

Caring of those who care: Striving for more dignity and recognition for early childcare staff!



EPSU takeaways from the the European Commission Early Childhood and Education expert group Peer Learning Activity in Milan

(4 November 2019) Well trained and motivated professionals are key to ensuring the provision of quality early childhood education and care for all children and families. This is why 23 representatives from 15 EU countries, social partners and various stakeholders met recently in Milan to discuss ECEC competences, the way which they can be developed, the attractiveness of the ECEC profession, and the ways in which new ECEC workers can be supported when they begin employment.

To support Member States in implementing the Council recommendation and its Quality Framework, the ET2020 Working group for ECEC is working towards identifying best practices and ideas, which will support efficient reforms in the field of inclusion in ECEC and the professionalisation of staff.

The working group will work on ways make the ECEC workforce more professional, and to ensure a high quality ECEC system. It will also look at ways to raise attractiveness of the profession.

PLAs hosted by the municipality of Milan (Italy) provided the opportunity to discuss ECEC competences, the ways in which they can be developed, the attractiveness of the ECEC profession and the ways in which new ECEC educators can be supported when they are first employed.

Mapping the core competences for childcare professionals

The working group reflected in particular on how to define the core competences of ECEC staff which need to be better recognized, particularly with regards to three main positions: assistants, core practitioners, leaders. This is a challenging exercise as we don't yet have a common definition of such jobs across all the 33 countries of the EU, especially in terms of qualifications. Particular discussion was held on the topic of assistant's tasks and status. Assistants are those working on a daily basis with/under the teacher (Not as cleaners, not prepare the room, etc., but working directly with the children under the teachers leadership). For assistants, the situation is extremely different among member states, with countries where no initial qualification is required and others where assistants have high level of initial training. In this regard, experts focused in particular on the situation in Estonia, Belgium, Milan. The key issue discussed by the group was how to find the right staff ratio between pedagogues and assistants. If we have assistants in childcare facilities, then it is important to rethink the role of pedagogues.

Continuous professional development in ECEC

The expert group focused especially on CPD, and whether it should be compulsory for all staff. Europe is still lagging behind on this: In the most countries, CPD is still invisible: most carers are still confronted with short term and precarious working arrangements that prevent them from accessing continuous professional development and other training opportunities.

The PLA was a good opportunity to visit different ECEC facilities, (Giacosa Pre-School, Ogilo Preschool, Thomas Mann Preschool) to see how those facilities are organised and what the challenges are for workers in Milan. It is important to continue to invest in offering attractive professional status and career prospects for early childhood education and care staff, reaching a better gender balance and creating professionalisation pathways for staff with low or no qualifications as well as specific pathways to qualify assistants.

After this PLA in Milan, a recommendation will summarize and feed the work on how to better implement the ECEC Quality Framework proposed by the European commission to provide high-quality early childhood education and care for all children.

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