conduct a licensed occupation comes into force upon its entry in the Trade Register. The Trade Register is publicly accessible in an electronic form. Apart from the need to submit qualification documentation when establishing a regulated licensed trade, no further monitoring of the business entities is carried out by the MoIT. The premises on which a regulated licensed trade is conducted can be subject to monitoring by the Regional Public Health Authority in the case of a regulated licensed trade activity operated outside the trade licence holder's home.



4. Conditions for operation. The conditions for facilities operated on the basis of a regulated licensed trade are defined by Decree No. 410/2005 Coll.⁶⁰. The conditions for those premises, if they are outside the client's home, are similar to those for the operation of a children's group.



5. Qualification conditions. There are no additional qualification conditions apart from the basic conditions for setting up a trade – legal age, legal capacity, a clean criminal record – that a person must meet in order to perform unqualified trades. The qualification conditions for the operation of the regulated licensed trade “Caring for a child up to 3 years of age in the daily regime” are defined in Annex 2 to Act No. 455/1991 Coll. Obtaining that licence requires professional competence to work in the field of healthcare, social care or preschool education⁶¹ (similarly to children's groups) or the professional qualification of a nanny for children until the start of compulsory school attendance.



6. Standards. Apart from the already-mentioned qualification and health safety conditions for the operation of a regulated licensed occupation, there are no universal standards for the provision of care on the basis of a licensed trade.



7. Financing. Childcare under this regime is paid for exclusively by the child's parents on the basis of a contract with the holder of the trade licence.

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61

<https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2005-410>

These include the professional qualification of a nurse, a paediatric nurse, a medical assistant, a midwife, an emergency medical technician, a kindergarten teacher, a social worker or a worker in social services.

3.1.3 Summary

The offer of five types of formal and five types of non-formal preschool care and education facilities is quite wide. Compared to the other available studies, we also provide basic information about day care centres, which, in addition to special kindergartens and the preparatory grade of special primary schools, offer care for children with special educational needs, and on the centres for preschool children at centres for children and youth.

The above overview of the types of formal and non-formal ECEC facilities suggests that the Czech Republic has a relatively wide range of facilities, set up by various types of entities. This wide range is however rather the result of uncoordinated spontaneous development than of a well-thought-out educational policy. This lack of coordination and tendency towards spontaneity can be seen mainly in that both of the main branches providing ECEC, MoLSA and MoEYS, create their own systems independently of each other. At the same time, other entities providing ECEC services are developing independently of either of the systems. The spontaneous development results, among other things, in the absence of a common register from which information on non-formal care facilities could be drawn and which would allow citizens to easily understand which ECEC facilities are available in a given region.

The existing ECEC facilities can be divided into several types. The first type of facility provides ECEC primarily for children under the age of 3 for whom systematic care was not provided by the state since the abolition of nurseries in 2012 and until the emergence of children's groups (in particular adaptation clubs, licensed trades, children's groups, and partly also centres for preschool children, which also run groups for 2-year-olds). Children's groups and centres for preschool children also provide care for children over the age of 3 who were not accepted for preschool education in a kindergarten or for whom their parents have chosen a different form of ECEC than a kindergarten. These belong to the second type of facility which provides ECEC for children over 3 years of age alongside kindergartens. The third type of facility provides education and care for children with specific educational needs – either for children with social disadvantages (in particular preschool clubs operated by social services), for children for whom higher-level support measures are needed⁶² (in particular special kindergartens (according to Section 16 (9) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.), preparatory grades of special primary school, and outpatient care centres), or for children with deferral of school starting age (preparatory classes, preparatory grade of special primary schools). This category also includes children's groups providing care for children with specific educational needs (e.g. speech disorders, neurodevelopmental disorders). In general, CGs do not have the authority to accept children with SEN; however, they can do so, but without any extra state subsidy for additional support measures. Based on the qualitative research that was conducted, we can define a fourth type of facility, the emergence of which is related to the preference for modern educational trends, which some parents feel are not sufficiently taken into account by mainstream kindergartens (these are mainly forest clubs and forest kindergartens, as well as private kindergartens and some children's groups providing non-standard services, typically English language teaching with native speakers or the Montessori method of education).

In terms of using the existing capacities, it is particularly worth noting the facilities that use spaces intended for children's activities in the afternoon – centres for preschool children. These were created in centres for children and youth and considering the extensive

62 Children with additional support needs are primarily educated in regular primary schools.

network of CCYs in the country and their systematic support by the MoEYS, they represent a unique and not fully realised potential.

Further consideration on the development of the ECEC system should be preceded by a discussion on whether the existing range of facilities is desirable and whether it is appropriate to support all types of facilities in the future, or to what extent they should continue to receive support. If the variety of services is seen as an asset, it would be appropriate to improve their registration and monitoring and impose requirements on the facilities in terms of the quality of education and care provided.

3.2 Supply in formal and non-formal ECEC facilities

In Section 3.2.1 of this chapter, we present the data and conclusions of the available analyses which looked at the supply in formal and non-formal education facilities. In Section 3.2.2, we present a proposal of indicators that describe the supply, provide a graphic depiction of their regional distribution and describe the deficiencies in the availability of the individual types of facilities/services. In the last section, Section 3.2.3, we present the results of a qualitative survey focused on the causes of the deficiencies in the supply of ECEC facilities/services.

3.2.1 Available analyses

For monitoring the development of ECEC, a number of analyses are available that describe the situation before the emergence of children's groups and the introduction of the compulsory year of preschool education⁶³. The more recent *Analysis of the Availability of Pre-school Care Facilities*, published by the Department of Evaluations of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020) attempts to map the licensed care trades in addition to formal ECEC facilities. Early childhood education and care are also included in the *Access for Children in Need to the Key Services Covered by the European Child Guarantee* analysis made by Masaryk University for the European Commission (Sirovátka et al., 2023). The analysis focuses mainly on the availability of formal ECEC for socially disadvantaged children in the 2021/2022 school year. Below we present the most important findings from the available analyses. Where more recent data are available, up-to-date statistics are also presented.

Kindergartens

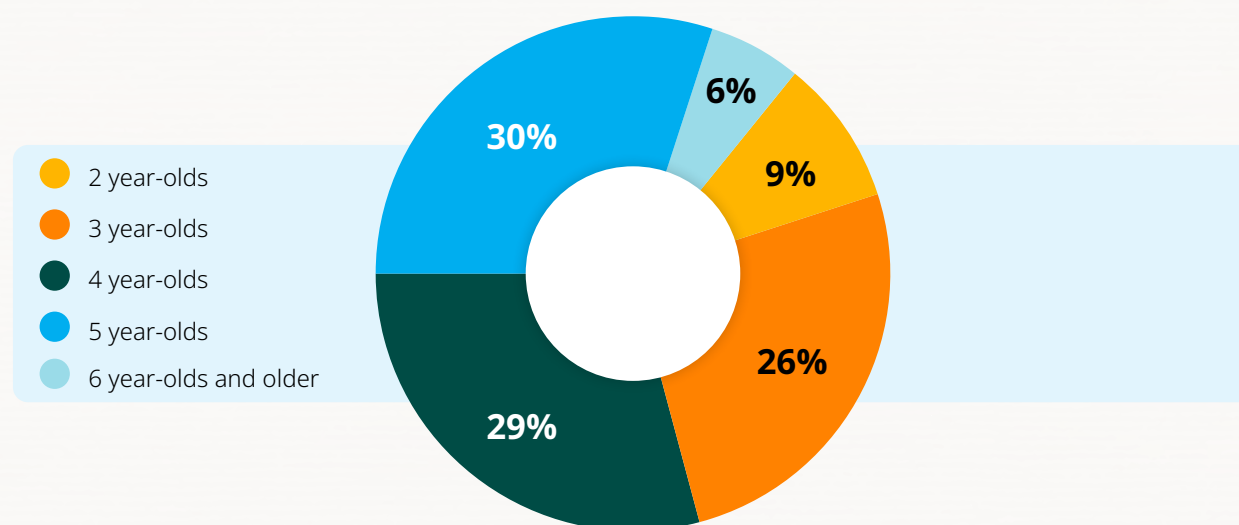
The state of the supply of kindergartens is summarised yearly in the annual reports of the MoEYS and the Czech School Inspectorate (see below). As kindergartens provide pre-school education for the vast majority of children in the country, at least a summary of their capacities is included in all the available ad hoc analyses of ECEC in the Czech Republic. Publications which deal only with kindergartens include, for example: *Analysis of Demographic Development at MER Level* (Kováčová, 2023), *Overview Study of Preschool Education Research in the Czech Republic in 2011–2020* (Syslová & Najvarová, 2021), and documents by the Platform for Early Care dedicated to its activity in the area of facilitating the enrolment of socially excluded children in kindergartens (Platform for Early Care, 2023).

63 For example, the monograph *Nové formy denní péče o děti v České republice* [New Forms of Day Care for Children in the Czech Republic] (Palonciová et al., 2014) or the publication *Péče a vzdělávání v raném věku* [Care and Education in Early Childhood] (Syslová et al., 2014).

In the 2022/2023 school year, preschool education in the Czech Republic was provided by a total of 5,374 kindergartens with a total of 17,120 classes in which 369,205 children were enrolled. In 1.8% of the kindergartens a special class for children with SEN (according to Section 16 (9) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.) was established (CSI, 2023). Zykanová and Janhubová (2020) conclude from the available data that as at 31 December 2018, at least one kindergarten was operating in the 3,403 municipalities in the Czech Republic⁶⁴. In almost half of the municipalities of the Czech Republic, i.e. in 2,826 municipalities, neither a kindergarten nor a children's group was operating. These are mostly in the Central Bohemian Region (533 municipalities) and in the Vysočina Region (443). The overwhelming majority of the municipalities without either a kindergarten or a children's group had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and altogether only 6% of the Czech population lived in them. As measured by the number of children, kindergartens provided approximately 95% of ECEC (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020).

In the 2023/2024 school year, ECEC was provided by a total of 5,398 kindergartens, with 364,491 children enrolled. 0.8% of the children attended a special kindergarten (according to Section 16 (9) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.); 4.7% of the children attended a non-public kindergarten (church and private kindergartens). At least one kindergarten was located in 3,452 municipalities (CSI, 2023).

The age composition of children attending a kindergarten as at 30 September 2023 is shown in Graph 1.



Graph 1: Proportion of 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-year-olds and 6-year-olds and older children in the total number of children attending kindergartens as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

The information on the filled capacity of kindergartens and the number of rejected applications for admission (CSI, 2023) show that although the capacity of kindergartens has been increasing yearly since 2019, it is not enough to fully meet the demand, especially in the Central Bohemian and Moravian-Silesian regions. The lack of supply and the problematic nature of the catchment areas of kindergartens – the difference in population size between children whose permanent residence is registered in a given catchment area and children who actually live there, as well as the division of catchment areas between mu-

⁶⁴ The number of municipalities in the Czech Republic in 2023 was 6,258, of which 3,349 municipalities had a population of less than 500 people (<https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/cesko-v-cislech-2023>).

municipalities with extended responsibilities (MERs) – have already been noted in the annual CSI reports from the previous years and are described as the biggest barrier to children's access to preschool education. Another problem related to catchment is that catchment areas are arbitrarily designed in a way that concentrates socioeconomically disadvantaged children into one area (CSI, 2023).

In 2023, the research agency Median, s. r. o. carried out two focus groups with representatives of municipalities in the Central Bohemian Region and some city districts in Prague, which also included a mapping of the ability to provide capacity in kindergartens for all the children from 3 years of age in that catchment area, as is legally required from the municipalities (Median, 2023b). The Prague focus group showed that the city districts are mostly able to offer such capacity, albeit sometimes by using creative solutions such as adding a container kindergarten or quickly building a wooden structure to create space for new classes. One of the challenges identified in the focus group was the provision of education for Ukrainian children in some Prague districts and planning future capacities. In the Central Bohemian Region, the situation varied locally. A representative of a small municipality stated that the capacity for 3-year-old children could not be provided because of the need to primarily provide spaces for all the children fulfilling their compulsory preschool education. The director of their kindergarten also had problems securing staff for the kindergarten. The municipality is attempting to offer a nominal financial contribution to cover part of the attendance fee to parents whose children were not accepted into the kindergarten to allow them to send their children to a private facility. To provide capacity in the future, they have implemented a project with other municipalities for a school for a union of the municipalities. In one case, the representative of a Central Bohemian municipality mentioned insufficient consideration of the impacts of new development on the necessary infrastructure and community amenities. Children were expected to attend facilities in the surrounding municipalities or in Prague. The pressure from smaller municipalities in the Central Bohemian region further complicates the situation with the availability of capacity even in larger municipalities. The main barriers to expanding the existing capacity that were mentioned included finance, the administrative burden, and in smaller municipalities also the lack of staff. In Prague, the lack of suitable space is sometimes a barrier.

Children's groups

A number of ad hoc analyses and studies have been carried out in the last decade in order to map the situation of children's groups and the introduction of micro-nurseries, both by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020) and by research agencies contracted by the MoLSA (Median, 2023b), as well as by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (Barvíková et al., 2018; Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023). In addition to the state administration, the Association of Children's Group Operators also carried out surveys among its members in 2020.

The register of children's groups in 2023 included 1,638 children's groups with a total capacity of 22,030 places, the capacity being the maximum number of places at a given point in time⁶⁵. This is a significant increase in capacity; as at 31 December 2018, 861 children's groups were registered (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020). As at 31 December 2018, there were children's groups in 245 municipalities in which there was also a kindergarten and in 29 municipalities in which there was no kindergarten (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020). As at 6 December 2023, there were 974 CG providers registered. Of these most had one (628) or two (188) children's groups.

65 <https://evidence.mpsv.cz/eEDS/index.php>



Only 23 providers had more than five children's groups registered.

A survey of providers of children's groups was carried out by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs in January 2023. A total of 318 CG providers participated in the survey, with the return rate thus reaching 35%. In the data collected, the providers most frequently offered medium-sized groups, i.e. with a capacity of 7 to 12 children, which were most often in operation for 9 or 10 hours a day. The vast majority of the children's groups operated by them also provided their services during the summer holidays, when kindergartens are generally closed. Another difference from kindergartens is the enrolment of children throughout the year (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023).

In the same research study, it was found that the vast majority of providers surveyed had had to reject some applications for admission to their children's groups in the previous year (2022), generally because of the insufficient capacity of the facility. This was also shown in research conducted by the Association of Children's Group Operators in 2020 (156 groups), according to which 73% of the providers surveyed had a waiting list of applicants for placement in a children's group for whom there was no capacity in the group at that time. On average, they had 12.5 children on such a waiting list.

Compared to kindergartens, whose founders are municipalities in most cases, municipalities had established only 4% of the existing children's groups as at 31 December 2018. The most frequent founders – in 80% of cases – included associations, charitable societies, institutes and endowment funds (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020). In the aforementioned focus group with representatives of municipalities aimed at exploring the capacities of municipalities for securing adequate ECEC capacity, the discussion revealed that they were critical of the administrative and bureaucratic burden they are faced with when implementing a formal project and applying for finances. This process was seen as time- and staff-consuming, which, in their opinion, may hinder the development of preschool care in the municipality (Median, 2023b).

As at 6 December 2023, at least one children's group was located in 439 municipalities in the Czech Republic. In the 2023/2024 school year, children's groups provided 5.7% of preschool childcare. 98.7% of children's groups had a non-public founder (legal or natural person) (MoLSA data).

Table 1 shows a comparison of the kindergarten and children's group sectors (assuming CGs are operating at full capacity).




	 Number of facilities	 Number of children	 Number of municipalities with a facility	Share of non-public founders/providers	Share of children attending facilities with non-public founders/providers (out of all children attending ECEC)
KG	5,398	364,491	3,452	9.5%	4.7%
CG	1,638	22,030	439	87.7%	86.2%

Table 1: Comparison of the kindergarten and CG sectors. Data source: MoEYS, MoLSA

Preparatory classes and preparatory grade of special primary schools

The state of supply of preparatory classes and preparatory grades is summarised yearly in the annual reports of MoEYS and CSI (see below). In the available analyses, these forms of preschool education were generally not mentioned at all, or if so, only marginally.

In the 2022/2023 school year, preparatory classes were established in 418 primary schools, including schools for children with SEN established according to Section 16 (9) of the Education Act. In total, there were 507 classes attended by 6,463 children. In the 2022/2023 school year, 268 children were enrolled in the preparatory grade of special primary schools. This grade was established in 36 out of a total of 320 special primary schools (CSI, 2023).

In the 2023/2024 school year, the number of preparatory classes increased slightly. Currently, there is a total of 563 preparatory classes established and they are attended by 7,074 children. 268 children were enrolled in a total of 52 classes in the preparatory grade of a special primary school in the Czech Republic (CZSO, 2023).

Day and week care centres

Data on day and week care centres were not included in any of the available analyses. Statistics on their functioning are collected by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which publishes the data in the *Statistical Yearbook of Labour and Social Affairs*. The most recent data available are from 2021. For the purposes of the statistics of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, all clients under the age of 18 are reported as one category, so it is impossible to say exactly how many clients of the services of day and week care centres are of preschool age. In 2021, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs registered 263 day care centres and 46 week care centres, which were attended by 912 and 70 clients under the age of 18, respectively (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2022). It can be assumed that the number of children of preschool age who attend these facilities is in the lower hundreds.

Day rehabilitation centres

Data on rehabilitation centres were not included in any of the analyses that were processed. Statistical data on children's day centres are collected, stored and made public by the Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic (IHIS CR). Because of the structure of the reports, which divide the patients by age into categories from 0 to 2 years and 3 to 14 years, it is impossible to determine the number of preschool children in these facilities exactly from the available statistics. The most recent published data are from 2020 and identify 27 care centres with a total of 1,415 children aged 14 years and younger attending them. Of these, 335 children are aged 0 to 2 years (IHIS, 2021). It can be deduced that the number of preschool children in these facilities is in the order of hundreds.

Forest clubs

Forest clubs are not mentioned in any of the available analyses; data on some of them are collected only by the Association of Forest Kindergartens. The Association recorded 100 forest clubs as at the end of January 2024. They were being attended by 1,996 children as at March 2023⁶⁶.

Family centres

The only available survey of the situation of mother, family and community centres was carried out in 2023 by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs. For its needs, 404 organisations were contacted, of which 136 actively participated. The absolute number of family centres operating in the Czech Republic is unknown.

According to that research, the offer of family centres is relatively wide; however, the core part is the offer of regular and one-off leisure, educational and preventative activities, not only for children but also for adults. Activities tend to be predominantly targeted at preschool children or their parents. A third of the family centres that were surveyed currently run a children's group, and almost half of them offer babysitting for young children. Centres generally limit their availability during the summer holidays, but only less than 10% of the centres surveyed interrupt their operation (Palonciová & Hohne, 2023).

Preschool clubs of social services

Preschool clubs were not mentioned in any of the available analyses. The publication *Guide to Low Threshold Preschool Clubs* (Lánská et al., 2015), published by the organisation People in Need, contains case reports from a total of 18 preschool clubs, of which ten were being operated by People in Need at the time. In 2021, there were 13 preschool clubs operated by People in Need (Macková, 2021)⁶⁷. The most recent available annual report of this organisation is from 2022 and does not mention the number of clubs; however, it states that a total of 373 children attended them in 2022. According to their 2022 annual report, 372 users in four preschool clubs were also registered by the Charity Czech Republic, a network of Catholic church charities in the country. These two organisations are far from being the only ones operating preschool clubs; however, because of the absence of any

66 Information provided by a representative of the Association of Forest Kindergartens. Data on the number of forest clubs which are registered with the Association can be accessed at: <https://www.lesnims.cz/lesni-ms/mapa-lesnich-ms.html>

67 <https://zapojmevsechny.cz/clanek/predskolni-kluby-jejich-prinosy-a-cile>

central register of these clubs or their operators, it is impossible to determine how many clubs are currently active or how many children attend them.

Centres for preschool children

None of the available analyses mentions centres for preschool children. As part of the research for this report, several theses were found which dealt with various aspects of their functioning. The most detailed insight was provided by the 2012 thesis *Centres for Preschool Children. Description of the Intention and Implementation of the Project of the Prague City Hall in the Period 2009–2010* (Martinovská, 2012). According to the information provided by the President of the Association of Staff of Centres for Children and Youth in the Czech Republic, there is no central register of centres for preschool children or any uniform methodological management of these facilities. However, the respondents agree that the centres are following the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education. According to the information from the head of the Department of Leisure of the City of Prague, Prague had 29 regular CPCs and 4 CPCs for Ukrainian children as at January 2024. The number of participants depends on the space available and usually ranges between 10 and 20 children. In Brno, there are six centres (called Maceška), which still had spare capacity at the time of the interviews in January 2024⁶⁸.

The respondents agree that CPCs represent an appropriate use of the capacity of CCYs for parents who need half-day care for their children. They stress that the capacities of kindergartens are not used efficiently in this respect, as many children regularly leave after lunch. The President of the Association of Staff of CCYs in the Czech Republic believes that the MoEYS in general does not support CPCs, which is unfortunate in a situation where the capacity of kindergartens is not sufficient to address the demand of the whole age group (i.e. starting at 2 years old).

ECEC provided by holders of a trade licence

The option of using the service of licensed care trades is mentioned in some of the texts summarising the overall state of ECEC in the Czech Republic (Palonciová, 2014; Barvíková, 2018); however, an attempt at a more detailed mapping of their supply was made only in the *Analysis of the Availability of Preschool Age Care Facilities* (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020). The expert estimate published therein was that between 20 and 291 facilities with a maximum possible aggregate capacity of 4,600 children were operating at the end of 2018 based on the regulated licensed trade “Care for children up to 3 years of age in a daily regime”. The analysis also points out that most of the facilities listed in the licensed occupations register that were examined were also registered either as a kindergarten or as a children's group and were thus maintained in the relevant register.

3.2.2 Supply indicators and their geographical representation

The range of supply in ECEC facilities can be extrapolated from the number of places in ECEC facilities in relation to the number of children in a given age group and territory. The basic indicators of supply are therefore indicators that show the ratio of the capacity of a given type of facility to the number of children of a given age cohort in the population listed below. The data from the MoEYS reports as at 30 September 2023 and information on children's groups capacities as at 12 November 2023 were used for the calculations.

68 <https://maceska.luzanky.cz/>

Indicator N1 “Capacity of children’s groups and kindergartens for children aged 1.5 to 5 years”

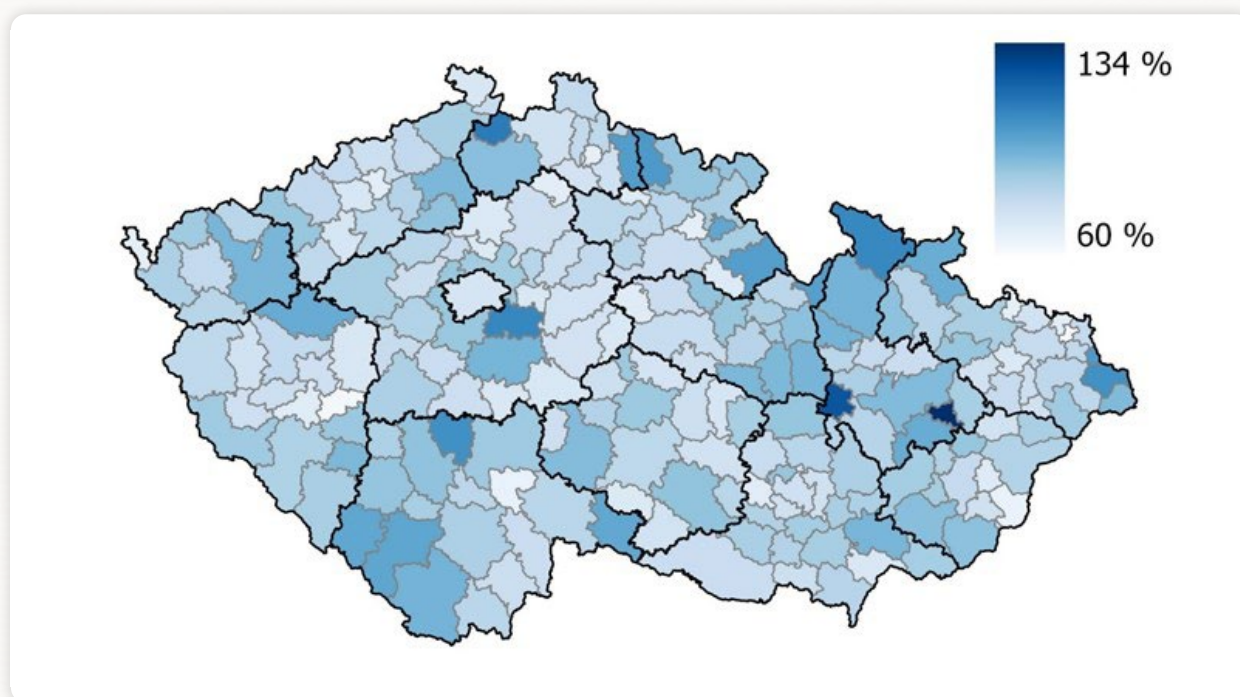
$$N1 = (\text{capacity of kindergartens} + \text{capacity of CGs} - \text{children aged 5+ attending kindergarten}) / \text{number of children in the population aged 1.5 to 5 years}$$

This indicator takes into account the fact that a part of the capacity of the kindergartens is principally reserved for children fulfilling compulsory schooling. Therefore, the number of these children (aged 5+) is subtracted from the registered capacity of the kindergartens. The resulting difference is related to the population which is not participating in compulsory preschool education.

The main weakness of this indicator is the low quality of the data on the capacity of kindergartens. According to Section 144 of Act No. 561/2004 Coll.⁶⁹, the Register of Schools and School Facilities records the maximum permitted number of children, including their stand-alone workplaces, beds, meals, classes, groups or other similar units, as stated in the decision on registration in the Register of Schools and School Facilities. When it comes to a change in any of the data entered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, an application is needed for the registration of a change only in the event of a change in the identification and contact details. As a result, kindergartens may in practice refrain from applying for a change in the Register of Schools and School Facilities in the event of a change in the number of places available.

Another limitation is the fact that the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) data on the number of children in the given age groups in some territories are probably underestimated, as they do not take into account migration, including the arrival of a large number of refugees from Ukraine, the majority of whom were mothers with children. The general limitation of the population data is the fact that they take into account children whose permanent residence is registered in a given area, rather than children who actually live there.

Map 1 shows indicator N1 values for each municipality with extended responsibilities.



Map 1: Indicator N1 – Capacity of kindergartens and children's groups for children aged 1.5 to 5 years at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 11 December 2023. Data source: MoEYS, MoLSA, CZSO

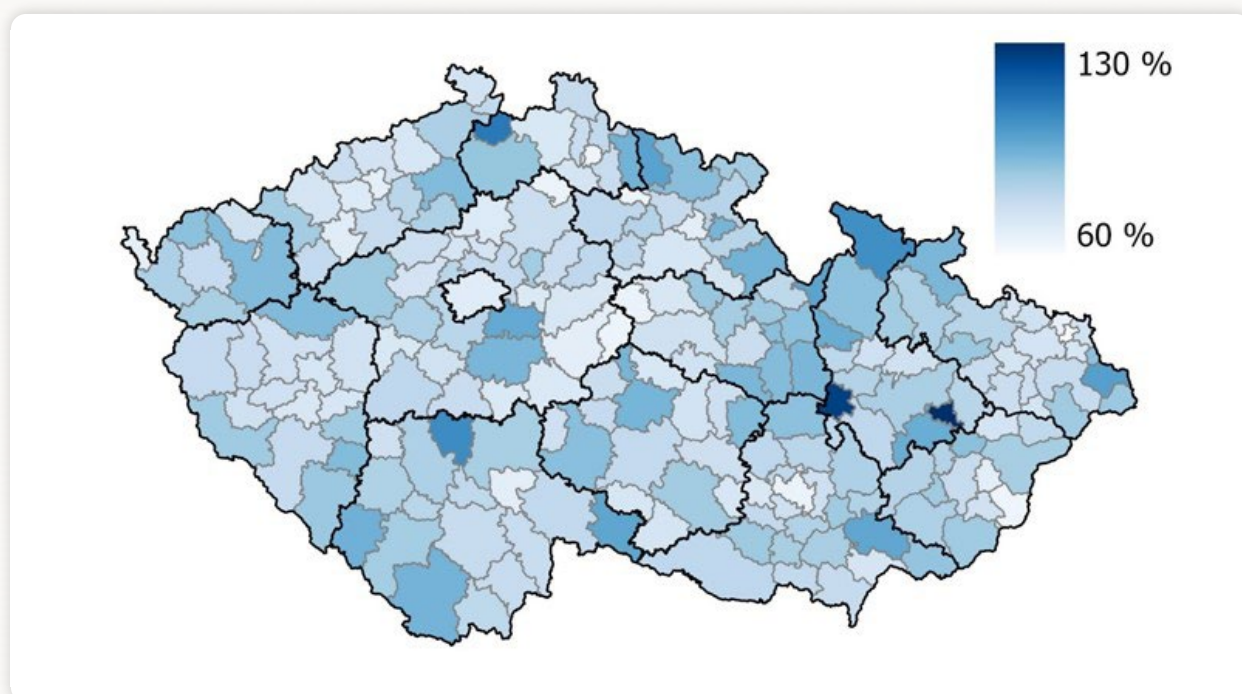
The cartogram shows that indicator N1 in some MERs reaches values higher than 100%, which would theoretically mean that the capacity of kindergartens and CGs in the territory of these MERs is sufficient. This is true, however, for only 12 MERs. The rest does not have sufficient capacity to cover the entirety of this age group.

Indicator N2 “Capacity of kindergartens for children aged 2–5 years”

N2 = (capacity of kindergartens – children aged 5+ attending kindergarten / number of children in the population aged 2–5 years)

This indicator illustrates the capacity of kindergartens for all children who can attend kindergarten in theory, but for whom attendance is not mandatory. It has the same shortcomings as indicator N1.

Map 2 shows indicator N2 values for each MER.



Map 2: Indicator N2 – Capacity of kindergartens for children aged 2–5 years at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 11 December 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

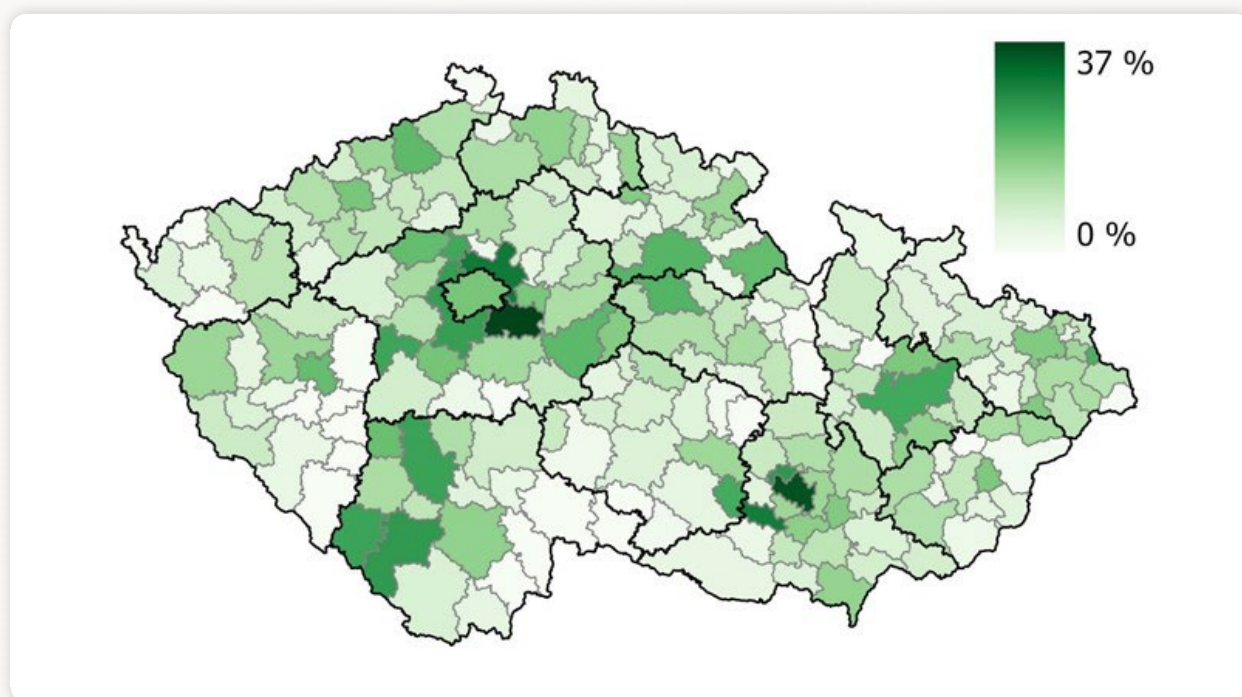
Indicator N2 shows values higher than 100% in only five MERs. In half of the MERs, the values are lower than 80%. While it is also true that the values of the indicator are influenced by inaccuracies in the capacity values and in the determination of the child population in the MERs administrative areas, the indicator is indicative of insufficient capacity in most MERs if we would like to also offer education in kindergartens to 2-year-old children.

Indicator N3 “Theoretical capacity of the children’s groups for children under 3 years”

N3 = capacity of the children’s groups / number of children born between September 2020 and February 2022

When considering the free capacity of children’s groups, we took into account the fact that children’s groups are the primary ECEC facility for children under 3 years of age, but according to the information from both the providers and the parents they are hardly ever attended by children younger than 1.5 years. This is why we focused primarily on this age group. Since in reality children’s groups are also attended by children over 3 years of age, this indicator only refers to the theoretical free capacity for children in the respective age cohort. Unfortunately, data on the actual attendance of children’s groups in the respective age groups are unavailable and thus do not allow for a more concise expression of the capacity of children’s groups for the respective age cohorts.

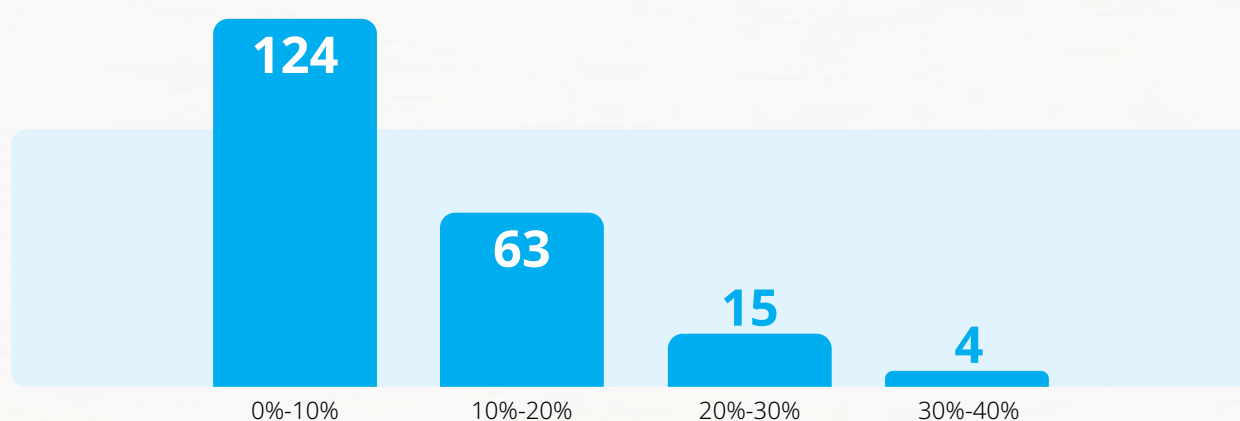
Map 3 shows indicator N3 values for each MER.



Map 3: Indicator N3 – Theoretical capacity of children’s groups for children aged 1.5 to 3 years at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 6 December 2023. Data source: MoLSA, CZSO

The cartogram shows that the largest capacity of children’s groups is available in Brno and its surroundings, around Prague and in some MERs of the South Bohemian, Hradec Králové and Zlín Regions. However, in most of the MERs’ administrative areas the capacity of children’s groups is not such as to fully compensate for the insufficient capacity of kindergartens for children 2 years of age and older.

Another view of the capacity of children’s groups is provided in Graph 2, which shows the numbers of MERs that have capacity covered in the defined categories.



Graph 2: The percentage intervals represent the share of children aged 1.5–3 for whom there is capacity in children's groups. The columns show the number of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities that fall within each interval.
Data source: MoLSA, CZSO

The histogram in Graph 2 shows that for the vast majority of MERs (124) the capacity of children's groups only covers up to 10% of the population from 1.5 to 3 years old.

As mentioned above, there are a number of limitations associated with the proposed indicators. The CZSO data show children with a registered permanent residence in the territory of the MER at the time of their birth, and this number may differ from the real population of children residing in that territory. Another limitation is the fact that a portion of children who have their residence in the territory of one MER may have their catchment kindergarten in the territory of another MER if the catchment area covers two neighbouring MERs. A third limitation is the fact that children may also attend a kindergarten in the territory of another MER for other reasons, such as transport or time accessibility.

The proposed indicators describe the offer according to the MER territory, which provides clear information at the level of the whole education system. To monitor the offer at the level of other self-governing units (municipalities and regions), it is useful to also map the offer in their territories. This is particularly important for municipalities, which are also the founders of public kindergartens. At the same time, municipalities should not only have an overview of their supply – including the supply of non-formal facilities – but should evaluate their supply in connection with the supply of the neighbouring municipalities and in cooperation with them. In their strategic planning, they should also consider the development of the territory, i.e. take into account the expected population increases.

3.2.3 Causes of shortcomings in the supply of ECEC facilities/services

The findings presented below are primarily derived from the qualitative survey conducted among ECEC providers as part of this project (a complete list of respondents can be found in Annex 2). The aim of the qualitative survey was primarily to supplement and update the information already published by the MoLSA, RILSA, CSI and MoEYS about the problems that prevent the individual types of providers from creating a sufficient supply of ECEC facilities.

Public kindergarten founders

The indicators presented above show that in regard to ECEC facilities/services for children under 3 years of age, municipalities are currently not ready in terms of capacity to receive these children. In some municipalities (mainly in large towns or municipalities around

large towns), kindergartens do not have sufficient capacity to meet the needs of citizens living in the cadastral area of the municipality for the age range of 3 to 6 years. The lack of capacity may be the result of several types of problems described below.

Insufficient capacity of municipalities to expand the existing facilities or build new buildings

If a kindergarten established by a municipality does not have sufficient capacity, the solution is to increase the capacity by extending the existing building of the kindergarten, adapting another building or building new space. All these approaches require building adaptations and the related activities – preparing design documents, obtaining a building permit, and subsequently ensuring completion of the construction. For smaller municipalities in particular, it is already problematic to ensure design documents and obtain a building permit, and the subsequent financing of the construction often exceeds the abilities of even larger settlements. The existing grant calls have low allocations and the soaring investment amounts needed for construction work have been posing yet another big hurdle in recent years. As a consequence of these challenges, it is unrealistic to expect the gap in capacity in municipalities with a significant excess demand to be easily closed.

Insufficient capacity of neighbouring municipalities to create common catchment areas

If a municipality does not have its own kindergarten or the potential for its establishment, it is dependent on entering into an agreement to create a common catchment area with another municipality that has such capacity. Data on what share of municipalities does not have an agreement on the establishment of common catchment area with another municipality is not readily available (it would be necessary to check with all the municipalities that have not established their own kindergarten whether they have an agreement to create a common catchment area). Regional geographers Sylvia Rita Kučerová and Petr Meyer estimate that this may be the case for 10–20%⁷⁰ of such municipalities when it comes to elementary schools. Furthermore, the law does not provide a solution for a situation where a municipality tries to enter into an agreement, but the municipalities that are eligible in terms of the driving distance do not have the capacity or will for such an agreement. If such an agreement is not concluded, Act No. 561/2004 Coll. (Section 178 (3)) imposes an obligation on the regional authority to create or extend the school district of another school for the duration not exceeding 24 months⁷¹.

Residents who are not registered for permanent residence

A kindergarten founded by a municipality or an association of municipalities will preferentially admit those children who are at least 3 years of age at the start of the new school year and whose registered permanent residence (or registered residence in the case of foreigners) is in their territory or children who are placed in a children's home on its territory (Section 179 (3)). However, a number of people live in the territory of a municipality without being registered as the municipality's permanent residents. This fact can then lead to a shortage of places in the kindergarten even if, according to the administrative data, the kindergarten's capacity seems to be sufficient.

⁷⁰ This figure was estimated on the basis of a questionnaire survey among representatives of municipalities responsible for primary education. The respondents were chosen on the basis of the authors' typology of municipalities with the goal of ensuring that each of the 12 identified types of municipality is sufficiently represented in the survey. For more information see: <https://www.eduin.cz/clanky/bez-spadove-oblasti-muze-byt-pres-10-procent-skol-ne-vzdy-je-to-problem/>

⁷¹ <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561>

The idea that municipalities should create sufficient capacity for all children living in their area is hindered by financial limits. If children are not registered for permanent residence in a municipality, the municipality does not receive a contribution for them according to the budgetary allocation of taxes. At the same time, it is sometimes difficult to reach agreement on whether municipalities that use a school founded by another municipality as their catchment area school will pay a fee to the founding municipality for children residing permanently on their territory or how high such fee should be.

Uncontrolled development of the territory

Some municipalities are experiencing a significant increase in their population which is not accompanied by the development of the relevant infrastructure. As a result, the population of the municipality may multiply without sufficient increase in the capacity of the existing kindergarten or the establishment of a new one.

Catchment tourism

The phenomenon known as “catchment tourism” has been occurring in the case of kindergartens. Catchment tourism describes a situation where children who do not live in a municipality are registered for permanent residence in that municipality only in order to qualify for enrolment in the municipality's kindergarten. Such children not only increase the requirements for the overall capacity of the kindergarten, but also reduce the availability of the kindergarten for children from lower age categories who actually live in the municipality.

Quality and availability of data for planning

Municipalities work with limited data in their forecasting projections. Their demographic forecasts usually include only children who have permanent residence in the territory of the municipality and not children in the relevant age cohort who actually live in the territory of the municipality. The difference between these two cohorts can be significant in some cases (for example, the number of residents with permanent residence being approx. 4,000, the number of residents without permanent residence in the territory of the municipality being approx. 1,500). The number of “real” residents can be significantly distorted, especially in the case of areas previously reserved for holiday homes converted to permanent homes.

On the other hand, data relating to children registered for permanent residence can also be overestimated if some of the parents are interested in attending a kindergarten in a different municipality than the one in which they live. This is often due to the unfavourable opening hours of kindergartens, which do not allow working parents to transport and pick up their child to and from the kindergarten and work full-time, or sometimes even part-time, at the same time. For example, if the opening hours of the kindergarten end at 4:30 p.m. and the working hours of the parent start at 8:00 a.m. (which is the case for a number of professions), they cannot work full-time even if they work directly in the municipality, let alone if they have to commute to work. While the children of such parents reduce the demands on the number of places in the facility in the municipality in which they live, they also increase the demands on the number of places in the municipality to which the parent commutes to work.

Obtaining quality data can be further complicated by the relatively common practice of kindergartens enrolling 2-year-old children on paper but deferring their real start of attendance to after the child's third birthday. Such a child can then be formally enrolled in a kindergarten but also enrolled in and actually attending a children's group or another

facility until they turn 3 years of age, thus statistically occupying two ECEC places at once. Zykanová and Janhubová (2020) state that roughly a fifth of all kindergartens enrol 2-year-old children in this manner.

Providers of private and church kindergartens

The problems faced by providers of private and church kindergartens are in many respects similar to those faced by providers of public kindergartens – they result from the lack of available data. In addition, however, they are faced with problems with registering in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, resulting both from the legislative set-up of the Register of Schools and School Facilities⁷² and from the long-term aims of education and the development of the education system in the individual regions⁷³.

Providers of children's groups

Setting up children's groups involves financial requirements related to adjusting the premises to meet the requirements for the operation of children's groups (e.g. strict fire safety requirements). Since children's groups are often set up by non-profit entities (a representative of an association of CGs providers claims that mothers who are trying to provide care for their children are often the driving force behind setting up a children's group), they do not have adequate financial reserves and therefore need to secure funding in the form of grants. Various grant programmes are available; for example, ESF-funded grant programmes are available on a long term basis⁷⁴. The discussions with municipality representatives suggest that municipalities in general are not interested in founding children's groups and focus mainly on providing kindergarten capacities.

Since children's groups were first enacted, the requirements for their operation have been tightening (e.g. the amendment to Decree No. 23/2008 Coll., on technical conditions of fire protection of buildings⁷⁵, which comes into effect on 1 January 2025, requires a new fire safety solution for children's groups, which will require significant investments from a number of providers). Providers of childcare services in children's groups often organise into umbrella associations which try to provide feedback on the proposed legislative changes. MoLSA allows these organisations to voice their opinions on the matter (for example on the proposed legislation).

Family centres which set up adaptation clubs in a different regime than in the form of children's groups are also in a similar situation.

72 An application for registering in the Register of Schools and School Facilities for the next school year must be submitted by 30 September at the relevant regional office. A number of details must be presented with the application, such as an outline of staff and material provision, proof of ownership of or the right to use the premises, and reports from the relevant public health office and the local building authority which confirm that the building is fit for the proposed use. In practice this means that the school must be fully operational roughly a year before its operation actually starts. While some of the documents may be supplied after the application is submitted, it is often difficult for private providers to have everything ready so far ahead.

73 In some cases the application process for registering a private school is terminated because the establishment of a new school contradicts the region's Long-term Strategy (i.e. "the establishment of a new school only exceptionally, based on proven need and considering the current conditions in the given area") (the Supreme Administrative Court, 2023).

74 These are for example call No. 049 OPZ+ Establishment of Children's Groups (Vybudování dětských skupin). This call makes possible the application for a subsidy for creating a new children's group (non-investment expenses for the adaptation of premises) along with a subsidy for supporting the first year of operation. Furthermore, call No. 31_22_045 Development of the Capacities of Children's Groups according to Act No. 247/2014 Coll. (Budování kapacit dětských skupin dle zákona č. 247/2014 Sb., o poskytování služby péče o dítě v dětské skupině a o změně souvisejících zákonů).

75 <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2008-23>

3.2.4 Summary

In the chapter dealing with supply in ECEC facilities, we tried to analyse the range of the supply available in the individual MERs. However, the currently available data showed that the possibilities for a quantitative evaluation of the supply are very limited. The main reason for the limited information is the nature of the available data, both population data (how many children have a registered permanent residence and actually live in a MER) and data on facility capacities (how many places are available in each type of facility and how many places are occupied in a set period of time). Population data refers to the children who were residents of the MER at the time of the child's birth. The number of these children may differ from the real population of children residing in the territory. Data on facility capacities also need updating (as well as the creation of a mechanism for regular updates). Another source of inaccuracies is the fact that the kindergartens' catchment areas may not always fully correspond to the MER administrative areas, i.e. children from certain MERs may have their catchment kindergarten in a neighbouring MER.

A qualitative survey among the providers of the numerically most represented types of services confirmed the problems with capacity provision identified in previous surveys. These include, in particular, insufficient financial and spatial resources on the part of municipalities and insufficient financial resources on the part of the children's groups providers. At the same time, a number of problems derive from insufficient mechanisms of demand mapping, i.e. the limited quality of the available data and setting of its evaluation processes, and the absence of joint strategic planning processes of neighbouring while suitably connected municipalities.



3.3 Demand for formal and non-formal ECEC facilities

In Section 3.3.1 of this chapter, we present the data and conclusions of the available analyses, which dealt with the demand for formal and non-formal education facilities. In Section 3.3.2, we present a proposal of indicators, describe the demand met and its regional distribution, and provide its graphical representation. Finally, in Section 3.3.3, we present the results of a qualitative survey focused on demand factors related to parents' needs, their expectations, barriers to access to ECEC services and attitudes to them, including vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families.

3.3.1 Available analyses

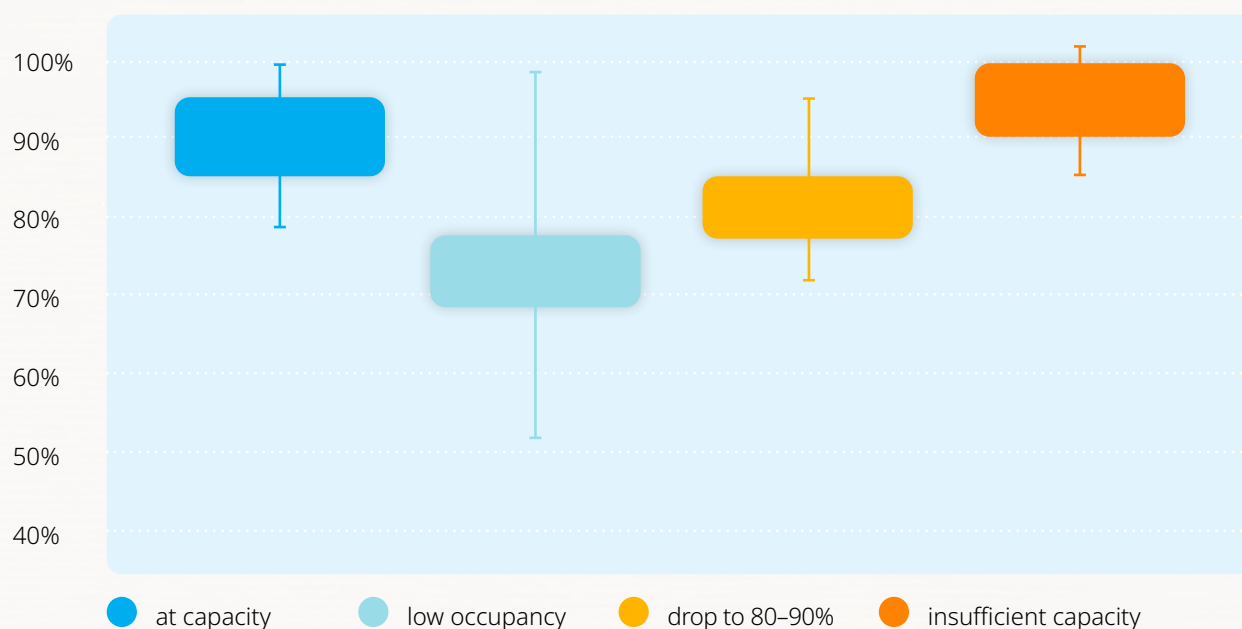
The available resources and analyses mostly deal only with the demand met, i.e. the number of pupils in ECEC facilities at a given time. Because of the unavailability of data on other facilities, these analyses deal almost exclusively with the demand met in kindergartens or the quantity of rejected applications for enrolment (Paloncyová & Hohne, 2023; Kováčová, 2023; Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020; Paloncyová et al., 2014). For the calculations of the demand met, these sources rely on data from the Czech Statistical Office for demographic data on the population and on the MoEYS data from school records.

Analysis of Demographic Development at the MER Level, prepared for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs by SC&C spol. s r.o. (Kováčová, 2023), focuses on medium-term demographic trends (ten years), thus presenting a prediction of the development of demand until 2033. It was carried out on the basis of data from the Czech Statistical Office as at 31 December 2022 (population statistics) and data on kindergartens as at 30 September 2022. Because of the sources of the data used, this analysis is fraught with the same problems that have already been mentioned several times in this report (e.g. it is unclear whether it takes into account the children of refugees from Ukraine who were born outside the Czech Republic, but will complete their preschool education here; the data from the Czech Statistical Office are linked to permanent residence, which may not be the actual residence, etc.). The analysis itself warns of the limits of longer-term demographic predictions. It is necessary to update them once every 3 to 4 years or in the event of emergencies such as pandemics or war conflicts (the 2021 census took place after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, but before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began).

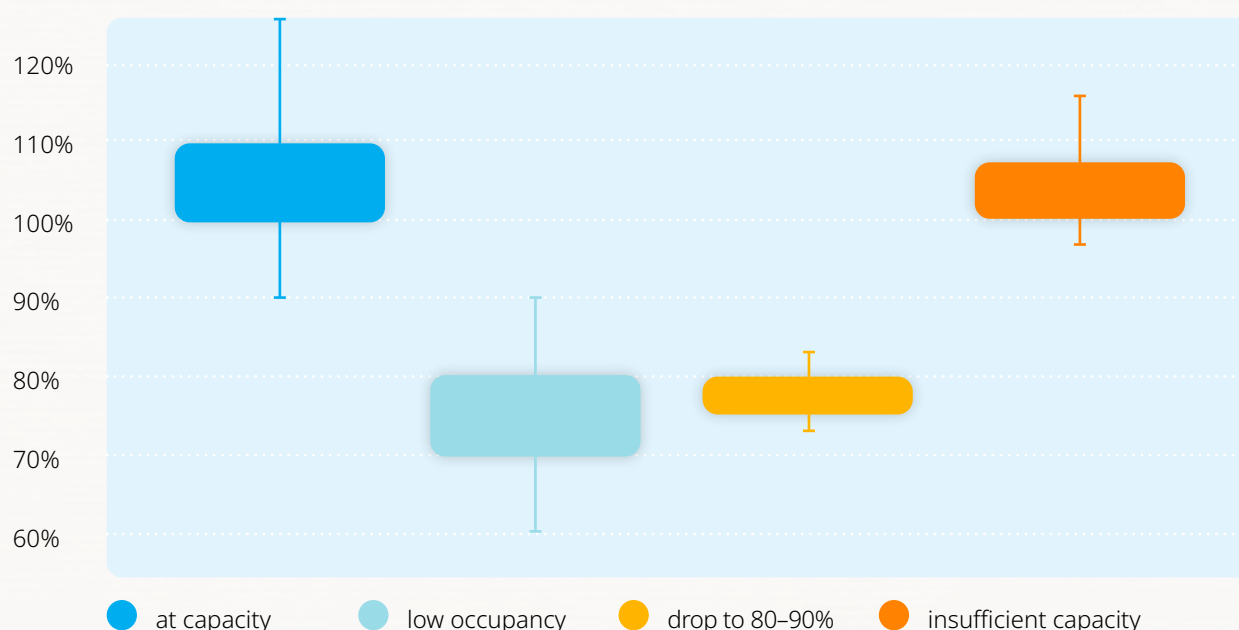
According to this demographic prediction, the number of children in the Czech Republic will decrease over the next decade and the situation in kindergartens will depend mainly on the rate of intranational migration. Those regions which have a strongly negative migration balance today will continue to be the regions with the lowest occupancy rate of kindergartens, and even if children from the age of 2 are placed in kindergartens in those regions there will be administrative districts of 22 municipalities with extended responsibilities (MERs) where the occupancy rate will be below 80% of the kindergartens' capacity. Conversely, regions with a high positive migration balance, i.e. areas around Prague, selected urban areas of Prague and the areas of former county towns, will face insufficient capacity of kindergartens. If children aged 2 and above enter kindergartens, 128 MERs will have insufficient capacity in the kindergartens, of which 77 MERs will have a demand exceeding supply by more than 10%.

The graphs below show the results of cluster analysis of the occupancy of kindergartens according to MERs in 2022 and the predicted occupancy in 2032. The y-axis represents the share of occupied places in 2022 and the expected share of occupied places in 2032. MERs

were divided into four groups: group 1 – the characteristics of these MERs were occupancy rates higher than 90% in 2022 and a similar or somewhat higher predicted occupancy in 2032, with a possibility of full occupancy. This group included 70 of the 227 MERs, i.e. 31%; group 2 – the occupancy of kindergartens in these MERs was 80% or lower in 2022 and as a result of a strongly negative migration balance it is expected to keep decreasing until 2032. This group included 40 MERs, i.e. 18%; group 3 – the occupancy of the kindergartens in these MERs was up to 90% in 2022 and the prediction shows a slight decrease in the number of preschool-aged children in the area; the occupancy rate is thus expected to fall to between 80 and 90% by 2032; 40%, i.e. 92 MERs were in this group; group 4 – these are MERs characterised by an increased birth rate and a positive migration balance. The occupancy rates in these MERs exceeded 93% in 2022 and an increase in the number of preschool children is predicted, leading to insufficient kindergarten capacity by 2032. This group includes 25 MERs, i.e. 11%.



Graph 3: Occupied capacity of kindergartens in 2022. Data source: MoEYS (as at 30 September 2022), CZSO, calculation: SC&C Agency (Kováčová, 2023: 12)



Graph 4: Predicted occupied capacity of kindergartens in 2032. Data source: MoEYS (as at 30 September 2022), CZSO, calculation: SC&C Agency (Kováčová, 2023: 12)

Several analyses point to problems which families encounter when trying to place a child in an ECEC facility. According to a survey of 30 member organisations of the Platform for Early Care, a total of 180 children whose registered permanent residence was not in the place where they actually lived were clients of these organisations in 2021. Over the past 3 years, only 10 of the 26 organisations working with these children managed to place all of them in a kindergarten, while 7 organisations did not place these children in a kindergarten at all or did so only exceptionally. Most frequently, organisations managed to place children in the compulsory preschool year (Platform for Early Care, 2021).

A research conducted by PAQ Research in late 2022, carried out on a panel of the Ukrainian Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences respondents who came into the country between February 2022 and April 2023 and are still here, brought to light the obstacles encountered by refugee families from Ukraine when enrolling in Czech schools. According to the data collected, 84%⁷⁶ of Ukrainian preschool children were enrolled in a kindergarten in November 2023. Because of the stark discrepancy between the PAQ Research data and similar MoEYS data (the MoEYS reports that 39% of the preschool children registered for temporary protection were enrolled in kindergartens as at 1 September 2023), PAQ Research estimates that the real attendance rate of Ukrainian children in ECEC is between 69 and 84% (Šafářová et al., 2023b).

Earlier waves of this research included data about children whose parents did not manage to enrol them in ECEC. According to a research conducted in late 2022, the parents of 24% of the children were unsuccessful in their attempts to enrol their child (Prokop et al., 2023). For children who were not successfully enrolled or whose parents did not attempt to enrol them, parents most often cited insufficient capacity of a facility at an accessible distance or the absence of such a facility as the reason (59% of cases). A lack of information was also quite a common problem – 15% of parents did not know how to enrol a child in a facility or did not understand the education system (Prokop et al., 2023). A research wave conducted

⁷⁶ As at 30 September 2023, a total of 3,183 Ukrainian children were enrolled in Czech kindergartens.

in June 2023 shows a clear improvement of this situation, as only 6% of the respondents who applied for enrolment in ECEC were not accepted at that point (Šafářová et al., 2023a).

The analysis *Access for Children in Need to the Key Services Covered by the European Child Guarantee* conducted by Masaryk University for the European Commission (Sirovátka et al., 2023) identifies barriers encountered by children from socially disadvantaged families to access to ECEC facilities. These are mainly financial barriers to enrolling a child under 5 years of age in a kindergarten or other educational facility. These include not only fees for attending the facility, which are often too high, but also other fees such as those for meals, aids or school events.

The monograph *Families with Children in 2018-2022* produced by RILSA (Křečková Tůmová et al., 2023) provides insights into the lives of Czech families using data obtained in several waves of quantitative surveys carried out over the aforementioned 5-year period. Given the scale of the study, ECEC is rather a marginal topic; however, ECEC is listed within the battery on the use of and satisfaction with state services. That section informs us that the vast majority of families have used ECEC services; however, between 2.5% (multiple-child families) and 4.4% (incomplete families) of families had not used these services because they were not able to place the child or children in such a facility⁷⁷.

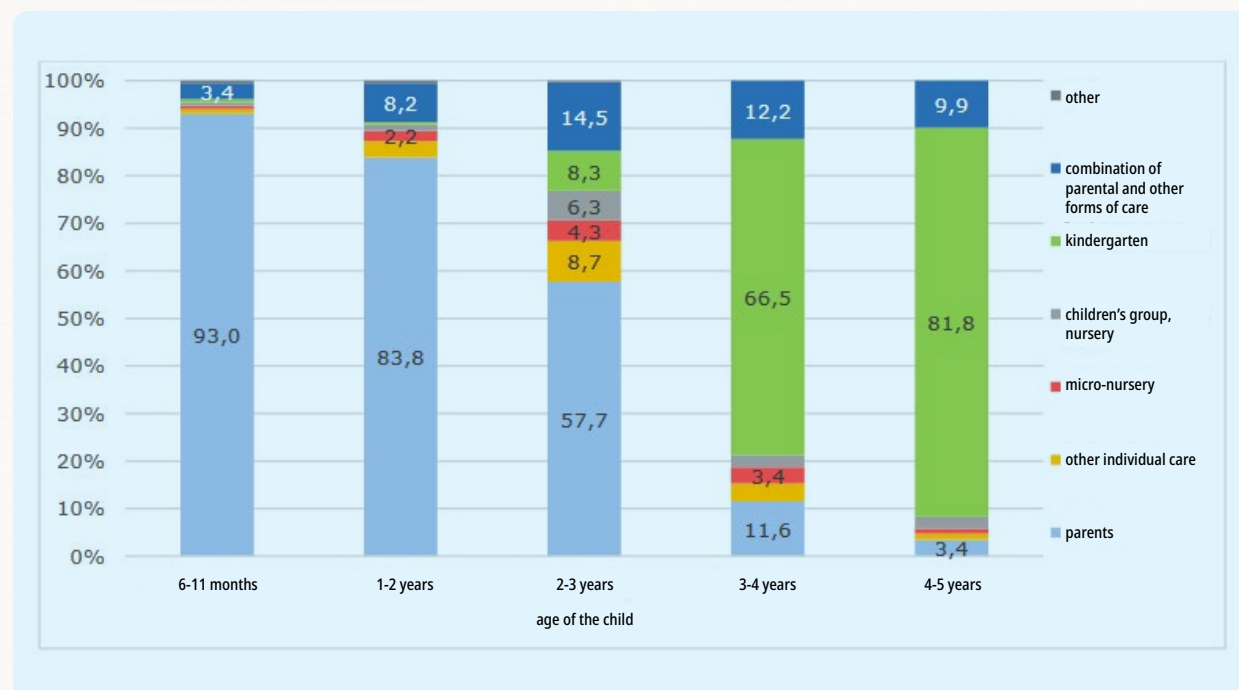
Given the interdependence of the employment of mothers with young children and the availability of ECEC, the findings from the section dealing with the reconciliation of work and family life are also valuable for this report. According to the data from this series of studies, the age of the youngest child was one of the most significant factors influencing the success in the reconciliation of family and work roles – the younger the child, the higher the response rate of parents who felt that they were failing to reconcile family and work responsibilities. It can be concluded that one of the reasons for this is precisely the lack of suitable services for parents of preschool children (Křečková Tůmová et al., 2023).

The most detailed analysis of parents' demand for ECEC services that is available was carried out by RILSA in 2018 (Barvíková et al., 2018). This was a public opinion survey carried out as part of a pilot project to introduce micro-nurseries as a new kind of formal ECEC services (since 2021 micro-nurseries have been one of the possible forms of a children's group). For this, 588 participants – mothers of children under 5 years of age – were selected through a quota selection in order to represent all regions of the Czech Republic equally. The research focused mainly on identifying the potential demand for the service provided in micro-nurseries; however, it included a battery of questions mapping the demand for ECEC services in general. It clearly showed that until the child's first birthday, almost all the parents (93%) prefer to provide childcare themselves. Between the first and second birthdays, 84% of the respondents considered parental care to be ideal, and a further 8% saw a combination of parental and other forms of care as ideal.

Only parental care also seemed to be ideal for the majority of the parents (58%) between the child's second and third birthdays; however, during this period, the views on what non-parental form of care parents would consider were the most varied ones. A similar number of the parents would ideally choose a kindergarten (8%), another form of individual care (9%), and children's groups or micro-nurseries (6% and 4%, respectively). This was also the age range when a combination of parental and other forms of care was most often named as being ideal (15%). Between the child's third and fourth birthdays, the vast ma-

77 The respondents answered the question "Have you used formal ECEC services (kindergartens, nurseries)" by choosing from four options: Yes, we have; No, we never needed to; No, we never got accepted; I do not know / I cannot judge.

jority (66%) of the parents considered kindergarten care to be ideal; however, the number of parents who would consider only parental care (12%) or a combination of parental care and other forms of care (12%) to be ideal was also not insignificant. For children aged 4 to 5 years, parental care alone appeared to be ideal to just 3% of the parents, while 82% of them considered a kindergarten education to be ideal, and 10% considered a combination of parental care and other forms of care to be ideal.



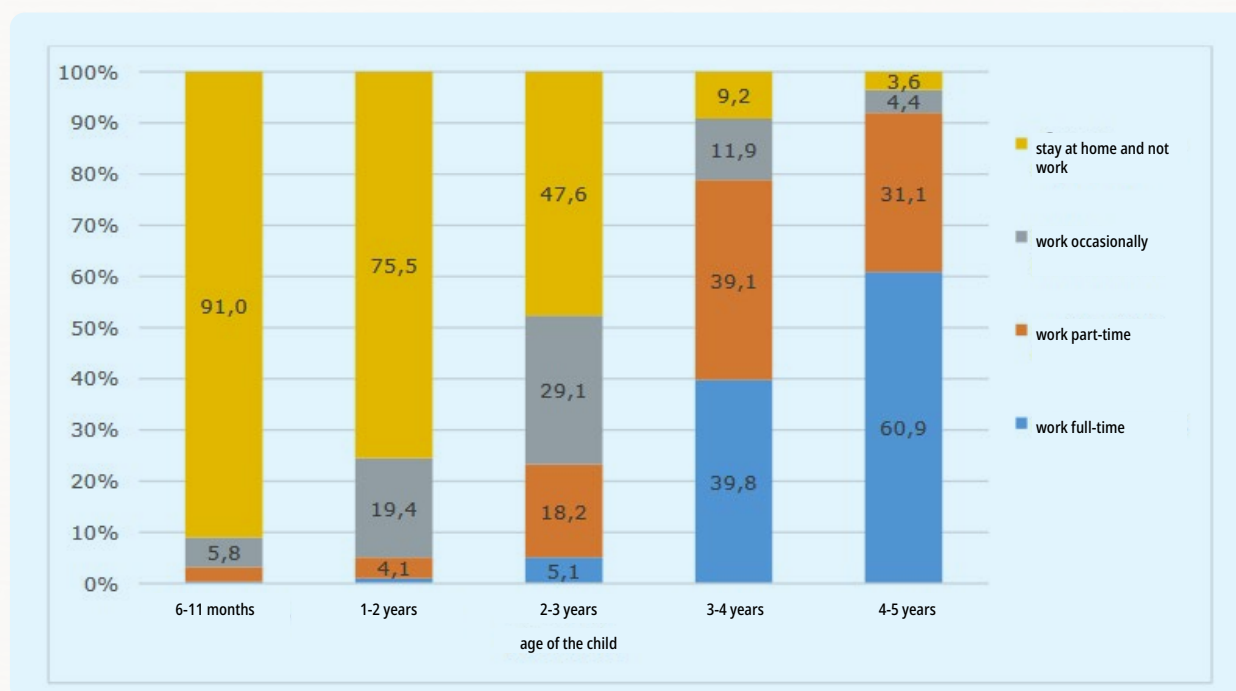
Graph 5: Ideal form of care for a child according to age, as selected by mothers. Source: Barvíková et al. (2018: 40)

In addition to the form of care, the time spent in a collective care institution which would be considered ideal by parents was also examined. In line with the previous question, until the child's first birthday, only 11% of the parents would consider care in a collective institution to any extent, mainly on an occasional basis (6%). After the child's first birthday, 16% of the parents would want occasional care in a collective institution, while another 5% would also want regular care for part of the day. 76% of the parents would still not be interested in care in a collective institution at all. Between the child's second and third birthdays, most of the parents (55%) would consider care to some extent to be ideal, of whom 19% would use it only occasionally, while the remaining 36% would use it regularly either for part of the day (26%) or even for the whole day (11%). From the age of 3, 88% of the parents would prefer regular care, and when the child is aged 4 or 5, almost all the parents would. 68% of them would place the child in a collective facility on a daily basis for the whole day.



Graph 6: Ideal amount of time spent in a collective care facility according to age, as selected by mothers.
Source: Barvíková et al. (2018: 42)

This research also focused on the ideal extent of the mother's work involvement, depending on the child's age. Here, in line with previous findings, it was found that 91% of the mothers would not want to work at all during the child's first year, 76% after the child's first birthday, 19% would ideally work only occasionally, and for 4% part-time work would be ideal. After the child's second birthday, most of the mothers would want to work to some extent; 29% would want to work only occasionally, 18% part-time and 5% full-time. After the child's third birthday, 91% of the mothers would want to work, 12% of them occasionally, 39% part-time and 40% full-time. Once the child has reached 4 years of age, 61% of the mothers would like to work full-time and another 31% would like to work part-time. 4% of the mothers with children aged 4 to 5 would like to work only occasionally and only 4% would not want to be employed at all.



Graph 7: Ideal extent of the mother's work according to the child's age. Source: Barvíková et al. (2018, 43)

Given that this research took place in 2018, before the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, it is possible that parents' preferences and ideas about the ideal form of early childhood education and care have changed, but the findings of this study can still serve as a baseline point.

3.3.2 Indicators of (satisfied) demand and their graphic representation

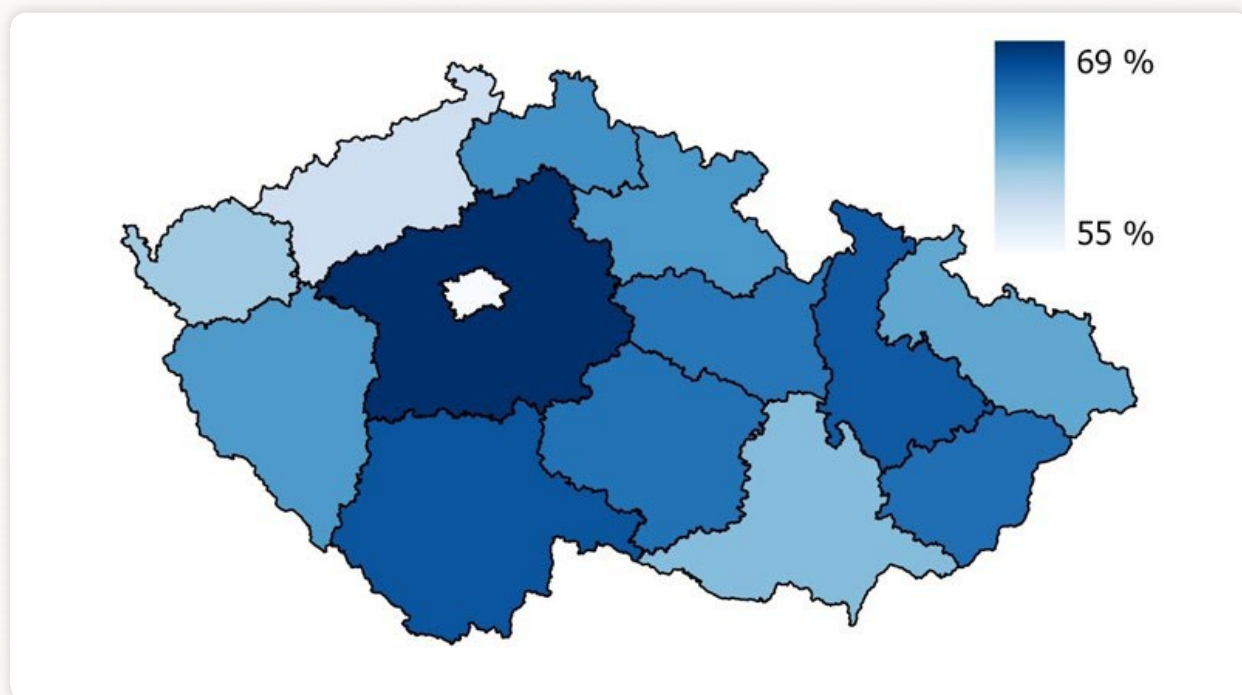
The aim of the quantitative mapping was to obtain an overview of the demand for ECEC facilities. To evaluate the current demand, however, a representative survey would have to be carried out, but such a survey was not part of the assignment. Therefore, in the following section, we look at the level of use of various types of ECEC services and their availability in various locations, which we consider to be an indicator of a satisfied demand. Because of the limits of the available data, which we regularly reiterate in the report, the information provided herein must be seen only as approximate. However, it is more than sufficient to characterise the basic trends as well as weaknesses of the data currently available.

The following cartograms present indicators characterising attendance at various types of kindergartens. Since the numbers of children in some types of kindergartens are low, we present selected indicators in the breakdown by region for reference.

Indicator P1 “Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 years enrolled in a regular kindergarten”

P1 = number of children aged 2–7 enrolled in a regular kindergarten / number of children aged 2–7 in the population

Map 4 shows indicator P1 values for each region.



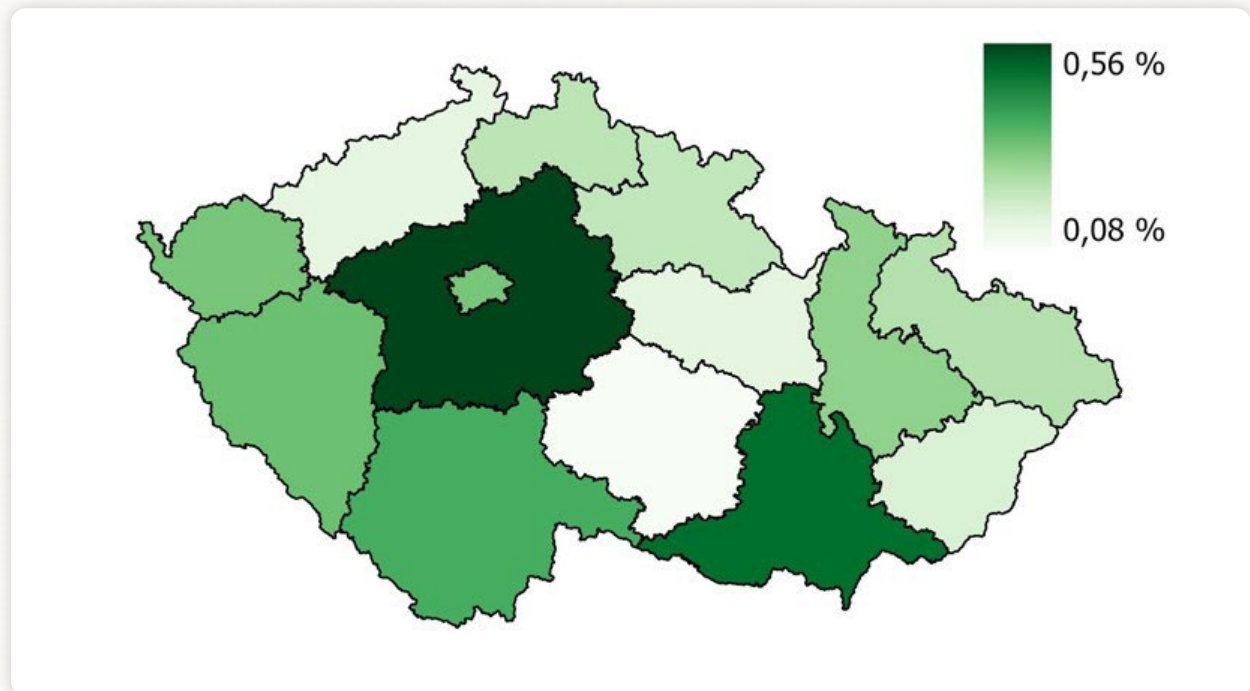
Map 4: Indicator P1 – Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 years enrolled in a regular kindergarten at the regional level as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

When interpreting this indicator it is important to remember that only a relatively small number of 2-year-old children attend a kindergarten (see Graph 1). The values of this indicator range between 55% and 69%, with the Capital City of Prague having the lowest share of children in regular kindergartens. We assume that this is due to the fact that the demand for ECEC is partially covered by other services (see below). The Ústí nad Labem and South Moravian Regions also show fairly low shares of children in regular kindergartens. The largest share is in the circle around Prague. The mean value for this indicator is 63.2%.

Indicator P2 “Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 enrolled in forest kindergartens”

P2 = number of children aged 2–7 enrolled in forest kindergartens / number of children aged 2–7 in the population

Map 5 shows indicator P2 values by region.



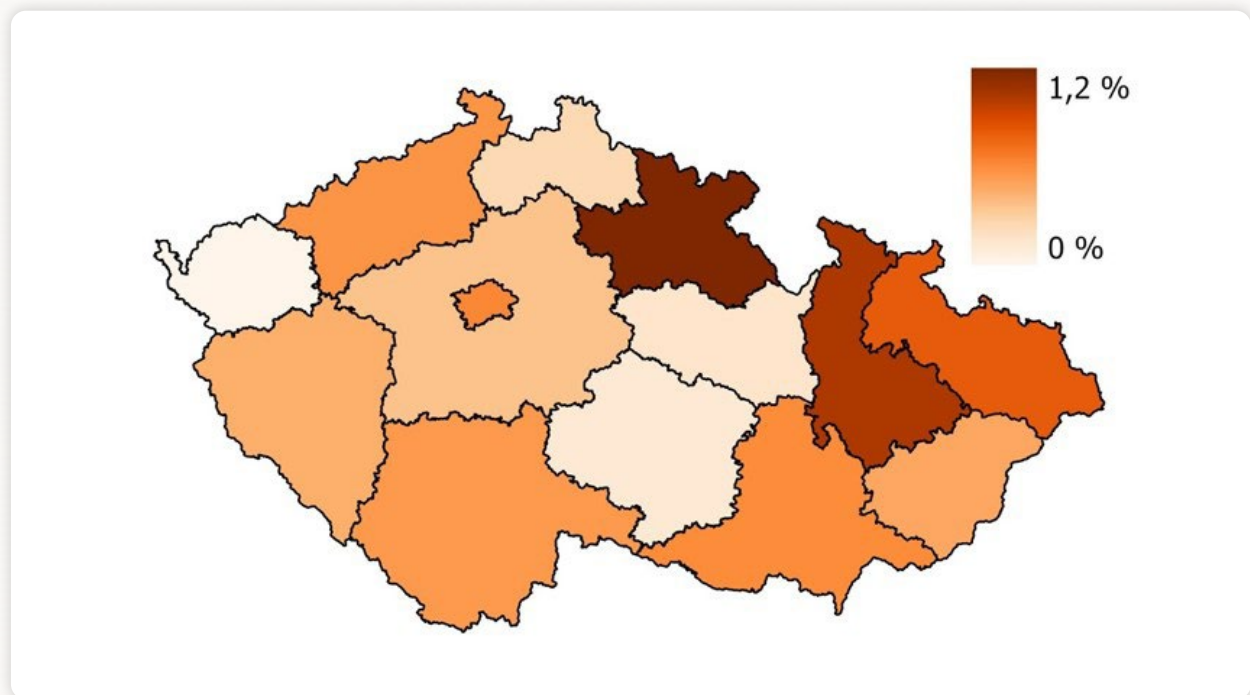
Map 5: Indicator P2 – Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 years enrolled in a forest kindergarten at the regional level as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

The percentage of children attending forest kindergartens is generally very low, which is certainly connected to a low supply. The mean across regions is 0.3%. The indicator reaches the highest values in the Central Bohemian (0.6%) and the South Moravian Regions (0.5%). On the other hand, the lowest percentages are in the Vysočina, Ústí nad Labem and Pardubice Regions.

Indicator P3 “Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 enrolled in kindergartens for children with SEN”

P3 = number of children 2–7 enrolled in a kindergarten for children with SEN / number of children 2–7 in the population

Map 6 shows the values of indicator P3 at the regional level.



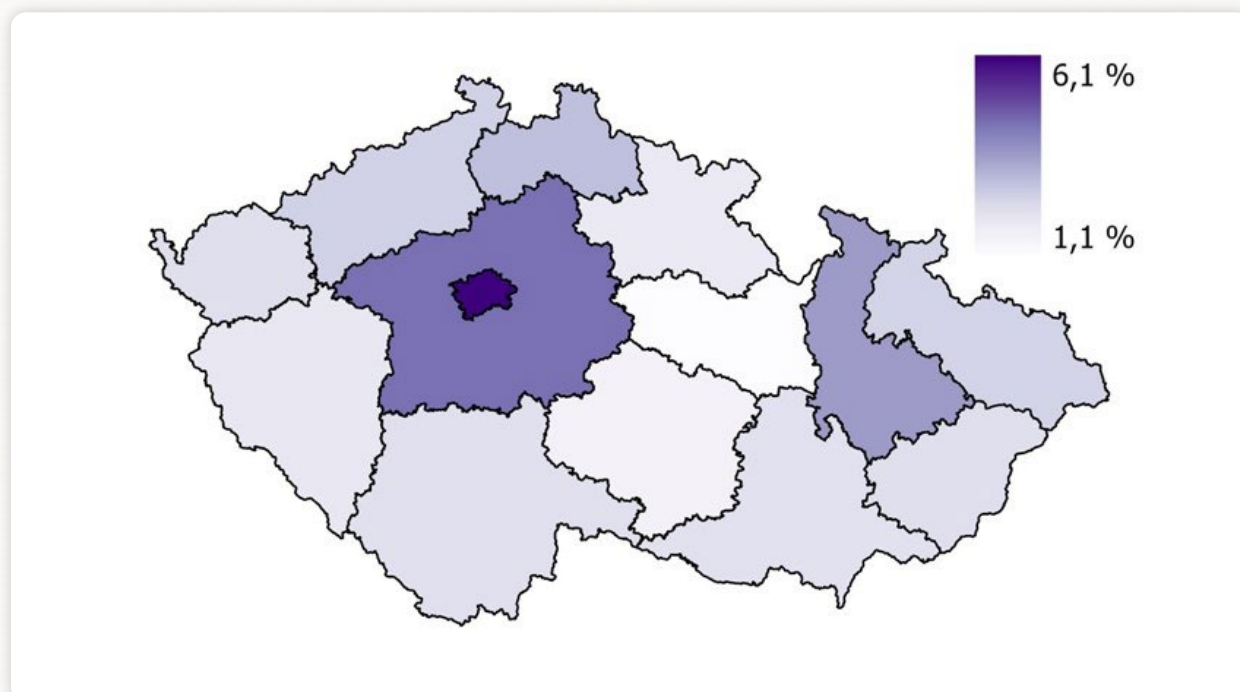
Map 6: Indicator P3 – Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 enrolled in kindergartens for children with SEN at the regional level as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

Attendance of kindergartens for children with SEN in the Czech Republic is very uneven, reaching its highest values in the Hradec Králové and Olomouc Regions and the lowest values in the Vysočina and Karlovy Vary Regions. The mean across regions is 0.5%. When interpreting this indicator, it is important to remember that an inclusive approach to children with SEN is systemically supported and children with SEN are enrolled in regular kindergartens where possible.

Indicator P4 “Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 enrolled in non-public kindergartens”

P4 = number of children aged 2–7 enrolled in non-public kindergartens / number of children aged 2–7 in the population

Map 7 shows the values of indicator P4 at the regional level.



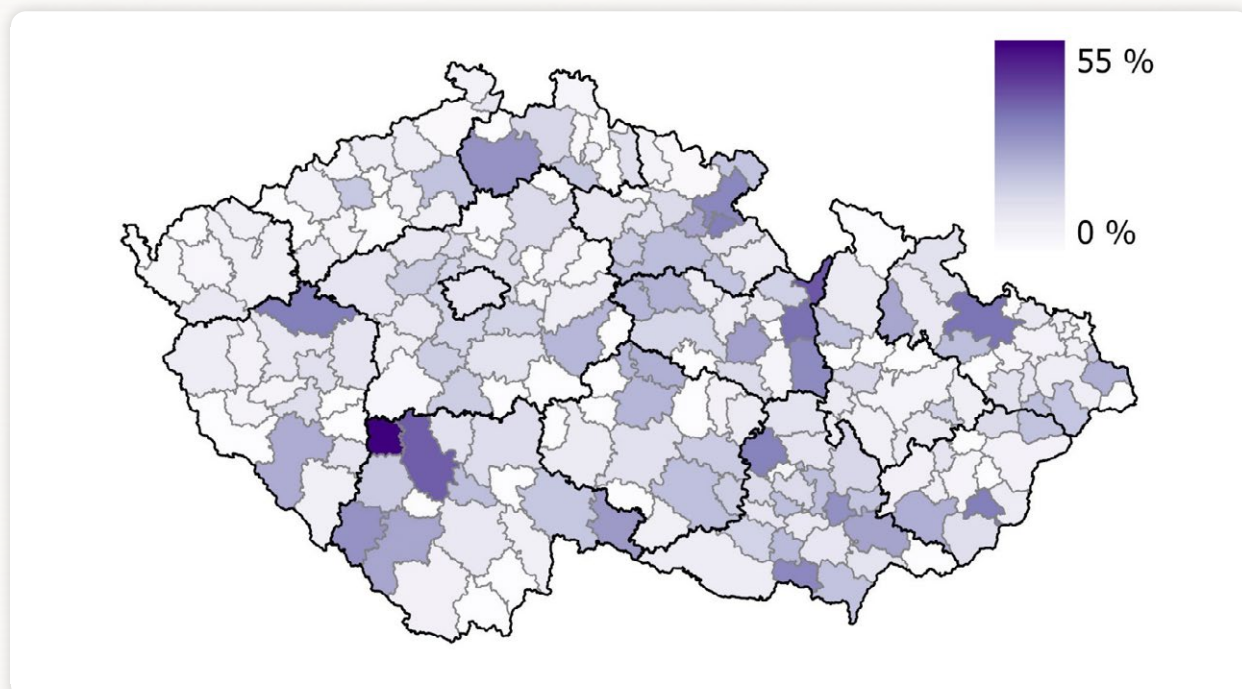
Map 7: Indicator P4 – Percentage of the population of children aged 2–7 enrolled in private kindergartens at the regional level as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

The highest percentage of children attending kindergartens with private and church founders is in Prague (6.1%) and the Central Bohemian Region (4.4%). The lowest proportion of children in church and private kindergartens is in the Pardubice Region (1.1%). The mean across all regions is 2.6%.

Other indicators illustrate attendance of compulsory preschool education presented in the breakdown to the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities (MERs).

Indicator P5 “Percentage of children aged 5+ in individual education”

P5 = number of children aged 5+ entering into individual education / number of children aged 5+ enrolled in kindergartens



Map 8: Indicator P5 – Share of children aged 5+ in individual education at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

Indicator P5 illustrates how many children enrolled in compulsory preschool education enter directly into individual education⁷⁸. This primarily includes two groups of children, which we are not able to distinguish from each other with the available data:

1. children whose parents do not want to enrol them in regular attendance at kindergartens – this group may include children of parents who want to educate them at home or in an unregistered preschool facility, as well as children of parents who are not interested in preschool education at all;
2. children whose parents want to enrol them for regular kindergarten attendance, but the kindergarten to which they have applied has not accepted them for compulsory preschool education – this group may include both children of parents who have not managed to find a place in any institution and children who attend a children's group.

High proportions of children entering individual preschool education indicate a systemic problem with the supply of ECEC facilities in the territory of the relevant MER. However, they may also result from the fact that families who already provide individual education for their older children and who are concentrated around several specific primary schools, may enrol their children in the kindergartens belonging to said primary schools.

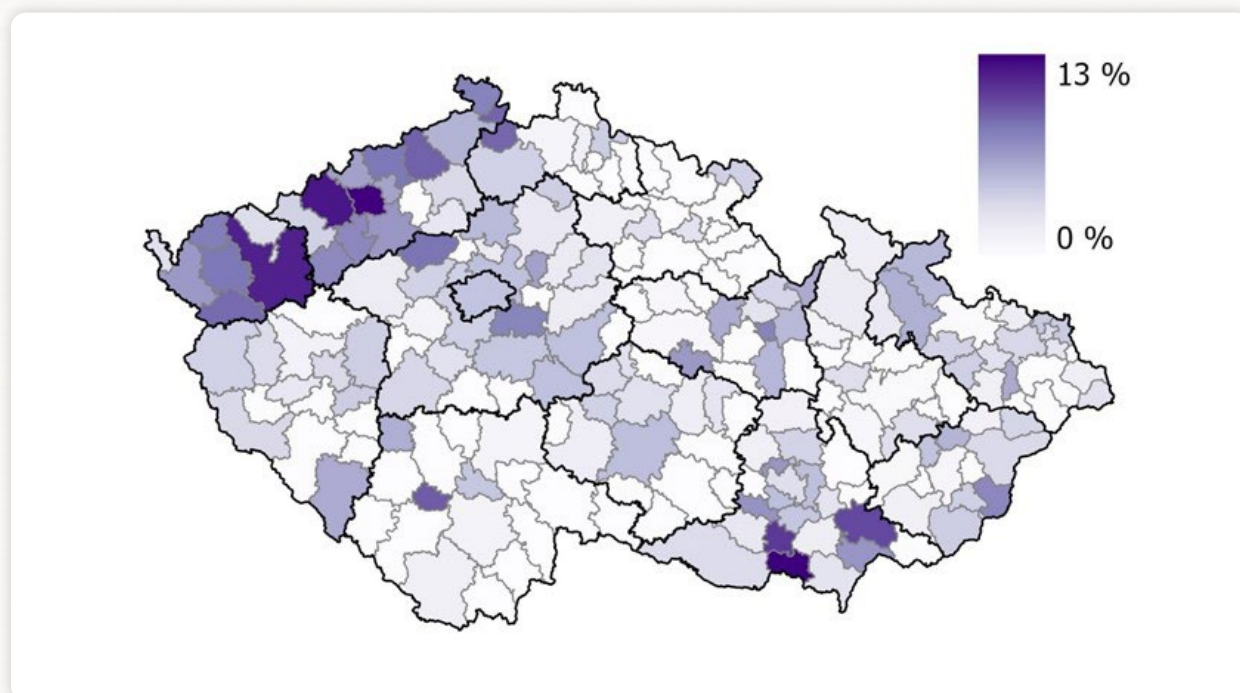
⁷⁸ In the 2022/23 school year, 369,205 children were enrolled in kindergartens, 2,525 of whom were in individual education.

Indicator P6 “Proportion of children aged 6 and 7 in preparatory classes”

P6 = number of children aged 6 and 7 in preparatory classes / number of children aged 6 and 7 in the population (deferred demand)

Indicator P6 illustrates the interest in education in preparatory classes. These are children for whom attendance of a preparatory class is expected to equalise their development, primarily children who have been granted compulsory schooling deferral.

Figure 11 shows the values of indicator P6 for each MER.



Map 9: Indicator P6 – Percentage of children aged 6 and 7 in preparatory classes at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

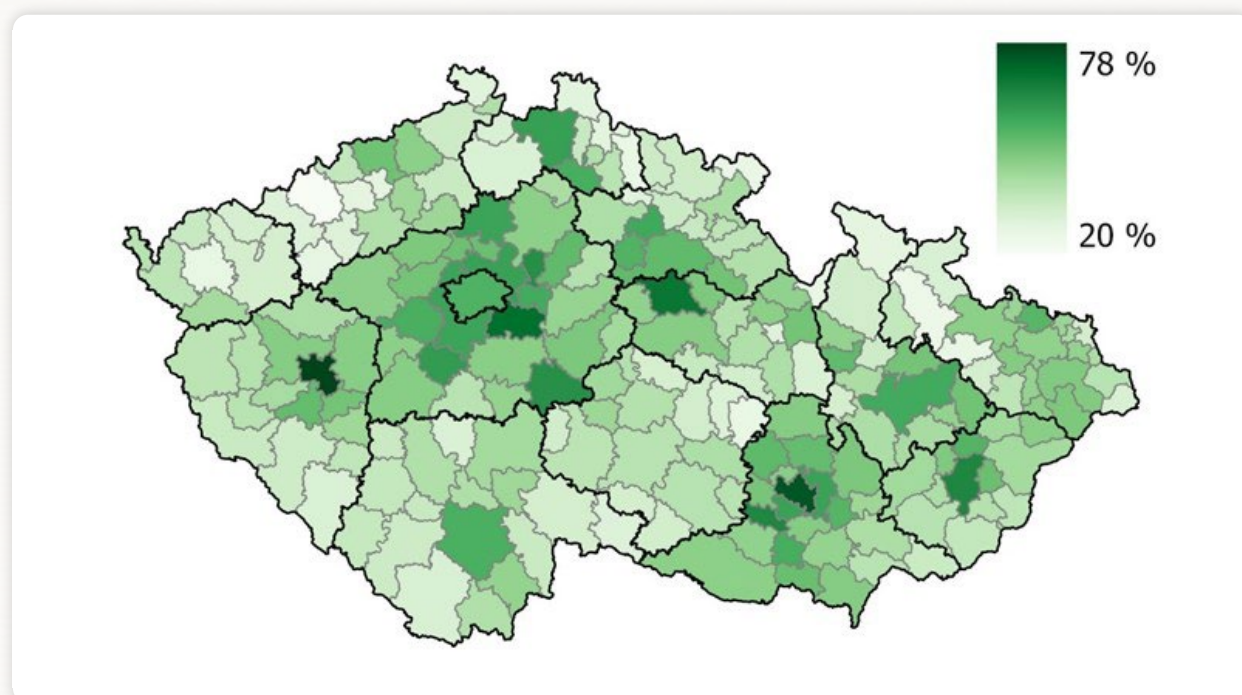
The highest percentage of children in preparatory classes is in the most socio-economically disadvantaged regions in the northwest of the Czech Republic and in southern Moravia. According to the research respondents, in some cases setting up preparatory classes may also be a mechanism by which the founders address the lack of capacity of the kindergarten or the first year of primary school. This strategy is, however, not endorsed by the MoEYS.

Indicator P7 “Proportion of applications submitted per population of children aged 2–5 years”

P7 = Proportion of total applications submitted / number of children aged 2–5 years in the population

Indicator P7 shows the interest in placing children in preschool education in kindergartens before they reach the age at which preschool attendance becomes compulsory, thus indicating areas with high demand.

Map 10 shows the values of indicator P7 for each MER.



Map 10: Indicator P7 – Percentage of kindergarten applications submitted per population of children aged 2–5 years at the level of Municipalities with Extended Responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS, CZSO

As can be seen from the Cartogram 10, areas of high demand include the circles around Prague and Brno and the surrounding area; other large cities such as Plzeň, Pardubice, Liberec, Olomouc and Zlín also show a high demand. The data is skewed by the fact that parents submit more than one application and parents who want to secure a place for their child and fear failure are motivated to submit even more applications in the areas with a high demand.

Unfortunately, the existing data does not allow us to systematically map the use of other services, typically children's groups, nannies, preschool children's centres or adaptation clubs organised within family centres.

3.3.3 Factors influencing demand for ECEC

In this section we present the factors structuring the demand for ECEC. We base these on a qualitative survey taking place in a very short period of time (both the data collection and the analysis took place in January 2024, for more information see Annex 2), which is only an introductory probe and brings limited insights into the issue as a result of its scale. The quantitative research findings are supplemented by findings from other research studies.

The prevailing culture of childcare

Although the Czech society is diversifying increasingly when it comes to childcare, it is dominated by a model in which the mother is the primary caregiver devoted to childcare until the child is about 3 years old. A number of mothers who want to place a child younger than 3 years of age in a care facility have to overcome great backlash from the community: their husbands, parents, in-laws, grandparents and others disagree. They argue that the mother's primary duty is to look after the child, who is too small to attend an ECEC facility. Sometimes the desire to return to work is difficult to defend even in front of their female friends.

For many women, however, the placement of the child and going back to work are very important, not only for economic reasons, but also because they do not do well on parental leave dedicated to full-time childcare. Some women suffer from a great deal of loneliness or a certain loss of self-esteem, and exclusive childcare does not bring them self-fulfilment.

Basically, when I say it in one sentence, I have been trying to go back since my first child was born. When during my first year I found out that I really couldn't just stay at home and deal with nappies, etc. (FG M04)

The current prevailing culture of childcare also implicitly and often explicitly assumes that a parent should engage in economic activities while the child is being cared for in an ECEC facility – work, do business or prepare for these activities through studies. Attendance of a children's group is, after all, directly dependent on the parents' employment. Preventive physical and mental healthcare and well-being (including "mere" rest), nurturing the relationships with their partner, co-workers or friends, housekeeping and family life management, leisure and other aspects of the sphere outside of work remain insufficient grounds for encouraging child attendance in ECEC facilities, especially for children under the age of 3. Neither is the potential benefit to the child and the child's development considered a worthy reason for their ECEC placement.

Forms of family cohabitation

The form of family cohabitation is also reflected in the demand for ECEC facilities. Parents who share a common household can share childcare responsibilities, while providing childcare tends to present a much greater financial and logistical challenge for single parents. Families also differ in the availability of grandparents to provide regular or occasional care.

Family's cultural and social capital

Some parents who have not experienced the institutional environment of kindergartens themselves (for example parents growing up in a socio-culturally disadvantaged environment) are concerned about it. These concerns tend to be justified because it is often difficult for them to adapt to the institution's expectations both in terms of parental competences as well as in terms of the competences of a child whose psychomotor development sometimes does not correspond to the age norm (Greger et al., 2021). Possible bullying is also a major concern as, for example, it is very important for Roma parents that their children are happy and content in kindergarten and they tend to worry for their children. Parents also pass their negative experiences on to children, who then enter the institutional environment with concerns, creating a vicious circle that complicates the adaptation to the facility. In some cases, parents postpone institutional care to the latest possible time and enrol their child in preschool education only once it is compulsory for them to attend.

It can be difficult for parents who are foreigners (typically, for example, Ukrainian mothers) to navigate the supply, the enrolment systems and the requirements of institutions.

Some parents do not consider it appropriate to place a child in a public kindergarten because they are afraid that their child will suffer and will not receive proper care in a large group with rigid rules. They are usually afraid of demotivated or strict teachers who will not sufficiently aid the child's development or will restrict their freedom. Parents' experience from their own childhood and the current experience of other parents, as well as social media, play a big role in reinforcing parents' fears regarding public kindergartens. Because of the capacity overload or the need to return to work before a child is admitted to a kindergarten, some parents gain direct experience with facilities where children are provided with more individual care than in a public kindergarten (typically, children's groups). This allows them to compare their experience of a different facility with that of a kindergarten and generally leads to higher expectations for the latter. Due to better financial accessibility and greater proximity to the family home – which is associated with the expectation that a child will make friends in the neighbourhood (from the same catchment area) – parents still end up choosing a public kindergarten at least for the compulsory preschool year. For parents from large cities or their surrounding areas, a private kindergarten which also offers preschool education is considered a viable alternative to a public kindergarten. The expectation of a respectful environment, as well as English language classes, tend to be the main factors there. In some cases, parents admit that they have to cut back elsewhere to pay for the child's preschool attendance, but consider this a necessary expense. Parents' social capital often plays a role when choosing alternatives to public kindergartens – friends, acquaintances or neighbours who have already dealt with similar situations.

Type of primary caregivers' economic activity

In Czech households, mothers are still the primary caregivers, while fathers are often seen as the “family's breadwinner” (Křečková Tůmová et al., 2023). The Czech labour market and childcare arrangements do not allow mothers in most professions to combine work and childcare or for parents to share the two roles more equally. Jobs with reduced or flexible work hours and childcare for children under 2 years of age are simply not available. Returning to some professions after parental leave is very complicated, if not impossible.

I started a job, but not the job I wanted... I used to be a waitress and I am also a trained waitress, and I really enjoyed the job, but after maternity leave I started working in Albert [translator's note: a supermarket chain], because they want twelve [hour shifts] everywhere...(IR, M12)

For myself, I actually wish it wasn't such a struggle. To be able to maintain my career, too, with some limitations, of course. But not like getting out for three years and then nothing, just having to fend for yourself. (FG, M01)

Mothers who take up full-time work after parental leave often appreciate full-time care. They would, however, also appreciate childcare options other than an ECEC facility in case a child gets sick. Especially in ECEC facilities with larger numbers of children recurrent illness is very common, which makes it much more difficult for mothers to return to work. Only some of them can, or want to, fully use help of other family members, such as grandparents, to look after their children.

Basically, the whole time I am struggling with what to do with the children when they are sick. This has [...] really been one of the main struggles from the very beginning – sickness, who will look after the child when they are sick. (FG, M04)

Mothers whose profession allows flexible or reduced working hours would often, on the contrary, welcome care only on selected days of the week.

Some mothers do not return to their original position after parental leave for various reasons. In these cases they would appreciate the possibility of pursuing further education combined with receiving childcare or other support.

Frankly, I am already afraid of what will happen from September; unfortunately, I have to give up and I have to find some work that can be done from home. With my education it's pretty wild; just everyone wants some graphic designers from home or accountants and so on, so it's wild. I had no idea when I went on maternity leave that it was so terrible to return to work after. (FG, M04)

State family policy

The demand for ECEC facilities is also shaped by the state's family policy, specifically the parameters of parental benefit provision. It can therefore be expected that the recent change in the provision of parental benefit, which introduces a reduction in the use of the benefit to a maximum of three years starting on 1 January 2024⁷⁹, will lead to an increased demand for ECEC facilities.

Umbrella organisations working with families (Family Union / *Rodinný svaz*, z.s., Network for Family / *Sít pro rodinu*, z.s. and the Union of Centres for Family and Community / *Unie center pro rodinu a komunitu*, z.s.) were against the reduction of parental leave⁸⁰. According to their statement, the basic conditions for an earlier return to work – a sufficient offer of flexible, especially part-time, positions for both men and women (the Czech Republic has only about a quarter of such positions in comparison with the EU average⁸¹) and a sufficient supply of kindergartens and children's groups, especially in some regions – have not been established in the Czech Republic. Additionally, they pointed out that the state would not save money by doing this, as the amount of money dedicated to parental leave remains constant (CZK 300,000 for one child, CZK 450,000 for twins) and parents can decide the manner in which they want to receive it. Their return to the job market, however, depends on the existing job market offer, the inadequacy of which has been described above.

Parenting style

Some parents place great emphasis on the educational concept of facilities when choosing from among them. This means that they consider not only the physical or financial accessibility of a facility as important, but also an individualised approach, mutual communication, and the sharing of modern elements of education. Some parents who have multiple children would also appreciate if care was provided in such a way that one child could spend time with their peers, while the parents could focus their attention on the other one of their children.

⁷⁹ The provision of parental benefits is regulated by Act No. 117/1995 Coll., on state social welfare (<https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/1995-117>)

⁸⁰ <https://www.rodiny.cz/nesouhlasne-vyjadreni-k-navrhu-na-zkraceni-rodicovske-dovolene/>

⁸¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00159/default/table?lang=en&category=t_labour.t_employ.t_lfsi.t_lfsi_employ

Many Roma mothers find it very difficult when their child does not want to go to kindergarten or cries at kindergarten. It is of the utmost importance to them that their children are happy. For this reason, they sometimes give up on the child's attendance at an ECEC facility. A regular kindergarten regime (which entails an obligation to get up in the morning) can also be an obstacle to the child's attendance. Some mothers, on the other hand, appreciate the regular regime.

My cousin used to put her daughter in kindergarten, she never wanted to go, so she stopped putting her there; it was the same with my other friend... See, Roma mothers are like that, they want their kids to be happy and when they see a little unhappiness or anything like that they immediately retract... (a Roma mother)

Child's special educational needs

Parents of children with SEN place them in kindergartens, children's groups, day care centres or in the preparatory grade of special primary schools. Parents of children with more severe disabilities sometimes prefer to take care of their children at home, especially in the case of younger children, because the child is especially vulnerable (e.g. because they have a feeding tube).

The awareness of parents of children with SEN about the option of attending ECEC facilities and the provision of support related to it is problematic. Furthermore, the operating hours in such facilities is not always fully satisfactory. In the case of children's groups, financial accessibility is also an issue – without the use of grant schemes, children's groups which focus on children with SEN are unaffordable for a number of parents. On the other hand, parents whose child is enrolled in a children's group are happy that they can attend only on certain days of the week (e.g. Monday, Wednesday, Friday).

When choosing a facility for a child with SEN, the parents' main points of consideration tend to be the accessibility of the facility and the availability of other services that are important when caring for a child with SEN, such as the availability of assistance services, the way in which individual care is provided (e.g. administering medication), special diet options (e.g. a gluten-free diet) or the availability of compensatory aids and tools.

Parents of some children with SEN choose specialised care primarily as a necessary precursor for starting attendance at a regular primary school as the child being placed in a special primary school or a class for children with SEN is not something they want for their child. They primarily try to place the child in a regular kindergarten; if that is not possible, they look for a special "speech therapy" kindergarten (kindergarten established according to Section 16 (9) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll. for children with a speech impediment) or a children's group aimed at children with developmental disorders. In specialised facilities, parents appreciate when children are encouraged to be independent. They also appreciate the efforts to educate the general public about developmental disorders through social media.

In some cases, parents perceive the approach of ECEC staff as problematic. They encounter a lack of support or outright labelling of the child, even in front of other children and parents. Negative experiences are also reported in the case of public kindergartens. What is otherwise perceived as an advantage, i.e. the proximity of a preschool, can turn into a disadvantage in such a case, as the child may be at risk of longer-term stigmatisation as a result. The inclusion of a child needing higher-level additional support measures in a kindergarten can lead to a reduction in the kindergarten's capacity and thus be perceived

negatively by other parents. Securing a teaching assistant is also sometimes problematic. Children's groups and private kindergartens are in most cases perceived as being more open to the needs of both children and their parents. This is attributed both to a lower number of children per carer at such settings and also to a less conservative regime, which allows for more flexibility.

Financial accessibility of services

For many parents, the key attribute is the amount paid for care and education. Where possible, they opt for care and education which does not place an economic burden on them. For families with very low income, this may mean primarily taking care of the child in their home (especially if they are receiving parental benefit for a younger child) or care being provided by relatives. For families in the middle- and higher-income brackets, the financial costs are usually weighed against the perceived quality of the services and their distance from their home or workplace. Price is therefore not the main selection criterion. Nevertheless, some options in the system are generally considered to be financially unaffordable (for example full-day nanny care or full-week attendance at a children's group). For children under 3 years of age, solutions that do not exceed a monthly cost of about CZK 3,000–7,000 per child are preferred. If the services are more expensive, parents tend to use them on a less than full-time basis. Mothers usually opt for full-time care only for children over 3 years of age. The main choice in that case is public kindergartens. This attitude can reflect both the amount of parental benefit and the fact that the fee in public kindergartens is rather nominal. If mothers were to spend a larger part of their income on childcare provided by another person, in most cases they would prefer to provide it themselves. However, there is a group of parents who are prepared to pay high fees for preschool education even if, objectively speaking, they exceed the family's financial capacity. Such parents have specific requirements for preschool care that they believe can be fulfilled only by non-public facilities.

Physical accessibility of services

Another important factor is the physical proximity of services, so that parents' work and other duties can be completed within the opening hours of the preschool.

In some cases, the lack of physical accessibility of facilities leads to career changes, regardless of economic status – parents (especially mothers) look for work in the vicinity of a facility that has the capacity to enrol their child. They opt for work that allows them to place their child in a preschool care and education facility even if they do not find work that matches their qualifications and experience.

Parents are willing to commute for care and education, but they state that the length of the commute should not exceed 20–30 minutes. Especially for parents living in smaller municipalities, this usually means that they must drive their child to the ECEC facility because the facility is in a different town and public transport does not run there directly or does not run often enough to be convenient.

In addition to adapting work to the available facilities, another option to respond to the physical availability of services is that both parents, and possibly other family members, are involved in dropping off and picking up the children, or that mothers taking the children to the same facility take turns picking up the children. If the parents have not found a facility in the municipality, this is often only a temporary solution (e.g. as long as both parents work in the same city or the facility is conveniently on their way to work). Family situations can also be complicated if there are more children in the family and they cannot be placed

in the same facility or they can only go to one facility together for a limited time. In cases where there is a need to commute, a change of facility happens often, even if both the child and the parents were satisfied with it (change of work, pregnancy with another child).

The importance of the availability of services in one place is also mentioned in the context of preschool education of Roma children. In her interview, the principal of a segregated school with a predominance of Roma pupils justified the high attendance of preparatory classes at their school precisely by the fact that it is natural for parents to place a younger child in a preparatory class at the primary school when they are already taking older children to school in the same building.

Time accessibility of services

The accessibility afforded by the facility's operating hours is an important factor for parents. For working mothers, it is important that the facility's operating hours correspond to their working hours (plus the time for commuting to/from the workplace), which is often difficult to achieve. If the facility were to serve the children of parents whose work hours start between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m., this would mean a range of operating hours from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The lack of available ECEC with optimal operating hours discourages mothers from starting or expanding economic activities and, if they do have to start or expand economic activities, this makes the logistics of their everyday life much more complicated and ultimately has a negative impact on their well-being. This, in turn, has repercussions for both their work and their child's upbringing and personal life.

Especially in kindergartens, parents described some psychological pressure to keep their child from being the last child remaining in the kindergarten at the end of the day. In one case, a functioning model of organisation was described where classes in which children who are still waiting for their parents from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. are joined.

Demographic trends

Demographic trends are one of the fundamental factors influencing demand for ECEC. Demographic trends forecasts indicate a continuation of the current trends, i.e. a constant pressure on ECEC facilities in large cities and their surroundings and a gradual decrease in demand especially in peripheral regions (Kováčová, 2023).

Number of children in a family

If a family only has one child, there is often a higher perceived need to gradually get them used to other children. If parents find a facility that suits them, they generally appreciate if the child can attend it until they start primary school. In the case of one child, it is easier to financially secure a private facility for the entire time, even if payments are increased after the child no longer falls into the under-3-years category.

Especially if there are two or more children in the family who fall into different age categories and thus cannot attend one type of facility, parents would appreciate if the two facilities were at least near each other or if, for example, a children's group could be operated together with a kindergarten. This is highly unusual in the current setting. The density and capacity of kindergartens is significantly higher than that of other types of ECEC.

Refugee status of refugees from Ukraine

The situation of foreigners is specific. Interviews with Ukrainian mothers showed that accessibility is made fundamentally more complicated by the lack of information. Mothers do not know how to apply for a place in a kindergarten, when to apply, and especially how to act if a request for the enrolment of a child is not granted. According to the respondents,

kindergartens are neither able nor willing to provide information in many cases. Ukrainian mothers use the methods they used at home, but these do not work in the Czech Republic. The result is often giving up on a child's enrolment in a kindergarten even in a situation where a child could be placed in one. For Ukrainian mothers, in most cases, only public kindergartens are considered, as they do not have the funds to pay the fees for private facilities. Furthermore, they would need the facilities to operate for a long time, as they often work long shifts.

Ukrainian mothers generally do not have specific requirements for the quality of the care provided; they want their child to learn Czech and for the kindergarten to prepare them for school, because they cannot do so because of their workload and poor knowledge of the Czech language. They do not protest even if their child is not doing well in the kindergarten, as they do not want to draw attention to themselves. However, the experience of their child suffering in school because they do not understand the language and being excluded from joint activities is not infrequent. More emancipated mothers with bad experiences look for kindergartens which have experience with children of foreigners and are not afraid of them.



I'm content with how education looks here in Czechia; it prepares kids for school. I think that's important in my situation, because he is a foreigner and I can't give him Czech. It's important that it's preschool education, which is also why we changed kindergartens, because I knew that in the kindergarten where we were before they were not going to give him as much time and give him Czech as well as in this kindergarten, where they have experience with foreigners. (a Ukrainian mother)

The situation is very specific in the case of a child with special educational needs. For mothers who do not know the Czech environment and have limited knowledge of the language it is a huge problem to even ensure that the child gets the necessary assessment (through an appointment with a psychological and educational counselling centre or a special educational centre). At the same time, they face a shortage of places in special kindergartens. According to the information from the META organisation, mothers with a disabled child most often choose to return to Ukraine, because they are unable to organise the necessary care for their child here. If the proper care is organised (placing the child in a special kindergarten, providing the necessary medical care), on the other hand, mothers of disabled children are motivated to stay because they consider the care to be of high quality and the society to be friendly to children with SEN. To achieve this, however, they usually need the help of supporting NGOs.

The problem of lack of information does not only concern Ukrainian families, but foreigners in general. They generally obtain information from social media that reinforces some harmful stereotypes and support them in choosing a variety of expensive private facilities even in situations where their children would best benefit from a standard public service.

Perception of the advantages and disadvantages of each type of facilities from the parents' point of view

Kindergarten

Kindergartens are appreciated for their financial accessibility, the density of the kindergartens network and the fact that children get together with children from the neighbourhood.

First of all, the children's group would have been quite expensive already and we would have had to take it to the X. I had the second baby at that moment, yeah, so it was much more practical for us to put him here [in the kindergarten in the village]. (IDI, D1)

At the same time, kindergartens generally have larger buildings and gardens than children's groups.

Parents who had experience with children's groups or other forms of ECEC mostly perceived kindergartens as less suitable, primarily because of the large number of children in the class and the lack of individual care and communication.

I was at some of the open days of the state kindergartens. It kind of scared me, like the number of children and so on. In that, the children's group is better. But of course financially, especially if a person has more children, it's a very expensive private facility like this and it's not even that close. And then if I go to work, I don't know if it's completely practical to take the child somewhere, then rush to work (FG M02, respondent expecting a second child).

In some cases, the perception of the problematic characteristics of kindergartens also reflects their own memories: "I remember the kindergarten; it was a terrible struggle."

Parents would appreciate more information about what is going on in the kindergarten.

Like from the state kindergarten, you don't see a picture of the child for a whole year, or what they were doing in the kindergarten. (IDI, D1)

More flexibility in adaptation might also help in the integration of Roma children into the kindergarten.

Maybe more with those mums so that the children could be there. I also felt quite sad that I couldn't be there with him anymore on the third day... (IR, M12)

Children's groups

In some cases parents do not know that their child is attending a children's group; they refer to it as a private kindergarten or a private nursery. Some of the previously established children's groups do not yet have the term "children's group" in their name⁸². Mothers who use the services of children's groups have generally placed the child in them between the age of 2 and 3, sometimes earlier. They usually prefer collective facilities for children of this age to individual care (nannies), but they also make decisions on the basis of their specific

82 Registered providers are legally obliged to use the phrase "children's group" in their name. At the same time, the name cannot be used by a service which is not registered. Providers that were registered prior to 30 September 2021 must amend their children's group's name to comply with the law by 1 October 2024.

needs and options. They often feel that between the age of 2 and 3 children are already more likely to benefit from the presence of other children. The care in children's groups for children under the age of 3 is also still financially more affordable than nanny care, in part because of the state support, and is more predictable for families. Especially in larger cities and their surroundings, it is easier to get the necessary information about children's groups, usually from friends, acquaintances or neighbours, than it is in the case of nannies. Parents could consider placing their child in a children's group for a shorter period of time once the child turns 1 year of age. It depends on the age structure and the number of children in the children's groups that are being considered. It is not a barrier if the child still uses nappies and does not speak, but it can be a barrier if they do not yet walk.

In many cases, children's groups are also used for a short time before the child enters kindergarten, especially in cases where the child has reached 3 years of age later than in August and did not manage to enrol in a public kindergarten in the given school year. Children usually attend either for a few days a week in the mornings, or a whole week, or a few days a week, including sleeping in the afternoon and the afternoon programme. Mothers then work part-time, take advantage of the option of working from home or take care of their younger child.

Children's groups are also used by parents of children with SEN if they find one that takes into account their child's specific needs, which is sometimes impossible in regular kindergartens.

None of the respondents who considered placing their child in a children's group, or used their services directly, reported that they found out about the offer in their neighbourhood through the MoLSA register.



Most of them choose the services of the facility so that the payments do not overly burden their family budget (CZK 3,000–7,000 per month for non-Prague respondents).

Parents appreciate that children's groups allow attendance only for part of the day, for some days of the week, or that it can be limited to some weeks or months, in addition to daily attendance. It is not uncommon for a child not to attend a children's group for a whole year, or to attend, for example, in the autumn and then return in the spring. The reasons for interrupted attendance vary (unsuitable children's group, bridging the period before a child is admitted to a state kindergarten, siblings can no longer go to the same children's group together, the birth of another child, the child is frequently sick). In some cases, it is possible to plan attendance in the form of a booking system or to purchase a package of entries for the following period.

Parents also appreciated that children's groups operate in the summer, unlike regular kindergartens. For example, in the case of a children's group set up by an employer, this group was also open in the summer to older children who attended kindergartens during the school year (the attendance of older children had to be booked in advance).

Parents also appreciate the more favourable adult-to-child ratio. In addition, a higher number of caring staff and a smaller number of children generally also translates into much more individualised communication with parents (communication during the drop-off and pick-up of a child, closed groups on social media such as WhatsApp or Facebook, sending photos of their happy child during the day).

Children's groups generally have relatively clearly established processes, both regarding the child's gradual adjustment to an unfamiliar environment and group, and regarding attendance.

In most children's groups, children get used to the group gradually (e.g. the first visit lasts only one hour), with the child's attendance gradually increasing (an adaptation period of about 1 to 2 weeks).

For many families, full-time care in children's groups is financially unaffordable, even if the children's group applies for a subsidy and thus has to comply with the legal fee cap for children under 3 years of age. In addition to the impractical commute, the increase in payments for children over 3 years of age is often the reason for moving the child to a kindergarten even if the parents were satisfied with the chosen children's group and its regime. The members of the working group have also pointed out that the financial unaffordability is also caused by other financial demands which are above the prescribed fee cap in the case of children younger than 3.

Some parents consider the necessity of parents' employment to be a barrier to entry, while others are discouraged by the demanding administration.

Adaptation clubs operating at family centres

A big advantage of adaptation clubs is precisely the fact that they are set up at family centres, which are visited by mothers with children from their early childhood (for example they use playrooms), so adaptation to the child's independent stay tends to be easier than in a completely new environment. In addition, family centres are naturally prepared to consider the individual needs of both the children and the parents. Mothers appreciate the gradual adaptation in a familiar welcoming environment, as well as the community dimension of the facility, which naturally links childcare with other community activities.

Forest clubs / Forest kindergartens

Many parents who have their children in a forest kindergarten, but especially in a forest club, have specific demands concerning their children's education. They want their child to spend a lot of time in a natural environment, to be given freedom, and to be content and balanced in the kindergarten. Some parents value the cultivation of physical endurance and physical fitness, but this is far from being the case with all parents who place their children in forest clubs. For many of these parents, a public kindergarten is out of the question from the beginning and they search among private or alternative kindergartens, with some having experimented with Montessori method of education but finding it too constraining and performance-oriented. For some of these parents, a forest club ends up being the only option, even though they sometimes see increasing physical endurance as overburdening the child. One motivation for choosing a forest club is often also the refusal to vaccinate their child. These parents are usually prepared to overcome obstacles in the form of long commute and high fees. Parents consider the children's attendance of the forest facility to be so important that they adapt the family's life and their own work arrangements to it. If the fees for the facility are too high, they place their child in the club only for a few days a week and on the other days they stay at home with the child.

When a new guide is being sought, they are looking for a person who really has something to pass on to the children. But frankly, it's not so much looking at a piece of paper as at the approach. The parents who go to a forest club aren't usually parents who don't try a respectful approach in some way, etc. (FG M02, a mother of three, who is also a guide at the forest club)

Centres for preschool children

Parents often attend a centre for children and youth/leisure centre for exercise activities with the children and the children then naturally transit to a programme in which they function independently. At the same time, parents have confidence in the facility because they are themselves users of its services.

The disadvantage of a CPC is that it does not offer meals (children have to bring snacks from home) and its operation is limited. For children aged 2 to 3 years, it is usually from 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. three times a week, for older children from 8.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. every working day. This means that a CPC does not cover the need for day care for parents working full-time.

Nannies

The use of nannies tends to be limited to specific situations, such as occasional assistance with care or occasional babysitting. The family usually approaches nannies for whom the family gets a recommendation or whom they know directly. In some cases, it is a matter of informal mutual assistance among friends, while in other cases the service is professionalised. Despite this, it is not usual for households to enter into contracts with a nanny or for the nanny to invoice for their services. Only more extensive and/or longer-term cooperation takes a more official form, which is extremely rare. In one case, the respondent said that their nanny was a family acquaintance who, after helping out in families while studying, had gained a qualification as a professional nanny and started working in a children's group.

In the case of short-term nanny assistance, parents generally do not place high demands on them. The child is supposed to be comfortable with the nanny and is supposed to survive in good health, in which case the parents do not need a professional nanny, but simply a reliable vetted person.

To use the services of nannies more, mothers would prefer if the service was systematically registered, guaranteed and supported in a similar way as kindergartens are. The problem in the current system is the material and financial unaffordability of the service, especially in the form of full-time childcare at home. The lack of state support either pushes professional nannies into the grey economy or they end up choosing a different profession (e.g. nannies in a children's group). If nannies were to pay tax on their income, the arrangement would not pay off for either party. Working parents believe that when subsidising ECEC, the state should not pay as much attention to the child's age, because the child's parents work and pay taxes just the same regardless of the child's age. A quite possible hourly fee for a nanny service is around CZK 150–200. For financial reasons, sometimes the parents themselves do not seek the services of nannies, but of babysitters.

Well, as far as babysitters are concerned, that's what I also tried to look for. Luckily, I found a friend there [...]. So I did use a babysitter, but in a way that I actually approached her privately and not through a babysitter website. That's where I discovered her photograph, so I knew who she was and that's how I approached her. The babysitters are good, but they're strangers. (FG M01)

Domestica's CEO Eva Kopečná, who is a member of the Sector Council and the head of the working group for the preparation of the rating standard for nannies for children up to the start of compulsory school attendance and nannies for children in a children's group, added that the professional qualification of a nanny in the National Qualifications System was originally defined as a caregiver in the family, "nanny for children up to the start of compulsory school attendance". The professional qualification of a "nanny for children in a children's group" was subsequently derived from this professional qualification and became a key professional qualification for caregivers in children's groups. However, less attention is paid to the original profession. Although these are specifically qualified people, families mostly need them on an ad hoc basis, often in the same way as when they use the care of relatives (for example, the child is ill and cannot go to kindergarten and the parent has to go to work). In most cases, they cannot afford a more systematic care of a child by a professional nanny because of the lack of tax breaks or other support measures.

3.3.4 Summary

Any systematic data collection concerning the demand for various forms of ECEC is missing in the Czech Republic. The latest available quantitative data on the demand are from 2018, leading to a lack of comprehensive information on how the demand was changed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the influx of refugees from Ukraine, as well as data on whether the requirements for regularity of care have changed.

According to the available analyses, demand in regard to the use of various attendance regimes at ECEC facilities is in principle not matched by supply. As Barvíková et al. (2018) state, roughly 10% of parents would consider care at ECEC facilities already before the child's first birthday, albeit about half of them only occasionally. Between the child's first and second birthdays, the share of the group of parents interested in regular care is higher by about 5 pp, while the parents' interest then increases sharply between the child's second and third birthdays, when more than a third of parents would want regular care and another fifth would want occasional care. From the age of 3, almost 90% of parents prefer regular care, and from the age of 4, practically all parents prefer regular care. However, the available data clearly suggest that the demand for ECEC facilities is not satisfied

even for children aged 3 years and older, who are entitled to a place in a kindergarten under the applicable legislation.

As the indicators of the satisfied demand show, the demand is very unevenly distributed regionally. In some places (especially around Prague), there is great uncertainty about the placement of a child – whether the child can be successfully placed in a kindergarten, children's group or other facility. Mothers cannot plan their lives, they do not know whether they will be able to start work or not, and some find themselves in a very difficult situation.

A number of factors influence the demand for ECEC facilities. In addition to the child's age and specific needs, these are the beliefs of the mother and those in her immediate surroundings regarding the desired care provided to the child and parenting style, the family situation (including economic provision), the mother's desire to return to work and her profession, the family policy of the state, the status of foreigners and refugees, and the physical and financial availability of ECEC services.

The current system setup is very problematic with regard to the gradual adaptation of children to ECEC facilities and, above all, the gradual involvement of mothers in economic activity. On the one hand, the system assumes that the vast majority of children under the age of 3 will be exclusively in the mother's care, on the other hand, it expects that the child will start full-time institutional care on 1 September after its third birthday, five days a week, and the mother will start full-time work. At the same time, it does not systematically provide care for the period from when the child is 3 to the start of attendance at a kindergarten, which in extreme cases can last practically a whole year (for children born in September).

In many cases, parents would prefer, both for themselves and for their child, a more gradual transition to institutional care and the associated more gradual transition to a full-time workload. In this context, parents mention a greater need for a supply of part-time and home-based work options on the one hand, and for adaptation clubs, nannies, babysitting services and children's groups on the other.

In some cases, because of the greater proximity and price, mothers would prefer a catchment kindergarten to a children's group, but the barrier may be that they need to place the child starting on a different date than 1 September or that the child will not yet have reached the age of 3 on 1 September. In some cases, parents are discouraged by the large number of children in classes or the catchment kindergarten may have a bad reputation (for example a disrespectful environment or overworked teachers).

Parents would definitely prefer that children do not have to get used to other facilities as often, but this is prevented by the setup of both the children's groups and the kindergartens. They think it is a good thing that in some cases there is a connection between children's groups and kindergartens or the preschool grades of kindergartens and primary schools.

From a regional point of view, it would be useful in the future to concentrate targeted efforts on areas where demand outstrips supply. From a system point of view, it is particularly advisable to create databases for systematic mapping, monitoring and evaluation of supply and demand (see also Chapter 4).

3.4 Analysis of the gap between supply and demand

3.4.1 European context

According to Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, all children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. The European Council set the targets for the participation of the youngest children in education for the first time in Barcelona in 2002. As an issue affecting employment, gender equality and social inclusion policies, early childhood education and care remains one of the European Union's priorities (European Council, 2019).

The original Barcelona targets (ECEC facilities available for 90% of children between the age of 3 and the start of compulsory education and 33% of children younger than 3) have been met in terms of the EU-wide average. In 2022, the Barcelona targets for the whole of the European Union were revised to create a new impetus for encouraging participation in early childhood education and care. By 2030, the target is the participation of 45% of children under 3 and 96% of children over 3 in ECEC (European Council, 2022). While the average for the whole European Union is already approaching the target today, at least for the older age group, the status of early childhood education and care varies considerably from one Member State to another.

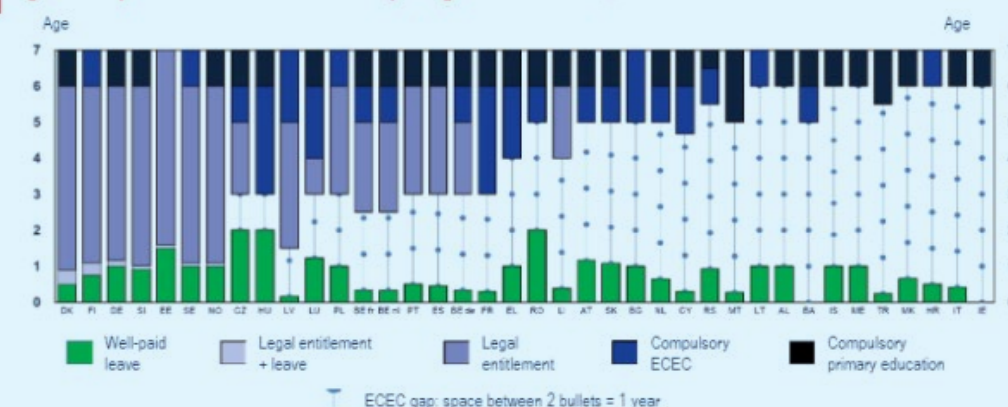
As an illustration we can state that participation in ECEC was 90% or more in 17 Member States for the 3+ group, and even the new target of 96% has already been reached in six EU countries (Eurostat, 2023). Participation for this group exceeds 80% in all Member States. For the group of children under 3 years of age, the range of values is much larger and the high participation rate in some Member States contributes significantly to the increase in the European average (European Commission, 2018).

The Czech Republic is one of the countries whose ECEC participation values remain not only below the EU average, but are also far from reaching the Barcelona targets. In particular, in 2021, the participation of children in the older age group (3+) was 92.5% across the EU, while the participation for the same age group in the Czech Republic was among the lowest, with 84.2% (lower participation rates were reported in only Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia and Romania) (Eurostat, 2023). Regarding the participation of the younger group of children in ECEC, the Czech Republic is among the countries below the overall EU average, with only 6.8% of children attending ECEC facilities (European Commission, 2023)⁸³. This can be attributed, among other things, to the fact that parents are eligible to get paid parental leave until their child is 3 years old.

Graph 8 illustrates the continuity between parental leave eligibility and a legally guaranteed place in an ECEC facility. It shows that the institution of a legally guaranteed ECEC place does not exist in a number of EU nations.

⁸³ Data for indicators on children aged 3 or older come from the UOE (UNESCO-UIS/OECD/Eurostat) data collection and is provided by the MoEYS on the basis of school statistics. It therefore only includes children attending kindergartens or preparatory classes. Data for indicators concerning younger children come from the EU Survey of income and living conditions (EU-SILC) sample survey, which is carried out annually in the EU Member States. The base population for EU-SILC includes all independent households in the Member State. All members of a household are included in the survey, but only people aged over 16 are surveyed. Like any sample survey, EU-SILC is not exempt from a certain statistical error potential. However, the data collection methodology ensures sufficiently reliable reporting on ECEC use in the younger age group (EU, 2022).

Figure 2: Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC, 2022/2023

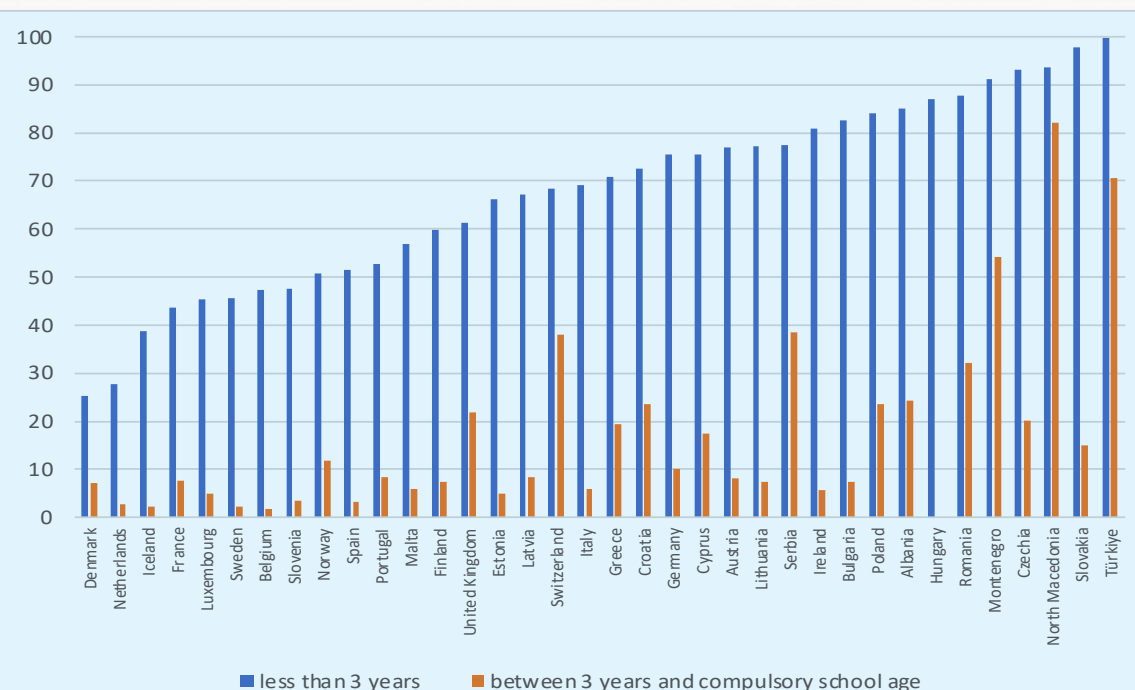


Source: Eurydice.

	BE fr	BE de	BE nl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU
Leave	0.3	0.3	0.3	1	2	0.9	1.2	1.6	-	1	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.2	1	1.2	2
Legal entitlement	2.5	3	2.5	-	3	0.5	1	1.5	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1.5	-	3	-
Compulsory ECEC	5	5	5	5	5	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	6	-	4.7	5	6	4	3
Compulsory primary	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	7	7	6	6
	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	AL	BA	IS	LI	ME	MK	NO	RS	TR
Leave	0.3	0.7	1.2	1	0.5	2	1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1	-	1	0.4	1	0.7	1.1	0.9	0.3
Legal entitlement	-	-	-	3	3	-	0.9	-	0.8	1	-	-	-	4	-	-	1	-	-
Compulsory ECEC	-	5	5	6	-	5	-	5	6	6	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	5.5	-
Compulsory primary	5	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.5	5.5

Graph 8: Gap between childcare leave and place guarantee in ECEC, 2022/2023. Source: Eurydice.

Graph 9 shows the percentage of children younger than 3 and children older than 3 and younger than compulsory school age who were not attending any formal ECEC facility in 2022 (for several countries for which 2022 data were not provided, the last available data were used)⁸⁴.



Graph 9: Percentage of children younger than 3 and aged between 3 and the start of compulsory schooling who are not attending any formal ECEC: European comparison. Source: Eurostat, 2022

84 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_enrp02/default/table?lang=en&category=educ.educ_part.educ_uoe_enrp.educ_uoe_enrp

3.4.2 Indicators of the gap between supply and demand and their graphic representation

We can only provide an approximate picture of the relationship between supply and demand for kindergartens as formal facilities and forest clubs which are members of the Association of FKG as non-formal facilities. As mentioned above, the data on children's groups do not distinguish between capacity and actual occupancy and there is no available data for the other types of facilities.

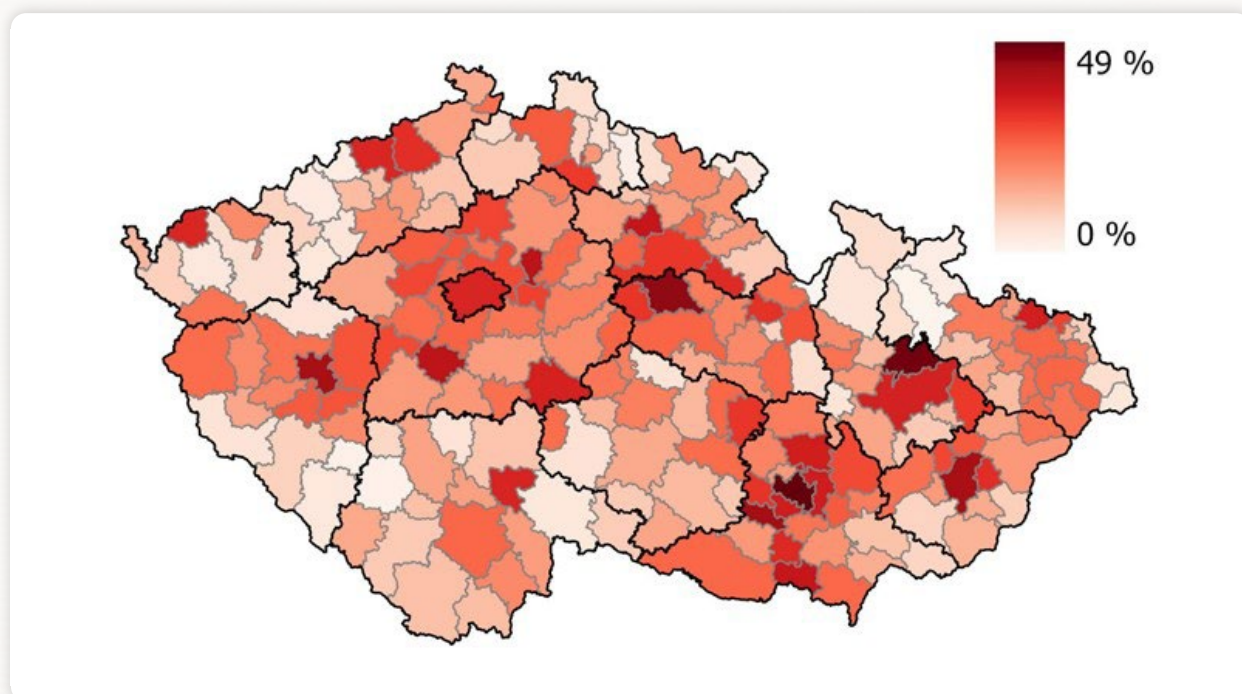
Regarding forest clubs, the ratio between children attending them and the club capacities was greater than one in all regions except the Ústí nad Labem Region in March 2023. This is due to the fact that children often do not attend the club every day – one place is shared by multiple children. However, it is clear that there is interest in forest clubs in most regions.

We assess supply and demand in the case of kindergartens using five indicators broken down to the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities (MERs).

Indicator R1 “Proportion of rejected applications”

R1 = number of rejected applications / total number of applications submitted

The first indicator is the proportion of rejected applications for enrolment to the total number of applications submitted. The information is distorted by the fact that parents submit multiple applications. Nevertheless, we believe that the total proportion of rejected applications to successful applications can provide a basic idea of the excess in the individual locations.



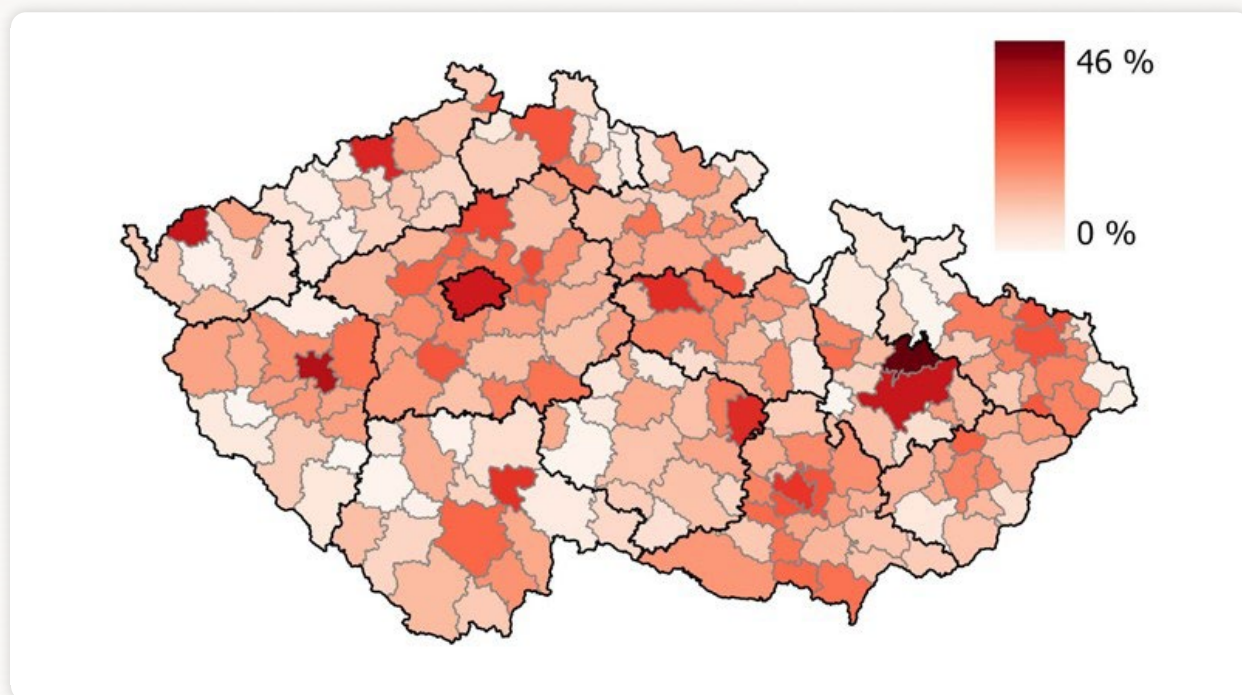
Map 11: Indicator R1 – Proportion of rejected applications for enrolment in kindergarten at the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

Cartogram 11 clearly shows that high proportion of rejected applications does not only concern large cities, but is also reported by MERs with smaller settlements, such as Kraslice, Soběslav, Dobříš, Lysá nad Labem, Kostelec nad Orlicí, Bystřice nad Pernštejnem and

Šternberk. At the same time, the bright spots on the cartogram show places where the proportion of rejected applications is close to zero and supply thus matches demand in such locations. These places would be suitable targets for further analyses.

Indicator R2 “Proportion of rejected applications from the catchment area”

R2 = number of rejected catchment applications / total number of catchment applications submitted



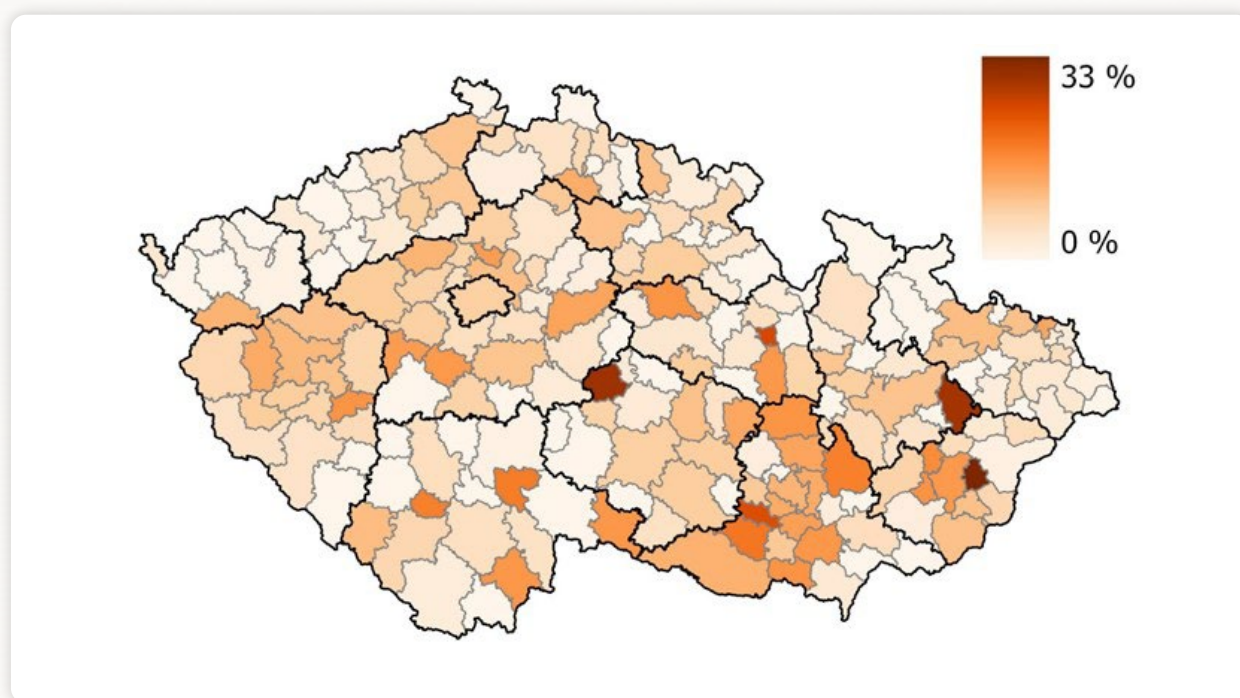
Map 12: Indicator R2 – Proportion of rejected applications for admission to a kindergarten from its catchment area at the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

Indicator R2 focuses on applications for the enrolment of children from the kindergarten catchment area. The information may be distorted by the fact that a number of settlements establish a common catchment area for all their kindergartens, meaning that regardless of which of the kindergartens in the territory of the municipality a child ends up enrolled in, the child is always admitted on the basis of what is known as a catchment application. It is clear that in about half of the MERs none of the applications from the catchment area are being rejected. However, the proportion of rejected catchment applications is relatively high in some locations.

Indicator R3 “Proportion of rejected applications of children of compulsory preschool age”

R3 = number of rejected applications of children born before September 2018 / number of applications of children born before September 2018 submitted

Indicator R3 refers to rejected applications of children who are not only entitled to pre-school education, but also have an obligation to attend compulsory preschool education.



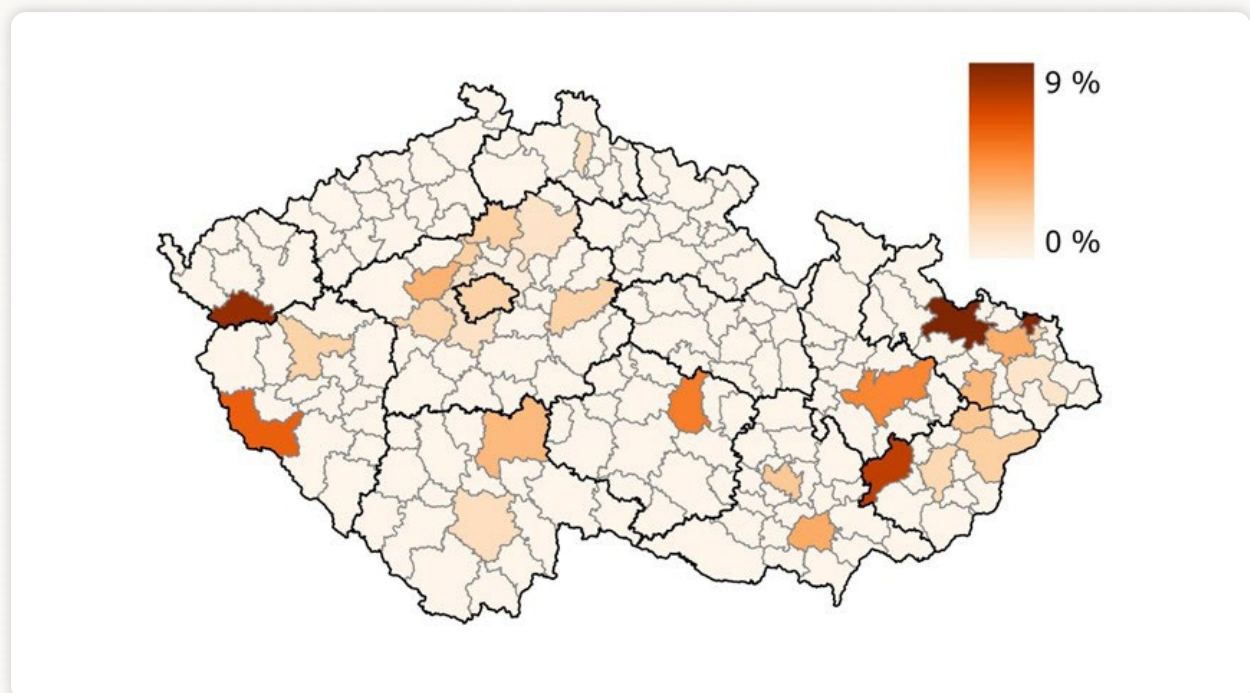
Map 13: Indicator R3 – Proportion of rejected applications of children of compulsory preschool age for admission to kindergarten at the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

Considering the obligation to attend compulsory preschool education, information on the difficulties faced in the enrolment of children of compulsory preschool education age is important. The above cartogram indicates the proportion of rejected applications relating to children who had reached the age of 5 before 1 September 2023 and applied for admission to a kindergarten. The information is distorted by school enrolment deferrals as well as the fact that parents can apply to more than one kindergarten. 89.2% of kindergartens did not reject children of 5 years of age and older at all. Only 72 kindergartens rejected catchment children of the age corresponding to the compulsory preschool year. The proportion of rejected applications from the catchment area out of the total number of applications is shown in the next cartogram.

Indicator R4 “Proportion of rejected applications of children of the age of compulsory preschool education from the catchment area”

R4 = number of rejected applications of children born before September 2018 from the catchment area / number of applications of children born before September 2018 from the catchment area submitted

Indicator R4 has a similar meaning to indicator R3, but only applies to children from the kindergarten’s catchment area. As already mentioned, its values and interpretation may be influenced by the fact that many municipalities declare a single common catchment area for all their kindergartens.



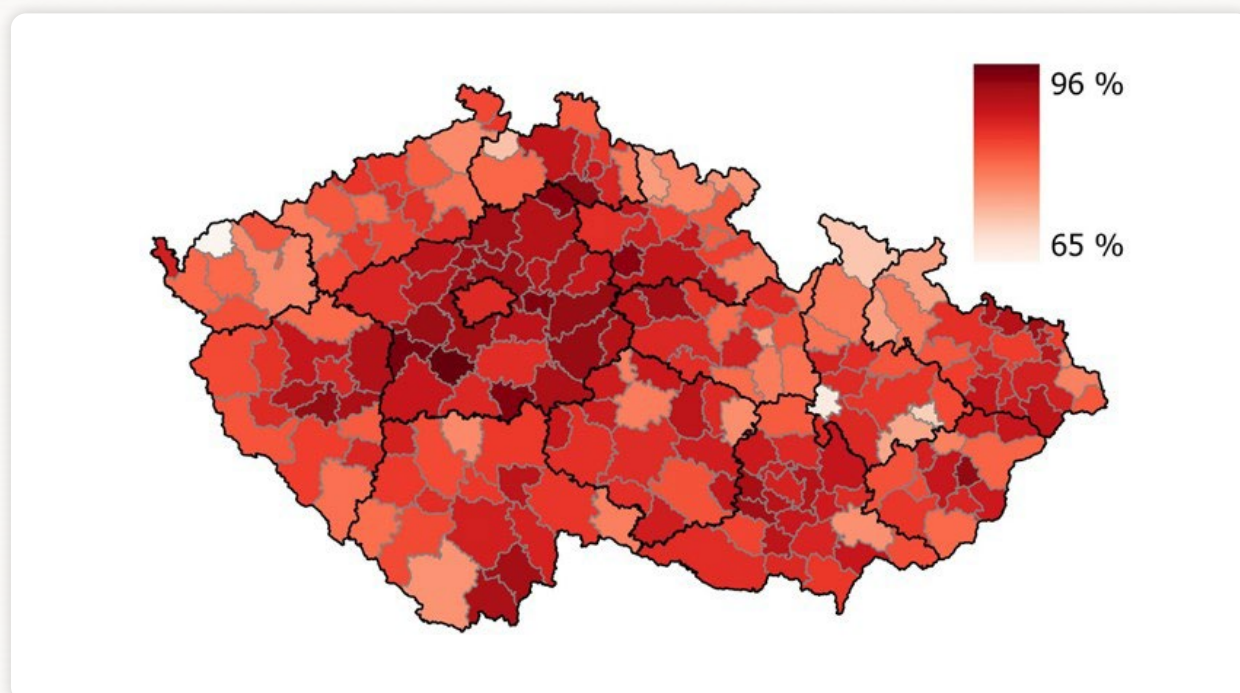
Map 14: Indicator R4 – Proportion of rejected applications of children of the age of compulsory preschool education from the catchment area for admission to the kindergarten at the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities of as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

Although the proportion of rejected applications of children older than 5 years is minimal in the vast majority of the MERs, in some of them this proportion is approaching 10% and is therefore not completely negligible.

Indicator R5 “Occupied capacity in kindergartens”

R5 = children attending the kindergarten / registered capacity

The last indicator refers to the proportion of children attending a kindergarten to its registered capacity. However, we must also understand the information as highly approximate, as in many cases the capacity is lower than the number of pupils reported by kindergartens. As such, the data – probably the capacities registered – clearly contain errors. The capacities have either been wrongly determined or are not sufficiently updated.



Map 15: Indicator R5 – Occupied capacity of kindergartens at the level of municipalities with extended responsibilities as at 30 September 2023. Data source: MoEYS

The cartogram shows what was already obvious from the previously presented data – at the level of regions, the highest number of kindergartens at or over capacity is in the Central Bohemian Region, in a circle around Prague. The surroundings of Brno and Plzeň also have a relatively high occupancy rate.

3.4.3 Summary

In the absence of current quantitative data on demand, it is impossible to directly evaluate the differences between supply and demand. Data on the share of rejected applications – available only for kindergartens – can serve to illustrate the situation. However, such data are distorted by the fact that parents can submit applications to any number of facilities and also by the fact that many municipalities with more kindergartens create a common catchment area for all the kindergartens they are in charge of.

3.5 Strengths and challenges of the ECEC system

In this chapter, we present an assessment of the strengths and challenges of the ECEC system. We have based our assessment on the available literature, the testimonies of the informants involved in the qualitative survey, and the expertise of the individual authors. To facilitate the following analyses, we have structured the chapter according to the standards of the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (see Annex 3).

3.5.1 Provision of services that is available and affordable for all families and their children.

Strengths

- high availability of facilities for children aged from 3 to 6, except for large cities and their agglomerations and small municipalities without any facilities
- diverse range of services offered by various providers
- financial concessions for families receiving selected types of social support benefits

Challenges

- low availability of ECEC for children aged from 0 to 3 for all families
- low financial accessibility of ECEC for children aged from 0 to 3 from lower- and middle-income families
- low capacity of facilities for children aged from 3 to 6 for families residing in a different location than their registered permanent residence
- low capacity of facilities for children aged from 3 to 6 for families residing in large cities and their agglomerations
- low cultural and financial accessibility of facilities for children aged from 3 to 6 for families at risk of social exclusion and families with a lower economic status
- limited operating hours of a number of facilities, which prevent parents from working full-time
- low availability of information on the system and on the individual facilities for foreign families as well as for some parents with social disadvantages
- problematic identification of catchment areas in some locations
- significant differences in the options of different types of providers

3.5.2 Provision of services that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

Strengths

- existence of targeted initiatives for the involvement of parents in decision-making processes in some ECEC facilities
- creation of prerequisites for the continuous professional development of kindergartens and children's groups staff in the provision of support to bilingual children
- highly individual approach to children and their parents which takes into account their needs in some ECEC facilities
- integration of children with special educational needs in kindergartens

Challenges

- absence of a formally established structure that would allow and support systematic involvement of parents in decision-making processes
- the conditions set out by kindergartens which children must meet to be accepted to a kindergarten tend to be high (e.g. a high level of self-sufficiency)
- limited support for children with different socio-cultural backgrounds (e.g. Ukrainian children, children from excluded locations) from a number of ECEC facilities, including public kindergartens
- segregated character of preparatory classes and the preparatory grade of special primary schools in some locations
- low representation of educators from marginalised groups in the staffing of ECEC facilities
- low level of training of ECEC staff in the provision of support to bilingual children
- very traditional design of some kindergartens and exceptionally also children's groups, low level of flexibility and willingness to take into account children's and parents' needs

3.5.3 Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enables them to fulfil their professional role

Strengths

- systematic efforts to strengthen the professional status of teaching staff in kindergartens
- highly qualified staff in kindergartens
- openness of the system to different qualifications and expertise
- wide range of opportunities for further professional growth used by a number of ECEC organisations
- the option to tailor further education to the individual staff members' individual needs
- umbrella organisations creating conditions for training of staff members of selected types of ECEC (exchange of experience, upcoming webinar series)
- high motivation of many providers who foster high-quality staff

Challenges

- very diverse approaches to ensure opportunities for professional development of staff in different types of ECEC facilities
- relatively low necessary qualifications of staff providing childcare for children over 3 years of age in children's groups (a teaching assistant qualification is sufficient), including managerial positions
- relatively low or absent standards for qualifications of carers in some types of facilities and services
- low level of preparedness of staff in the area of monitoring and evaluation of the ECEC goals both at the facility level and for individual children, as well as various groups of children according to different criteria (i.e. gender, socioeconomic status, SEN)
- low preparedness of staff for individualised education based on each child's potential, needs and interests
- low access to children's groups for children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds

3.5.4 Supportive working conditions, including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents

Strengths

- increased wages of teaching staff in kindergartens
- the recent reform of the financing of public kindergartens (PH max) allows for two educators to be present in a class simultaneously for longer periods of time
- favourable adult-to-child ratio in children's groups, forest kindergartens and forest clubs

Challenges

- unclear perspective on wage increases for staff of ECEC facilities other than kindergartens
- large differences in the adult-to-child ratio in different types of ECEC facilities (the ratio can be 24 children to one adult for part of the day in a kindergarten, in some cases up to 28:1⁸⁵)
- very diverse working conditions of staff in ECEC facilities depending on the founder, staff composition and the ratio of carers to children entrusted to them
- low emphasis on creating professional learning communities, including limited opportunities for mutual enrichment between long-term staff and new hires
- relatively low availability of mentorship and supervision in a number of ECEC facilities
- low awareness of the benefits of professionally provided supervision in some types of ECEC facilities
- markedly different management styles in different facilities (in some cases, the kindergarten and primary school are one entity, or several kindergartens are combined into one, while also some very small facilities exist)

3.5.5 A curriculum based on teaching goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being

Strengths

- a high-quality Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education aimed at the child's comprehensive development used not only by the kindergartens, but also by centres for preschool children
- a well-designed preparatory classes programme, which allows for the improvement of the knowledge and skills of especially those children who have not previously attended ECEC
- high motivation of many providers who strive to provide services of the highest quality and offer a well-thought-out programme

85 A high child-to-staff ratio can be compensated for by employing another teaching/non-teaching member of staff for a class. In the 2023/24 school year, 5,434 teaching assistants are working in kindergartens. School assistants are also employed by kindergartens.

Challenges

- education and care plans in some children's groups are hardly developed
- different conception of educational programmes for children of the same age in different types of ECEC facilities
- the quality of education in preparatory classes is highly varied and often not as high as that of kindergarten education
- low emphasis of educational programmes on the inclusion of immigrants, refugees and children from socio-culturally different backgrounds
- varied availability of books and other printed materials depending on the facility
- varied parental expectations, which are conflicting in many cases

3.5.6 A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice

Strengths

- efforts to involve parents, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in some types of facilities
- efforts to accommodate parents' needs as much as possible in some facilities

Challenges

- varied emphasis of the educational programmes of a number of ECEC facilities on the possibilities of involving parents, colleagues working in other services for children (including health and social care) and other actors
- varied emphasis of educational programmes on cooperation with school staff when it comes to children's transition to primary or kindergarten
- persevering lack of motivation, prejudice and low willingness towards a greater involvement of parents, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, in some types of facilities

3.5.6 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice

Strengths

- evaluation of the kindergartens by the Czech School Inspectorate aiming to provide feedback based on criteria describing the condition, process and outcome of education at the level of the facility, educational programme and the teaching process, which allows for the monitoring of achieving the desired educational outcomes and evaluating the development of schools over time
- CSI evaluation aimed at data collection for the monitoring and evaluation of the system; aggregated data form the basis of the evaluation of the educational system and its parts as presented in the annual report and ad hoc thematic reports
- a sophisticated system of indicators and data collection in the MoEYS department
- starting work on the eEdu education information system

Challenges

- absence of a debate and the resulting consensus on the main principles of monitoring quality and effectiveness across the different types of ECEC facilities
- absence of consensus on the set of indicators monitoring the whole ECEC system
- very diverse availability of information concerning the different types of facilities, the educational programme they offer and the qualifications of their staff at the national, regional and local level
- major irregularities in providing informative feedback on the effectiveness of the services provided
- very varied availability of relevant data for improving the quality of services and the professional development of ECEC staff

3.5.7 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

Strengths

- evaluation of kindergartens by the CSI – regular activity based on well-thought-out criteria (including criteria aimed at judging if the kindergarten allows for a maximum possible development of each child according to their abilities); summary information provided by annual reports

Challenges

- diverse integration of child protection and safety policies in the different types of ECEC facilities
- monitoring and evaluation procedures are only conducive to cooperation between all stakeholders to a small extent
- absence/scarcity of tools for examining the impacts of education and care on a child's development
- varied availability of information on the extent to which different methods are used to monitor a child's progress in the different types of ECEC facilities
- insufficient information on the extent to which participatory evaluation procedures are used to involve children in monitoring and evaluation

3.5.8 Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations

Strengths

- a number of initiatives which create an environment for a shared understanding of the different actors' roles and tasks (e.g. Local Action Plans⁸⁶, TSI project)
- efforts by EU institutions to support the creation of sharing platforms

86 A Local Action Plan for Education / Místní akční plán rozvoje vzdělávání (MAP) is the product of the cooperation of partners in one location. It sets out priorities and the individual steps to achieving the aims of educational policy in the given location on the basis of local needs, local advantages, and real data and analyses from the area. The goal of MAPs is to increase the quality of preschool and primary education through a systematic approach, action planning, and innovative and inhibitory methods, but first and foremost through the cooperation of school founders and other actors. For more information see: <https://opvv.msmt.cz/download/file3010.pdf>

Challenges

- low level of cooperation among different services providing support to children, including social and health services, schools and local actors
- low emphasis on engaging different types of actors at the local and national levels
- low level of coordination among the actors responsible for the various regulations governing early childhood education and care

3.5.9 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to high-quality affordable early childhood education and care; progress is regularly reported to relevant stakeholders

Strengths

- gradual creation of a universal legal entitlement to children's participation in ECEC
- sufficient information on unequal access to market-oriented early childhood education and care services for disadvantaged children
- use of at least part of a range of measures aimed at reducing inequalities, even if their implementation is insufficient⁸⁷

Challenges

- the gradual development of a universal legal entitlement is not fully finalised and does not automatically lead to improvements in the quality of ECEC facilities
- lack of coherence between the different early childhood education and care systems, including family care, resulting in a concept where children under 3 are to be in their mother's uninterrupted care and on the date of 1 September after reaching the age of 3 are to be immediately ready for full-time institutional care in a group with up to 27 other children
- lack of thorough development of the concept of a child's gradual adaptation
- lack of a range of measures aimed at reducing inequalities, such as effective measures preventing the arbitrary creation of catchment areas or measures which would lead to a unified approach to diagnosing intellectual disability in children across facilities
- lack of connection between the education policy and the employment, health and social policies

87 For example, the implementation of compulsory preschool education.

4. Recommendations for public policy on the mapping of supply and demand in the ECEC sector

On the basis of the analyses carried out, we make recommendations aimed at improving the supply and demand mapping for ECEC facilities. More specific ideas and a set of indicators for the national and regional levels and the level of individual centres will be part of the “Proposal for a comprehensive, integrated framework for the monitoring & evaluation of preschool education and care (children aged 0–6)” output of this project.

Participatory indicator creation process

A participatory process requires the active involvement of all relevant actors, such as educators, parents, providers and other stakeholders, in the development of a set of indicators. This set of indicators should reflect the supply and demand of the ECEC sector and should also include the national, regional and local levels. The set of indicators will be part of the overall monitoring and evaluation framework to be contained in the document titled “Proposal for a comprehensive, integrated framework for the monitoring & evaluation of ECEC (0–6 years)”.

Considering short-term as well as long-term objectives

When selecting indicators, it is important to consider both the short-term and the long-term objectives of education policy and social policies at the national and international levels. The key strategy papers for ECEC must be considered, including the international commitments to which the Czech Republic has agreed⁸⁸.

Establishing a data collection remit

It will be necessary to define which authorities or institutions will be responsible for the collection of data on early childhood education and care. Deciding which authorities will be responsible for the collection of data is crucial in order to ensure an effective and coordinated monitoring process. This decision must consider the com-

88 This refers primarily to a commitment to increasing participation in ECEC. As part of the commitments related to EU membership, under the European Education Area initiative, Member States, through the Council of the European Union, agreed on a target of at least 96% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education to participate in early childhood education and care by 2030. As part of the commitments related to the UN (Sustainable Development Goals), the Czech Republic agreed to the goal “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” with an indicator “percentage of children aged one year before the official primary entry age who participate in one or more organized learning programme”.

petences and capabilities of the individual institutions in order to be able to collect the necessary data efficiently and reliably. At the same time, it is important to ensure transparent cooperation among these institutions to achieve the highest possible quality of the data obtained.

Specification of data providers

All providers of services in this sector, regardless of their type, should be included in the monitoring and registration of early childhood education and care. The scope of data providers should be as complete as possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of the state of early childhood education and care, i.e. it should include all organisations that provide early childhood education and care services, regardless of whether they are public, private or non-profit. Covering all types of services will ensure that data are not limited to a specific segment of the population.

Specification of methodologies and tools for data collection

Data collection tools must be defined and methodologies for data collection carefully described, including the time frame and technical aspects of data collection. Data collection methodologies and tools should be carefully selected so that they are able to obtain the most accurate and relevant information. This includes establishing clear procedures for data collection, including a time schedule and frequency of collection, and ensuring that the tools used are suitable for monitoring the information needed.

Ensuring data collection, management and archiving

Securing the data collection, management and archiving processes is crucial for an effective evaluation of indicators mapping supply and demand in the early childhood education and care sector. The data collection, management and archiving process must be properly organised and secured so that its integrity and availability for further analysis and evaluation can be guaranteed. This includes ensuring the quality of data during collection, the correct processing and storage of data, and implementing security measures to protect sensitive information.

Establishing a data sharing platform

Establishing a central data sharing platform will enable an effective exchange of information among different actors in early childhood education and care. The platform should be designed to be user-friendly and provide access to the relevant data and information for those who need them.

Establishing mechanisms for data analysis and interpretation

Establishing mechanisms for analysing and interpreting the data generated is essential for the effective use of such data. This includes the use of statistical methods and tools to identify trends and patterns in the data, as well as the ability of effective interpretation and drawing the relevant conclusions from the results of the analysis.

Establishing mechanisms to reflect data effectiveness

In addition to the data analysis itself, it is important to establish mechanisms to reflect the effectiveness of the information generated. This may include regular evaluation and revision of the monitoring system and its adaptation to the needs and changes in the ECEC environment.

Making information on ECEC publicly available

Making information on the options and capacities of each type of ECEC available remotely to a wide range of actors, including parents, providers and ECEC facilities.

It is appropriate that information on the options and capacities of each type of ECEC facility be available by remote access to a wide range of actors. In turn, such availability can contribute to better awareness of and data-driven decision-making by parents, founders, providers and other stakeholders. At the same time, rules for sharing data need to be established to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of data. This may include determining the level of data anonymisation when sharing the data, identifying authorised recipients of data and establishing procedures for requesting access to data.



5. Conclusions

This report has provided an overview of the types of formal and non-formal education and care, including their basic characteristics. The overview shows that the range of types of formal and non-formal ECEC facilities is quite wide. In the future, consideration should be given to whether it is appropriate to support all types of facilities, and if so to what extent, and to consider the needs of different types of parents.

The diversity of supply, even if not the result of deliberate policy, but rather of spontaneous development, can be seen as an asset. Different facilities meet the needs of different children and of different parents. The smaller size of children's groups, meant to provide care primarily for children aged from 6 months to 3 years, allows for a greater individualisation of care, a targeted development of each child and the provision of the necessary support to children with special needs, as well as meeting the parents' needs by regularly informing them (e.g. by sending photos) about how their child is doing. Adaptation clubs allow the child to socialise in a safe and familiar environment with the involvement of parents. Forest clubs can better develop children's physical resilience and dexterity, because the lower adult-to-child ratio and the presence of two adults allows them to ensure supervision and safety during physical activities and also a highly individualised approach to all children, which allows for work with children with SEN. The staff of preschool clubs for children with socio-economic disadvantages have excellent knowledge of these children's needs and are able to gain their parents' trust. A great advantage of kindergartens and, to a large extent, centres for preschool children run by CCYs is the standardised care provided by qualified educators.

There are therefore a number of good reasons for maintaining the diversity of the ECEC supply and for enriching the supply of public kindergartens thanks to the great motivation of a number of private providers. However, the supply should become much clearer for parents than it is now, in order to ensure that all parents can benefit from the diversity offered. At the same time, comparable conditions should be created for all providers and comparable quality standards should be required. Nevertheless, standardisation needs to be approached very carefully so as not to discourage private providers, whose high level of commitment and motivation is an unquestionable asset in the current situation.

The report has provided an overview of the available information on supply in each type of ECEC facility. According to the currently available data, the possibilities of quantitative evaluation of supply are very limited due to the quality of both the available population data and the available data on facility capacities.

To monitor the supply, we have designed a set of indicators that indicate the ratio of the capacity of the respective type of facility to the number of children in the respective age cohort. The practical applicability of these indicators will still need to be verified on model examples taking into account the needs of each type of actor.

A qualitative survey among providers of the numerically most represented types of services confirmed the problems identified in previous surveys – insufficient finances, space and staffing. At the same time, a number of problems are the result of the limited quality

of the available data, the design of the data evaluation processes, and the absence of any systematic joint strategic planning of neighbouring municipalities or municipalities with appropriate transport connection.

A system of data collection on the demand for various forms of ECEC is missing in the Czech Republic. According to the available data, the supply in many municipalities with extended responsibilities does not match the demand; the demand is very unevenly distributed across regions. Due to the absence of current quantitative data on demand, it is impossible to evaluate the differences between supply and demand directly. Data on the proportion of rejected applications can serve to illustrate the situation. They are, however, distorted by the fact that parents can submit applications to any number of facilities and also by the fact that a number of municipalities with multiple kindergartens establish a common catchment area for all of their kindergartens.

Qualitative mapping showed that the demand for ECEC in kindergartens exceeds supply, especially in the circle around Prague and other large cities. The capacity of children's groups covers at most 10% of the population of children aged from 18 months to 3 years, for whom it is primarily intended, in the majority of MERs (see Map 3).

The analysis of the ECEC system's strengths and weaknesses shows that the ECEC system faces four main challenges.

The first challenge is the absence of sufficient quality data on supply and demand, which complicates monitoring and evaluation, but also the access of citizens to information on the basis of which they could make informed decisions.

The second challenge is the lack of consensus on what the primary objectives of the ECEC system should be, how it should be organised and managed, whether it should be subject to common standards, and, if so, what the nature of those standards should be.

The third challenge is the very diverse design of the different types of ECEC facilities. While the ECEC established under the responsibility of the MoEYS benefits from a long-standing tradition in many aspects, it takes the parents' needs and wishes into account to a relatively small extent. The facilities established under the responsibility of the MoLSA bring new concepts and a more individualised supply of care and education, but place incomparably higher financial demands on parents than the MoEYS does. Within the vaguely defined zone between them lies a relatively wide range of facilities, which were created mainly as a result of the need to respond to demand unsatisfied by the state education and employment policies. These "grey zone" facilities function as a specific type of innovator incubator, which moves on a dynamically changing interface in a fluid system defined, on the one hand, by the changing needs of different groups of parents and, on the other hand, also by the changing options of the founders governed by legislation and other conditions.

The fourth challenge is the fact that, while there is a number of measures in the ECEC system that try to promote the involvement of children with different types of disadvantages, there is a lack of a common framework that would give a shared focus and sufficient backing to this effort.

In the final part, the report makes recommendations for a public policy focused specifically on the area of supply and demand mapping, which bring a number of proposals to make the mapping processes more effective.

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Annex 1 Overview of the sources of information on supply and demand

The table below provides an overview of all analyses and other resources shared with the authors of this report through the project working group.

Title	Author	Type	Focus	Data source – name	Data author	Year of data collection
Dětské skupiny a rodinná centra – jejich fungování a přístup dětí se specifickými potřebami k těmto službám [Children's Groups and Family Centres – Their Functioning and the Access of Children with Specific Needs to These Services]	RILSA	Study	Children's groups, Centres for mothers	focus groups		2023
			General	Životní podmínky ČR (EU-SILC) [Living conditions – CR]	CZSO	2022
			General – EU	Formal child care by duration and age group	EUROSTAT	2022
			General	Demografická ročenka ČR [Demographic Yearbook CR]	CZSO	2021 (2022 now available)
			General	Statistika v souvislosti s válkou na Ukrajině [Statistics Connected to the war in Ukraine]	Ministry of the Interior of the CR	2022 (monthly updates available)
			Kindergarten, children's groups	Hlas Ukrajinců: vzdělávání dětí [The Voice of Ukrainians: Education of Children]	PAQ	2022

Realizace a vyhodnocení fokusních skupin, Tematická oblast 3, 6. dílčí zpráva: Obce a jejich vztah k dětským skupinám [Realisation and Evaluation of Focus Groups, Thematic Area 3, 6th Constituent Report: Municipalities and Their Attitude towards Children's Groups]	Median, s. r. o. for MoLSA	Project report	Children's groups	Own focus group		2023
Analýza dostupnosti zařízení péče o děti v předškolním věku [Analysis of the Availability of Pre-school Care Facilities]	MoLSA	Analysis	Kindergarten	School Register	MoEYS	2018
			Licensed occupations	Licensed Occupations Register	MIT	2018
			General	Počet obyvatel v obcích [Number of residents in municipalities]	CZSO	2018 (data available for 1 January 2023)
			Children's groups	Evaluační zpráva výzev 35 a 36 Operačního programu Zaměstnanost (evaluace dětských skupin) [Evaluation Report of Calls 35 and 36 of the Employment Operational Programme] (evaluation of children's groups)	MoLSA	2017
Analýza demografického vývoje na úrovni ORP [Analysis of Demographic Trends at the MER Level]	SC&C for MoLSA	Analysis	General	Demographic statistics, Census data	CZSO	2022, 2021
			Kindergarten	School Register	MoEYS	2022
Realizace a vyhodnocení fokusních skupin, Tematická oblast 2, 3. dílčí zpráva: Odložené nástupy dětí do MŠ ve vybraných regionech [Realisation and Evaluation of Focus Groups, Thematic Area 2, 3rd Constituent Report: Deferred Kindergarten Enrolment in Selected Regions]	Median, s.r.o for MoLSA	Project report	Kindergarten	focus group data		2023

Nové formy denní péče o děti v České republice [New Forms of Daily Care for Children in the Czech Republic]	Paloncyová for MoLSA	Project monograph	Kindergarten, Licensed occupations, Demand	research		2013
			General	Demographic data	CZSO	2013
			General	Situace rodičů s dětmi do sedmi let na trhu práce podle výsledků výběrových šetření pracovních sil [The Situation of Parents with Children under Seven Years of Age on the Job Market, Based on Results of Sample Survey among Workforce]	Hora, O. (Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum)	2009
			General	Česky: nevyužitý potenciál země [Czech Women: the Unused Potential of the Country]	Kalíšková, Munnich (CERGE)	2012
			Kindergarten	Kvalifikovanost učitelů – hlavní výsledky dotazníkového šetření [Qualifications of Teachers – Main Results from Questionnaire Survey]	MoEYS	2009
			Kindergarten	Analýza podmínek a možností zařazení dětí od dvou let věku do mateřských škol a vyhodnocení dalšího řešení rozšíření péče o děti do tří let. [Analysis of the Conditions and Possibility of the Inclusion of Two-year-olds in Kindergartens and Evaluation of Further Solutions for Expanding Care for Children under Three Years of Age.]	MoEYS	2011
			Kindergarten	České školství v mezinárodním srovnání 2013 [Czech Education in International Comparison]	MoEYS	2013
			General	Rodina, zaměstnání, vzdělání. Série výzkumných sond rodin v různých fázích rodinného cyklu [Family, Employment, Education. A Series of Research Probes into Families in Various Phases of the Family Cycle]	RILSA	2006

Regionální potřebnost [Needy Regions]	MoLSA	Internal document	General	Civil statistics	CZSO	2021
			General	Informativní počty obyvatel v obcích [Informative numbers of residents in municipalities]	MI CR	2021
			Kindergarten	Zápisy do předškolního vzdělávání [Enrolment in preschool education]	MoEYS	2022
Vyplatí se částečný úvazek při rodičovské dovolené? [Does a Part-Time Job Pay Off When on Parental Leave?]	MoLSA	Model	Demand	Data used not specified	CZSO, EU-ROSTAT, MoLSA	
Průzkum veřejného mínění na vybudování tzv. mikrojeslí a umístování dětí mladších tří let do takového-to zařízení služeb péče o děti [Public Opinion Research on the Attitudes Towards Micro-nurseries and Placing Children under Three Years in Such Facilities]	RILSA	Report	Licensed occupations	Licensed Occupations Register	MIT	2017
			Demand	Výzkum veřejného mínění zaměřený na sladění pracovního a rodinného života a rovnost žen a mužů v oblasti rodinné politiky a trhu práce [Public Opinion Research on the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life, and Gender Equality in the Family Policy and Job Market]	SocioFaktor for MoLSA	2016
			Employment of mothers	OECD Family Database	OECD	2018

Systém denní péče o děti do 6 let ve Francii a v České republice [The System of Day Care for Children under Six in France and the Czech Republic]	RILSA		General	Série empirických sond rodin v různých fázích rodinného cyklu v rámci projektu „Komplexní analýza sociálně-ekonomické situace rodin v České republice a návrhy na prorodinná opatření“ [A Series of Research Probes into Families in Various Phases of the Family Cycle and Proposals for Pro-family Measures]	Sociological Institute of the Academy of Sciences CR, STEM	2002
			General	Výběrové šetření pracovních sil [Sample Survey of the Workforce]	CZSO	2010
			General	Zaměstnání a péče o děti. Dotazníkové šetření v rámci projektu „Zaměstnání a péče o malé děti z perspektivy rodičů a zaměstnavatelů“ [Employment and Childcare. A Survey under the project “Employment and Childcare from the Point of View of Parents and Employers]	RILSA, STEM-MARK	2005
			General	Naše společnost	CVVM	ongoing
Metodika indikátorů komplexního výzkumu o situaci rodin s dětmi [Methodology of Indicators for Comprehensive Research on the Situation of Families with Children]	RILSA	Methodology	General	European Values Study	Masaryk University	1991, 1999, 2008, 2017/18
Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European Child Guarantee: Czechia	Masaryk University for ESPAN	Report	Children's groups	Analytická zpráva výzkumu Šetření o dětských skupinách, jejich nastavení a vnímání poskytovateli a rodiči. [Analytical Report of the Research on Children's Groups, their Functioning, and Provider and Parent Attitudes]	MoLSA	2019
			Children's groups	Náklady na provoz dětských skupin. Zpráva z dotazníkového šetření [Costs of Running Children's Groups. A Survey Report]	Zamykalová, Vojtíšková for MoLSA	2020

			Kindergarten	Net Childcare Costs for Parents Using Childcare Facilities	OECD	2023
				Zpráva o stavu romské menšiny [Report on the Roma Minority]	Office of the Government	2021
				Statistická ročenka školství [Statistical Yearbook of Education]	MoEYS	2022
				Veřejná podpora míst ve školkách se vyplátí: analýza výnosů a nákladů [Public Support for Places in Kindergartens Pays Off: A Costs and Returns Analysis]	Kalíšková et al. (CERGE)	2016
Péče a vzdělávání v raném věku [Care and Education in Early Childhood]	Syslová, Borkovová, Průcha	Publication	General, kindergarten	Key Data on Education in Europe	EURYDICE	2012
			Kindergarten	Analýza podmínek a možností zařazení dětí od dvou let věku do mateřských škol a vyhodnocení dalšího řešení rozšíření péče o děti do tří let [Analysis of the Conditions and Options for Including Two-year-old Children in Kindergartens and Evaluation of Solutions for Extending the Care Services for Children 0-3]	MoEYS	2013
			General	Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Czech Republic	Santiago, P. for OECD	2012
			NS	Monitorování realizace kurikulární reformy v mateřských školách – zpráva [Monitoring the Realisation of Curricular Reform in Kindergartens – A Report]	Pedagogical Research Institute	2011
Přehledová studie výzkumů předškolního vzdělávání v České republice v letech 2011–2020 [Overview of Research on Preschool Education in the Czech Republic between 2011 and 2020]	Syslová, Najvarová	Overview	Kindergarten	75 published research articles		

Průzkum mezi členy asociace provozovatelů dětských skupin a mikrojeslí [Survey of Members of the Association of Children's Groups and Micro-nurseries Providers]	Asociace provozovatelů dětských skupin [Association of Children's Groups and Micro-nurseries Providers]	Survey results	Children's group	questionnaire		2020
Platforma pro včasnou péči – analytická skupina [Platform for Early Care – Analytical Group]	Platforma pro včasnou péči [Platform for Early Care]	Survey results	Preschool clubs, NS	questionnaire		
Zápisy do MŠ [Kindergarten Enrolment]	Platforma pro včasnou péči [Platform for Early Care]	Project evaluation, internal report	Kindergarten	data		
Hodnocení ČŠI a materiální podpora MŠ [CSI evaluation and Material Support for NSs]	PAQ	Calculations	Kindergarten	Sources not specified, authors' calculations	CZSO	2022
Účast, dvouletí, odklady, nedokončování [Attendance, Two-year-olds, Deferrals, Unfinished Education]	PAQ	Calculations	Kindergarten	Sources not specified, authors' calculations		2020–2023
Sladování práce a rodiny formou pomoci s péčí o děti v domácnosti rodičů aneb proč stát podporuje práci chův „načerno“? [Reconciliation of Work and Family Life through Help with Children in the Parental Household: Why Does the State Support Nannies Working Illegally?]	Kopečná, E.	A text by a member of the Sector Council and the head of the working group for the preparation of the rating standards for the professional qualifications for a <i>Nanny for children up to the start of compulsory school attendance</i> and <i>Nanny for children in a children's group</i>	Licensed occupations, Nannies	Based on the authors' expertise in this area		

Annex 2

Methodology

Data collection

Data were collected in several successive steps.

Phase I – Call for data sharing

At the first meeting of the working group on 20 September 2023, the members of the group were asked for any materials, analyses, research, data or tools related to supply and demand regarding both the formal and non-formal early childhood education and care services and the current system and practice of monitoring and evaluation in the field of early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic. Materials produced by the individual actors as well as materials from other sources that they had encountered in their own practice were welcome.

Phase II – Gathering information on available data sources

The next phase took place in the form of a meeting on 23 October 2023, which allowed for the specification of the available data sources provided by the state administration institutions (MoLSA, MoEYS, CSI) and RILSA. Following that meeting, the data structure for the subsequent analyses was established.

Phase III – Sorting of collected data

The materials collected in phase I were divided into two categories: data sources and data analyses.

Phase IV – Creating a plan for additional data collection

On 1 December 2023, the current plan for preparing the report was presented to the working group members, who contributed additional data sources and suggested suitable respondents for the interviews and focus groups. Subsequently, a list of informants was compiled and a plan for the interviews was created. At the same time, the first version of the interview scripts/guides and focus group guides/protocols was created.

Phase V – Acquiring additional primary data

(a) Quantitative data

Quantitative data were obtained from the ministry records, CZSO and providers of early childhood education and care in order to map the level of use of various types of facilities and their availability in the individual municipalities with extended responsibilities (MERs). Below we describe the data sources that were used for the mapping.

Register of kindergartens and preparatory classes (MoEYS)

Data from the statistical data collection that took place in autumn 2023 was used for the mapping. Specifically, the following statistical reports were used: S1-01 (Statement on a kindergarten), S 51-01 (Statement on enrolment for preschool education in a kindergarten) and S 4c-01 (Statement on the preparatory class of a primary school and the preparatory grade of a special primary school). Furthermore, data on the capacity of kindergartens from the Register of Schools and School Facilities, which was provided to the MoEYS, were used. It would also be possible to use the S 4-01 report (Statement on a kindergarten / elementary school at a medical facility). However, we decided not to include this, as our goal was to obtain general information and there were only 858 children attending a kindergarten in a medical facility in the whole Czech Republic as at 31 September 2023. Furthermore, this number changes constantly throughout the year.

Data on the enrolment and attendance of children in specific age cohorts at various types of kindergartens (regular, forest, for children with SEN established according to Section 16 (9) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., non-public kindergartens) and preparatory classes were used. The MoEYS data can be processed on the level of any territorial subdivision, as it contains all the necessary identifiers.

Registration of children's groups (MoLSA)

Data from the register of children's groups generated from the applications for granting authorisation to provide childcare in a children's group were used, as well as the data from the notice of change in the register of providers of childcare services in a children's group and from the obligatory annexes delivered with these applications, which were provided to us by the MoLSA on 6 December 2023.

Unfortunately, the data set contains only the information on the capacity of children's groups, not on the number of children who actually attend them. Information on the number of children who attend children's groups could theoretically be obtained from the subsidy or grant applications. However, the funding is obtained from various sources, so only some of the providers apply to the MoLSA. There is no central register of applications for a grant. Therefore, the data do not contain information on the age of children who attend children's groups, which considerably limits their usefulness.

Centres for children and youth (MoEYS)

The Z 15-1 report contains information on the number of preschool children who regularly attend centres for children and youth. Unfortunately, the report does not make it possible to distinguish between the children who attend some kind of after-school activity and the children who attend centres for preschool children, which in many cases function as a half-day kindergarten for children aged from 2 to 6 years.

Information on forest clubs (Association of Forest Kindergartens)

The Association of Forest Kindergartens (FKGs) represents kindergartens which are registered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities (and are therefore recorded in the MoEYS register and included in the S 1-01 report under the code A15) and forest clubs (FCs) which are not registered elsewhere if they do not operate as a children's group. For the purposes of this report, the FKG Association provided data on FCs which are members of the Association. Those data are, however, only specific to the territorial division level of a region. The data contain information on the capa-

city of the club, the number of pupils who attend it and the number of adults who care for the children. Such information is available only when it comes to certain FCs operating in the Czech Republic, as not all clubs are members of the Association. Information on the total number of FCs in the country is not available.

Data on the number of children in the individual age groups (CZSO)

The Czech Statistical Office provided a database containing data on the number of children born from 2015 to 2022, divided by the month of birth and MER. The information on the month of birth was needed in order to relate the data on children's attendance at kindergartens and preparatory classes to the respective age groups. However, according to the CZSO information, the data may not contain current information, as they disregard the migration of the population. The sizes of the individual age groups are therefore likely to be underestimated, as they will not include Ukrainian children who moved to the Czech Republic in 2022 and 2023 in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

(b) Qualitative data

During December, the scripts for the interviews were prepared and submitted for comments by the head of the Family Policy Department RILSA, Jana Paloncyová, Ph.D. The scripts were modified on the basis of the comments provided. During January, interviews and focus groups were held with the individual actors on the demand and supply sides. When choosing informants, the representation of the individual ECEC facility types, providers and users were taken into account. Actors who provided information on supply were chosen over time so that they could provide any information missing and answer the questions which arose in the process, thus contributing to data saturation.

An overview of the supply side actors involved in the interviews and focus groups:

- a representative of the Association of Local Authorities,
- a representative of the Platform for Early Care,
- the operations director of the Association of Children's Groups,
- the founder of a forest club in Prague 4,
- an employee of META, an organisation which provides assistance regarding educational services to Ukrainian mothers,
- employees of the Centres for Children and Youth (CCYs) in Prague 4 who oversee the centres for preschool children (CPCs),
- the head of the Department of Leisure of the Department of Education, Youth and Sport of the Prague City Hall,
- the chair of the Association of Staff of Centres for Children and Youth in the Czech Republic,
- the CEO of a community centre,
- Domestica's CEO,
- directors of primary schools educating Roma pupils.

On the demand side, an interview was held with a representative of Awen Amenca, an Ostrava-based organisation engaged in education of Roma children; individual interviews and focus groups were held with 45 mothers from various places in the Czech Republic. The respondents were selected to encompass different family situations, using different types of ECEC services, living in different parts of the country and in settlements of different sizes. In all cases the respondents were women, which is in line with the fact that the care for children of preschool age falls almost exclusively to women, making them more involved in the process of choosing the ECEC services and reconciling childcare and economic activity. Among other things, we interviewed the following groups of mothers:

- Ukrainian mothers, in temporary protection,
- foreign mothers,
- Roma mothers,
- single mothers and mothers with children in joint custody,
- mothers of children with disabilities or special educational needs,
- mothers of children attending children's groups,
- mothers of children attending a forest club,
- mothers of children attending preschool centres at a CCY,
- mothers of children attending public kindergartens,
- mothers of children attending private kindergartens,
- mothers of children attending an adaptation club at a mother centre.

Data analysis

The above data were used to calculate 15 indicators characterising supply and demand and the differences between them. The possibilities of quantitative analysis are very limited, as records are missing for most facilities (except kindergartens) or provide only basic information without more detailed breakdowns (in the case of children's groups). The calculation procedure and information regarding the limits of the available data are given for each indicator.

The data from the interviews and group interviews were repeatedly listened to and read and encoded using open coding. The codes were then used to create categories, which were described in more detail in the sections describing the results of the qualitative data collection. Because of the limited time period for the qualitative data collection, only the first round of qualitative data analysis took place. The data will be analysed more intensively and utilised in subsequent reports on the system on ECEC monitoring and evaluation and used when developing the recommendations.

Annex 3 European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

"Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality."⁸⁹

The European Pillar of Social Rights

Learning and education start from birth and the early years are the most formative in children's lives as they set the foundations for their lifelong development. This Quality Framework provides key principles and a European approach to high-quality early childhood education and care systems based on good practices in the EU Member States and a state of the art research. It comprises ten quality statements which are structured along five broader areas of quality: access, staff, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and governance and funding. The ten quality statements describe the main features of high-quality services as identified in practice. The Quality Framework is a governance tool aimed at providing orientation for the development and upholding of early childhood and education care systems.

The framework's main objective is to describe a system which can provide high-quality early childhood education and care for all children and its development; it is guided by the following principles:

- high-quality services are crucial in promoting children's development and learning and enhancing their educational chances in the long term;
- parents' participation as partners of such services is essential — the family is the most important place for children to grow and develop, and parents (and guardians) are responsible for each child's well-being, health and development;
- early childhood education and care services need to be child-centred, actively involve children and acknowledge children's views.

ACCESS to quality early childhood education and care services for all children contributes to their healthy development and educational success, helps reducing social inequalities and narrows the competence gap between children with different socio-economic backgrounds. Equitable access is also essential to ensure that parents, especially women, have flexibility to (re)integrate in the labour market.

Quality statements:

1. Provision of services that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

Universal legal entitlement to early childhood education and care services provides a solid basis for reaching out to all children. Population data and parents surveys on the demand for early childhood education and care places can serve as a basis for estimating further needs and adjusting capacity.

Provision of services can address barriers that may prevent families and children from participating. This may include an adjustment to the requested fees for early childhood education and care to allow also low-income households' access. There is also evidence that flexibility in opening hours and other arrangements can enable participation especially for children of working mothers, from single-parent families and from minority or disadvantaged groups.

Provision of services that is equally distributed across urban and rural areas, affluent and poor neighbourhoods, and regions can facilitate access for disadvantaged groups in society. Availability and affordability of high-quality services in neighbourhoods where poor families, minorities, or migrant or refugee families reside is reported to have the biggest impact on supporting equity and social inclusion.

2. Provision of services that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

Early childhood education and care settings can actively encourage participation by involving parents, families and carers in decision-making processes (e.g. in parent committees). Reaching out to families – especially to single-parent and disadvantaged or minority or migrant families – with targeted initiatives allows families to express their needs and enables services to take these into account when tailoring the provision of services to local communities' demands.

Recruitment of staff from marginalised, migrant or minority groups can be encouraged as it has proven to be of advantage if the composition of staff in early childhood education and care settings reflects the diversity in the community.

Creating a welcoming environment for children that values their languages, culture and home backgrounds contributes to the development of their sense of belonging. Appropriate continuous professional development also prepares staff to welcome and support bilingual children.

Early childhood education and care settings can develop good practices in families for a smooth transition from the home environment to the setting, as well as foster high levels of parental participation by organising specific initiatives.

STAFF is the most significant factor for children's well-being, learning and developmental outcomes. Therefore staff working conditions and professional development are seen as essential components of quality.

Quality statements:

3. Well-qualified staff with initial and continuing training that enables them to fulfil their professional role.

Effective early childhood education and care systems take into account the raising of the professional status of staff – which is widely acknowledged as one of the key factors of quality – by raising qualification levels, offering attractive professional status and flexible career prospects and alternative pathways for assistants. This can be supported by aiming for teaching staff members who are highly qualified professionals holding a full professional qualification specialised in early childhood education, in addition to assistant staff.

State-of-the-art initial education programmes are designed together with practitioners and provide a good balance between theory and practice. It is also an asset if education programmes prepare staff for working collectively and for enhancing reflective competences. Such programmes can benefit from training staff to work with diverse groups in terms of language and culture, from minority, migrant and low-income families.

Staff members who are equipped to follow the young children's developmental needs, interests and potential and able to detect any potential development and learning problems can more actively support child development and learning. Regular, tailor-made and continued professional development opportunities benefit all staff members, including assistants and auxiliary staff. Regarding the necessary elements of child development and psychology, competences for staff should, in line with the different structures of training in the Member States, include knowledge on child protection systems and, more generally, on the rights of the child.

4. Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

Early childhood education and care systems that aim at improved working conditions, including more adequate wage levels, can make employment in early childhood education and care a more attractive option for better-qualified staff looking for proper careers.

Adult-to-child ratios and group sizes are most adequate if designed in an appropriate manner for the age and composition of the group of children, as younger children require more attention and care.

Professional learning communities, where they exist within and across settings, have shown a positive impact through assigning time and space for staff collegial practices and joint work.

Offering mentoring and supervision to newly recruited staff during their induction can help them to quickly fulfil their professional roles.

CURRICULUM is a powerful tool to improve children's well-being, development and learning. A broad educational framework sets out the principles for sustaining children's development and learning through educational and care practices that meet children's interests, needs and potentialities.

Quality statements:

5. A curriculum based on teaching goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential addressing their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and their well-being.

Child-centred teaching approaches can better sustain children's overall development, provide support for their learning strategies and promote their cognitive and non-cognitive development by building more systematically on experiential learning, play and social interactions.

There is strong evidence that an explicit curriculum is an asset as it can provide a coherent framework for care, education and socialisation as integral parts of early childhood education and care provision. Ideally, such a framework defines teaching goals enabling educators to personalise their approach to children's individual needs and can provide guidelines for a high-quality learning environment. It gives due consideration to including availability of books and other printed material to help literacy development of children.

By promoting diversity, equality and linguistic awareness, an effective curriculum framework fosters integration of migrants and refugees. It can nurture the development of both their mother tongue and the language of education.

6. A curriculum that requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

A curriculum can help to better involve parents, stakeholders and staff and to ensure that it responds more adequately to the needs, interests and the children's potential.

A curriculum can define roles and processes for staff to collaborate regularly with parents as well as with colleagues in other children's services (including the health, social care and education sectors).

Whenever possible, the curriculum can provide guidelines for early childhood education and care staff to liaise with school staff on children's transition to the primary and/or pre-primary schools.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION sustain quality. By pointing to strengths and weaknesses, its processes can be important components of enhancing quality in early childhood education systems. They can provide support to stakeholders and policy makers in undertaking initiatives that respond to the needs of children, parents and local communities.

Quality statements:

7. Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

Transparent information on service and staff or on curriculum implementation at the appropriate – national, regional and local – level can help to improve quality.

Regular information feedback can make the process of policy evaluation easier, also by allowing to analyse the use of public funds and of what is effective and in what context.

To identify staff learning needs and to make the right decisions on how best to improve service quality and professional development, it is beneficial that early childhood education leaders collect relevant data in a timely manner.

8. Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child.

In order to protect the rights of the child, robust child protection / child safeguarding policies should be embedded within the early childhood education and care system to help protect children from all forms of violence. Effective child protection policies cover four broad areas: (1) policy, (2) people, (3) procedures, and (4) accountability. More information on these areas can be found in *Child Safeguarding Standards and How to Implement Them* issued by Keeping Children Safe.

The monitoring and evaluation processes can foster active engagement and cooperation among all stakeholders. Everyone concerned with the development of quality can contribute to – and benefit from – the monitoring and evaluation practices.

The available evidence indicates that a mix of monitoring methods (e.g. observation, documentation, narrative assessment of children's competences and learning) can provide useful information and give account of children's experiences and development, including helping a smooth transition to primary school.

Monitoring tools and participatory evaluation procedures can be created to allow children to be heard and be explicit about their learning and socialising experiences within settings.

GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING are crucial to enable early childhood education and care provision to play its role in the personal development and learning of children and in reducing the attainment gap and fostering social cohesion. Quality results from comprehensive and coherent public policies that link early childhood education and care to other services concerned with the welfare of young children and their families.

Quality statements:

9. Stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

Early childhood education and care provision benefits from close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, schools and local stakeholders. Such inter-agency alliances have shown to be more effective if governed by a coherent policy framework that can proactively foster collaboration and long-term investment in local communities.

Stakeholders' involvement has been shown as crucial to design and implement early childhood education and care provision.

The integration or coordination of services in charge of different regulations on early childhood education and care can have a positive effect on the quality of the system.

10. Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal entitlement to high-quality affordable early childhood education and care, and progress is regularly reported to relevant stakeholders.

Improvement of quality in service provision for all children might be better achieved by progressively building up universal legal entitlement. This includes promoting participation in early childhood education and care from an early age. It can be useful to evaluate whether market based early childhood education and care services create unequal access or lower quality for disadvantaged children and, if necessary, make plans for remedy actions.

A close link to labour, health and social policies would clearly be an asset as it can promote a more efficient redistribution of resources by targeting extra funding towards disadvantaged groups and neighbourhoods.



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Website: www.unicef.org/eca

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