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”Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities”

- a new EURYDICE publication

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- In January 2009 a new study was published by EURYDICE
- The study presents ECEC (early childhood education and care) in 30 European countries
- It is focussed on
 - Organisation
 - Policy for disadvantaged children
 - Quality assurance (ensuring high quality standards)
- Why ECEC? Because it is a priority topic at the EU level



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ECEC - a priority theme for cooperation between EU Member States

- In 2006 the European Commission published a ***Communication on Equity and Efficiency in European Education and Training Systems*** (the role of ECEC in the whole education cycle is strongly emphasized)
- The European Commission has recently suggested a new benchmark for Europe: **90% of 4-year olds should participate in pre-primary education by 2020.** (At present the European average in this respect is 87%, with **FR, IT, BE** reaching 100% but **TR, PL, IE, FI** having it below 50%)

ECEC



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Why has ECEC been identified as a priority theme?

- Pre-primary education facilitates later learning
- Pre-primary education has the highest rate of success in terms of the social adaptation of children
- Especially for disadvantaged children pre-primary education can produce large socio-economic returns
- Establishing the basis for further learning, pre-primary education prevents school drop-out and contributes to the increase of equity of outcomes



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Organisation of ECEC (1)

There are two main organisational models in Europe

- 1. A single structure** for all children of pre-school age (**from 0 to 6**) – called a unitary setting. Educational staff have the same qualifications and salaries, regardless of the age of children in their care. This is the case in **FI, IS, LV, NO, SI** and **SE**.

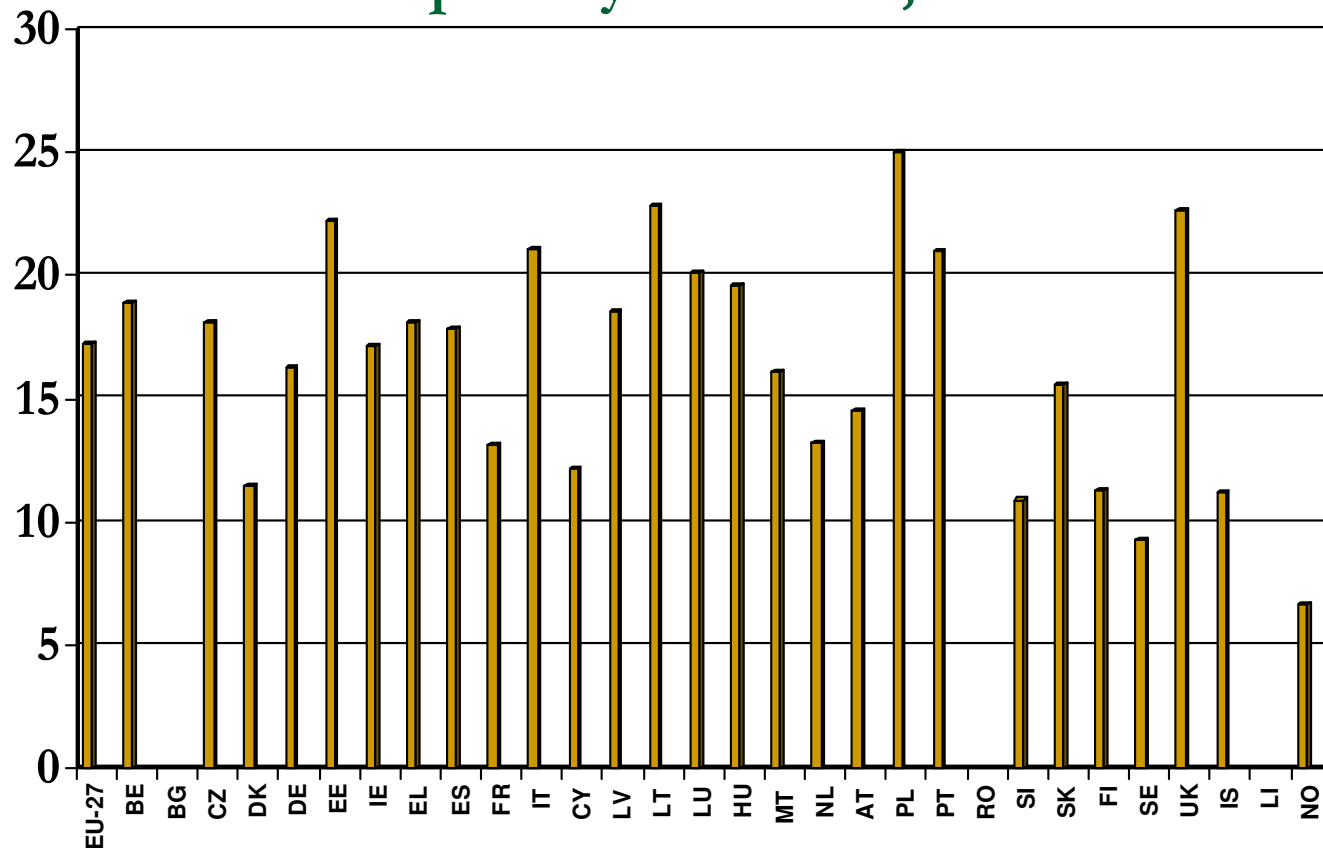
Organisation of ECEC (2)

2. **A separate provision** according to age-group - for children aged **0 to 3** years and **3 to 6** years. Staff qualifications and salary scales differ. This is the most widespread model in Europe (eg. **FR, IT, DE, AT, CZ, HU, RO, BG, PL**)
 - In a few countries **both models** co-exist: **CY, DK, EL, LT** and **ES**.
 - In the **UK** unitary provisions for pre-school children are currently being implemented (until now there were mainly or solely pre-primary classes for 3-6 year olds).

Policy for disadvantaged children (1)

- A serious risk of educational failure for children is usually caused by
 - social
 - cultural
 - or economic factorsor a combination of these.
- **Poverty**, however, **has the strongest impact**. Almost **one in six** European households with a child under six lives **on the poverty threshold**. This is of special concern in **EE, IT, LT, LU, PT, UK** and **PL**.

Percentage of households with children of 0-5 years living on the poverty threshold, 2005



Source: Eurostat

Policy for disadvantaged children (2)

Taking into account

- that pre-primary education provides all children with a good basis for lifelong learning
- that it helps to close the educational gap for children at risk
- that children from underprivileged families (ethnic minority or single – parent families) appear to participate least in ECEC

policy makers in many countries set themselves the following goals:

- To implement a universal right to ECEC, i.e. to guarantee a place for all children (this is already the case in **DK**, **FI**, **SE**, **NO**, **ES** and **SI**)
- To ensure high quality provision
- To ensure additional funding from public sources



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Ensuring high quality standards

The most important elements to ensure high-standard ECEC are:

1. a favourable child/adult ratio
2. parental involvement
3. high-level training for staff



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Education and training of ECEC staff (1)

- Practical and theoretical training is usually provided, which prepares staff (teachers, educators etc.) for the diverse tasks they must carry out.
- The tasks they have to perform are the following:
 - sharing games and activities with children
 - guiding them in their discovery of the world
 - supporting them in their emotional and social development
 - introducing them to early learning activities (literacy, numeracy, science)
 - awakening their cultural interest (in music, drama, arts, etc.)
 - encouraging and maintaining their curiosity in the surrounding complex environment
 - paying attention to physical well-being and health of children
 - conducting dialogue with parents



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Education and training of ECEC staff (2)

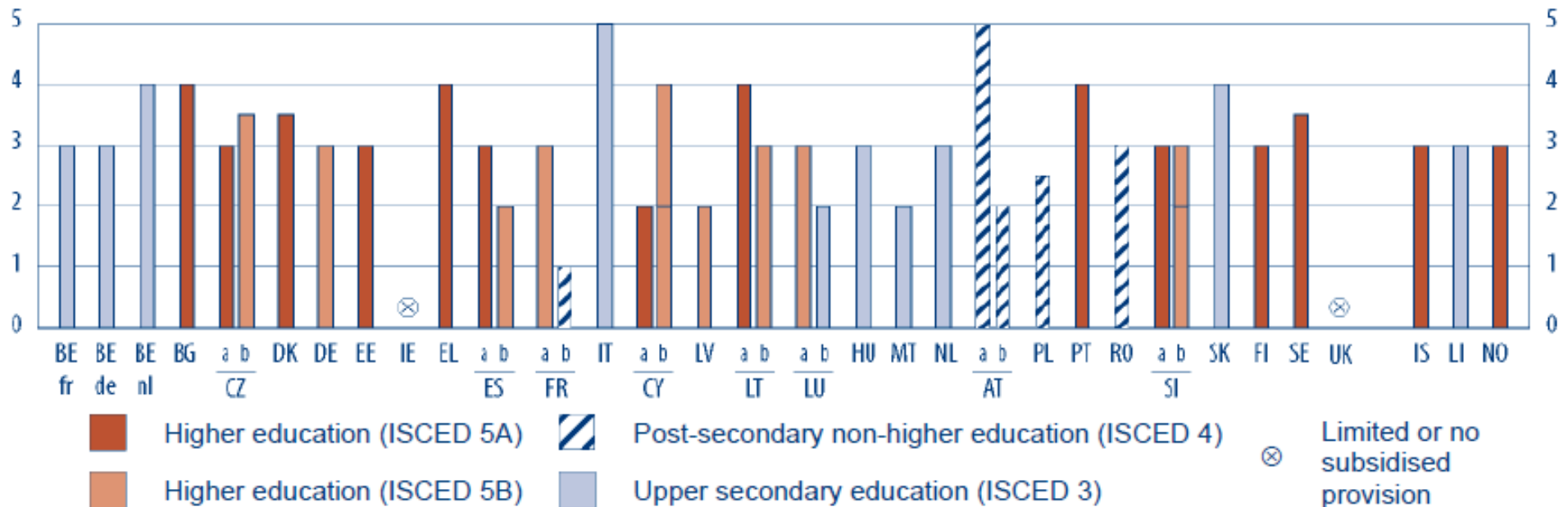
Most countries have 2 distinct paths of training

The 1st path:

For staff dealing with the youngest children
(under 2 or 3 years)

- usually at the level of upper secondary or post-secondary, very rarely higher education
- most often in the fields related to health and social welfare

Minimum requirements for the level and duration of initial education and training for staff working with children under 2-3 years, 2006/07



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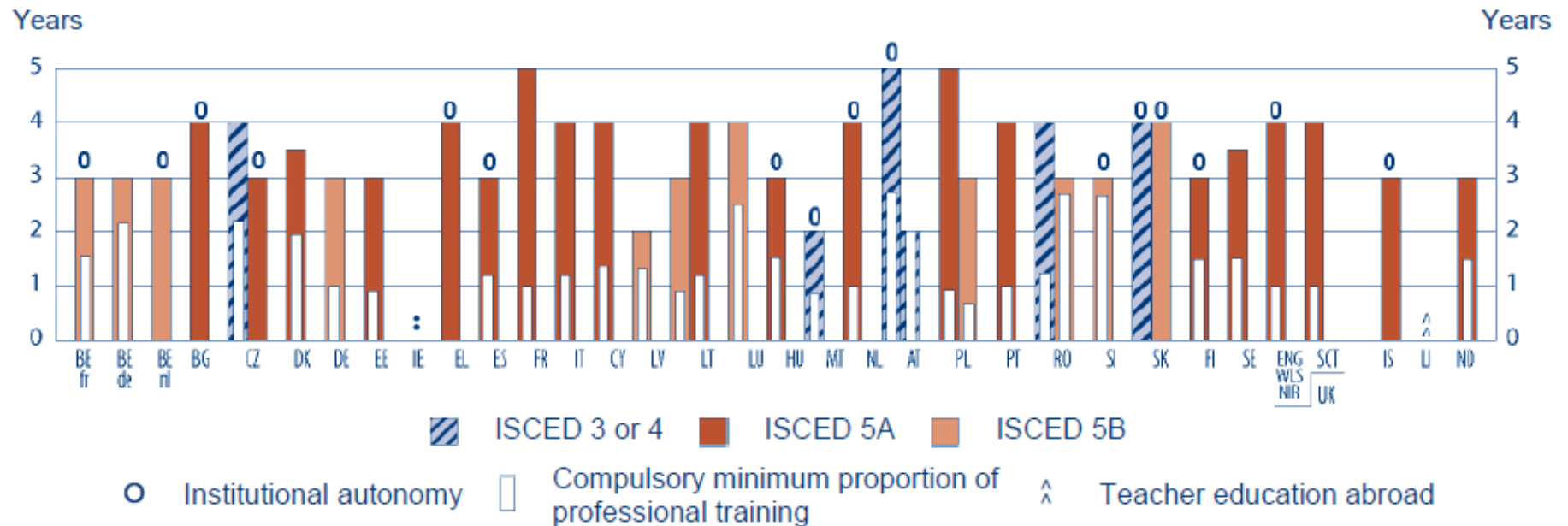
Education and training of ECEC staff (3)

The 2nd path:

For staff dealing with children over 2 or 3 years (pre-primary education)

- usually at the level of higher education – either university type (B.A. or M.A. courses) or vocational higher education institutions, very rarely upper secondary or post-secondary level
- most often in the fields of education (pedagogy) with substantial professional component (i.e. theoretical and practical skills needed to be a teacher, courses in psychology and teaching methodology)

Level and minimum length of initial teacher education for pre-primary level (ISCED 0), and the compulsory minimum proportion of time devoted to professional training, 2006/07





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Thank you for your attention

ECEC