

The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2010/2011

**A description of the responsibilities, structures and
developments in education policy for the exchange of information in Europe**

- EXCERPT -



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4. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

4.1. Introduction

Traditionally in Germany children under the age of three years are looked after in *Kinderkrippen* [crèches] and children from the age of three up to starting school in *Kindergarten*. Every child from the age of three up to starting school has a legal right to day-care in a child day-care facility or in day-care for children. In past years the profile of day-care centres has changed considerably. The number of facilities, which offer day care above all for children from the age of three up to starting school has decreased while more and more facilities offer day care for different age groups. One reason for this change in the supply structure is the expansion of day care for children agreed by the Federation, Länder and local authorities for children under three years of age, which is expected on average to create day-care places for 35 per cent of children nationally and gives the legal right to a place in day care from the age of one. The heightened efforts to expand day care for children aged below three have since the introduction of official statistics in 2006 led to a steady rise in day-care uptake.

General objectives

Today, day-care centres for children in the early childhood sector are regarded as an essential part of the education system. Under the Child and Youth Welfare Act [*Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz* - R60] of 1990, day-care centres for children are called upon to encourage the child's development into a responsible and autonomous member of the community. Furthermore, the day-care centre is designed to support and supplement the child's upbringing in the family and to assist the parents in better reconciling employment and child rearing. This duty includes instructing, educating and caring for the child and relates to the child's social, emotional, physical and mental development. It includes the communication of guiding values and rules. The provision of education and care is to be adjusted to the individual child's age and developmental stage, linguistic and other capabilities, life situation and interests, and take account of the child's ethnic origin. In terms of pedagogy and organisation, the range of services offered should be based on the needs of the children and their families.

Under the joint framework of the Länder for early education in day-care centres for children [*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*], educational objectives in early childhood education focus on communicating basic skills and developing and strengthening personal resources, which motivate children and prepare them to take up and cope with future challenges in learning and life, to play a responsible part in society and be open to lifelong learning.

Specific legislative framework

Under the Basic Law [*Grundgesetz* - R1], as part of its responsibility for public welfare, the Federation has concurrent legislative competence for child and youth welfare. This also applies to the promotion of children in day care [*Kinderkrippen, Kindergärten, Horten* or *Kindertagespflege*]. The Federation exercised its legislative authority in this field by passing the Child and Youth Welfare Act in June 1990. The legal framework of the Federation for child and youth welfare is completed, supplemented and extended by the Länder in their own laws [R64-79].

The Child and Youth Welfare Act was amended in July 1992 and expanded to include the legal right, introduced on 1 January 1996 and in force without restriction since 1 January 1999, to a *Kindergarten* place for all children from the age of three years until they start school. It was amended by the Day-Care Expansion Act [*Tagesbetreuungsausbaugesetz* – TAG – R61] in 2004 and has been revised by the Law on the Further Development of Child and Youth Welfare [*Kinder- und Jugendhilfeweiterentwicklungsgesetz* – KICK – R62] in 2005. The Child and Youth Welfare Act was last amended in December 2008 by the Children Promotion Act [*Kinderförderungsgesetz* – KiföG – R63]. Under the Children Promotion Act, the range of children under the age of three with a right to day care in a day-care centre or in day care for children was extended. There is a legal right to a place in day care, if required for child development purposes or because the parents are in employment, seeking work or in training. From 1 August 2013 onwards all children from the age of one have a legal right to a place in day care. As a matter for local self-government, the implementation and financing of child and youth welfare legislation is the responsibility of the *Kommunen* [local authorities].

Under Federal Law the legal framework for day care for children provided under the youth welfare office is regulated by the Child and Youth Welfare Act [*Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz*] and covers the placement, briefing, training and payment of suitable day-care staff by the youth welfare office. The Länder and local authorities are responsible for implementation, and have as a rule adopted their own legal provisions substantiating the framework conditions.

4.2. Organisation of Programmes for Children under 2-3 Years

Children under the age of three may be looked after in *Kinderkrippen* [crèches] or, in mixed-age groups, in day-care centres for children, together with children between three to six or 12 years of age. At present, day care for children under three years of age is undergoing expansion. More detailed information on the expansion of day-care centres for children can be found in chapter 14.2. For information on the funding agreed for the expansion of day-care centres, please see chapter 3.2.

4.3. Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children under 2-3 Years

For information on educational work in day-care centres for children, please see chapter 4.6.

4.4. Assessment in Programmes for Children under 2-3 Years

For information on assessment in day-care centres for children, please see chapter 4.7.

4.5. Organisation of Programmes for Children over 2-3 Years

Geographical accessibility

The local maintaining bodies of public youth welfare [local authorities – *Kommunen*] are obliged to provide places in day-care centres to all children from the age of three until they start school. In this regard, they cooperate with the non-public youth welfare services. Needs-oriented day-care services are to be established for children under three years of age in day care and in day-care centres.

Admission requirements and choice of institution/centre

Early childhood education includes all institutions run by the non-public and public child and youth welfare services which cater for children until they start school.

Under the Child and Youth Welfare Act [*Kinder- und Jugendhilfegesetz* – R60], all children who have reached the age of three have the legal right to be admitted to a day-care facility until school entry. The *Kindergarten* is the traditional form of institutionalised early childhood education for children from the age of three until they start school in Germany. Some Länder have group care facilities for children of all ages between four months and six or 12 years.

Besides the *Kindergarten* other forms of institution and care facilities exist in the early childhood sector. However, in terms of the number of children they cater for, these institutions are of lesser significance. For information on *Vorklassen*, *Schulkindergärten* and *heilpädagogische* or *sonderpädagogische Kindergärten* for children with disabilities see chapter 12.3.

Age levels and grouping of children

Early childhood education is not organised into grades, groups frequently consist of children from different age groups.

Organisation of time

Organisation of the year

The organisation of supervision in *Kindergärten* during the year corresponds with the organisation of school time [see chapter 5.2.]. If day-care institutions close during holidays, the maintaining body of the public youth welfare has to ensure alternative supervision for children who cannot be supervised by the persons who have parental power.

Weekly and daily duration of education and supervision

In Germany, early childhood education and care in day-care facilities is not part of the state-organised school system, but is assigned to Child and Youth Welfare, which means that the Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder therefore do not adopt regulations governing the time-table in the early childhood sector.

Opening hours are largely arranged by youth welfare offices [*Jugendämter*], generally with the agreement of the maintaining bodies and in consultation with the parents. These times may vary between the different *Kindergärten* and depend to some extent on the needs of the families in their catchment areas. The contracted child-care hours range from up to five hours in the morning [half-days] to between six and seven hours of care daily, sometimes with a midday break [three-quarter days], to seven-hour full-day care including lunch [whole days]. There are considerable regional differences in the pattern of daily use of places in *Kindergarten*. In eastern Germany more than two out of three children over the age of three attend day-care facilities for the whole day [67.9 per cent], compared with just one quarter in western Germany. The number of whole-day options is, however, increasing in western Germany too.

Many *Kindergärten* are now trying more consciously than before to adapt their opening times in line with the needs of families and, if necessary, are organising an early-

morning service or a late service as well as a lunch-time service for some children or groups of children. However, any extension in opening hours is often limited by the number of staff employed at each establishment and the capacity of its premises.

4.6. Teaching and Learning in Programmes for Children over 2-3 Years

Curriculum, types of activity

Subjects and weekly teaching hours are not laid down for the *Kindergarten* sector, and there are no curricula such as those in schools. The Länder have laid down objectives and areas of education in education plans which are implemented in agreement with the maintaining bodies of the day-care centres for children. The following areas and activities are designed to encourage the development of children from the age of three years until they enter school in the *Kindergarten*: development of the child's physical, mental, emotional and social abilities. According to the joint framework of the Länder for early education in day-care centres for children [*Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen*], educational areas are:

- language, writing, communication
- personal and social development, development of values and religious education
- mathematics, natural sciences, [information] technology
- fine arts/working with different media
- body, movement, health
- nature and cultural environments

The early educational and school education concepts in each case are to be agreed at local level between the non-public youth welfare services and the primary schools [*Grundschulen*].

Teaching methods and materials

According to the joint framework of the Länder for early education in day-care centres for children, methods of educational work in day-care centres for children are determined by a holistic approach. The main emphasis is on project work, which shall communicate subject-matter of relevance to the child's own environment and interests. Educational work shall encourage self-organised learning, give the child the freedom for creativity, encourage team work, enable the child to learn from mistakes, as well as to investigate and experiment.

The educational work in the *Kindergarten* is essentially based on the situational approach: it is guided by the interests, needs and situations of the individual children. The pedagogical staff therefore have to observe the children, document their development and talk to parents regularly.

4.7. Assessment in Programmes for Children over 2-3 Years

Evaluation and progression of children

Children's performance at *Kindergarten* is not assessed, as teaching does not take place in the sense of lessons at school. Specialised educational staff monitor and document

children's development and inform parents of their child's progress and of individual educational needs.

4.8. Organisational Variations and Alternative Structures in Early Childhood Education and Care

As well as day-care centres for children, day care is also available for children under the age of six, partly on a privately-organised basis. One or more children are looked after in a private home by a suitable childminder. Children in the *Kindergarten* are sometimes also looked after by a childminder if the opening times of the *Kindergarten* do not suit the needs of parents. It is mainly younger children who are cared for by childminders. In recent years the share of publicly-funded childminders has reached almost 15 per cent of day-care on offer for children under the age of three, and has therefore gained increasing importance. As part of the endeavour to establish needs-oriented day-care services for children under three years of age by the year 2013, the percentage of day care for children is to be increased to 30 per cent.

The Day Care Expansion Act [*Tagesbetreuungsgesetz* - TAG - R6I] which entered into force at the beginning of 2005, enhances day care for children by setting up, for the first time, minimum qualification requirements for the childminder. In future, day care for children should provide an alternative which in terms of quality equals the supervision in day-care centres, in particular for children below the age of three. Within the scope of the *Action Programme Day Care for Children*, in close cooperation of the Federation, the Länder, the local authorities and the associations, the quality of day care for children is to be ensured and improved, more personnel is to be engaged, the infrastructure expanded and the parental role reinforced. Moreover, within the scope of the Qualification Initiative for Germany "Getting ahead through education" [*Aufstieg durch Bildung*] the Federal Government also provides measures of continuing training for childminders.

