

# LITHUANIA

## Key contextual data

*Compiled by*

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## Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

### Please note

In alignment with country-specific usage, the term used in this report for the main form of centre-based ECEC provision is **early childhood education centre** (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas, lopšelis-darželis*, 1–5), comprising **nursery groups** (*lopšelis*, 1–2) and **kindergarten groups** (*darželis*, 3–5). Compulsory **pre-primary groups** (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupės*, 6–7)<sup>1</sup> are located in both ECE centres and schools. Any additional forms are described where appropriate.

### Historical milestones in ECEC in Lithuania

1847	First educational establishment for young children opened in Klaipėda.
1936	Kindergartens included in national legislation for the first time.
1938-1990	During the Soviet era, access to education, including early childhood education, was an important policy focus, both to strengthen political ideology and to enable parents, particularly women, to enter the employment market.
Until 1990	Steady expansion of ECEC provision
1990–1997	Two alternative programmes for early childhood education are introduced: (1) Guidelines for Early Childhood Education: a Curriculum for Teachers and Parents, and (2) the Kindergarten Programme <i>Vėrinėlis</i> .
1998–2002	Parliament approves pre-primary education for 5 and 6 year-olds.
2003–2012	Access to early childhood education is expanded, in particular for children from socially disadvantaged communities.
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Introduction of state funding for four hours of pre-primary education</li> <li>– Ministry of Education approves "Criteria for the early education programme".</li> </ul>
2013	National education strategy for 2013–2022 sets out a goal to achieve 90% ECEC attendance among 4 year-olds by 2017 and 95% by 2022.
2014	The Education Act is amended to accommodate a needs-related approach in ECEC.
2015	Adoption of „Description of the achievements of preschool-aged children“ ( <i>Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų aprašas</i> ) and the “General curriculum framework for pre-primary education” ( <i>Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa</i> )
2016	One-year compulsory enrolment in a pre-primary group comes into force.
2018–2022	Project on the development of guidelines for the external evaluation of ECEC settings is launched.
2019	A new mixed-funding model is introduced for early education.
End of 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Amendments to the Education Act provide the framework for a step-by-step entitlement to universal early education by 2025 for 4, 3 and 2 year-olds.</li> <li>– Other amendments included: allowing parents to choose whether their child should start compulsory pre-primary education at age 5 or 6; and transferring responsibility for compulsory ECEC for children of at-risk families from the state to the municipalities.</li> </ul>

Sources: Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010; Siarova and Buinaukas 2017; Malinauskienė 2020; Eurydice 2023

<sup>1</sup> **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. We have chosen the following age-inclusive format for the SEEPRO-3 reports: **0–2** years for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the case of Lithuania, where primary school starts at age 7, the relevant formats are **0–5** (early childhood centre) or **3–5** years (kindergarten) and **6–7** years (pre-primary group).

## ECEC system type and auspices<sup>2</sup>

In Lithuania, the system of early childhood education and care for children up to primary school entry at age 7 is uniformly regulated and organised in two stages. Both **early education** in ECE centres (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas*) for 0 to under 6 year-olds and **compulsory pre-primary education** (*priešmokyklinis ugdymas*) for 6 to 7 year-olds are part of the education system and are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (*Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerija*). Both stages are classified as non-formal education.

The education system in Lithuania is decentralised, with the State and municipalities working closely together. For example, while the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports is responsible for the development and implementation of education policy, the municipalities or other early education providers are responsible for the admission procedures of children. In terms of management, educational content and pedagogy, the ECE institutions have a relatively high degree of autonomy.

## General objectives and legislative framework

Education has high political priority in Lithuania and is supported and funded by the State. Overarching goals are set out in the national ten-year education strategy 2013–2022, with particular emphasis on access to education for all children, high quality provision and structural financing strategies.

The 2011 Education Act (*Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo įstatymas 2011*, with amendments from 2020) sets out the basic principles of the education system: humanistic and democratic values, human rights and individual freedom. The objectives include: developing persons with a sense of responsibility; supporting communication and language skills as well as creative and cognitive competences; having regard both for national and ethnic cultural values; and the acquisition of skills and abilities needed to become a responsible citizen of the Republic of Lithuania, in Europe and in the global community.

## ECEC entitlement and compulsory attendance

Until very recently, there was no universal entitlement to a place in ECEC provision in Lithuania. Although each municipality was required to have a network of ECEC providers, they were not obliged to ensure a place for every child. However, amendments to the Education Act adopted at the end of 2020 provide for the step-by-step introduction of universal early education: from September 2023 for 4 year-olds, from 2024 for 3 year-olds and from 2025 for 2 year-olds.

In general, attending an early education institution is not compulsory in Lithuania. However, there are exceptions, for example: if child's family is considered "socially vulnerable"; if the child does not attend the setting despite being enrolled; if a child's special educational needs cannot be met by the family; or if the parents live in difficult conditions. Provision is then free of charge.

In September 2016, one-year compulsory enrolment in a pre-primary group for 6 to 7 year-olds came into force, with an obligation to attend for at least 20 hours per week (or 640 hours per year). Since September 2021, attendance may last two years if this is deemed necessary. From September 2024, pre-primary group enrolment is to start at the age of 5.

Primary school starts at age 7 and this will be lowered to 6 years of age in September 2024.

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<sup>2</sup> The Eurydice country report on ECEC in Lithuania provided orientation for legal and regulatory aspects. All other sources are clearly indicated within the text and in the references section.

## Main types of provision

Early education for children under 3 years of age in Lithuania is classified as ISCED 01, and pre-primary education for children aged 3 and over as ISCED 02, although ECEC centres are not generally organised on an age-segregated basis.

### Early education (0–5/6 years)

**Early childhood education centres** (*ikimokyklinis ugdymas, lopšelis-darželis*) for children from the age of 1 to 5 years are the regular form of educational provision. They are age-integrated facilities that cater for under 3 year-olds in nursery groups (*lopšelis*) and 3 to under 6 year-olds in kindergarten groups (*darželis*). Most centres offer full-day provision, but opening hours may vary and can be 12 hours, 9 to 10½ hours, 5 to 6 hours or 3 to 4 hours or have opening times that are negotiated with parents according to their specific needs for combining family and work duties. In addition, there are also a number of round-the-clock facilities

### Pre-primary education (6–7 years)

**Pre-primary groups** (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupės*): Attendance at a pre-primary group in the year before school enrolment for a minimum of 640 hours (including holidays) has been compulsory since September 2016. The main aim is to provide targeted preparation for school. An increasing number of 5 year-olds are also attending these groups (see *Table 1*). Pre-primary groups are located both in age-integrated ECE centres and in schools (*priešmokyklinio ugdymo grupė mokykloje*) and, particularly in remote areas, also in other types of institution (see below). Additionally, they may be run by private teachers or other service providers.

Most groups open at 7:30/8:00 for a minimum of four hours daily. Transportation is provided for children living further than 3 km from the nearest facility, but parents have to cover the costs.

In 2022, a total of 46,139 children between the ages of 5 and 7 attended pre-primary groups in ECE settings and 10,450 pre-primary groups attached to schools (OSP 2023a – see *Table 1*).

Table 1

Lithuania: Number of children in pre-primary groups by location, 2022

Age	Children in pre-primary groups in ECE centres	Children in pre-primary groups in schools	Total*
5 year-olds	27,460	1,215	28,675
6 year-olds	18,629	9,205	27,834
7 year-olds	50	30	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,139</b>	<b>10,450</b>	<b>56,589</b>

Source: OSP 2023a, \*own calculations

### Additional forms of ECEC provision

Self-contained **kindergartens** (*darželis*) are a form of all-day setting. Traditionally they were for 3- to 6 year-olds, but today younger children can also be admitted. Kindergartens taking in children younger than 3 years old are normally referred to as kindergarten-nurseries (*lopšelis-darželis*), with groups for children younger than 3 being referred to as nurseries (*lopšelis*) and those for children between 3 and 6 being referred to as kindergartens (*darželis*). In remote areas with few children, kindergarten groups may also be offered in schools. Some kindergartens work according to an explicit educational approach (e.g. Waldorf, Montessori).

**School kindergartens** (*mokykla-darželis*) combine early education and elements of primary education in one institutional setting for children from 2 or 3 years old until they turn 10. They are mostly to be found in rural areas.

**Multi-functional centres** (*daugiafunkcinis centras*), which also offer provision for children from the age of 3 years often focus on special education support. Besides providing ECEC, they also offer leisure-time activities and other services (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 181).

## Provider structures

In 2022, there were a total of 742 ECEC settings (*ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokykla*) in Lithuania, 542 of which were public and 200 private-independent (Eurydice 2023, 2.8). These figures indicate a tremendous surge in privately-run settings. Whereas in 2013, almost all children up to 7 years of age (93.4%) attended public facilities (OSP 2018, 30), by 2021 the number of children in private facilities had increased significantly, both for under 3 year-olds and over 3 year-olds (Eurostat 2023e) – see *Table 2*.

*Table 2*

**Lithuania: Children in ECEC centres and pre-primary groups by provider, 2013 and 2021**

Provider	Number and age of children			
	Under 3 year-olds		3 years to school entry	
	2013	2021	2013	2021
Public	18,299	21,462	91,837	101,060
Private for-profit	719	3,240	1,732	6,741
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,018</b>	<b>24,702</b>	<b>93,569</b>	<b>107,801</b>

Source: Eurostat 2023e

In 2022, 54 ECEC providers had special education and development groups for children with SEN. In 2022 there were in total 15,578 pedagogical staff working in ECEC institutions (OSP 2023a, c, d).

## Participation rates in regulated ECEC settings

National statistics show that in 2022, there were 715 ECEC centres in Lithuania offering 134,230 places, with a total of 125,207 children were enrolled in 7,453 groups (OSP 2022a, 2022b). On average, there were 107 places per 100 children in ECEC institutions across the country. However, the number varied between 98 to 140 depending on the region (OSP 2023c).

In 2022, 54.1% of 1 to 2 year-olds attended an ECEC setting, 82.7% of 1 to 6 year-olds and 94.9% of 3 to 6 year-olds (OSP 2023a, 2023b). Most 5 year-olds (92.7%) and 6 year-olds (63.5%) attended pre-primary groups (5–7) located in ECEC centres (OSP 2023a).

Table 3

**Lithuania: Number and enrolment rates of 5 to 7 year-olds in pre-primary groups by age and institution, 2022**

	Pre-primary groups in			
	ECEC centres		Schools	
	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %	Number of children	Enrolment rate, in %
5 year-olds	27,460	92.7	1,215	4.1
6 year-olds	18,629	63.5	9,205	31.4
7 year-olds	50	0.2	30	0.1

Source: OSP 2023a

Table 4

**Lithuania: Enrolment rates in ECEC centres by age, 2022**

Age groups	Enrolment rates, in %
1 to 2 year-olds	54.1
3 to 6 year-olds	94.9
1 to 6 year-olds and older	82.7

Source: OSP 2023c

Eurostat data from 2022 (Eurostat 2023b) show a marked increase in enrolment rates in centre-based ECEC settings. They doubled for the under 3 year-olds (2005: 11%, 2022: 22,8%), but also increased significantly for the older age group (2005: 57%, 2022: 92.5%, see Table 5).

Table 5

**Lithuania: Enrolment rates in ECEC centre-based settings by age and duration of attendance, 2005-2022**

Year	Weekly attendance	0 to under 3 years in %**	3 years to school entry in %
2005	1 to 29 hours	2	11
	Over 30 hours	9	46
	No enrolment in ECEC	89	43
2010	1 to 29 hours	2	9
	Over 30 hours	12	59
	No enrolment in ECEC	86	32
2015	1 to 29 hours	2.0	5.0
	Over 30 hours	7.7	68.8
	No enrolment in ECEC	90.3	26.2
2022	1 to 29 hours	0.4	11.0
	Over 30 hours	22.4	81.5
	No enrolment in ECEC	77.1	7.5

Source: Eurostat 2023b, deviations in the sums due to rounding

Overall, the ratio between demand for places and supply was relatively balanced in 2022 (107 places per 100 children on average), although this can vary greatly depending on the region (from 98 to 140), with large cities often facing a shortage of places (OSP 2023c).

## Financing and costs for parents

In 2022, 0.9% of GDP was spent on ECEC centres (0–5), and 2% on pre-primary, primary and secondary education (OSP 2023e).

Since September 2019, a new mixed funding model (“class basket”) has been in place for ECEC centres and pre-primary groups, linked to the implementation of the national curriculum. The majority of the available funding is calculated for one group and part of the costs are based on the number of children. About 80% of the “class basket” is made available to the institutions (state, municipal and also private) and is used almost entirely for personnel costs. The municipalities receive the rest. The aim of this new principle is to give smaller settings more financial stability. The pedagogy-related costs (i.e. staff needed to implement the curriculum) are covered by the state, the operating costs by the provider. This has made it possible to expand the network of private facilities and thus reduce the shortage of places, especially in large cities. Nevertheless, the decision to include private institutions (especially private non-profit ones) has been and still is a controversial issue.

Both ECE centres and pre-primary groups are free of charge, except for the cost of meals. In pre-primary groups, the state contribution covers 20 hours per week; if a child attends the facility for longer, parents have to pay for the additional hours. Municipalities often charge less to families from disadvantaged backgrounds or families with more than three children. Some municipalities that cannot provide enough places in public facilities compensate parents for a partial fee in a private facility (€100 per month, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 58).

Private ECEC institutions can charge the parents fees that are set individually by each institution. The prices may vary between a few hundred to up to around 1,500€ per month. Parents can apply for a subsidy of 100€ per month to cover part of the private kindergarten fee. The subsidy is financed by the municipalities.

In 2022, a couple with two children spent about 5% of net household income on childcare costs. The calculation is based on: full-time working parents (average wage); two children aged 2 and 3 years in full-time childcare; childcare benefits included (OECD.stat 2023).

## Staff to child ratios and group size

### *Early education (0–5/6 years)*

In Lithuania, the number of professionals per group is regulated by the Hygiene Standard (HN 75:2016), which is approved by the Ministry of Health. In addition to the required number of core professionals (see *Table 6*), other staff members also work in the groups. The children are usually placed in same-age groups. Children with a disability count as two children. Special groups in which only children with disabilities are cared for are smaller.

*Table 6*

**Lithuania: Maximum number of children per group by age and required core practitioners per group**

Age group	Maximum number of children in a group	Minimum number of core practitioners in a group
Under 1 year	6	2
1 to 2 years	10	1
2 to 3 years	15	1
Under 3 years	8	2
3 to 7 years	20	1
Under 7 years	10	2



Age group	Maximum number of children in a group	Minimum number of core practitioners in a group
1 to 7 years	12	1
2 to 7 years	16	1

Source: Eurydice 2023, 4.2

### *Pre-primary education (6–7 years)*

A pre-primary group consists of a maximum of 20 children. If the group also includes a child with a disability, the maximum number decreases by one. If the children speak a language other than Lithuanian, the number is reduced to 15. If a group consists only of children with disabilities, group size depends on the type of disability, ranging from 3 to 10 children (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022b).

## Curricular frameworks

All early education institutions and pre-primary groups in Lithuania are required to follow guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and develop a centre-specific programme based on them which reflects local needs. There is a national, approved, detailed curricular framework for the compulsory pre-primary year.

### *Early education (0–5/6 years)*

In 2011, "Criteria for the early education programme" (*Ikimokyklinio ugdymo programų kriterijų aprašo*) were approved by the Ministry of Education, describing six stages to track children's development. This was followed in 2014 by "Methodological Recommendations" (*Rekomendacijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo programai rengti*) and, in 2015, the "Description of the achievements of preschool-age children" (*Ikimokyklinio amžiaus vaikų pasiekimų apraša*). The latter describes 18 learning areas (e.g. physical activities, expression of emotions, spoken and written language, aesthetic perception, creativity) and related skills that a child should have achieved at a certain age. However, the document is viewed as curricular guidance and not as a required national standard.

Each centre-specific programme is required to adhere to the guidelines and, for example, reflect universal human rights in its objectives. Objectives and materials are to be age-appropriate and methods for evaluation included. The early education curricular framework is not divided into specific subjects or time units; it is expected that the learning areas are integrated into everyday life in the setting through play-based activities.

### *Pre-primary education (6–7 years)*

In 2015, the "General Curriculum Framework for Pre-primary Education" (*Priešmokyklinio ugdymo bendroji programa*) was adopted for the one to two-year pre-primary groups.

The curriculum is based on five basic principles: socio-cultural orientation; individualisation; integrity; contextuality; interactions. The content and activities emphasise health care, knowledge, communication and artistic education as well as the development of emotional intelligence. These activities are transmitted through a holistic approach and not as separate elements in at least 700 minutes per week (for half-day settings) or at least 1,260 minutes per week for full-day settings, which corresponds to approximately four hours per day.

Professionals choose their own materials and are expected to ensure ongoing development of the curriculum, opening up opportunities for children to make their own choices, satisfy their curiosity, solve problems and express their own opinions.

## Digital education

Digital competence is included in the pre-primary curricular framework. In the framework digital competence is defined as a motivation and ability to use digital technology to complete various tasks, study, solve problems, work, communicate and cooperate, manage information, and safely, properly, critically, independently and ethically create and share digital content. According to the framework, children in pre-primary groups should be able to use digital technologies with the support of a teacher and to partially understand topics such as digital safety or ethical communication through digital technologies (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022c). The early education curriculum suggests that children use digital materials to gather and assess information (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, 100).

## Monitoring – evaluation

### *Child-related assessment*

#### *– Early education (0–5/6 years)*

The group leaders observe the children regularly and discuss the results with the parents. In the "Description of the achievements of preschool-age children" (see also *Curricular Frameworks*), there are six levels, of which the first three serve to evaluate the achievements of under 3 year-olds and the other three of 4 to 6 year-olds. If a 6 year-old child has not yet reached the sixth level, the corresponding focal points are continued in the pre-primary group.

#### *– Pre-primary education (6–7 years)*

Evaluation requirements as well as the handling of their results are laid down in the "General Curriculum Framework for Pre-Primary Education". The children are assessed at the beginning and at the end of the year by the respective core practitioner using preferred methods (e.g. observation, conversations, children's work). A written report is used to inform the primary teacher. The child's performance is also discussed with the parents at least twice a year.

### *Centre-level internal evaluation*

Municipal education departments select the methods for self-evaluation and quality assurance, analyse the results and make recommendations for improvement. ECE centres carry out their self-evaluation according to the "Methods for the internal auditing of early education settings" (*Dėl ikimokyklinio ugdymo mokyklos vidaus audito metodikos*, 2005). Criteria include the support of children and their families and the management of the institution.

General education schools perform self-evaluation themselves. The School Head initiates the self-evaluation. The school council chooses the area of self-evaluation of the school's activities and the methodology. The self-assessment is performed by a group formed of the school staff.

### *External evaluation*

For ECE centres there is no established procedure for external evaluation; each municipality can decide this for itself. As a rule, the education departments of the municipalities are then responsible for this. In 2018, however, only five of the 60 municipalities had carried out external evaluations.

A project conducted by the National Agency for Education (2018-2022) is focusing on the "Improvement and development of evaluation and self-evaluation in non-formal education (early education and pre-primary education) and general education". The aim is to test methods for (self-)evaluation, to train professionals in these methods and to develop an online system for self-evaluations. The Ministry of Education has therefore committed itself to creating a system for the external evaluation of ECEC centres by 2022 and in June 2022 a law defining external evaluation of schools providing early childhood and pre-primary education was published (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2022a).

## Inclusion agenda

### *Children with special educational needs and disabilities*

The Education Act (most recent amendment 2020) states that the responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for children with special educational needs lies with the Child Welfare Committee. It organises and coordinates the adaptation of curricula to the needs of children. It is also responsible for the initial identification of children with special needs. These children can either attend a mainstream institution in a special group located there, or a separate support setting.

Integrative preschool groups are smaller than the groups in mainstream settings. Depending on the severity of the disability, there are 4 to 12 children in a group. Educational plans and materials are adapted accordingly to the needs of the children.

In 2022, there were 54 ECE settings, in which 1,109 children were cared for in special needs groups, these were most frequently children with language-related developmental delays (564) and children with complex medical conditions (400). 24,740 children with special educational needs were integrated into regular groups (OSP 2023a).

### *Children with a background of migration*

In 2022, only 1.2% of the total population held a non-Lithuanian citizenship, the majority of whom (89.2%) came from countries outside the EU27(2020). In the age group up to 5 years, these shares were 0.4% and 94.3% respectively (Eurostat 2023c). According to Busygina and Onishchenko (2019; 47, 55), persons of Polish and Russian origin make up the largest ethnic minorities (around 6% and 5.8% respectively in 2018 – but each only 0.05% of the total population).

National minorities have a legal right to use their family language in ECEC centres and schools (Department of National Minorities 2018).

In 2020–2021, Lithuanian was spoken in 634 ECEC centres, Russian in 10 and Polish in 6. In 55 settings, more than one language was spoken, e.g. Lithuanian and Russian (23) or Lithuanian and Polish (21) or Lithuanian, Russian and Polish (18), Russian and Polish (5) (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2021).

Since September 2021, it is a requirement that activities in Lithuanian should take place in ethnic ECE centres for at least five hours per week.

## Parental leave arrangements<sup>3</sup>

**Maternity leave** (*nėštumo ir gimdymo, motinystės atostogos*) is 18 weeks, of which 70 are before the birth and 56 after. During this period, 77.58% of the net salary (without an upper limit), at least €294 per month, is paid. The payment of social security contributions for at least 12 months during the last two years is required.

Under the same conditions, fathers receive 28 calendar days of **Paternity leave** (*tėvystės atostogos*) in the three months following the birth of the child.

**Parental leave** (*vaiko priežiūros atostogos*) can be taken as a family entitlement until the child is 3 years old. Each parent is entitled to two individual, non-transferable and fully paid months. For the remaining time, parents can choose between two options: (1) They receive 77.34% of the net salary until the child is 18 months old, with a cap equal to the national average salary (in 2023: €2,929.11 per month), but at least €294 per month. (2) They receive 58% of the net salary until the child is 12 months, with a ceiling of €2,050.53, and 38.67% of the net salary until the child is 24 months, with a ceiling of €1,171.57. The remaining time until the child is three years old is not paid. If parents decide to work while receiving allowances, the amount is reduced accordingly.

According to the Social Insurance Fund Board (SODRA) data, all working mothers take Maternity leave; in 2022, 75.6% of mothers and 24.4% of fathers took Parental leave.

## Current challenges for the ECEC system in Lithuania

*Country expert assessment by Hanna Siarova and Radvilė Bankauskaite*

### Quality of ECEC

Following the transfer of responsibility for the curriculum from the central to the local (pre-school education institution) level, combined with a lack of clear guidelines on how overall principles and recommendations for the content of pre-school education could be operationalised, the pre-school establishments and pedagogues face challenges on ensuring quality in pre-school education and responding to each child's specific needs. Many practitioners were used to working under structured and rigid curricula, and have not received adequate professional preparation on how to design curricula according to local needs or how to implement national guidelines effectively. For many, it is difficult to recognise different levels of pre-school children's achievements, to create an evaluation framework, to individualise the educational approach and to connect it with the real needs of children (UNICEF 2021).

Beyond this, the current work organisation of Early Childhood Pedagogues leaves very limited time for non-contact work, which could be dedicated to quality improvement (e.g. methodological work, self-reflection, cooperation with colleagues and other ECEC institutions) (Supreme Audit Institution 2019). Another important aspect affecting the professionalism of ECEC Pedagogues is the lack of attractiveness of the profession due to low salaries, challenging working conditions, and a lack of opportunities for further professional development. Nevertheless, there are also some improvements taking place such as a salary raise. Since 2020, ECEC Pedagogues (early childhood and pre-primary education) are paid the same amount of money as Primary School Teachers (UNICEF 2021). A shortage of learning support staff in ECEC centres (especially in rural areas) is also reported.

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<sup>3</sup> The brief overview in this section is based mainly on the country note for Lithuania by Ruta Braziene and Sonata Vysniauskiene in the *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2023* (see References).

The evaluation and monitoring system of early childhood education and care also needs to be improved. There is no evidence as to whether the results of self-assessments are actually used by ECEC institutions for the improvement of their performance. Moreover, in some cases recommendations provided in self-assessment reports are not implemented in practice due to a lack of external supervision on how internal audit results are applied.

### **Funding of ECEC**

The growing number of children participating in early childhood/pre-primary education is not proportionate to the much slower increase of financing levels for ECEC, despite the introduction of the so-called pre-schooler's basket. Recent debates regarding this issue urge the Ministry of Education to change the current pre-school basket of four hours daily to eight hours daily, using EU Structural Funds, government funding and education sector savings.

Municipalities also do not have budgets to offer transportation (shuttle service) for children living in remote locations to attend ECEC.

Starting in September 2021, compulsory ECEC for children living in at-risk families was introduced and additional financing granted to the municipalities for this purpose (Ministry of Social Security and Labour 2021). Children from families at social risk are provided with transport, free meals, learning equipment, families' monitoring by The Child Welfare Commission and parental counselling about the benefits of ECEC.

### **Accessibility and inclusiveness of ECEC**

There is a huge disparity between children's participation rates in ECEC in cities and rural areas. Whereas there is a shortage of places in early childhood and pre-primary education groups in cities, the number of children attending such groups in smaller towns and rural areas is minimal. The data show that children in rural areas more often tend to experience poverty and social exclusion. Attending ECEC is therefore especially important in reducing negative socio-economic impacts on a child's development and academic achievements, as research shows that ECEC improves socio-economic competences and cognitive abilities among those children who attend.

Even though the overall number of private pre-school establishments has increased, they are not affordable for many population groups (UNICEF 2021).

For children aged 0–5 years there is no guarantee of a place in publicly funded ECEC (Eurydice 2023). A low participation rate can be observed among children under 3 years of age. In this regard, Lithuania ranks as the country with the fifth-lowest take-up in the EU after Bulgaria, Latvia, Slovakia, and Hungary (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport 2019).

There is also need for greater flexibility of the programmes on offer. Too little attention is paid to diversity within ECEC and settings are not adequately prepared to deal with multilingual children, or those from families at risk, or those with special education needs. There are no guidelines and support for ECEC staff on how to organise good quality learning for these children and to ensure their holistic development and the realisation of their fullest potential. ECEC centres lack both adequately prepared professionals as well as educational tools and methodology to work with immigrant children. Moreover, there is an insufficient number of psychologists who would be able to help children to cope with trauma (UNICEF 2021).

## Demographic data

*Please note: For reasons of comparability, data on children are always reported up to 6 years of age, even if compulsory schooling starts earlier or later in some countries.*

### Total population

In 2022, the total population in Lithuania was 2,805,998. Until 2020, the population continuously decreased slightly, since 2021 it has been increasing again (2000: 3,512,074; 2010: 3,141,976; 2020: 2,794,090) (Eurostat 2023a).

### Total fertility rate

In 2021, the average total fertility rate in the EU27(2020) was 1.53. The highest total fertility rate among the 33 SEEPRO-3 countries was in France (1.84), and the lowest in Malta (1.13). At 1.36, Lithuania was significantly below the EU27 average (Eurostat 2023d)<sup>4</sup>.

### Children under age 6

Table 7

**Lithuania: Number of children under age 6 in the population, 2022**

Age	Number of children
Under 1 year	23,395
1 year-olds	23,733
2 year-olds	25,447
3 year-olds	27,206
4 year-olds	28,267
5 year-olds	29,625
<b>Total 0 to under 6 year-olds</b>	<b>157,673</b>

Source: Eurostat 2023a

In 2022, 2.6% of the total population were children under 3, 5.6% were children under 6. The proportions are thus roughly in line with the EU27 average, with those under 3 slightly below and those 3 to 6 slightly above.

<sup>4</sup> Data for **Ukraine** and the **UK** (2021) are from Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296567/fertility-rate-in-ukraine/> and <https://www.statista.com/statistics/284042/fertility-rate-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>). Data for the **Russian Federation** (2021) are from WorldBankData (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RU>)

Table 8

Lithuania: Share of children under 6 years compared with the EU averages, 2000 to 2022, in %\*

Year	Comparison Lithuania/EU	Under 3 year-olds	3 to under 6 year-olds	0 to under 6 year-olds
2000	Lithuania	3.1	3.4	6.5
	Ø EU15 <sup>5</sup>	3.2	3.2	6.4
2005	Lithuania	2.6	2.9	5.5
	Ø EU25	3.1	3.1	6.2
2015	Lithuania	3.1	3.1	6.2
	Ø EU28	3.0	3.2	6.2
2022	Lithuania	2.6	3.0	5.6
	Ø EU27(2020)	2.7	2.9	5.7

Source: Eurostat 2023a, \* Own calculations, slight deviations due to rounding

### Single households with children under age 6

71.4% of all households with children under 6 in Lithuania in 202 were couple households. Single-parent households accounted for 13.3% – mostly single mothers (10.5%).

Table 9

Lithuania: Households with children under age 6, 2022

Household type	Total households	Share of all households, in % <sup>+</sup>
Total households	259,300	
Couple households	185,100	71.4
Other types of households	39,800	15.3
Total single households	34,400	13.3
Single households, women	27,300	10.5
Single households, men	7,000	2.7

Source: Eurostat 2023k, \*Own calculations

### Employment rates of parents with children under 6 years of age

In Lithuania, in 2022, the overall employment rate for men (15-64 years) was 79.2% and for women 78.1% (Eurostat 2023j).

In 2022, 75.5% of women and 90.5% of men (18-64 years) with children under 6 were employed. Among the 27 EU-countries (2020), the shares of employed fathers were thus well above the EU-average (87.2%) as were those of mothers (EU-average 63.6%) (Eurostat 2023g).

<sup>5</sup> The data for 2000 include the EU15-Länder at that time (AT, BE, DK, DE, IE, EL, ES, FI, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, UK). The 2005 data (EU25) include CY, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, MT, PL, SI, SK. Data for 2015 include the additional EU28 countries BG, RO und HR. Data for EU27 (from 2020) comprise the countries of the EU28 without the UK.



Table 10a

**Lithuania: Employment rates of parents with children under 6 compared with other EU countries, 2010 und 2022**

	2010	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
<b>Lithuania</b>	67.5	75.2
Highest rate of employment in 27 EU countries <sup>6</sup>	Denmark: 82.7	Netherlands: 93.4
Lowest rate of employment in 27 EU countries	Hungary: 31.7	Latvia: 72.7
	2022	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %
<b>Lithuania</b>	75.5	90.5
Highest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries <sup>7</sup>	Luxembourg: 81.9	Sweden: 95.1
Lowest rate of employment in 27 (2020) EU countries	Czech Republic: 42.5	Romania: 78.5

Source: Eurostat 2023g

For the SEEPRO-3 countries that were not part of the EU27(2020) in 2021/2022, data are displayed in *Table 10b*:

Table 10b

**Employment rates in non-EU SEEPRO-3 countries, 2021/2022/2023**

Countries	Parents with children under 6 years		Overall employment rate	
	Mothers in %	Fathers in %	Women in %	Men in %
*Norway (2022)	82.9	94.3	75.4	80.1
***Russia (2021/2022)	67.1 (2021)	k.A.	55.6 (2022)	70.4 (2022)
*Serbia (2022)	64.4	78.3	57.9	71.0
**Switzerland (2022/2023)	46.9	95.3	60.0 61.1 (2023)	83.5 84.2 (2023)
+Ukraine (2021)	n.d.	n.d.	60.7	69.9
+++United Kingdom (2021/2023)	75.6	92.1	++72.3	++79.2
with dependent children	72.4	93.1	++72.1 (2023)	++79.4
with children under 2 years	70.7	95.0		(2023)
with children 3–4 years				

\*Eurostat 2023g, 2023j

\*\*[BFS] Bundesamt für Statistik. 2023. *Erwerbsquoten in Vollzeitäquivalenten nach Geschlecht, Nationalität, Altersgruppen, Familientyp* [Full-time equivalent employment rates by gender, nationality, age groups, family type]. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/je-d-03.02.00.01.03>

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+ [SSSU] State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2022. *Employed population in 2021, by age group, sex and place of residence*. <https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2017/rp/eans/eanse/Archznmve.htm>

++ Statista. 2023. *Employment rate in the United Kingdom from June 1971 to January 2023, by gender*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/280120/employment-rate-in-the-uk-by-gender/>

<sup>6</sup> AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK

<sup>7</sup> AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, F, FI, IE, IT, HR, HU, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK



+++Office for National Statistics. 2023. *Families and the labour market, UK: 2021*.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/familiesandthelabourmarketengland/2021>

## Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>8</sup>

In 2022, 19.3% of children under 6 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This proportion was below the EU27 average (23.3%) for this age group. The share of all persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population was 24.6% (EU: 21.6%). 3.3% of children under 6 and 5.4% of the total population suffered from severe material deprivation in 2020 (EU average 6.1% and 4.3% respectively). While the share of under 6 year-olds was significantly below the EU average, that of the total population was slightly higher than the EU average (Eurostat 2023h, i).

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<sup>8</sup> 'At risk of poverty or social exclusion' refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty (threshold set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers), or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material\\_deprivation](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Material_deprivation))

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