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Ministère de l'Éducation nationale,
de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse

European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Working Group

Peer Learning Activity

How can ECEC leaders best recruit and manage diverse teams and work with diverse families?

16-18 October 2024

Luxembourg

SUMMARY

Questions related to this PLA can be addressed to EAC-WG-ON-ECEC@ec.europa.eu.

Executive summary

To support European Union Member States in implementing the 2019 Council recommendation for high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems[1], and the European Quality Framework for ECEC, the European Education Area Working Group (WG) for ECEC[2] is working towards identifying best practices and ideas, which can support efficient reforms. For its 2024-25 work cycle, the group focuses on leadership in ECEC, with three topics and a set of key questions:

1. Leadership in ECEC: models and practices across Europe

- What are the main **functions and tasks** associated to centre leaderships?
- What are the main **structures of leadership** in place (*i.e. hierarchical/distributed, support structure, role of providers, local authorities,…*)?

2. How to train, recruit and motivate leaders in ECEC

- What are the **competence requirements/professional profile** for ECEC centre leaders?
- What are **initial and in-service training** programmes provided?
- Which **career pathways** are currently available *(i.e. from being a practitioner to become a leader)*?

3. From centre leaders to ECEC system leadership (tbc)

- How can **network leadership** support **integrated work across sectors** *(horizontally)?*
- as well as **across different levels of education** *(vertically), i.e.* 0-3/3-6 in split systems, ECEC/primary schools in integrated systems?

The Peer Learning Activity (PLA) that took place in Luxembourg between 16-18 October 2024, is related to the second key theme on **training, recruiting and motivating ECEC leaders**. The discussions were held around the following guiding questions:

- **In a context of staff shortages, how can leaders recruit professionals with a range of backgrounds and qualifications in order to build a competent team?**
- **Which competences do leaders need to manage diverse teams[3] and welcome all families?**
- **Which training (initial and continuing) is / should be offered to ECEC leaders to manage diverse teams and welcome all families?**

The PLA was jointly organised by the European Commission and Luxembourgish Ministry of Education, Children and Youth, with the collaboration of the non-formal education steering committee.

During this PLA, Working Group members as well as policymakers and practitioners from Luxembourg provided several presentations. Participants could attend study visits and there was also time for discussions and the exchange of both inspiring practices and challenges. Key background documents that were referenced during the PLA were:

- How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified ECEC staff,
- Toolkit for inclusive ECEC,
- Policy brief on staff shortages in the ECEC sector.

[1] EUR-Lex - 32019H0605(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)
[2] ECEC - EACGroups - EC Public Wiki (europa.eu)
[3] Diverse teams: teams made of individuals with different professions, levels and types of qualifications, years of experience, cultural background, language, age, gender, etc.

The ECEC system in Luxembourg

The ECEC system of Luxembourg[4] was presented by a representative of Luxembourg's Ministry of Education, Children and Youth's Directorate-General for the childhood sector. Besides the key milestones in the development of Luxembourg's ECEC sector, he highlighted the evolution of ECEC attendance rates, which shows an explosion of the sector since 2005 – this can be seen both in terms of the number of places and of ECEC providers, with a large expansion of private ECEC, especially for children aged 0-3 years. The evolving demands of leadership in ECEC and the importance of providing high quality ECEC were also stressed. In this regard, the national educational reference framework for non-formal education and the national quality assurance mechanism have been in place since 2016. The regulations for ECEC leadership positions were also mentioned, including the necessary qualifications, the need for 3 years of professional experience, and the required time commitment (20 hours of management tasks). Furthermore, the challenges around recruiting, maintaining, upskilling and reskilling in ECEC were noted, such as related to staff shortages, recruiting qualified staff, and the specificities of cross-border workers. Finally, the government programme for 2023-2028 was presented.

Specific examples of Luxembourgish ECEC-practices were provided by various leaders and providers of ECEC in Luxembourg. They provided examples of how they recruit and retain staff, in the context of staff shortages. They emphasised the need for a clear vision and mission, proactive outreach approaches (e.g. on social media, job fairs), flexible hiring criteria, and examples of trial days. The importance of ECEC leaders' empathy and emotional intelligence was also mentioned in addition to the need to build a positive workplace culture, and inspiring as well as motivating their whole team. Inevitably, this demands training and support for leaders (e.g., by mentoring, job shadowing, etc.).

Input from Working Group members

A representative of the **German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**, presented the German plans to tackle ECEC staff shortages, which is caused, among others, by the expansion of places, efforts to improve quality and the introduction of a new legal entitlement to all-day care for children of primary school age. She referred to:

- The 'Strategy for securing skilled workers in ECEC and all-day care at elementary schools' that produce 46 recommendations on short, medium and long-term measures, developed in a participatory working method;
- Ongoing quality development processes in ECEC, including the Childcare Quality Act;
- The longer-term goal of Nationwide Quality Standards which define standards also in relation to the qualifications of managers in ECEC centres.

A representative of the **Portuguese Ministry of Education** presented how leaders are trained for diversity and multicultural public school environments in Portugal. The ECEC training landscape and components, as well as the standard profiles for public ECEC staff were explained in detail. In Portugal, the ECEC system is embedded within public school clusters, which are seen as spaces for inclusive education and social intervention. Core themes for school hub headteachers' training are management and administration, as well as legal and policy knowledge, whereas more wide-ranging programmes also focus on instructional leadership and strategic planning. Domains that are missing from headteachers' training are community and stakeholder engagement, crisis management and emotional intelligence. Other challenges and areas for development relate to practical implementation, the depth of cultural competency training and ongoing professional development. 12 domains were mentioned to improve ECEC training for diversity, such as culturally responsive leadership, collaboration with families, multilingualism, equity and social justice.

A representative of the **Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs** presented a special grant scheme (2022-2024) to work with diverse families in the field of ECEC. This grant has been provided in cooperation with UNICEF, mainly supporting Ukrainian refugees in Czechia. The grant focuses on counselling and complementary services for the whole family, the provision of childcare services (min. 10 hours / week) and support for children with specific needs, among others. Additional organised activities include methodological guidance to work with children with specific needs, also via online trainings and seminars, which met the expectations of the participants.

[4] For more information see the Luxembourg country report of the SEEPRO-3 and the Eurydice website.

Key take aways

Discussions during the PLA focused on inclusive leadership and how leaders manage diverse teams and welcome diverse families, as well as the preconditions needed for this. Participants agreed on the **added value of diverse teams**, with many benefits **for children, families, and the ECEC staff**, such as:

- For children: exposure to / respect for various types of diversity (such as cultural and linguistic), open mindedness, role models;
- For families: more accessible services, reduced language and cultural barriers, more welcoming and reciprocal relations;
- For staff members: learning from multiple perspectives, different team dynamics, higher job satisfaction;

For the organisation: possibility to cope with staff shortages, higher quality ECEC. However, these advantages are not self-evident. Several challenges remain, including linguistic and cultural barriers demanding more transparent communication and more time to come to common understandings. Additional challenges in diverse teams include the differences in status, wages, training needs, as well as a potential reluctance from experienced workers to change practices.

These **challenges demand that leaders first acknowledge the existing types of diversity in their teams** that can be related to age, gender, experience, wages, profiles, contractual status, nationality, culture, religion, language, personal talents and preferences, health condition, family situation, etc. Secondly, **leaders should value these differences** and lastly, **strive for building inclusive teams where the diversity can become an added value for all stakeholders**. The latter can be done by creating an organisational culture which avoids judgement and biases, favours open and transparent communication, provides support and supervision according to the needs of each individual.

Implications of the above for the recruitment and retention of diverse ECEC staff include:

- Aspects to consider in recruiting staff: knowledge of the experience and staff's needs, clear vision of priorities and clear definition of the organisational culture, search for complementary staff, openness and willingness to create diverse teams, autonomy in hiring staff.
- Aspects to consider in retaining staff: have faith and empathy, recognition / appreciation / praise of differences, providing constructive feedback, transparent communication, empowering staff to express their competences based on trust and autonomy, open mindedness, awareness of one's own biases, not tolerating discrimination, embracing the unknown, cultural intelligence, keeping a balance between team spirit and the importance and uniqueness of each individual, communicating and aiming to understand staff needs (e.g. work-life balance, health problems, etc.).

Policy pointers

In order for leaders to become inclusive, **leaders should be trained (initially and in-service) both in managerial and pedagogical functions, as well as in diversity and inclusiveness towards families and all staff members**. This also implies that **competence profiles for ECEC centre leaders must be defined, and these must include an aspect related to working with diverse families**. This can build further on the competences mentioned in the document 'How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified ECEC staff'. Detailed competence profiles will in turn inform and guide training support needs.

National policymakers play an important role in supporting ECEC leaders in recruiting and retaining diverse staff, such as by supporting their continuous professional development (CPD) including with sufficient budget and time allocated for this purpose, revising regulations to provide more flexibility, promoting the value and esteem of the profession, as well as improving working conditions. This should be an ongoing process, including individual and peer support (e.g., mentoring, job shadowing, learning communities). Ensuring autonomy and flexibility for ECEC leaders is also key, whereas distributed leadership contributes to making the job more feasible and attractive by allowing for sharing tasks and responsibilities.

'Leadership is not about being in charge. It's about taking care of those in your charge.' Simon Sinek