

The Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany 2017/2018

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

– EXCERPT –

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*. In past years the profile of day-care centres has changed considerably. The number of facilities, which offer day care exclusively 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. A nationwide needs-oriented supply of day-care places for children is to be established in order to create the basis for fulfilling the legal right to early childhood education and care in a day-care centre or child-minding service from the age of one which has entered into force on 1 August 2013. This complements the legal entitlement introduced back in 1996 to day care in a day-care centre for children from the age of three up to starting school. 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

Under the Social Security Code VIII (*Achtes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – R61*), day-care centres for children and child-minding services are called upon to encourage the child's development into a responsible and autonomous member of the community. Furthermore, day care 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 attaining 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, Horte* or *Kindertagespflege*). The Federation exercised its legislative authority in this field by passing the Social Security Code VIII 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 Social Security Code VIII 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. The Social Security Code VIII was last amended in December 2008 by the Children Promotion Act (*Kinderförderungsgesetz – KiföG – R62*). The Child Promotion Act laid down a gradual expansion of supervision and care offers for children under the age of three. In a first stage the maintaining bodies of public child and youth welfare had been obliged to increase the number of places available to children under the age of three in day-care centres or child-minding services and to provide a place if required for child development purposes or because the parents are in employment, seeking work or in training. This was an objective obligation, however, not a legal right to a place. On 1 August 2013 the second phase of the expansion of supervision and care offers was achieved: since this point there has been a legal entitlement to a place in day care for children who have reached the age of one. The implementation and financing of child and youth welfare legislation lies, under the Basic Law, in the sphere of competence of the *Länder* and, as a matter for local self-government, 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

Geographical Accessibility

The local maintaining bodies of the public youth welfare (administrative districts and independent towns or cities) are obliged to provide places in day care facilities for children or in child day care for children from the age of one until they start school. They hereby cooperate with the maintaining bodies of private child and youth welfare.

Admission Requirements and Choice of ECEC institution

Since 1 August 2013 there has been a legal entitlement to support in a day care centre for children or in a child-minding service for children who have reached the age of one. The scope of daily support is oriented to individual needs.

Age Levels and Grouping of Children

Children under the age of three may be looked after in *Kinderkrippen* (crèches), in groups of children under the age of three in day-care centres or, in mixed-age groups, in day-care centres together with children between three up to 14 years of age or in child-minding services. Day care for children under the age of three was initially expanded in view of the introduction of the legal entitlement in 2013. This expansion is currently being continued as there are still day-care requirements which need to be covered.

Organisation of Time

For the organisation of time in day care for children, the information in chapter 4.6. applies.

Organisation of the Day and Week

For the organisation of the day and week in day care for children, the information in chapter 4.6. applies.

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

Steering Documents and Types of Activity

According to the specialist recommendations of the national working group of the Land youth welfare services (*Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Landesjugendämter*) of November 2009 on the quality of the education, upbringing and care of children under three in day-care centres for children and child-minding services, early child-care must respond in particular to the basic needs of small children. The specific needs of children under three include:

- loving attention
- sensitive care based on stable relationships
- sympathetic support appropriate to development stage
- empathy and support in stressful situations
- unconditional acceptance
- safety and security

Educational support at this stage in life is primarily understood as shaping relationships with the child and as holistic support complementing development. It is accompanied by educational partnership with parents. The educational processes take place through social interaction and communication, and above all through play. Special development themes of early childhood promotion include supporting communication, language and motor development.

Teaching Methods and Materials

The promotion of communication and language is a core educational task. Children acquire language skills not in isolation, but in daily interaction with adults and other children. Language development is promoted in an emotionally approachable atmosphere. Educational staff are expected to support workflows and care processes with language, and to structure them as language-stimulating situations. Language development is also supported by the language model provided by educational staff, through customs including songs, finger play and verse, teaching work with picture books, and much more besides.

Another development aspect is the promotion of motor development. Extensive opportunities for motor activities are designed to support secure movement and the development of body awareness, self-acceptance and the attentiveness of the child. This includes inter alia a wealth of physical activities, open spaces, programmes such as rhythmic early education, and song and movement games. Children should also have enough time to make motor advances by themselves.

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

There is no assessment of performance in day-care centres for children, as there are no lessons in the traditional sense. Regular observation and documenting of development and the abilities and needs of the children allows educational staff to support individual development tasks competently. Staff incorporate these observations into dialogue with the child and conversations with the parents.

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 or child-minding services to all children from the age of one until they start school. In this regard, they cooperate with the non-public youth welfare services.

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 Social Security Code VIII (*Achtes Buch Sozialgesetzbuch – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe – R61*), all children who have reached the age of three have the legal right to be admitted to a day-care facility until school entry. Since 1 August 2013 there has been a legal entitlement to support in a day care centre for children or in a child-minding service for children who have reached the age of one. This complements the legal entitlement introduced back in 1996 to day care in a day-care centre for children from the age of three up to starting school.

Besides the day-care centres, in some Länder 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 and care takes place to some extent in age-based groups and to some extent in groups of mixed ages.

Organisation of time

The organisation of early childhood education and care in day-care centres during the year corresponds to a large extent 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.

Organisation of the Day and Week

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 early childhood education and care. There are legal rights to supervision times in certain Länder, however, that have to correspond with the child's well-being.

Opening hours are largely arranged by the maintaining bodies 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, as a rule, from up to five hours in the morning to between six and seven hours of care daily, sometimes with a midday break, to seven-hour full-day care including lunch. There are considerable regional differences in the pattern of daily use of places in day-care centres.

Many day-care facilities 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 to some extent limited by the number of staff employed at each establishment, the capacity of its premises and the obligation to take into account the child's best interest.

Since the beginning of 2016, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (*Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend – BMFSFJ*) has been supporting families with the federal programme *KitaPlus: Because Good Care Is Not a Question of the Time of Day (KitaPlus: Weil gute Betreuung keine Frage der Uhrzeit ist)*. This programme aims to create additional care offers in after-school and day-care facilities for children as well as in child-minding services that are tailored to the needs of the family from the very beginning of care through to the after-school care centre. More detailed information is available in chapter 11.2.

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

Steering Documents and Types of Activity

Subjects and weekly teaching hours are not laid down for the sector of early childhood education and care, 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 aim of supporting the development of children from the age of three until they start school is to develop their intellectual, physical, 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 framework is currently being updated and expanded to include other areas of education.

The early educational and school education concepts in each case are to be agreed at local level between the non-public child and youth welfare services and the primary schools (*Grundschulen*). Language education plays a special role in educational con-

cepts. This should also be seen against the background of the promotion of multi-lingual children.

Teaching methods and materials

The educational work in day care facilities for children is dominated by the principle of holistic support and learning together with others (co-construction). The main emphasis here is on individual educational work with the children, be this in projects or integrated in day to day life. Educational work shall encourage self-organised learning, give the child the freedom for creativity, enable the child to learn from mistakes, as well as to investigate and experiment.

The educational work in day-care centres for children 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

Children's performance at day-care facilities is not assessed, as teaching does not take place in the sense of lessons at school. Trained educational staff monitor and document the development of the children and use this as a basis to draw up, with the assistance of parents and in dialogue with the children, individual measures to support the children's development.

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

As well as day-care centres for children, child-minding services are also available, especially for children under the age of three. Here one or more children are cared for by a childminder in a private home or an apartment or house rented for this purpose. Children in day-care facilities are sometimes also looked after by a childminder if the opening times of the institution do not suit the needs of parents. It is mainly younger children who are cared for by childminders. Publicly funded childminding services accounted for 15.4 percent of all care offers for children under the age of three in 2017.

Since 2005 minimum qualification requirements for the childminder are in place. Child-minding services 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 Child Day Care Action Programme (*Aktionsprogramm Kindertagespflege*), 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. At the same time through the Child Day Care Action Programme, the German Youth Institute (*Deutsches Jugendinstitut*) curriculum has established 160 hours as the minimum standard for the training of childminders. Besides the qualification of childminders on the basis of this standard, the programme also provides for the option of continuing education while in employment and permanent employment models for childminders.

The federal programme Child Day Care: Because the Smallest Ones Need Closeness (*Kindertagespflege: Weil die Kleinsten große Nähe brauchen*) runs from 2016 until 2018. One focus of the programme is to help local authorities realise and further

implement the Qualification Manual Day Care for Children (*Qualifizierungshandbuch Kindertagespflege – QHB*).