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► Strengthening childcare provision in Moldova through public and private efforts – opportunities and constraints

Market system analysis of the childcare sector in Moldova

▶ **Strengthening childcare provision in Moldova through public and private efforts – opportunities and constraints**

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First published 2023



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ISBN: 9789220394731 (web PDF)

Also available in Romanian: Oportunități și constrângeri în consolidarea îngrijirii copiilor în Moldova prin eforturi publice și private. O analiză a sistemelor de piață a sectorului de îngrijire a copiilor.

ISBN: 9789220394748 (web PDF)

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► Abbreviations

ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research
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ECEC	Early childhood education and care
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ELDS	Early learning and development standards
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FNDRL	National Fund for Regional and Local Development
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GDP	Gross domestic product
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ILO	International Labour Organization
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ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
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LEA	Local Education Authority
-----	---------------------------

LPA	Local public authorities
-----	--------------------------

MSA	Market systems analysis
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NEET	Not in education, employment or training
------	------------------------------------------

NGO	Non-governmental organization
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OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
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UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
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► Acknowledgements

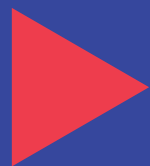
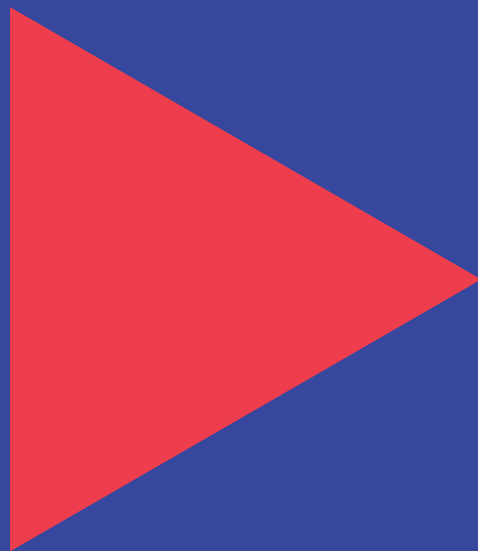
The present report is the result of collaboration between ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the ILO SME Unit's Women's Entrepreneurship Development programme within the framework of the Swedish funded project "Childcare system in Moldova: A systemic approach to improve provision and strengthen formalization" implemented by the International Labour Office.

The core research and analysis were carried out by Loes van der Graaf and Hanna Siarova of the research centre PPMI. The overall work was guided, supported and supervised by Maria José Chamorro (Formalization and Gender Equality Specialist, DWT/CO-Budapest), Nelea Rusu (National Project Coordinator ILO–Moldova) and Virginia Rose-Losada (Technical Officer, Women's Entrepreneurship Development–SME Unit, ILO).

Much appreciation goes to the participants to the presentation workshop of the preliminary draft held in Chisinau in April 2023 and to the representatives of Moldovan working group on National Programme on childcare services for children up to 3 years coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social protection, who provided detailed and very relevant inputs to previous drafts. Finally, the current draft of the report could not have materialized without the steady support and efforts by Ala Lipciu (National Coordinator ILO–Moldova) and Steve Hartrich (Project Manager ILO SME) as well as design and layout work by Judit Kovács.



Executive summary



► Executive summary

In recent years, the use of childcare in Moldova has increased steadily, enabling women to return to the labour market. However, the use of childcare for children aged 0–3 is still significantly lower than for older generations. This is due to a large extent to the lack of (public) childcare services for this age group. The available childcare for young children is provided mainly through informal services, such as nannies.

In December 2022, the Moldovan Parliament sought to facilitate the use of childcare for 0–3 year-olds by adopting the Law on Alternative Childcare Services, which allows for the establishment of three formal, private forms of childcare: (i) work-based childcare, (ii) home-based nurseries, and (iii) individual nanny services.

To analyse the current childcare situation and the impact of the new legislation, the ILO commissioned a market systems analysis to determine how the alternative forms of childcare would affect – and be affected by – the supply and demand of childcare, the childcare supporting functions, and the overall rules and regulations governing the childcare sector.

The introduction of the new forms of childcare can fill certain gaps in the **demand and supply** of childcare, on condition that a number of important barriers are addressed in the process. First, in terms of supply, there is still uncertainty among employers regarding their responsibility and a resistance among current nannies to obtain formal registration. In terms of demand, there is a general interest in the use of alternative childcare services, but the use of private childcare is not affordable for many families.

The alternative forms of childcare interact with existing **support systems** to a certain degree. As mentioned above, the implementation of alternative childcare still suffers from the lack of financial support and insufficient understanding of what providers need. Current private childcare services are mostly informal, meaning that providers are generally not trained in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The new law requires childcare professionals to have appropriate qualifications, with a view to improving the quality of childcare. However, the childcare profession remains unattractive because of the low wages, and there are few opportunities for further professionalization, besides the initial course provided by Alexei Mateevici College.

The **rules and regulations** governing the childcare sector have been amended as a result of the new Law on Alternative Childcare and the accompanying regulations. Interviewees are worried about the strict requirements concerning establishment and compliance with sanitary regulations. In both cases, the requirements are in line with international standards, meaning that there is no direct need for further legal revision, but rather for more support for potential providers.

Given the opportunities to increase the uptake of childcare opened up by the new law, as well as the persisting barriers to childcare use for 0–3 year-olds, the current report provides **recommendations for various interventions that should support the implementation of the legislation.**

Area 1. Improve affordability and accessibility of services:

- ▶ **Intervention 1.1.** Introduce targeted financial support for low-income and vulnerable families to enable them to access and afford early childhood education and care services
- ▶ **Intervention 1.2.** Introduce additional measures for the most vulnerable families and children (*outreach and “busing” measures*)
- ▶ **Intervention 1.3.** Ensure licensing support, especially for home-based services
- ▶ **Intervention 1.4.** Provide support to childcare providers to ensure efficient, quality operations

Area 2. Equal focus on quality of ECEC for 0–3 year-olds:

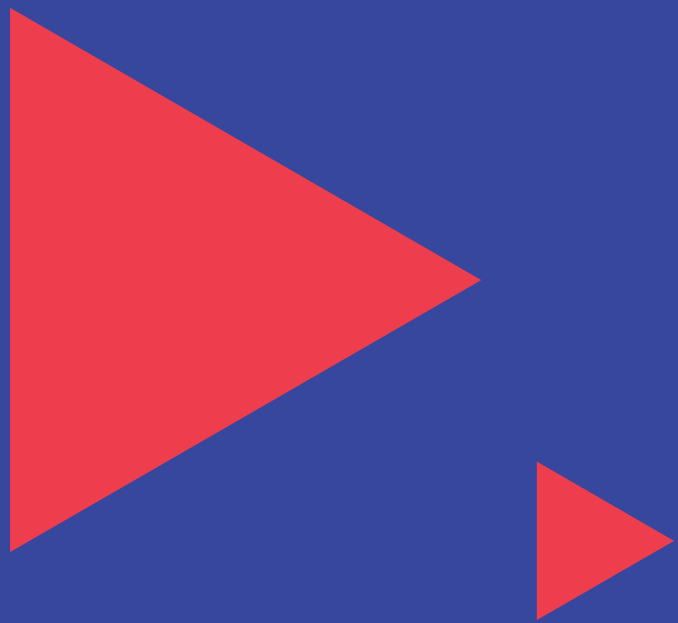
- ▶ **Intervention 2.1.** Operationalize pedagogical and “process quality” in terms of childcare activities for children aged 0–3 in Alternative (and public) Childcare services.
- ▶ **Intervention 2.2.** Include regular monitoring of pedagogical and “process quality” in existing quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms
- ▶ **Intervention 2.3.** Ensure coordination among ministries and stakeholders for better quality
- ▶ **Intervention 2.4.** Ensure a smooth transition between childcare for 0–3 and for 3–6/7 year-olds to guarantee children’s uninterrupted early development

Area 3. Supporting work-based childcare (especially in rural areas):

- ▶ **Intervention 3.1.** Create a business case for work-based childcare
- ▶ **Intervention 3.2.** Create business networks (in rural areas), where multiple employers set up and share one childcare space
- ▶ **Intervention 3.3.** Encourage public–private partnerships between employers and local education authorities

Part 1

Introduction



▶ 1. Introduction

▶ 1.1. Project introduction

Unmet childcare needs are one of the main causes of women's unemployment and the feminization of poverty, both in Moldova and worldwide. Women's activity and employment rates are substantially lower than those of men. Moreover, many young women are NEETs (not in employment, education or training), excluded from economic opportunities. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that the employment of women aged 25–49 who have at least one child below 3 years of age is 43 percentage points lower than that of women without pre-school age children (2021).

While in the past year parental leave policies have been adjusted to boost women's labour market participation by introducing new childcare measures that offer higher benefits for a shorter duration, as well as paternity leave, the number of families taking shortened leave remains low. Therefore, women still face obstacles to ensuring a balance between their private and professional lives, and thus remain outside the labour market for long periods of time.

In recent years, the Moldovan government has introduced new legislation with an accompanying programme and action plan to increase access to and uptake of early childhood education and care services (ECEC). Specifically, the new Law on Alternative Forms of Childcare enables the establishment of work-based childcare, home-based nurseries, and individualized childcare services to allow for an increase and diversification of available services.

Moreover, the 2030 National Development Strategy "European Moldova 2030" under objective 7 "Better work-life balance" prioritises access for all families to early childcare and preschool education.¹ The ILO aims to support implementation of the new ECEC strategies, ultimately to improve and strengthen women's position in the labour market.

The current market system analysis (MSA) aims to provide insights into the main opportunities and barriers of the new forms of childcare (and its legislative framework) in terms of enhancing access to affordable childcare services and subsequently enhancing women's return to the labour market. The market system analysis takes a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the underlying root causes that are constraining market performance and limiting opportunities for decent work. The market systems approach builds on the capacities and incentives of market actors – both private and public – to increase the likelihood that positive results are sustained and even scaled-up after the introduction of pilot interventions.

Furthermore, the study aims to suggest the main areas for ground-level interventions (that is, interventions targeted at meso- and micro-level to implement policies and stimulate both the foundation and the subsequent uptake of work-based childcare services and home-based nurseries), as well as proposed roles and responsibilities for different stakeholders in relation to these interventions.

1. National Development Strategy Moldova 2030, "European Moldova 2030".

► 1.2. Study methodology

1.2.1. Purpose and scope

This report focuses on the early childhood education and care market. The core research question it seeks to answer is: *What are the systemic constraints on and opportunities for families to make use of and for providers to establish alternative forms of early childhood education and care?*

The scope of the research includes all current forms of childcare, as well as alternative forms of childcare proposed in the new legislation. The geographical scope covers the entire Republic of Moldova.

Various terms can be used within the scope of early childhood education and care, such as childcare, preschool education, and early education, either interchangeably or referring to a particular type or stage. For consistency, this report follows the definition and terminology of the European Qualification Framework for ECEC, referring to early childhood education and care as “*any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age*”. Within this study, that covers all education and care activities for children aged 0–6/7 (including the compulsory pre-school year before the child enters primary education), as well as nanny services. Within the report, the terms “early childhood education and care” and “childcare” will be used interchangeably. When we are referring to a certain stage of ECEC provided for a particular age group (for example, 0–2), this will be specified.

1.2.2. Data collection tools

The study relies on three key data sources:

1. *Desk research.* The purpose of the desk research was mainly to understand the main challenges regarding access to childcare in Moldova, and the aims and activities foreseen in the Action Plan; and to map the stakeholders who are and who should/will be involved in childcare in the future.
2. *Interviews.* The research team conducted 19 interviews with 23 respondents. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand current barriers to the uptake of childcare and the possible solutions that alternative forms of childcare could provide.
3. *Focus groups.* The research team organized one focus group discussion with parents not using childcare, and one with parents using childcare. The focus group discussion aimed to understand parents’ priorities in selecting childcare and the barriers they perceive in doing so.

The research is based on the methods of the ILO’s [Value Chain Development for Decent Work](#) guide (ILO, 2021). The findings are to be validated during an in-person workshop in Moldova in April 2023.

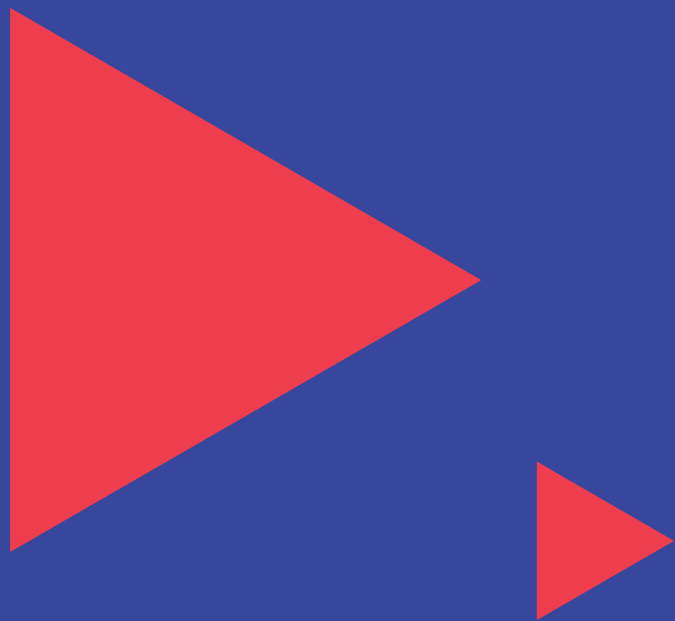
1.2.3. Report structure

The structure of this report is as follows:

- ▶ **Part 1** introduces the study background, its purpose and methodological approach.
- ▶ **Part 2** provides an overview of the childcare sector in Moldova. It looks at how this sector has developed over time and the direction in which it appears to be heading. Special consideration is given to how the use of childcare affects female employment opportunities.
- ▶ **Part 3** analyses the childcare system, taking into account possible constraints coming from the core childcare value chain, as well as from the supporting functions and rules that surround it. The key constraints are summarized at the end of the chapter.
- ▶ **Part 4** builds on the key constraints identified in the previous chapter to suggest potential areas for project intervention. This entails outlining a vision for what a future programme could hope to achieve during its implementation phase, an assessment of the key actors involved in the market system with their relative incentives and capacities for change, and suggested interventions.
- ▶ **Part 5** presents final conclusions to the report restating the key obstacles identified which the proposed interventions seek to minimize or circumvent.

Part 2

Sectoral structure

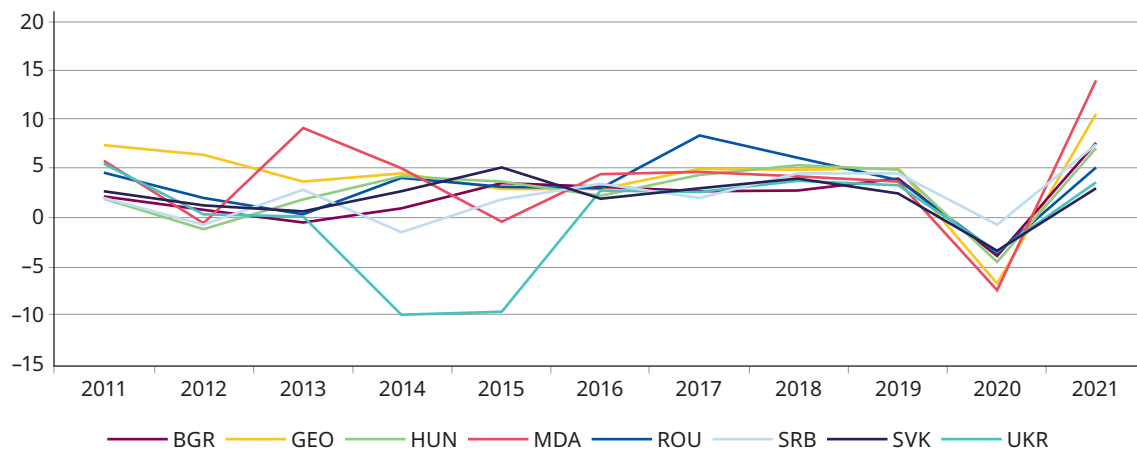


► 2. Sectoral structure

► 2.1. Market overview

Over the past decade, Moldovan GDP has grown from 8.4 to 13.7 billion euros, although it remains the lowest in the region. GDP growth has been rather unstable, with considerable fluctuations. While in a number of years it enjoyed the highest growth in the region (2013, 2016 and 2021), in 2015 and 2020 it experienced negative growth and was the lowest in the region. This tendency signals that the country's economy is sensitive to various internal and external changes and crises.

► Figure 1. GDP growth in Moldova and countries in the region



Source: World Bank data

Public administration, education, health and social work forms the largest employment sector (22.9 per cent), followed by agriculture (20.8 per cent of the employed population).² Average gross earnings have slowly increased in the past five years, from 6,268 lei in 2018 to 8,979 lei in 2021. The gap between men's and women's average earnings decreased from 9,787 lei in 2018 to 1,319 lei in 2021.³

² Statistica Moldovei: Labour Force and Earnings Statistics (2022).

³ Ibid.

► 2.2. Childcare in Moldova: sectoral overview

2.2.1. The traditional Moldovan ECEC sector

The network of early childhood education and care services (ages 0–6/7) covers the entire Republic of Moldova and the Government has invested considerably in its rehabilitation in recent years. The number of early childhood education institutions has been steadily growing since the 2000s (see Table 1). At the end of 2020, there were 1,485 early education institutions in the Republic of Moldova, 103 more than in 2010.

The majority of ECEC institutions are located in rural areas. In 2021, 1,131 early education institutions were located in rural areas and only 352 in urban. However, the ECEC participation rate is lower in rural areas where children are taken care of mainly through informal arrangements. In rural regions, there are 75 children per 100 places, but not all children are enrolled (see Section 3.1.).⁴

► **Table 1. Number of ECEC institutions**

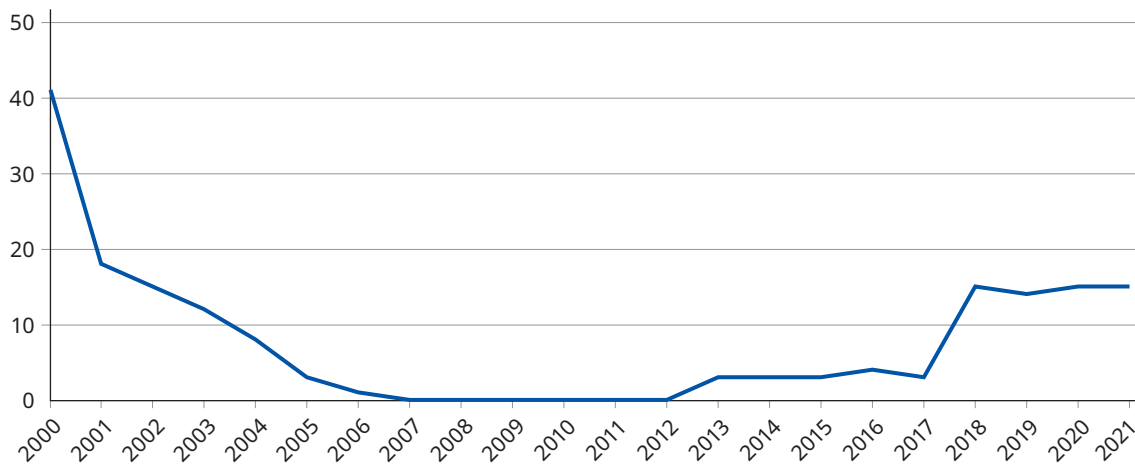
	2000		2005		2010		2015		2020		2021	
	Total	Rural	Total	Rural	Total	Rural	Total	Rural	Total	Rural	Total	Rural
Early education institutions	1,135	803	1,295	986	1,381	1,063	1,461	1,132	1,485	1,133	1,483	1,131

Source: National Bureau of Statistics.

Over the past decade, the majority of ECEC service providers were public. In the 2000s there was a significant drop in the number of non-public services providers and by 2007 the number had fallen to zero, before starting to grow again only in 2012 (Figure 2.). In 2021, there were 15 non-public ECEC providers in Moldova. The current National Programme, as well as interviews, state that private providers are discouraged from registering as certified ECEC providers because of legislative, technical, and financial barriers.⁵

4. UNECE. (2021). Childcare, women's employment and the impact of Covid-19: The case of Moldova.

5. The National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Year. 2023–2026, and multiple interviews.

► **Figure 2. Number of non-public early education institutions**

Source: Early education institutions by indicators, forms of ownership and years. National Bureau of Statistics.

Until recently, **early childhood education and care in Moldova was organized in two stages:** for children 0 to 2 years old and for children 2 to 6/7 years old.⁶ All ECEC (ages 0–6) fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research. The Ministry is responsible for developing the system and policies for ECEC institutions (curriculum, educational process, teacher training) and for adopting and regulating standards for these institutions. The main regulations regarding the activity of all ECEC institutions (public and private) are stipulated in the Standard Regulation on the organization and functioning of early education institutions.⁷ Tier 1 local public authorities (LPAs) are entitled to establish, reorganize, and close public early education institutions located on the territory that they administer according to the needs of the community, and based on their financial resources.⁸

However, Moldova offers a legal entitlement to ECEC only from the age of 2 and does not provide it for children below the age of 2 as a public service across the country. LPAs can establish creches for children aged 0–2 upon the request of parents, financed by their own funds, or private institutions can obtain sanitary authorization to provide ECEC for this age group.

Several conceptual and analytical issues are linked to the available **statistical data on early childhood education and care in Moldova**. According to the Education Code, childcare services are classified into services for the age groups 0–2 and 2–6/7, while statistical monitoring employs a different classification: childcare services for children aged 0–3 and 3–6/7, although in 2021 the National Bureau of Statistics released disaggregated data on children up to 2 years old. Furthermore, other laws make the distinction between 0–3 and 4–6. Interviewees revealed that many childcare services currently offered for the 0–2 age group are not certified as official ECEC services. They are therefore not captured by existing statistical data.

6. Education Code, Article 20 (1), (a) modified by LP269 dated 23.11.18, MO467-179/14.12.18.

7. Government Decision No. 1211 of 04.11.2016 on the approval of the Sanitary Regulation for early education institutions, and Order of the Ministry of Education No. 254 of 11.10.2017.

8. Education Code No. 152 of 17.07.2014.

As a result of the old system, there is virtually no enrolment of children in formal ECEC below the age of 2 and the scope of their involvement in informal childcare (nannies) is not known as it is not registered.

► **Table 2. Registered enrolment in childcare**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Up to 1 year old	7	3	4	—	—	—	—
1	864	896	862	714	825	378	513
2	15,861	16,217	15,891	15,605	15,974	10,106	13,124
3	30,574	31,104	31,333	31,399	31,089	24,677	27,129
4	33,121	33,951	33,764	34,457	33,976	32,062	30,078
5	34,998	33,841	34,040	33,750	34,467	33,361	33,446
6	32,249	32,427	31,481	31,886	31,542	31,986	31,406
7	2,262	1,738	1,841	1,702	1,829	1,588	1,417

Source: National Bureau of Statistics.

With regard to workers and employment, it is important to note that Moldova has not ratified ILO Convention C156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities. A key requirement of the Convention is laid down in Article 3, pointing to the responsibility of the state to *“enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities”*.⁹

2.2.2. New forms of childcare for children aged 0–3

The **new Law on Alternative Childcare and the accompanying regulations** created an important change in the ECEC system. First, the law provided grounds for the establishment of formal (private) childcare services for children aged 0–3, thereby extending the age group of children who can benefit from formal childcare. Secondly, it assigned responsibility for these childcare services to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

In many former communist countries (Croatia, Czech Republic, Republic of North Macedonia, and Romania), there is a tendency to assign responsibility for alternative ECEC services for children up to 7 years (in Czech Republic) or up to 3 years (in Romania) to the Ministry of Labour. In certain cases (for example, Romania), the responsibility is shared with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.¹⁰ However, research on early childhood education and care in Azerbaijan points out that the success of deinstitutionalized practices in childcare services, namely the transition from institutional care to family-orientated community-based care does not depend predominantly on the particular ministry responsible, but rather on the willingness of the political structures to work towards deinstitutionalization.¹¹

9. C156 – Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C156

10. Eurydice. 4. Early childhood education and care.

11. Huseynli, A. (2018): “Implementation of deinstitutionalization of child care institutions in post-soviet countries: The case of Azerbaijan”, in *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 76, pp. 160–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.10.020>

Currently, these forms of childcare are foreseen to be **established by private childcare providers** who hold the necessary qualifications (stipulated by law), are registered as childcare providers, and hold a business license (unless hired through an employment contract). While the law assigns all responsibility for setting up and running childcare services to the provider, the National Programme for Childcare Services for children aged 0–3 envisages a grant programme for companies to support the establishment of the childcare unit, and a business accelerator programme for home-based nurseries for the same purpose.¹²

► **Table 3. Three levels of laws and policies on childcare**

Law on alternative forms of childcare			
Regulation on work-based childcare	Regulation on individualized childcare	Regulation on home-based nurseries	Regulation on sanitary standards (for work-based and home-based childcare)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions on dedicated rooms • Provisions on noise, pollution, light, etc. • Provisions on activity plans, tailored activities and programmes • Provisions on group sizes • Provisions on qualified staff • Provisions on tax, contracts, and remuneration • Allocation of responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions on qualifications • Provisions on the childcare license, registration as an entrepreneur, enrolment in insurance plans • Provisions on activity plans, tailored activities and programmes • Provisions on contracts with parents and remuneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions on dedicated rooms • Provisions on group sizes • Provisions on qualifications • Provisions on the childcare license, registration as an entrepreneur, enrolment in insurance plans • Provisions on activity plans, tailored activities and programmes • Provisions on contracts with parents and remuneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions on necessary facilities • Provisions on room organization • Provisions for dedicated spaces • Provisions on furniture • Provisions on toys • Provisions on hygiene • Provisions on food storing, serving and dietary plans.
National Programme on Childcare Services for Children aged 0–3			

Source: Legislative documents.

2.2.3. Government and international interventions

The government of Moldova identified early childhood education and care as a priority for the first time in its 2002 “**Education For All strategy**”, which highlighted the main issues surrounding ECEC,¹³ including the continuous deterioration of the ECEC institution. The numbers show that since the introduction of the strategy participation in ECEC and the number of ECEC units have increased. The strategy was followed by further educational policy documents (see box).

12. The National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

13. Government of the Republic of Moldova (2003): Education for All Strategy. Link: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/moldova_efa_strategy_framework.pdf

Educational policies to improve ECEC in Moldova

- ▶ Education Code, 2014c;
- ▶ “Education 2020” Moldovan Education Strategy, 2014¹⁴;
- ▶ Development strategy “Education 2030”, 2022;
- ▶ Reference framework for early education in the Republic of Moldova, 2018 edition;
- ▶ Child Learning and Development Standards from birth to 7 years of age (ELDS, 2010, with subsequent changes in 2018);
- ▶ Curriculum for Early Education (Ministry of Education and Research, 2018);
- ▶ Standard regulation for the organization and operation of the early education institution (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017);
- ▶ Regulations on educational institutions “Kindergarten – Primary school” (Ministry of Education Board, 2011);
- ▶ In 2018, legislation on state funding of educational and care services for 2–3 year old children (Law 269);
- ▶ In 2021, establishment of creche services became a public policy priority;¹⁵
- ▶ The 2030 Moldova Strategy includes a direct commitment to developing the childcare system;¹⁶
- ▶ The new Law on Alternative Childcare Services was adopted in December 2022;
- ▶ The National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years of Age, 2023–2026.

Together with growing targets, **financial investments have also progressed**. As a priority sector, the budget allocated to ECEC over the period 2000–2015 grew steadily from 12 per cent of total education expenditure in 2000 to 22 per cent in 2015. In 2005–2012, public expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP increased from 7.9 to 8.4 per cent.¹⁷ The ECEC enrolment rate is slowly increasing for children above 3 years of age, thanks to sustained government efforts in partnership with development partners.

14. UNICEF. (2018). Press Release. “Moldova has one of the highest preschool enrollment rates but further efforts are required to strengthen the national coverage of early childhood education”, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/press-releases/moldova-has-one-highest-preschool-enrollment-rates>

15. UNFPA Moldova and Center “Partnership for Development” (2021): Policies for Desired Fertility: National Creche Fund to Support Parents.

16. Government Decision No. 944, Education Development Strategy 2014–2020, “Education 2020” (2014).

17. United Nations Children’s Fund (2022): Draft country programme document. Republic of Moldova, https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/media/11641/file/2022-PL27-Moldova-draft_CPD-EN-2022.06.13.pdf

Several international support programmes have been rolled out in Moldova since independence:

- ▶ in 1994 Moldova started to develop the ‘Step by Step’ programme as an experiment in several primary schools;
- ▶ since 1995 UNICEF has been supporting educational programmes on early education, first through the two-year emergency programme;
- ▶ in 1997 UNICEF started to develop the Individualized Early Education Project (PETI), focused on the implementation of international child-centred early education practices;
- ▶ since 2004 UNICEF has supported the development of education programmes, focused on an integrated approach to child development (from the perspective of health, education and child protection);
- ▶ in 2005 Moldova joined the Global Partnership for Education and received two grants, which targeted the revitalization of ECEC¹⁸;
- ▶ since 2006, UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF and MSIF, as well as the project “Education for All – Fast Track Initiative”¹⁹ have supported key reforms in ECEC standards, curricula, pedagogy and so on;
- ▶ since 2011 UNICEF has supported the development of parental education programmes for families with children aged 9 months–7 years;
- ▶ in 2014 Moldova institutionalized participation in the “Step by Step” programme through the Global Partnership for Education managed by the World Bank;
- ▶ in 2014–2015 UNICEF supported a pilot of the project “Modelling educational and care services for children under 3 years of age” in 10 localities;
- ▶ the EU has also provided support for ECEC improvement.²⁰ Examples of such programmes include “EU4Moldova” and the Focal Regions programme, funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP.²¹

However, most of these measures have targeted ECEC for children above 3 years of age. That is why the Law on Alternative ECEC Services for children from 0 to 3 years old was initiated.²² Various international organizations such as the ILO, UN Women, UNICEF and GIZ are currently active in the Moldovan childcare sector to support the implementation of the new law and the further development of the childcare sector in general.

18. Moldova Times (2016): “Over 150 villages of Moldova remain with no preschool enrollment programs”, <https://www.moldovaitimes.com/2016/12/30/over-150-villages-of-moldova-remain-with-no-preschool-enrollment-programs/>

19. Gutan, V. and Fuior, E. (2014): “Major Trends In Preschool Education Funding in the Republic of Moldova”, in *Journal of Research on Trade, Management and Economic Development*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 69–76.

20. Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova (2023): “170 children benefit from better conditions at the ‘Garofița’ kindergarten in Cocieri village”, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/moldova/170-children-benefit-better-conditions-%E2%80%9Cgarofi%C8%9Ba%E2%80%9D-kindergarten-cocieri-village_en

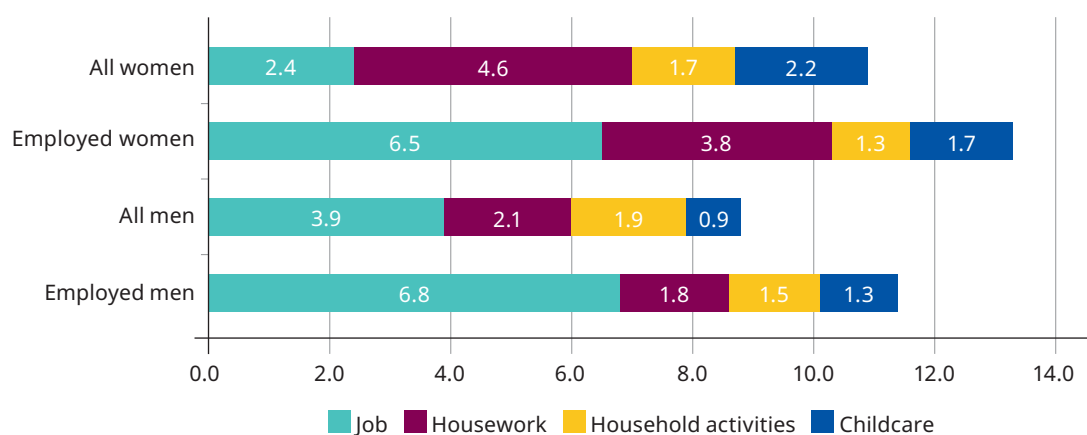
21. UN Moldova (2022): Access to early childhood education for more children in Ungheni, <https://moldova.un.org/en/206939-access-early-childhood-education-more-children-ungheni>

22. Law No. LP367/2022 of 29.12.2022 on alternative childcare services, 17.02.2023, Official Monitor, Nos. 45–48, Art. 85.

► 2.3. Role of the target group

The purpose of the current analysis is to provide evidence for the feasibility of possible interventions **to improve access to and uptake of childcare by women, to facilitate their return to the labour market**. According to the “Generations and Genders” 2020 Survey,²³ only 5 per cent of respondents in Moldova agreed that they were able to maintain a work–life balance. Some 70 per cent of women revealed that they were exhausted, especially in families with children. In other words, employed women face an overall higher workload, taking into consideration additional domestic responsibilities on top of working hours, as shown in Figure 3.²⁴

► **Figure 3. Average hours spent on job and household activities**



Source: UN Women, CPD (2020). Assessment of Covid-19 impact on gender roles.

Figure 3. also shows that, on average, women have lower labour productivity in Moldova, compared with men, because they have fewer paid working hours and lower labour force participation as a result of family duties. This results in a loss of around 20 per cent of potential GDP.²⁵

Although women seek higher education more often (58 per cent) than men in Moldova and have a higher level of educational attainment (24.9 per cent) than men (17.8 per cent), women’s employment rate (48.7 per cent) is slightly lower than men’s (51.3 per cent). Also, women earn on average 14 per cent less than men.²⁶ In Chişinău, which has the most educational and employment opportunities, about a third of women aged 15–29 are not in employment, education or training. In the south of the country, the NEET share among women is even higher, reaching 39 per cent.²⁷

23. UNFPA (2022): Summary of the generations and gender survey. Be the voice of your generation!

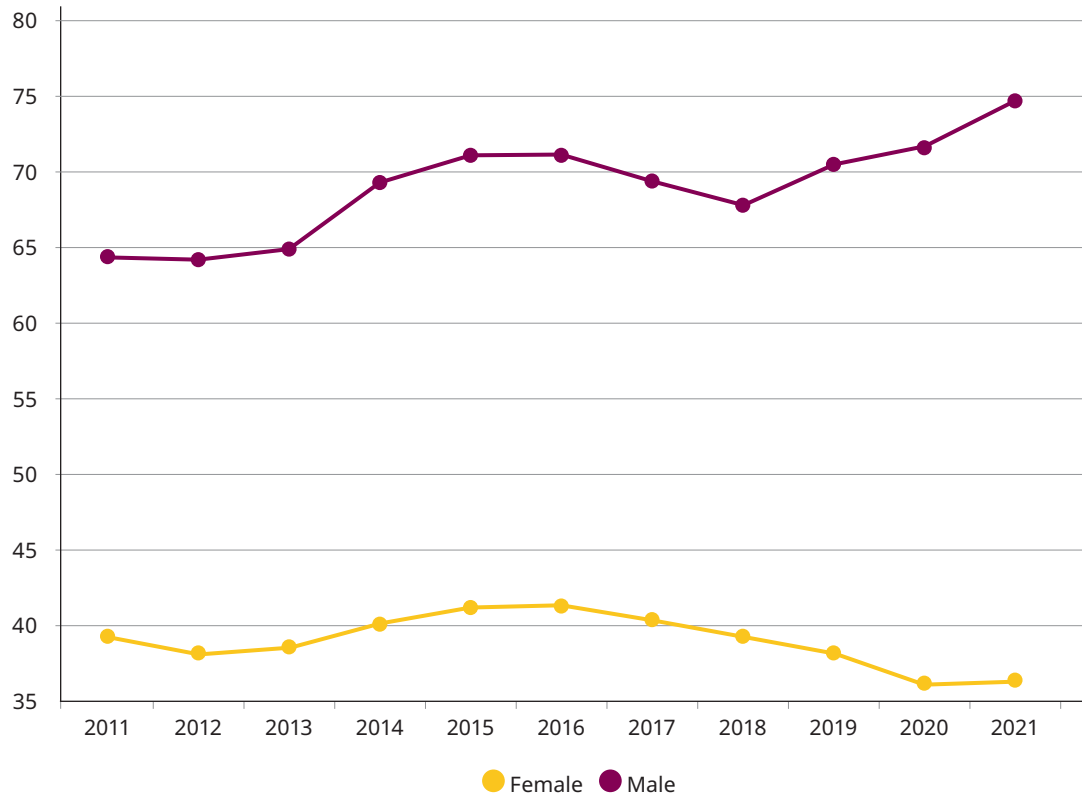
24. UN Women, CPD (2020): Assessment of Covid-19 impact on gender roles.

25. Centrul de Drept al Femeilor & Expert-grup Centru Analitic Independent (2020): Economic Cost of Gender Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova.

26. NIRAS (2021): “Country gender profile. Republic of Moldova”, funded by the European Union under the project EU4GenderEquality: Reform Help Desk.

27. UNFPA (2020): Policies for the Desired Fertility: National Creche Fund to Support Parents.

► Figure 4. Labour force participation rate (%)



Source: World Bank data.

► Table 4. Employment rate of persons aged 25–49, %

	Urban areas		Rural areas	
	At least one child	No children	At least one child	No children
Men	76.0	66.6	58.1	51.1
Women	37.6	68.3	37.0	58.1

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2021.

Table 4. shows the impact of having children on women's employability in Moldova. Young women without children have, on average, a slightly higher employment rate than men, both in rural and urban areas. Simultaneously, parenthood drastically lowers the female employment rate.

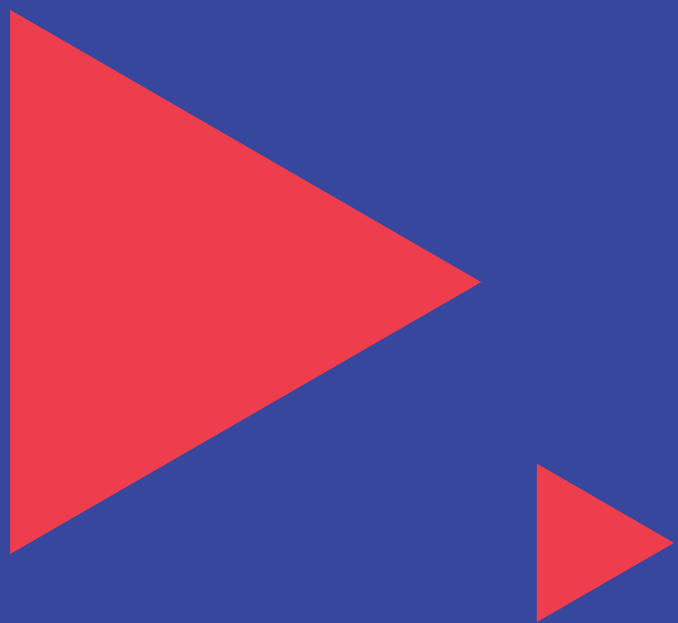
Data from the National Bureau of Statistics for 2021 show that women aged 25–49 who have at least one child below 3 years of age face a 43 percentage point lower employment rate than women without pre-school age children. In the past year, parental leave policies have been adjusted to boost women's labour market participation, for example by shortening childcare leave, introducing paternity leave, and raising allowances to make shortened leave more attractive. However, the number of families taking shortened leave remains low, which may be due to the discrepancy between childcare supply and demand.

According to the recent UN Women report on the impact of Covid-19, during the pandemic women's main source of income were social allowances and remittances, while men managed to obtain most of their income from productive activities.²⁸ These circumstances suggest that women still face obstacles in ensuring a balance between private and professional life, thus remaining outside the labour market for long periods of time, which in turn makes them even more vulnerable.

28. UN Women, CPD (2020): Assessment of Covid-19 impact on gender roles.

▶ Part 3

The market system



► 3. The market system

According to the ILO’s MSA approach, a market system comprises **the market itself** (supply and demand); the **supporting functions**, which include all the elements people need to be part of that market; and the **rules and regulations** (both formal and informal) that influence market functioning. The ILO’s MSA approach analyses the relationships between different actors in a sector with the objective of strengthening the whole system: enterprises, governance mechanisms, business networks, support services, and rules and regulations.

► Figure 5. ILO analytical framework for MSA - adjusted and applied to childcare



Source: Authors, based on the ILO approach to market systems development.

► 3.1. Core market

This chapter takes stock of current supply and demand with regard to childcare services in Moldova with the objective of identifying key constraints and opportunities to expand quality and affordable childcare access to benefit both children’s early development, and mothers’ access to economic opportunities and labor participation. This section first presents the supply side and the available childcare services, followed by the demand side and how well the supply meets this demand.

3.1.1. Supply side

The supply side includes the volume and types of ECEC offered, as well as the content, quality and flexibility of the provided services.

Childcare services for children aged 0–6/7 are provided by either **private** or **public actors**, although the majority of ECEC institutions are public. A total of 1,483 early education institutions were officially registered and in operation in 2021;²⁹ 1,468 of them were public, and only 15 were private (formally registered as private and providing data to the National Bureau of Statistics). These institutions had 176,612 places for children, and 137,113 of them were filled.³⁰

However, the situation is different regarding **children up to 3 years of age** as their enrolment in ECEC is much lower than that of older children (see Table 2). Moldova does not have public ECEC for children up to 2 years old, although, according to the Education Code, local authorities are allowed to form groups for children between 0 and 2 years of age.³¹ In fact, these groups are not developed, as there is a lack of dedicated state funding for such children and municipalities have to cover the costs from their own budget.³² The bulk of services for the smallest children are thus provided **by private ECEC providers, either formal or informal**. Parents are mainly responsible for covering these costs.

Furthermore, the majority of kindergartens do not provide their services according to parents’ needs. For example, many kindergartens close during the summer, for up to several months. Also, working hours in kindergartens in some localities are more restricted, so parents are obliged to take children to the kindergarten at 8 a.m. and pick them up at 4 or 5 p.m. Those who work shifts cannot bring their children earlier, at say 7:30 a.m. or pick them up later, for example, at 6 p.m. Many mothers take a longer period of leave in the summer when kindergartens are closed.³³

29. Statistica Moldovei (2021): Early education institutions by indicators, forms of ownership and years.

30. Statistica Moldovei (2021): Early education institutions by localities, years and indicators.

31. Interview with a government stakeholder.

32. Interviews with government stakeholders.

33. Information provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

As presented in Section 2.2.2, Moldovan legislation recently introduced three forms of private childcare that can be organized for children aged 0–3:³⁴

1. **individualized care services** – regulated and legalized “nanny” services;
2. **family care services** – mini nurseries organized for a limited number of children at home/temporary residence of the caregiver;
3. **services organized by the employer at the workplace** – childcare services provided by the employer to their employees at the workplace.

Services organized by the employer at the workplace are a new phenomenon in Moldova as a legal form of childcare.³⁵ But some employers have already launched childcare services for their employees in recent years (probably informally because the law was not yet in force at the time of the interviews). According to the interview data, employers are in principle keen to provide childcare services for their employees as they see its importance, as well as the benefits for the business in the long run.³⁶ Therefore, it is likely that this form of childcare may increase childcare availability.

Nevertheless, to ensure its development, employers need more government financial and technical support, as currently they lack funds for the initial establishment of creches and knowledge of how to meet the relevant legal requirements. Furthermore, experiences from other countries show that employer-based childcare is more common among larger companies, which are better able to absorb the costs.³⁷ It is far less likely that rural companies in Moldova will have the resources (and the demand) to establish a childcare unit.

Meanwhile, **home-based services** are provided in two ways: either in **family care** at service providers’ homes or by **nannies** (usually at children’s family homes). Before the introduction of the new law, home-based childcare and nannies operated mostly informally. Interviews show that service providers do not perceive sufficient incentives to formally register.³⁸ The main barriers to legalization include increased requirements and monitoring, the administrative burden and extra costs. As the work is carried out on an informal basis, there are no accurate statistics on the numbers of such childcare providers working in the country.³⁹

Home-based services are usually provided by women, who take care of a few children at the same time in their home. This tends to occur when women have their own children or grandchildren and decide to take in more children from neighbouring families. These services are already prevalent in areas outside large cities, as parents have no other means to take care of their children while they are at work. Interviews also show that these services are often used by parents who have emigrated to

34. National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

35. UN Women Moldova (2022): The bill allowing employers to offer child care services to employees with children under the age of 3 has been approved on third reading, <https://moldova.unwomen.org/en/stories/comunicat-de-presa/2022/03/proiectul-de-lege-ce-ar-permite-angajatorilor-de-a-oferi-salariatilor-servicii-de-ingrijire-a-copiior-cu-varsta-pana-la-3-ani-votat-astazi-in-lectura-finala-0>.

36. Interviews with childcare providers.

37. https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2018-61%20Workplace%20Childcare%20-%20What%20works%20for%20Vancouver%20children%2C%20families%2C%20and%20employers_Hunter.pdf and <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2011/sep/30/workplace-nurseries-squeeze>

38. Multiple interviews with childcare providers.

39. Multiple interviews with childcare providers.

other countries, and had to leave their children behind. In 2015, it was estimated that around 41,000 children were left at home without at least one of their parents due to migration.⁴⁰ In these cases, the children stay in family-care 24/7.

Nanny services are another type of home-care service. They tend to be more widespread in urban areas, and are usually provided by women who chose this job while still studying or as a temporary career option. Usually, nannies do not have qualifications and start their work based on demand from acquaintances. Currently, nanny services are growing in popularity, resulting in more organized childcare provision, for example, through apps, webpages and agencies that help parents to find nannies, such as the “Bonita” agency.^{41, 42}

Nanny services can be used for children of all ages and can be either long- or short-term. Interviews with nannies showed that some of them work with certain children a full five working days, and sometimes even weekends, while with other families they only work on call, as needed. They also have children of different ages (from 0 to 7 years old), and often work with siblings.

As alternative childcare is not formalized and monitored in Moldova, **there are no data on the quality of these services**. According to interviewees, the quality of services is not necessarily consistent with international ECE standards: the premises used for family-based care might not meet the criteria and educational staff have no qualifications. Interviews found that both nannies and family care service providers usually do not have professional ECEC qualifications. This is elaborated further in Section 3.2.4.

3.1.2. Demand side

Demand for ECEC has increased somewhat in Moldova over the past decade, especially in urban areas.⁴³ Research conducted by UNICEF showed that women are becoming more employment-oriented, and as a result the demand for childcare services has been growing continuously since 2017.^{44, 45, 46} This is reflected in the growing number of childcare institutions across the country, although the number of children enrolled has remained fairly stable in recent years (not including the first year of the pandemic, in 2020). However, only 15 private (registered) early education institutions provide data for the National Bureau of Statistics for children aged 0–3 (since 2019 for children 2–3 years old and from 2021 for children 1–2 years old). Because the enrolment of children aged 0–3 in childcare is mainly informal, the data are inaccurate. It is therefore not possible to statistically assess the growth in demand and enrolment in childcare.

40. IOM (2015): Country profile. Moldova, <https://moldova.iom.int/migration-profile-republic-moldova>

41. Focus group discussion with mothers.

42. Artzintez (2023), <http://artsintez.md/en/project/bonita-md-2/>

43. Government Decision No. 944 (2014) Education Development Strategy 2014–2020 “Education-2020”.

44. Institute for Development and Social Initiatives “Viitorul” (2009): Study on Social Protection and Social Inclusion in Moldova.

45. UNICEF (2016): Assessment of the preschool education system and definition of the costing methodology for childcare and education services in the Republic of Moldova, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/826/file/Assessment-of-the-preschool-education-system.pdf>.

46. UNICEF (2018): Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/8201/file/Evaluarea%20cuno%C5%9Ftin%C5%A3elor,%20atitudinilor%20%C5%9F%C5%9Fi%20practicilor%20famiililor%20privind%20%C3%AEngrijirea%20%C8%99i%20dezvoltarea%20copiilor.pdf>.

The demand is highest among **young, well-educated families in urban areas**. Data disaggregation by sociodemographic criteria, such as age, living environment and income of employed mothers, revealed that **mothers with children up to 3 years of age living in urban areas** (50.5 per cent) and **those who are financially advantaged** (43.1 per cent) most often seek childcare services.⁴⁷ Cities are struggling to match demand with an adequate supply of services. In 2019, 36 per cent of women with children under 3 years of age sought help through their social networks. Other options included unpaid childcare leave for an additional year, which makes it up to four years in total.⁴⁸

In **rural areas** historically demand is lower for ECEC services for children up to 3 years of age compared with demand in urban areas.⁴⁹ However, it has been slowly growing in recent years.⁵⁰ Demand is affected mainly by already low employment rates in rural areas, the lack of parents' awareness of the benefits of high-quality ECEC, and financial constraints.⁵¹ The tendency for lower demand is also affected by prevailing social norms, according to which women have to take care of children and the household.⁵²

Demand-side constraints are especially prevalent among children from disadvantaged households and children with special educational needs (11 per cent attended ECEC in 2021).^{53 54} **Children with special educational needs** are not being systematically included in mainstream ECEC.⁵⁵ Moreover, parents tend to believe that children with special educational needs do better in special schools. In 2018 there were almost 10,000 children with special education needs in general educational institutions.⁵⁶

Moreover, according to UNICEF,⁵⁷ only one Roma child in five attends pre-school compared with four out of five non-Roma children. Data from 2018 also showed that 88 per cent of children living in better off households attended early education programmes, but only 50 per cent of children from poor households.⁵⁸ Moreover, **socially vulnerable families** usually receive financial assistance, which

47. Zavatki, T. and Fuior, E.: Preschool Education in the Republic of Moldova: Current Situation, Development Opportunities and Financing, https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/p-34-46_0.pdf

48. Article 86(2) of the Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 154 of 28.03.2003.

49. Zavatki, T. and Fuior, E.: Preschool Education in the Republic of Moldova: Current Situation, Development Opportunities and Financing, https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/p-34-46_0.pdf

50. National Bureau of Statistics, https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/en/30%20Statistica%20sociala/30%20Statistica%20sociala__07%20INV__INV020/INV020200.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=0f776e51-2661-420c-b507-c453ecf00d4a

51. UN Women (2022): The bill allowing employers to offer child care services to employees with children under the age of 3 has been approved on third reading.

52. See n. 51.

53. World Bank Group (2018): Moldova Preschool and General Education: Transitioning to a Decentralized Service Delivery Model.

54. Statistica Moldovei.

55. See n. 51.

56. Education, Culture and Research Ministry and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF Moldova) (2018): Conference on implementing the programme on development of inclusive education in Moldova for 2011–2020.

57. UNICEF (2018): Roma children. Inclusion and reintegration of Roma children into the education system, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/what-we-do/roma-children>

58. UNICEF (2018): Moldova has one of the highest preschool enrollment rates but further efforts are required to strengthen the national coverage of early childhood education, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/press-releases/moldova-has-one-highest-preschool-enrollment-rates>

might discourage women from seeking employment.⁵⁹ The Ajutor Social programme is the main instrument providing a safety net for poor families and lifting them out of poverty. However, according to the UNICEF report,⁶⁰ the benefits provided by Ajutor Social do not yet cover a family's minimum consumption needs.

There is also the Republican Fund, which was designed to address the immediate needs of households that have experienced a shock through the provision of one-off material aid or cash assistance. Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection announce an additional benefits programme covered by international organizations at the end of 2022. One-off material aid of 1,000 lei (funded by the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR) was planned to be granted to about 17,000 families whose average monthly income per family member does not exceed 3,544 lei (including refugees from Ukraine).

Additionally, emergency financial aid of 700 lei monthly for a period of six months (financed from the funds of the UN Agencies on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection), was planned to be granted to about 40,000 families with: (i) disabled persons, (ii) an adult with child/children aged 0–17 years, (iii) three or more children aged 0–17, and (iv) children aged 0–2 (priority for pregnant or breastfeeding women).⁶¹ According to the National Bureau of Statistics⁶² in 2022 around 27,400 children received, on average, between 1,000 and 1,490 lei due to disability or a lost breadwinner.

When it comes to **demand for alternative childcare services**, focus groups showed that women would prefer **employer-based childcare services** over other types. They perceive that employer-based services would ensure that caregivers have qualifications, are easy to access, and mothers could come check on their children at any time.⁶³ The demand for work-based childcare services in public institutions was also noted from the interviews. Employees from some public institutions face similar difficulties regarding the affordability of private or alternative childcare, therefore such work-based services would be a solution.⁶⁴

Second in order of preference is **nanny services**. These services seem more attractive than family-based care as nannies stay in the family home, and parents can carefully select their nanny and monitor her activity themselves. Education or training as a nanny is not perceived as mandatory by the majority of interviewed mothers, but some courses and an understanding of child development and first aid may be expected. When it comes to nannies, personal qualities and genuine love for children are the

59. Interview with childcare provider.

60. UNICEF (2016): Assessment and recommendations to improve the resilience of the social protection system for a timely and flexible response to the needs of all vulnerable children and families facing shocks, disasters, and crises in Moldova, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/2481/file/Improve-resilience-social-protection-system-ENG-9-aug-2016.pdf>

61. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection website (2022): Vulnerable families in Moldova are registered in the "Crisis Support" information system to benefit from financial assistance programmes provided by international organisations, <https://social.gov.md/en/communication/vulnerable-families-in-moldova-are-registered-in-the-crisis-support-information-system-to-benefit-from-financial-assistance-programmes-provided-by-international-organisations/>

62. Statistica Moldovei (2022): Beneficiaries of state social allowances and the average size of the allowance, 1 January by Indicators, https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/en/30%20Statistica%20sociala/30%20Statistica%20sociala__09%20PRO/PRO102200.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=b2ff27d7-0b96-43c9-934b-42e1a2a9a774

63. Focus groups with mothers.

64. Multiple interviews with public stakeholders.

most important characteristics: “gentleness and kindness in these women mean more than 1,000 diplomas”.⁶⁵

Family-based services are the least desirable among childcare service users and potential users. Mothers do not believe that family-based care premises meet hygiene and safety requirements, or that the child’s surroundings will be cognitively stimulating enough. Some mothers think that family care services might be attractive for older children (over 18 months) to enable them to socialize, if the facilities, organization of care, food and other issues are properly managed, and mothers can be assured that the services are safe and respond to children’s needs. Meanwhile, interviewed family-based service providers stated that the majority of their clients already knew them or were referred to them by other clients. Therefore, parents trust the services they receive.⁶⁶

► 3.2. Supporting functions

This section presents the measures available to support supply and demand, and how well the measures address the relevant challenges. These include the ECEC infrastructure, access to information, access to finance, skills and training, and supporting organizations. Each sub-section reflects on the childcare sector in general, as well as on how this support function relates to the new alternative forms of childcare.

3.2.1. Infrastructure

3.2.1.1. Buildings and interior

According to the Standard Regulation for the organization and operation of early education institutions (2017), to establish an ECEC in Moldova, providers must fulfil the minimum requirements, such as complying with the Sanitary Regulations for Early Education Institutions and the Minimum Standards for Equipment of the Early Educational Institutions. Every ECEC institution must comply with the child-teacher ratio requirements, and the state established has the maximum number of children who may be enrolled in each facility. However, this does not always happen in practice.

Some childcare providers enrol children between 0 and 2 years of age in groups of older children. One interviewee noted that in such cases, **ECEC provision did not meet health and safety, hygiene, and other requirements to meet the needs of children 0–2 years old**. Additional equipment is needed (for example, baby-cots, special tables, mini baths and toys), create separate spaces (such as sleeping rooms), and hire additional staff.⁶⁷

Because many childcare providers for children aged 0–3 are informal, their provision is not monitored, and **there is no accurate data on the state and (sanitary) quality of alternative childcare infrastructure**. However, interview data show that well-educated families in urban areas seek services with high quality buildings, toys and sanitary facilities. As many public kindergartens are old and

65. Focus group with mothers.

66. Focus group with mothers.

67. Interview with a childcare provider.

unrenovated, parents turn to the private sector (even if private creches have not registered their services as ECEC provision) where providers usually have higher quality infrastructure.⁶⁸

Mothers who took part in the focus groups also expressed concerns regarding the quality of infrastructure in work-based and home-based childcare. Mothers worry that someone else's home or the workplace may not be an environment that could stimulate their children enough cognitively, and home-based centres might not meet safety and hygiene requirements. However, it should be noted that the new regulations provide for sufficient quality infrastructure and should therefore address their concerns.

3.2.1.2. Distance and transport

Meanwhile, in rural areas parents who want to send their children to ECEC, often face **distance and transportation barriers**. Families living in remote areas⁶⁹ need to use their own transportation to take their children to creches, as public transportation is not sufficient.⁷⁰ Several interviewees perceived this transportation barrier as one of the most important barriers to childcare uptake in rural areas. Therefore, nannies who come to the families' house are commonly used, as well as home-based nurseries located in the same community. This situation can continue under the new forms of childcare.

The use of **employer-based childcare** may not involve transportation barriers because the family will need to access their work location anyway. If the parents cannot access their site of employment, the work-based childcare would not come into play. As work-based childcare is more likely to be established in larger companies, near or within cities, it is likely that transport issues would not hinder the use of work-based childcare. However, parents who use work-based childcare and have **children of different ages**, need to drive them to two different ECEC, as creches offered by the employer are only legal for children between ages of 0 and 3. This may become a challenge for families.⁷¹

3.2.2. Access to information

3.2.2.1. Information for childcare providers

Currently, private childcare providers seem to be aware of the existing licensing requirements and sanitary standards, which they perceive as barriers to establishing formalized childcare. However, the interviews showed that there is a lack of knowledge about the new forms of childcare.

According to interviews, **the lack of information and technical support on how to implement work-based childcare** is the number one barrier for employers wishing to use this approach. Although there are companies, especially big ones, that favour providing early education on their premises, they find the proposed set-up too opaque, which makes them resistant to opening creches. Employers have

68. Interview with a childcare provider.

69. The extended OECD regional typology classifies rural and intermediate regions as remote when 50 per cent of the regional population needs at least 60 (45) minutes of driving time to reach a populated centre with at least 50,000 inhabitants. Source: Brezzi, M., Dijkstra, L. and Ruiz, V. (2011): "OECD Extended Regional Typology: The Economic Performance of Remote Rural Regions", OECD Regional Development Working Papers, 2011/06, OECD Publishing.

70. Interviews with stakeholders.

71. Interview with a childcare provider.

questions about content, costs and responsibilities, and suggest that there is a **need to “translate” the law into language understandable by employers.**⁷²

Employers need clear guidelines for their childcare units, and support structures that would also help monitor the quality of provision.⁷³ One respondent suggested that it would be beneficial to have a document or regulation at the state level that would clearly specify the costs of opening and maintaining a nursery, and the concrete requirements regarding safety, training, recruiting childcare personnel and other aspects of running a nursery. Business owners also lack understanding of the governance and coordination of ECEC (for example, which institutions are responsible for which issues and where they can seek counseling and other necessary support).⁷⁴ It is important to note in this context that the **National Programme for Childcare Services for children aged 0–3 includes an action plan to develop such guidelines and launch an awareness campaign.**

Meanwhile, **home-care providers** did not express concerns regarding their lack of knowledge of how to implement their services, as they provide such services informally, and in line with parents’ expressed needs and expectations. However, both nannies and family-care service providers raised questions on the process of formalizing their activity, and the changes that they would have to make. They are not sure how this process would be implemented, how this would affect their services, what requirements they would have to meet, what would be the financial and administrative burden, and what would be the government’s support. Furthermore, they lack understanding of the benefits of legalizing their services.⁷⁵ The latter indicates a possible lack of awareness of the benefits in terms of social security and (medical) insurance.

3.2.2.2. Information for parents

Lack of information and knowledge is also a barrier on the demand side. As already discussed in the chapter analysing demand for ECEC, **parents who lack knowledge of the benefits of ECEC on a child’s development tend to use childcare services less often.** This is especially common among less advantaged families, such as families at risk of poverty, families living in rural areas, Roma families, and parents with lower education. At the same time, the study conducted by UNICEF shows that two out of three surveyed parents in Moldova are open to early education and recognize the importance of positive parenting.⁷⁶

The focus group discussions with mothers revealed that they are familiar with the available possibilities for ECEC. Their reasons for not taking advantage of such services is more financial (see Section 3.2.3.) or infrastructural (see Section 3.2.1.). The focus groups noted that there is a **lack of understanding of the meaning of “quality”** among parents – especially parents with lower education. Many parents perceive certain characteristics in a provider as signs of “quality” rather than their qualifications to make a positive contribution to a child’s early development.⁷⁷

72. Interview with a business stakeholder.

73. Interviews with childcare providers and stakeholders.

74. Interview with a business stakeholder.

75. Interviews with childcare providers.

76. UNICEF (2018): Knowledge, attitudes and practices in early childhood development and care, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/8201/file/Evaluarea%20cuno%C5%9Ftin%C5%A3elor,%20atitudinilor%20%C5%9Fi%20practicilor%20famililor%20privind%20%C3%AEngrijirea%20%C8%99i%20dezvoltarea%20copiilor.pdf>.

77. Focus group discussion with mothers.

3.2.3. Finance and subsidies

3.2.3.1. Current financial arrangements

Regarding the financing of childcare for those aged 0–2, the Constitution of Moldova does not specify that the state must bear the cost. LPAs can establish childcare services for this age group, based on parental demand, but as there is no dedicated budget line **there are usually no available funds**. One public sector representative noted that they cannot find donors to help them financially to set up a creche, and therefore this effort has already been delayed for two years.⁷⁸

LPAs constantly suffer from budget deficits and have limited possibilities to accumulate enough income in local budgets to support quality childcare and to establish groups for children up to 3 years of age, as most of the budget is spent on renovating deteriorating buildings.⁷⁹ This budget allocation problem is especially prevalent in rural areas, where the quality of infrastructure is especially low.

Meanwhile, **financial contributions by parents to access childcare** are forbidden in kindergartens, but parents can be asked to contribute to various additional costs, such as drinking water, supplies, and furniture.⁸⁰ In practice, in state creches, parents have to contribute 30 per cent of the **cost of children's daily food** (four meals and one snack per day in Chişinău and three meals and one snack in rural areas), plus 10 leu (0.5 euro) for each day the child attends.⁸¹

Parents are responsible for the **transportation** of children, and there is an additional monthly fee for **toys and materials**.⁸² Usually daily meals cost 38.6 leu (19.3 leu to be covered by parents), and toys and material expenses amount to 100 leu per month. Meanwhile, the **monthly cost for a place in a private creche** is around 5,000–6,500 lei per month in urban areas.⁸³ These expenses are not even partially funded by the government, which makes it inaccessible to many families. In many cases, private services exceed mothers' wages or almost, therefore sending children to private institutions is out of the question. Since 1 January 2023 the minimum wage has been 4,000 MDL. Even **well-educated mothers with lower incomes cannot afford private institutional and nanny services in urban areas**.⁸⁴

78. Interview with a government stakeholder.

79. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of Covid-19: The case of Moldova.

80. UNICEF (2022): Situation analysis of children and adolescents in Moldova.

81. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of COVID-19: the case of Moldova.

82. Interview with a childcare provider.

83. Interview with a childcare provider.

84. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of COVID-19: the case of Moldova.

► **Table 5. Share of costs paid by the state and parents for early childhood education and care in Moldova**

Funder	ECEC provision for 0–2 year-olds		ECEC provision for 2–6/7 year-olds	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Central government	Not provided	N/a	~70% for meals and additional costs for ECEC	N/a
LPA	~70% for meals and additional costs for ECEC	N/a		N/a
Families	Up to 30% for meals and 10 leu per day for each day the child attends nursery	100% of costs	Up to 30% for meals and 10 leu per day for each day the child attends kindergarten	100% of costs

Source: UNECE/UN Women (2021).

Families **raising children up to 3 years old at home** also receive state support.^{85, 86} Mothers receive a one-off childbirth allowance, which has amounted to 10,932 lei since 1 January 2023 (the amount is approved every year).⁸⁷ Then, families are entitled to 90 per cent of the calculation base (average insured monthly income in the 12 calendar months preceding the month of the child's birth) for 12 months.⁸⁸ After that, no more allowance is granted. Otherwise, parents can also claim benefits until the child reaches the age of 2 years and 2 months, and receive 60 per cent of the average monthly insured income for the first year, and 30 per cent for the remaining time.⁸⁹ There is also a third option: parents can receive an allowance until the child reaches 3 years of age and claim 30 per cent of the average monthly income for the whole three years.⁹⁰ Moreover, **all families with children up to 2 years of age receive a monthly allowance of 1000 leu in Moldova**. However, these allowances are still not sufficient to cover the cost of private ECEC provision.

3.2.3.2. Financial arrangements for new forms of alternative childcare

Alternative care establishments also face financial challenges. For example, **there is currently no government funding available for companies that open creches on their premises**, although the National Programme proposes a grant programme for employers who seek to open creches.⁹¹ The law also specifies that childcare costs are tax-deductible.⁹² There is currently a debate among experts on whether financial support should be provided for employer-based childcare services providers. Some experts suggest that there should be funding, as employers lift a huge burden off the government's shoulders. Others argue that opening creches will already have a financial benefit to business owners

85. Zavatki, T. and Fuior, E. (ND): Preschool Education in the Republic of Moldova: Current Situation, Development Opportunities and Financing, https://ibn.idsi.md/sites/default/files/imag_file/p-34-46_0.pdf

86. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of Covid-19: The case of Moldova.

87. Moldpres (2022): One-off child-birth allowance to be higher in Moldova starting from 1 January 2023.

88. National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

89. UNFPA Moldova (2021): Comparative analysis. Gender-Responsive Family Policies: National Regulations in the Light of the New European Standards.

90. Ibid.

91. National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

92. Regulation regarding the organization and operation of childcare services organized by the employer at the workplace.

(in terms of increased labour activity of families with small children), and therefore there is no need for additional financial help.⁹³

However, interviews with companies suggest that **employers do count on additional support from the state**, especially in the context of the non-profit principle of private ECEC provision (as required by law⁹⁴). For instance, an interviewed business owner who had already opened a creche (informally) for his company's employees stated that he could have not opened a creche without additional (donor) support, which amounted to \$8,000 in total.⁹⁵ The interviewed stakeholders highlight the importance of initial financial support when opening creches, as this requires the biggest financial investments. Some examples of donors mentioned by the interviewees include the Romanian Embassy, the Chinese Embassy and the British Council.

Financial aspects also affect home-based care providers' attitudes towards legalization of their work. Interviewed nannies and family-care providers noted that legalization of their work would lead to increased costs (taxes, social and medical insurance, costs to comply with regulations). They suggested that many families could not afford the higher childcare costs necessary to cover these additional expenses,⁹⁶ especially given that financial constraints were already mentioned as one of the key barriers to the uptake of early childhood education and care. Otherwise, if there were no extra costs for childcare providers and families, interviewees would be better incentivized to formalize their services as this would also ensure safety and a legal child protection guarantee.

The higher costs are especially worrisome for family-based care providers, as they would have to meet a lot of safety, hygiene, and infrastructure requirements. However, to ensure that family-care providers do not suffer from a higher financial burden, the National Programme foresees an “accelerator for alternative family care services to be brought to market”.⁹⁷ The goal of these incubation programmes would be to “boost the market presence of these services, which would normally take longer”.⁹⁸

3.2.4. Skills and training

3.2.4.1. Availability of qualified staff

There is a **shortage of (qualified) caregivers** working in childcare for children aged 0–6/7 in Moldova. The lack of caregivers is especially acute in rural areas, with 24 per cent of (public) ECEC staff assigned to early learning institutions in Chişinău and 74 per cent assigned to the remaining 34 districts.⁹⁹ One interviewee mentioned that many caregivers in rural areas do not work all year, as during spring and summer they have to attend to their fields, vineyards and so on.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is very hard to find staff during these seasons.

93. Interview with a business stakeholder.

94. According to the Standard Regulation for the organization and operation of early education institutions, all income obtained must be used exclusively for institutional development, following non-profit organization principles.

95. Interview with a business stakeholder.

96. Multiple interviews with childcare providers.

97. National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

98. Ibid.

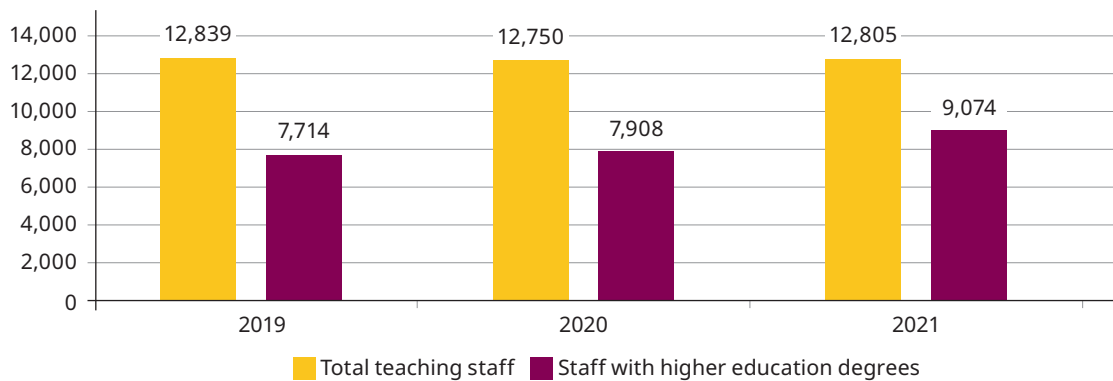
99. The National Program for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years, 2023–2026.

100. Interview with a childcare provider

In 2019, the Moldovan government increased the **wages of public officials** in various categories, including ECEC staff (all ages). The salary increased from 5,104 leu to 6,083 leu (+19.2 per cent).¹⁰¹ However, this applies only to public childcare provision.

In 2021, ECEC institutions (covering all ages) had a total of 10,291 teachers – 4,816 in urban areas and 5,475 in rural areas.¹⁰² Only 8,074 of all teachers had higher education degrees (though not necessarily an ECEC specialization), and a quarter of them work in the municipality of Chişinău (2,656).¹⁰³

► **Figure 6. teaching staff in early education institutions by Education level**



Source: Statistica Moldovei.

There is a lack of qualified caregivers for children aged 0–3, as most childcare providers work without formal ECEC qualifications.¹⁰⁴ As the childcare provision is informal, there are no requirements for their services and parents themselves often do not require qualifications. As already mentioned, references and personality are often perceived as more important. Therefore, there is no demand from parents that would encourage (future) childcare providers to educate themselves.¹⁰⁵ However, there is no statistical evidence on the extent to which individuals offering nanny and family care services are actually professionalized and trained in early childhood education and care, as they mainly work informally.

Currently, the **employers we interviewed lack sufficient knowledge** on which caregivers to hire, how to assess whether they meet all the necessary educational requirements and have the skills necessary to provide high quality childcare.¹⁰⁶ Acquiring such information is provided for in the new law (see Section 3.3.3.), but guides and other awareness-raising tools are needed to inform employers properly.

101. <https://www.ziarulnational.md/majorari-salarii-de-pestre-6-000-de-lei-pentru-educatori-si-de-pestre-10-000-de-lei-pentru-primarii-de-la-sate/>

102. Statistica Moldovei. (2021). Pedagogical staff in early education institutions by Medii, Indicatori and Years

103. Statistica Moldovei. (2021). Pedagogical staff in early education institutions by Regions/Districts, Years and Education level

104. Ibid.

105. Multiple interviews with childcare providers.

106. Interview with business owners.

Because of their lack of training, **many ECEC staff do not have the skills to effectively involve the children in their care in educational activities** (such as interactive learning) as foreseen in the policy guidelines, and they particularly lack skills to work with children with special educational needs.¹⁰⁷ There is a need, especially in rural areas, for more in-depth mentoring and training, regular psychological coaching and psychological certification for teachers.¹⁰⁸ Some sources also indicate a lack of appropriate teaching materials and educational activities are not tailored to specific age groups.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, although there are requirements for caretakers and learning materials, they are not necessarily implemented in practice.

3.2.4.2. Availability of training opportunities

There is a clear **need for professionalization and continuous training of caregivers**, including in areas such as children’s well-being, pedagogical innovation, management of ECEC institutions, and monitoring and evaluation culture.¹¹⁰ The Education Code stipulates that *“the professional development of the didactic, scientific-didactic, scientific and management personnel is mandatory during the entire professional activity and shall be regulated by the government. This shall be carried out in higher education institutions and/or in continuous professional training institutions, by other educational service providers, based on accredited professional training programmes.”*¹¹¹

However, **opportunities for professionalization are limited** for childcare staff, with only one accredited ECEC specialization track (either as educator or assistant educator and including all age groups between 0 and 6/7 years of age) currently provided within the general education programme at Alexei Mateevici College.¹¹² In 2022, Alexei Mateevici College offered 65 places on its education course, of which 30 were tuition-free. For the remaining 35 places, the tuition fee is 5500 leu.¹¹³ Some 15 per cent of the 30 free places are reserved for candidates that fall into the following categories¹¹⁴:

- ▶ with severe, pronounced or medium disability;
- ▶ without parental protection;
- ▶ with at least one parent with a severe disability;
- ▶ with at least one parent who has participated in military action to defend the integrity and independence of the Republic of Moldova, combat in Afghanistan or dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster;
- ▶ from families with four or more children, dependent on their parents;
- ▶ of Roma ethnicity.

107. Government Decision No. 944. (2014). Education Development Strategy 2014–2020 “Education-2020”.

108. Interview with a governmental stakeholder.

109. See, for example, UNICEF (2018): Assessment of the preschool education system and definition of the costing methodology for childcare and education services in the Republic of Moldova.

110. Ibid.

111. Code of Education, Article.133(1).

112. Ibid.

113. <https://cpam.md/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Repartizarea-locurilor-2022-1-pdf-1.png>

114. <https://cpam.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/OMEC-nr.-648-din-07.07.2022-cu-anexele-1-%C8%99i-2.pdf>

According to the interview data, the quality of the programme is good,¹¹⁵ but there is a lack of interest in this profession and demand for places decreases every year.¹¹⁶ Some of the reasons include low expected pay and lack of professional prestige.¹¹⁷ Moreover, a lack of career opportunities prevents young people from entering this profession.¹¹⁸ Interviewees also noted that more universities should be teaching ECEC courses, especially as legalization of new forms of childcare will require care providers to acquire qualifications, which is likely to boost demand for childcare education courses.¹¹⁹

3.2.5. Trade unions, NGOs and other supporting organizations

Trade unions play an important role in ensuring high-quality early childhood education and care provision. Trade unions are especially active in Western and Northern European Countries.¹²⁰ Trade unions are usually involved with childcare providers' training, coaching and protection of their rights and well-being. In Northern Europe they are even involved in monitoring the quality of childcare service providers.¹²¹ Trade unions also play a major role in policymaking, usually within the framework of tripartite arrangements and social dialogue.

In Moldova, however, trade union activities are limited. Trade unions should play a more active role in developing a comprehensive contribution to improving women's wellbeing, including the availability of early childhood education and care.¹²² When the new forms of childcare are implemented, trade unions will be able to play a role in ensuring that there is no discrimination against workers with family responsibilities. During an interview, a non-governmental stakeholder stated that trade unions in Moldova lack the capacity to properly carry out all of their functions.¹²³ He also suggested that young, pro-active people from different sectors should get involved in policymaking. An interview with a trade union representative showed that trade unions have developed channels to share their feedback and views in the process of policymaking. For example, trade unions have been fighting to ratify ILO Conventions No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities and No. 189 (Domestic Workers Convention), which also cover nannies and caregivers. Ratifying these conventions would provide the basis for the national legal framework, to ensure these workers protection. However, the conventions have not yet been ratified.

In some countries, such as the United Kingdom, private organizations also function as **childcare agencies** that support providers in establishing formal childcare services. They consult on the quality of childcare services and help parents to identify suitable childcare.¹²⁴ Currently, there are no umbrella organizations for childcare that could support new providers in navigating the law and new legal requirements in Moldova.

115. Interview with a childcare provider.

116. Interview with a non-governmental stakeholder.

117. Interview with a governmental stakeholder.

118. Interview with a childcare provider.

119. Interview with a non-governmental stakeholder.

120. Early Childhood Ireland (2021): Trade Union Efforts in Early Childhood Sector; Engel, A., et al. (2015): Early Childhood Education and Care Policy Review: Norway.

121. Interview with an early childhood education and care expert.

122. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of Covid-19: the case of Moldova.

123. Interview with a non-governmental stakeholder.

124. Described in more detail in Section 4.1.

NGOs have also been crucial in improving women's situation and educational provision in Moldova. In partnership with Moldova's national bodies, they support the development of the regulatory framework, including the framework on childcare.¹²⁵ NGOs rely mainly on international donors and governmental support.¹²⁶ According to the interviewees, **women's organizations** should also be more involved in the process of childcare development in Moldova. Women's work in civil society has always been guided by foreign donors and the experiences of Western women.¹²⁷ However, because of their different histories, Western women and Moldovan women have taken a very different approach to social issues and their role, which resulted in a certain disconnection and exhaustion, as well as a lack of activity. Women's roles in Moldova are still shaped by sexist stereotypes and rigid gender roles. As a result, women's organizations and feminist values are yet to be fully accepted in the country.¹²⁸

However, **international organizations and donors** have always been crucial in improving women's situations and childcare provision in Moldova. For example:

- ▶ **the UN Population Fund** and **UN Women** were actively involved in the drafting of normative acts;
- ▶ **UNICEF** supported the Ministry of Education and Research in finalizing Education Strategy 2030 and provided material support to ECEC centres (they provided learning materials for child-centred learning);^{129, 130}
- ▶ **The World Bank** invested in Moldovan early childhood education and care by providing additional financing to the Education Reform Project¹³¹;
- ▶ In 2006 Moldova joined the **Global Partnership for Education** and until 2014 received grants for developing childcare services for children between the ages of 3 and 6 and including children with special educational needs into mainstream early childhood education and care. As a result, 101 kindergartens were renovated and some new inventory purchased (toys, furniture, playground equipment, books and didactic materials);¹³²
- ▶ **the International Partnership for Human Development** has also been providing material support to nurseries.¹³³

125. Interview with non-governmental stakeholder.

126. People in Need (2021): Building a Stronger Civil Society in Moldova and the South Caucasus.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Interview with a governmental stakeholder.

130. UNICEF (2022): Country Office Annual Report 2022: Moldova, <https://www.unicef.org/media/136201/file/Moldova-2022-COAR.pdf>

131. World Bank Group (2019): World Bank invests in Early Childhood Education, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/964641554906838005-0090022019/original/ELPECEbriefV9PRINT.pdf>.

132. GPE Transforming Education (2016): How Moldova Made Pre-School More Equitable for its Children? <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/how-moldova-made-preschool-more-equitable-its-children-part-1>.

133. International Partnership for Human Development (2020): Moldova, <http://iphd.org/moldova/>.

► 3.3. Rules and regulations

The childcare sector is governed by a variety of national systems, including legislation, but also social and gender norms. Such (unwritten) rules and regulations can facilitate the establishment and uptake of childcare or serve to restrict it. The following sections present the main system-level factors affecting childcare in Moldova.

3.3.1. Legal and policy context

Childcare leave

Maternity leave includes prenatal leave of 70 calendar days (in case of pregnancies with three or more children, this is increased to 112 calendar days) and paid postnatal leave for a period of 56 calendar days (for complicated births or the birth of two or more children – 70 calendar days). In 2022, the law introduced **paternity leave for fathers**. Paternity leave is 14 days during the first 12 months after the childbirth, and paid in full, from the social insurance budget.¹³⁴

After the expiry of maternity leave, partially paid leave is granted for childcare up to the age of 3 with the payment of an allowance from the social insurance budget¹³⁵ if a parent was employed and paid social security taxes for at least three years in total or at least 9 months in the previous year.¹³⁶ Partially paid childcare leave may be taken by both parents alternately in instalments according to their availability, provided that the instalments do not overlap. The leave can also be granted to one grandparent or another relative directly involved in caring for the child, as well as to the guardian.¹³⁷ Additionally, there is a possibility to extend childcare leave up to 4 years, with one additional year of unpaid leave at the request of the parent.¹³⁸

The employer is obliged to maintain employees' jobs during the period they are on parental leave. Because women are usually the ones taking this leave, employers prefer to employ men,¹³⁹ especially with the newly introduced legal possibility of extending childcare leave up to four years.¹⁴⁰ The opportunity to stay out of the labour market for up to four years creates a negative situation for both employers and employees because it hinders young women from getting a job and lowers their working skills and competences if a long period is spent on childcare leave. The focus group discussion with mothers suggested that women tend to take longer leaves because there is no opportunity to use childcare.¹⁴¹

134. Article 124(2) of the Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova No 154 of 28.03.2003.

135. Ibid.

136. Law No. 289-XV of 22.07.2004 concerning Allowances for Temporary Work Disability and Other Social Security Benefits.

137. See n. 134.

138. Article 86(2) of the Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 154 of 28.03.2003.

139. Centrul de Drept al Femeilor & Expert-grup Centru Analitic Independent (2020): Economic Cost of Gender Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova.

140. Interview with a business stakeholder.

141. Focus group discussion with mothers.

Legal and policy provisions regarding childcare services

Formal childcare institutions are subordinated to the local education authority (LEA) for matters related to the planning design, organization, monitoring and evaluation of the educational process, and continuous training. In the case of public ECEC institutions, the LPA is responsible for developing the technical, material and teaching basis, maintenance of the institution, organization of children's meals and staff salaries.¹⁴²

There are several **challenges related to existing regulations** that limit the attractiveness of childcare services or hinder the establishment of new ones.

1) **There is no monitoring mechanism for early childhood education and care provision, quality and staff professionalization for children 0–3 years of age.**

Most private early education institutions are not legally registered and certified as early education providers by the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC), therefore they are not subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research. Thus, because there is no legal requirement from the state, they are not monitored and their provided education quality is not regularly assessed.¹⁴³

Moreover, private childcare institutions are organized according to the non-profit principle, which makes them unattractive for most private investors. The main funders of private childcare institutions are founders and the parents paying the tuition fees. Even though private childcare institutions should meet the same requirements as public institutions in terms of quality of services, they often fail to develop services that meet the needs of all children, especially younger ones (aged 0–3) because of the lack of continuous funding and competence.¹⁴⁴

The alternative early childhood education and care services law, together with regulations are creating a foundation for the monitoring of these services. However, a dedicated monitoring mechanism is also needed because the existing procedures for ECEC monitoring are rather bureaucratic (focusing on structural indicators such as child/staff ratio and hygiene, but not other dimensions of quality, such as process or curricula).¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the interviews raised concerns about the lack of a child-centred approach in the current quality standards for early childhood education and care in Moldova, which as a consequence are also not reflected in existing monitoring frameworks. Therefore, a mechanism for regular data collection and analysis should be designed and implemented. Such mechanisms will improve the distribution of resources and adequate investment in different quality dimensions of ECEC.

2) **There is insufficient coordination between different state actors.**

The interview analysis¹⁴⁶ showed that there is a lack of efficient coordination and consensus in terms of ECEC services between different ministries in Moldova. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was made responsible for alternative childcare provision, but the new law also assigns responsibility to the Ministry of Education (for methodological guidelines) and to the Ministry of Health (to monitor the sanitary requirements).

¹⁴². Regulation on pre-school educational institutions.

¹⁴³. Multiple interviews.

¹⁴⁴. UNECE (2021): Childcare, women's employment and the impact of Covid-19: The case of Moldova.

¹⁴⁵. Regulation on pre-school educational institutions; interview with a stakeholder.

¹⁴⁶. Multiple interviews.

To develop high-quality ECEC services, collaboration is needed among the health, educational and social protection systems, as well as partnership between the ECEC provider, families and the community, clearly stating the role, responsibility and contribution of each.

3) The Licensing and Sanitary Regulations are perceived as too strict.

Multiple interviews stressed that the old sanitary regulations for ECEC services were outdated, complicated and technical.

However, together with the new alternative childcare service law, the sanitary regulation for children aged 0–3 was developed and includes a shortened version of the old regulation. It contains only the necessary standards to ensure children’s safety and wellbeing without too many technical requirements.¹⁴⁷ The new requirements may increase the attractiveness of opening alternative childcare services for private providers.

It is important to note that the sanitary regulations are in line with examples from other countries. Therefore, compliance related challenges should not be addressed by simplifying the regulations further (because they are needed for children’s wellbeing), but by making them more understandable for childcare providers.

3.3.2. Gender and social norms

In Moldova, strong traditional gender roles still prevail: 90.5 per cent of men and 81.5 per cent of women consider that the most important thing for a woman is to take care of the household, while 95 per cent of men consider changing diapers, washing and feeding children as women’s responsibilities.¹⁴⁸ Men who try to take childcare leave are sometimes stigmatized by their colleagues, friends and relatives.¹⁴⁹

Consequently, there is pressure on women to take care of children. There are also indications that mothers who send a very small child to a nursery can be stigmatized as bad mothers by their relatives.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the demand for nurseries for children up to one year old is weak because most mothers would prefer to stay at home with their babies.¹⁵¹ However, no accurate statistics are available in this regard.

3.3.3. Qualification standards for ECEC professionals

The Ministry of Education and Research has a mandate to develop policy documents on educational standards for pre-school education and curricula. Likewise, the National Qualification Framework Department at the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for qualifications for the training of childcare specialists.

In general, the Education Code recognizes the following functions in early education (ages 0–6/7): educator, support teaching staff, music director, speech therapist, psychologist, psychopedagogue, and methodologist. The minimum qualification requirements for early education teaching positions are a relevant qualification to at least level 4 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) in post-secondary professional technical education.

¹⁴⁷. Sanitary regulation for alternative childcare services.

¹⁴⁸. Women’s Law Center (2015): Men and gender equality.

¹⁴⁹. Centrul de Drept al Femeilor & Expert-grup Centru Analitic Independent (2020): Economic Cost of Gender Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova.

¹⁵⁰. Ibid.

¹⁵¹. Interview with a business stakeholder.

At the moment, however, because of labour shortages, people employed as nannies, even in public kindergartens, often do not have qualifications. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Research in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection approved the *Occupational and Qualification Standard for “Babysitters (Nannies)”*.¹⁵² The Occupational Standard includes a variety of skills that babysitters or nannies should possess, while the Qualification Standard details the education required for this position, indicating that it should be at least level 3 ISCED.

Definition of occupation: Babysitters (nannies) (hereafter, nanny) ensure the care, upbringing, supervision, education and learning of the child when the legal representatives/legal guardians are at work or engaged in other activities. The nanny is involved in the relationship of care, growth, supervision, education, learning and development of the child’s basic skills and is responsible for implementing the actions and activities provided for in the service provision agreement. They will also monitor play activities, including developmental activities, meals served, and medications administered, if a child suffers from current ailments or chronic illnesses.¹⁵³

Regarding the existing qualification standards for teachers, it is evident that all teachers must go through compulsory medical check-ups, as well as psychological consultations before taking up a position in the public sector.¹⁵⁴ According to the Regulation on Types of Early Education Institution, all employees must be 18 or older to work in early childhood education and care “with moral qualities, medically and mentally fit, and relate appropriately to children, parents, or legal representatives”. All employees must undergo a compulsory medical examination once every two years and take a test on basic health knowledge under the hygienic programme.¹⁵⁵ In the Qualification Standard for nannies it is stated that as a condition of employment a nanny will need to present a health certificate indicating their physical and mental health. The same conditions are also laid down in the alternative ECEC law, indicating that in order to be registered all caregivers need to present a certificate proving their medical and psychological fitness.¹⁵⁶

The new law on alternative childcare requires that childcare be provided by qualified staff and defines clear requirements and options: “It is considered that the person is qualified in the field of caring for children up to the age of 3 provided for in letter b) paragraph (1) art. 15 of Law No. 367/2022 regarding alternative childcare services, if they have a certificate in any of the following studies [*this part of the law came into force only two years after it was adopted*]:

- higher studies in the field of education, health and social assistance;
- secondary technical vocational studies in the field of education, health and social assistance;
- certificate of secondary school studies/certificate of high school studies/baccalaureate diploma/certificate of secondary studies of general culture/higher studies or another equivalent document of studies, recognized by the competent authority and the document of studies confirming specialization in the field of childcare”.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵². By Order No. 457 of 30 May.

¹⁵³. Ministry of Education and Research (2022): Occupational Standard, Babysitter (nanny). Qualification level: 3 CNCRM.

¹⁵⁴. Interview with a government stakeholder.

¹⁵⁵. Interview with an education provider.

¹⁵⁶. Law No. LP367/2022 of 29.12.2022 on alternative childcare services, 17.02.2023, Official Monitor No. 45-48 art. 85.

¹⁵⁷. Regulation regarding the organization and operation of childcare services organized by the employer at the workplace; Regulation regarding the organization and operation of alternative individualized child care services; and Regulation regarding the organization and operation of family-type childcare services.

3.3.4. Licensing and formalization

Registered private kindergartens usually work as educational centres or with a public association license. This status gives them significant autonomy and provides no legal ground for state monitoring and inspection (unless they obtain accreditation as an early childhood education and care institution). A lack of accreditation prohibits them from issuing completion certificates for children who attend such institutions because they are not certified as official ECEC providers.¹⁵⁸ It also prevents educators from obtaining teaching degrees and accumulating formal experience because this work experience is not recognized by ANACEC.

The National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years of Age, 2023–2026 mentions that private providers do not emerge because of the legislative, technical, and financial barriers. The interviews data also showed that the main market barrier to private service providers are the stringent requirements (especially on health and hygiene), unclear registration system, non-profit status requirements, and the lack of government support. The accreditation procedure is complex and costly (for obtaining the license and meeting the sanitary requirements) and not every private service provider is aware of such possibilities.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the focus groups discussions with mothers revealed a prevailing stereotype that licensing in Moldova is corrupt. Therefore licenses are obtainable only if you have money, so a license alone does not prove the quality of services.¹⁶⁰

Family-based care and individual care services (nannies) are often not formalized. In the focus groups with parents, it was mentioned that there are agencies that provide nanny services, but the care itself often remains informal. The Ministry of the Economy is planning to change the licensing of caretakers to allow self-employment, which would involve additional reporting. It would also require caretakers to carry cash machines, registers and collect the payments, as well as to spend time reporting. This will scarcely create attractive conditions for caretakers to move from informal childcare provision.¹⁶¹ Moreover, it also will require a financial investment (up to 15,000 lei¹⁶²) which will also discourage caretakers from legalization.¹⁶³

In addition, most home-based childcare providers (nannies and family care services) lack easily accessible information on the steps and benefits of legalizing (formalizing) their services. They are concerned mainly about the high taxes that they will need to pay, and the paperwork required for formalizing their work. However, they also recognize some benefits that would be important for them, such as social security, pensions, also the ability to help children in need of medical assistance (when parents are abroad).¹⁶⁴

Interview data show that the main factors preventing nannies and family nurseries from registering their services officially include the administrative burden, additional expenses for themselves and the families they work for, which do not translate into improved working conditions or financial benefits,

158. Multiple interviews.

159. Interview with a childcare provider.

160. Focus group discussion with mothers.

161. Interview with a non-government stakeholder

162. Interview with a government stakeholder.

163. Interview with a childcare provider.

164. Interviews with multiple childcare providers.

and lack of trust in state-promised support.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, focus groups with mothers revealed that parents rarely prioritize the nanny’s legal status or even qualifications.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, informal ECEC service providers are not motivated to formalize their activity.

However, potential accidents and the need to guarantee safety was mentioned as one of the risks that registration and regulation would help prevent.

*“One of the children under my supervision got injured. I took him to the hospital, but he could not be treated as I did not have legal rights over the child. As the child’s parents were living abroad, the situation became extremely problematic, even the town mayor got involved. In the end the child received the necessary surgery, although I had to pay part of the expenses as caregiver. This is the main reason why I would consider making my services official”.*¹⁶⁷

3.4. Constraints – a summary

This section includes a summary table of the key constraints on the Moldovan early childhood education and care sector (focusing on the 0–2 age group), their underlying causes and their impact on the market.

► **Table 6. Summary of constraints**

CORE MARKET		
Constraint	Underlying causes	Impact on the market
Lack of ECEC provision for children aged 0–2 in rural and urban areas (to be potentially resolved by new forms of childcare established under the new law)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No legal entitlement for public ECEC services for 0–2 age group Lack of incentives for private actors to establish ECEC centres (for example, non-profit status, unclear or burdensome licensing process, lack of guidance and support) Inadequate funding distribution for public ECEC provision (LPA budget deficits) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Having to take longer parental leave Longer periods of labour inactivity for women More limited women’s employability Parents have to look for other solutions, not always legal Unequal access to available ECEC, putting vulnerable families into even higher disadvantage Increase in informal ECEC provision

¹⁶⁵. Multiple interviews with childcare providers.

¹⁶⁶. Focus group discussion with mothers.

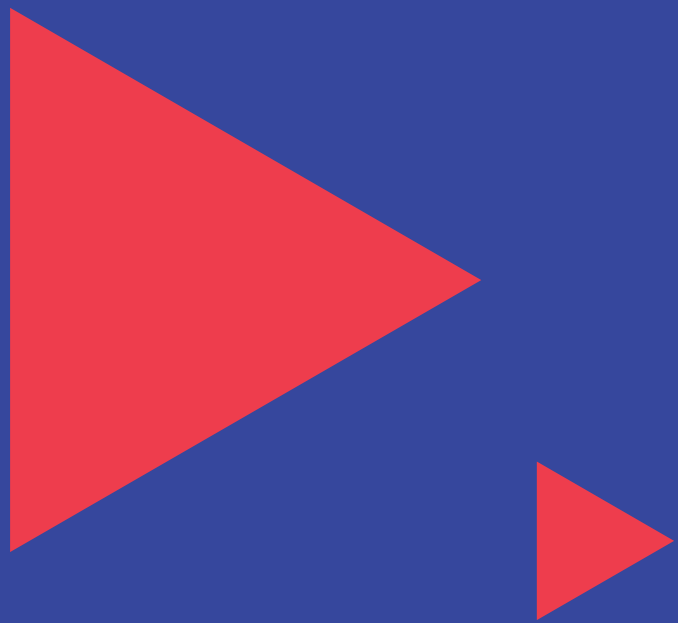
¹⁶⁷. Interview with a caregiver.

CORE MARKET <i>(continued)</i>		
Constraint	Underlying causes	Impact on the market
Low uptake of available childcare services in rural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness among families of the importance of ECEC for child development • Possible stigmatization of mothers and fathers in some communities (especially religious and ethnic ones) • High level of women's unemployment in rural areas, therefore they are used to taking care of their children themselves • Financial constraints on families (affordability of available childcare) • Mothers do not always want to go out to work earlier, in a situation in which allowances and childcare benefits are available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disparities across the country • Unused infrastructure • No increase in women's labour market activity • Fewer incentives to establish childcare services among potential providers
Spread of informal non-regulated ECEC provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucratic licensing process • Lack of incentives (financial and social) to formalize private childcare provisions • Lack of information on the benefits (such as attractive social security system) of formalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare for certain population groups • As a result, no improvement in women's labour market participation (marginalization of already vulnerable groups) • Limited guarantee of safety and quality of childcare
SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS		
Constraint	Underlying causes	Impact on the market
Inadequate funding models for parents using childcare for the 0–2 age group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High financial burden for parents. Many parents cannot afford private childcare services, but even in public ECEC the additional costs of transportation (especially for families living in distant rural areas), meals, toys and other materials become a burden for economically disadvantaged families • No state budget allocations for ECEC and LPAs face budget deficits • No co-financing foreseen for alternative childcare provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher prices result in lower demand • Reliance on international philanthropists and donors. • Disparity in affordability of childcare and increased vulnerability of certain groups of families (Roma, rural population, families with SEN children)
Insufficient professionalization opportunities and supply of qualified ECEC staff, especially in private and informal childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low attractiveness of ECEC profession • Low pay for ECEC staff • Lack of professional development opportunities (both initial and continuous) • Lack of updated educational materials and curricular frameworks tailored to different age groups • Lack of knowledge in society about the critical importance of ECEC for the growth and development of the personality, resulting in outdated opinions about early education as something non-essential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficiently qualified caregivers in public and private nurseries and kindergartens and difficulty attracting competent workforce. • Poor quality of private ECEC institutions

SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS <i>(continued)</i>		
Constraint	Underlying causes	Impact on the market
Information asymmetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited capacity/knowledge of actors for implementing suggested alternative childcare. Employers and potential private providers lack legal and technical knowledge. Limited accessibility to the information regarding health and safety requirements. Lack of technical/mentoring support for employers regarding hiring, personnel and creating curricula for children Lack of communication on the benefits and processes of accreditation of individualized (nannies) and home-based care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of private service providers and small numbers of creches in workplaces Low level of private investment
RULES AND REGULATIONS		
Constraint	Underlying causes	Impact on the market
Standards and quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deteriorating infrastructure (due to LPA budget deficits) No consistent quality monitoring across various types of childcare Lack of guidelines on quality of alternative childcare (individualized, home-based, work-based) No child-centred curricular frameworks for 0–2 age group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disparities in the country, cost ineffective maintenance of infrastructure. The inconsistent quality of available ECEC services (for both the 0–2 and 3–7 age groups) Lack of quality may affect demand, especially among more educated families ECEC profession unattractive
Limited coordination between different state and non-state actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of political will of some authorities and lack of historical tradition of collaboration Lack of participatory policymaking (key actors, such as businesses, trade unions, CSO sector not engaged) No cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms or guidelines for coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prolonged ECEC reforms and lack of consensus between different state actors Limited motivation and ownership of different line ministries to improve ECEC provision Fragmentation of efforts and no comprehensive ECEC provision

▶ Part 4

Opportunities



4. Opportunities

A market systems approach seeks to identify, address and remove system-level constraints inhibiting the growth of more inclusive markets. By their very nature, projects using the market systems approach pilot many different interventions, hoping that some gain traction and drive a larger systemic change, benefitting the many, while at the same time expecting that some will never make it to a point at which they can have significant impact (although they must do no harm). This is because many factors, often outside programme control, determine the success or failure of a pilot intervention. Such factors include partner capacity and motivation, and market forces, which affect prices and demand.

Once pilots have been tested and demonstrated to be effective in improving childcare provision and uptake, the project should then try to discover how these approaches can be scaled up for more impact. Sustainability and scalability will be a central focus, ensuring that business and intervention models can be scaled up and replicated by market actors to further increase the long-term impacts.

Traditional value chain development projects tend to orient their interventions towards the question of “what problems do value chains have and how can the project solve them?” rather than focusing on “why isn’t the market environment providing solutions?” and “how can the project address the constraints that prevent it from doing so effectively?”

A market systems approach opts for a “light touch” way of intervening, running a temporary package of activities designed to stimulate lasting behavioural change among public or private market players. The facilitation approach encourages market actors to take on new or improved roles which will lead to systemic change in the market system.

Anything is possible with facilitation: from “hard” tactics such as cost-sharing and technical advice, to “softer” tactics such as brokering relationships, as long as the facilitation stays true to the MSA principles on developing a more efficient and inclusive system that benefits the poor and does not have to rely on continued external support. There is no “correct” way to approach facilitation and decisions must always be contextual.

Some general ‘rules of thumb’ are outlined in the ILO LAB brief “[Market systems facilitation, how good are you?](#)”, 2017.

Based on the findings of the constraints analysis and given the assessment of the key market actors, several potential areas for intervention have been identified. These interventions are focused on addressing the underlying causes of key constraints. They also have a sustainability and scalability focus, such that businesses and organizations can continue, scale up or replicate interventions beyond the life of a given project.

4.1. Area 1. Improve affordability and accessibility of services

The analysis in this report shows that the lack of uptake of childcare services should not necessarily be understood as a lack of demand for services as such, but rather as a lack of demand for services at the existing cost and price/quality ratio. There is a mismatch between supply and demand of care services in terms of expectations with regard to availability, prices and quality, mainly because of a lack of adequate public provision or financial support to cover the demand from families facing financing constraints, and by strict regulations and standards imposed particularly on private services, which does not incentivize them to open accredited childcare services.

For most women – particularly for those with low levels of education – the difference between earnings and the cost of care is too low to justify joining the labour force and their capacity to pay for care does not match the current cost of childcare.

The alternative ECEC service law reflects this problem partly (available only to employed parents) by introducing an option for the work-based childcare services. The costs of these services should be covered by the employer (with the possibility of applying for government support/grants, as foreseen in the national programme) or with a contribution from the employee. This possibility is supposed to enable low-income families to return to work earlier, while also being confident in their child's care, protection and development.

However, not all companies will be able to offer such options and the establishment of such services might take some years. Thus there should be other types of support for the most vulnerable families to enable them to afford ECEC services. At the moment, no support seems to be foreseen for setting up home-based care services. Also, not all families will be able to afford private provision (be it home- or work-based).

In this regard, besides the specific interventions supporting the introduction of alternative childcare services, **it is highly recommended that Moldova ratify ILO Convention C156 – the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention**. This provides a basis enabling Moldova to support effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers.

For the implementation of Alternative Forms of Childcare, these additional actions could be taken:

- **Intervention 1.1.** Introduce targeted financial support for low-income and vulnerable families to access and afford ECEC services
- **Intervention 1.2.** Introduce additional measures for the most vulnerable families and children (*out-reach and “busing” measures*)
- **Intervention 1.3.** Ensure licensing support, especially for home-based services
- **Intervention 1.4.** Provide support for childcare providers to ensure efficient, quality operations

Intervention 1.1.

More targeted financial support for low-income and vulnerable families to take up childcare (especially when only private options are available to them)

In low-income families, mothers are forced to stay at home to care for little children, because the only accessible ECEC services are private and thus not affordable. If they do not have family help

(grandparents, aunts and uncles), they cannot return to the labour market. These families would benefit from work- or home-based childcare at no extra cost to the family.

One possible approach is to introduce targeted financial support for these families in order to help them afford private childcare services. One option includes using budgetary sums allocated for childcare not only for public services, but also for private ones. Another option includes subsidies for the use of childcare.

In **Denmark**, parents with an income below a certain limit can obtain a municipal subsidy in addition to the regular subsidy for early childhood education and care.¹⁶⁸

In **Japan**, for children aged 0–2 from households exempt from municipal resident taxes, access to early childhood education and care is free of charge.¹⁶⁹

In **Germany**, the emphasis is on reconciling family and working life, aimed at allowing parents to work as much, or as little, as they choose. In July 2015, “Elterngeld Plus” (Parental benefit plus) was introduced to support parents who start working part-time soon after the birth of a child, enabling them to receive parental allowance for a longer period (for example, to cover childcare). Furthermore, a partnership bonus was introduced: if both parents are working between 25 and 30 hours per week for four months at the same time, they will receive an additional payment of the new parental allowance for these months. This promotes the sharing of work and family responsibilities equally among parents.¹⁷⁰

The **Hungarian** government awards funding of up to €9,500 per workplace to help companies and public sector institutions work towards becoming family-friendly. In 2017 and 2021, new policies focused on workplace nurseries. Generous subsidies were made available for this purpose. In 2019, the prevalence of these services was still extremely low (only five companies reported it),¹⁷¹ increasing to 12 by 2023.¹⁷²

In **Belgium**, in subsidized home-based childcare settings, families’ financial contribution is calculated according to household income.¹⁷³

In **France**, childminders are a popular and subsidized childcare solution. Of the 28 per cent of children under the age of three looked after within the institutional system, two-thirds are taken care of by childminders in their home. Parents who choose this childcare option receive a monthly allowance, whose level varies according to the status and remuneration of the childminder, the child’s age, and household income.¹⁷⁴

168. OECD (2018): Providing Quality Early Childhood Education and Care: Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018. Annex A. Country profiles of early childhood education and care systems.

169. Ibid.

170. European Platform for Investing in Children, http://europa.eu/epic/index_en.htm

171. Utópia vagy valós lehetőség a munkahelyi bölcsőde? [Are day nurseries in the workplace just a dream or a real possibility?], HR Portál (hrportal.hu).

172. A bölcsődés gyermekek ötödét nincs hova beadni [There are no day nursery places for a fifth of children], Napi.hu.

173. European Commission, Eurydice.

174. European Platform for Investing in Children, link: http://europa.eu/epic/index_en.htm

In the United Kingdom, one of the most common ways in which organizations can support their staff with childcare costs are childcare vouchers. They are a government initiative that can save parents hundreds of pounds every year. Staff swap some of their pay for childcare vouchers through their organization, and use them to pay for childcare costs. Childcare vouchers are generally provided through a salary sacrifice arrangement. This means that staff give up a portion of their pre-tax salary to pay for benefits. So the vouchers don't provide a discount on childcare – the provider still gets paid the same amount as if their employees were paying cash. The savings are made through the salary sacrifice arrangement, which reduces their employees' taxable salary, and hence lowers the proportion of the overall salary paid in tax and National Insurance contributions.

Based on international experience, there are several options open to Moldova to help families to take up alternative childcare:

- ▶ Childcare vouchers through salary sacrifice arrangements – this would work only for working parents whose wages are sufficient.
- ▶ Monthly childcare allowances paid directly to families (from state or municipal budgets) for each child from 0 to 2 years old.
- ▶ Subsidized childcare for 0–2 year-olds (at least 50 per cent) plus an additional subsidy for low-income families (the subsidy can vary according to the status and remuneration of the childminder, the child's age, and household income).
- ▶ A partnership bonus (as in Germany) to promote the sharing of work and family responsibilities equally among parents, thereby making it easier for women to go back to work.

Intervention 1.2.

Introducing additional measures for the most vulnerable families and children (outreach and “busing” measures)

The report “Education 2020” recognized that **children living in rural areas, children from families of lower socioeconomic status**, and **Roma children** are least likely to attend an early childhood education and care programme in Moldova. All these vulnerable groups require additional attention when designing measures for alternative ECEC service implementation in Moldova.

Interviews show that demand-side constraints are especially prevalent among children from disadvantaged households and for children with special educational needs (11 per cent attended early childhood education and care in 2021). Demand is affected mainly by already low employment rates in rural areas, lack of parent awareness of the benefits of high-quality ECEC, and financial constraints. Children with special educational needs are not included systematically in mainstream ECEC.

Meanwhile, in rural areas without kindergartens parents who want to send their children to early childhood education and care in neighbouring localities often face distance and transportation barriers. Families living in remote areas need their own transport to take their children to creches, as public transportation is not sufficient. Moreover, parents who use services provided by their employer but have children of different ages, would need to drive them to two different early childhood education and care centres, as creches offered by the employer are only legalized for children between ages of 0 and 3. This too is a challenge for many families. Several interviewees perceived this transportation barrier as one of the most important barriers to childcare uptake in rural areas.

Various solutions have been adopted by countries trying to get vulnerable families to use childcare (in addition to financial support), as well as solve transportation problems.

Educational and outreach campaigns for Roma families

Information sessions from REYN **Bulgaria** are part of the small-grant programme “Every day in kindergarten I learn and play”. It is an initiative of the Network for Early Childhood Development in the Roma Community in Bulgaria (RHINE Bulgaria) to inform and motivate Roma parents to encourage regular attendance.¹⁷⁵

Toys for Inclusion in **Croatia**: The ECEC Play Hub is a place where children can participate in various creative, engaging activities with other children and adults. It is also a place where their family members can meet experts, as well as members of other families, and obtain information on child rearing, children’s health, education and development. Play Hub is specifically aimed at fostering the development of and creating equal opportunities for children from Roma and other vulnerable families. That is why the Hub was opened in the city of Sisak: ethnic Roma children go to a school located in Sisak, and the Play Hub is close to a Roma settlement.

Similar centres have been opened in six more European countries: **Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia**. The project was implemented under the leadership of the Dutch organization International Child Development Initiative (ICDI).¹⁷⁶

In **Belgium**, the play hubs also have a sustainability perspective, to foster trust in childcare facilities over the long term. *“This is achieved through the creation of community-based ECEC Play Hubs (resource and meeting centres) where relationships between Roma and non-Roma young children and their families are built and interactions in safe play spaces across all generations are supported.”*¹⁷⁷

Additionally, there are various examples of how to design a **strategy for inclusive ECEC** provision:

- In 2019 the Norwegian Government presented a White Paper on **“Early intervention and inclusive education”**. The two main objectives of this White Paper are that all children and youth obtain adequate support when they need it (early intervention), and that all children and young people have access to a well-adapted and inclusive pedagogical programme.
- The **Estonian Preschool Child Care Act** was updated in 2018 to include policies to support children with special needs, such as their admission to an integration group and to ensure that the number of teachers who work in an ECEC institution and comply with the qualification requirements is sufficient.
- Ireland’s **Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)** is a national programme introduced in 2016 to support the inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities within the universal, free pre-school programme in mainstream preschool settings.

175. <https://reynbg.com/bg/2494-2/>

176. <https://www.korakpokorak.hr/projects-eng/toy-for-inclusion-community-based-early-childhood-education-for-roma-children>

177. [toy-for-inclusion-4th-report-final.pdf \(vbjk.be\)](#)

Examples of solutions to transport barriers (in remote areas) include:

- ▶ In Creuse, **France**, a “**nursery van**” travels to areas that lack infrastructure to provide childcare. The van has equipment to care for six children between 0 and 4 years. The only thing the carers need is a room where they can set up a nursery. The destination is usually two villages: Ars and Ahun.¹⁷⁸
- ▶ A **Bulgarian** municipality provides free public transport and a range of free services for children and parents from the Roma community in Tundzha. A network of educational mediators helps kindergartens to reach out to families and support children’s transition between home, early childhood education and care, and school. Participation in ECEC and education has been one of the municipality’s first priorities and local political support has been crucial to the scheme’s success.¹⁷⁹

To implement this intervention, the following actions could be taken:

- ▶ carefully assess the need for transportation services in each municipality;
- ▶ organize “busing” services where needed (usually done by municipalities, but employers could also support with it);
- ▶ establish a network of liaison officers (as part of municipal education departments) to work with vulnerable and Roma families and improve their take-up of childcare.

Intervention 1.3.

Ensuring licensing support, especially for home-based services

The MSA interviews have shown that the perceived stringent requirements are a basic barrier to the formalization of childcare services. Providers believe that the costs of registering and complying with all health standards do not outweigh the benefits (in case of nannies, for example, social security benefits).

A review of licensing procedures around the world (for example, in New Zealand, Canada, USA) show that, in fact, the new Moldovan legislation is aligned with international practices. In other countries, such as New Zealand and the State of Connecticut, the licensing procedure includes numerous forms, local approvals, certificates, procedures and requirements.

178. <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/nouvelle-aquitaine/creuse/gueret/campagne-une-micro-creche-sillonne-les-routes-de-creuse-pour-offrir-ses-services-en-zone-rurale-2687250.html>

179. https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInfancia/documentos/toolkit_for_inclusive.pdf

In Connecticut, **USA**, the Initial Application for the license package (for group-based ECEC) consists of¹⁸⁰:

- application: application fee, application fee form (must include worker's comprehensive insurance info, as appropriate) (original only)
- property history form
- fire approval
- building approval
- zoning approval
- local health approval
- comprehensive lead inspection for buildings constructed pre-1978
- days/weeks programme is scheduled to be closed
- staff work schedule which includes head teacher & director
- health consultant agreement/contract
- head teacher verification: if not approved, the date the application was submitted to Connecticut Charts-a-Course
- food service certificate
- floor plan, indoor and outdoor. Floor plan for infants/toddlers
- water supply form / water bill / lead/chemical water test / radon test / pool approval – local health
- organizational chart
- certificates of approved first aid training
- certificates of approved CPR training
- background checks / state & federal fingerprint cards ð DCF

The procedure for centre-based childcare provision in New Zealand comprises many similar requirements.¹⁸¹

To address this perceived barrier in Moldova, it would be important to offer guidance and start-up support (with possible training and eligibility assessments) for those interested in setting up work-based or home-based childcare services.

Interviewees believe that especially home-based nurseries will require financial and technical support to set up the dedicated space in line with requirements. The new health regulations as well as registration requirements remain a possible obstacle to formalization for childminders offering group care services. Interviewees are especially concerned about the costs they will incur, that may translate into higher service costs for parents.

180. <https://www.ctoec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/DCCC-DCGH-Initial-License-App.pdf>

181. <https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/Early-Childhood/Forms/Amended-EC1C-Application-to-become-an-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Care-Service-2008.pdf>

There are various good practices around the world in terms of providing step-by-step guidelines (online and offline) to support the application process, as well as the operation of childcare once it is set up. However, the below example of the United Kingdom may be most useful for Moldova.

Introduced by the **UK** Department for Education in 2014, *childminder agencies* are “one-stop-shop” organizations that register childcare providers and provide them with training, advice, administrative support and marketing to families. They also provide a valuable service for parents looking for high quality flexible childcare. Given the difficulties that childcare providers face with registration and compliance with sanitary requirements, similar support systems could be beneficial to help formalize childcare services in Moldova.

The aims of childminder agencies include:

- providing childminders with a range of support services, including marketing, administration, training and development;
- providing parents with matching services to help them find a childminder, access to holiday and sickness cover, and regular updates about the quality of their childminder;
- raising the quality and professionalism of the childminding workforce;
- attracting new childminders to the profession.

Any organization that is committed to providing parents and children with high quality childcare can apply to be registered by Ofsted as a childminder agency. The Ofsted registration fee for childminder agencies is £220. Agencies are self-funded. It is up to agencies to determine the sorts of services they will provide and the associated charges, either to the childminder, parent, employer or others.

The Department for Education has published guidance for anyone wanting to register and operate as a childminder agency, which sets out the legal requirements and other issues to consider for anyone registering or operating as a childminder agency.¹⁸²

Similarly, in **Ireland**, 33 City or County Childcare Committees (CCCs) were established by the Government in 2001 to help improve the provision of quality childcare in each city and county. CCCs are not-for-profit organizations. They provide information and support to many different clients in the childcare sector, including childminders, parents and childcare providers who are setting up or operating childcare facilities.

In addition, Childminding Ireland is a professional association for childcare providers who are self-employed and work in their own homes, providing a family-based day care service for children. Registered membership is open to childcare providers who provide day care in their own homes, subject to certain conditions. Childminding Ireland provides many services to its members. It is dedicated to promoting quality childcare by providing support and information to childcare providers and the broader childcare sector, by telephone, electronically, through published materials and through its website. It also helps parents in identifying quality in family based childcare and in finding childminding places.¹⁸³

182. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childminder-agencies-a-guide>

183. <https://assets.gov.ie/23804/b4fbc4db075b488fae44bb82a66a3851.pdf>

Moreover, to minimize additional obligations for nannies, such as reporting, the change of their legal status could be considered. In other words, nannies could be employed by the ISM (State Labour Inspectorate) and FISC (State Fiscal Service).¹⁸⁴ However, then the service price might increase and therefore become a challenge for parents who may not be able to afford such services.

To implement this intervention, it is therefore recommended to:

- incentivize the setting up of umbrella child-minding agencies;
- develop the guidelines for setting-up, training and operation of childminders – this will help with understanding the stringent requirements;
- integrate quality monitoring and mentoring of home-based care into the regular education monitoring system;
- provide an opportunity of one-time grants (either from state or donor budgets) to set up home-based services.

Intervention 1.4.

Provide support to childcare providers to ensure efficient, quality operations

International experience shows that to ensure the smooth operation and sustainability of private childcare services after they are established, childcare workers need to be dedicated and possess management skills. In several countries, training of childcare workers has accompanied other measures, primarily to increase entrepreneurship and to achieve compliance with high standards.¹⁸⁵

In the box, various existing business models are presented that have proved to be effective in supporting entrepreneurship in the childcare sector and improved workers' dedication and management skills. These business solutions include training that is either cost-free or subsidized to overcome financial barriers to establishing and running the centres. Many among them were also useful solutions to increase innovation in the whole sector.

Social franchising initiatives are schemes to support the establishment of childcare under a franchise according to an established model. They usually arrange an intensive, introductory training for franchisees in the beginning, and then include frequent support and monitoring, as well as periodic training.¹⁸⁶ Multiple examples already exist in African countries, including Kidogo¹⁸⁷ and Tiny Totos in Kenya,¹⁸⁸ and SmartStart in South Africa.¹⁸⁹ Importantly, many among these initiatives also subsidize the costs of childcare for low-income families to ensure demand and overcome service disparities.

184. Suggestion by the National Confederation of Trade Unions.

185. ILO: Childcare leave and services from a women's entrepreneurship development perspective.

186. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

187. ILO: Childcare leave and services from a women's entrepreneurship development perspective.

188. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

189. Ibid.

Innovative activities of social franchising initiatives include:

- ▶ collecting data by franchisees through mobile applications to provide additional services or simplify the acquisition of resources;¹⁹⁰
- ▶ training through local field officers, allowing for networking opportunities between franchisees.¹⁹¹

Cooperative childcare services, where parents are the owners, and workers and parents are jointly responsible for their operation can also incentivize dedication and entrepreneurship through involvement. They are a useful solution when services are discontinued due to lack of funds, as they can ensure affordability through pooling resources. Examples include initiatives in Ghana¹⁹² and India.¹⁹³

Innovative activities of cooperatives:

- ▶ all profit is reinvested in the cooperative to the benefit of parents and workers;¹⁹⁴
- ▶ efficient management is ensured by representation of key stakeholders.¹⁹⁵

Lastly, large programmes that **support market-based solutions** for childcare directly (through training and capital investment schemes) could increase innovative solutions and foster entrepreneurship in the sector. Worldwide programmes, such as the Global Accelerator Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions Programme of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force, including the ILO, could promote private investments as its focus includes increasing the quality and sustainability of the care economy.

In the above models, the overall cost of establishing and running informal day care centres is reduced, and therefore the incentives are sufficiently high to increase the supply of childcare. Importantly, multiple innovative activities ensure that entrepreneurship in home- or (work-)based care provisions is increased and workers are sufficiently dedicated.

- ▶ Therefore, for the implementation of this intervention, which could be aligned with the provisions of the “National Programme of care services for children under 3 years, 2023–2026”, to develop an accelerator for the provision of home care services, it is recommended to incentivize the setting up of umbrella child-minding agencies.

190. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

191. ILO: Childcare leave and services from a women’s entrepreneurship development perspective. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_864385.pdf

192. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

193. ILO: Childcare leave and services from a women’s entrepreneurship development perspective.

194. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

195. <https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Childcare-Solutions-for-Women-Micro-and-Small-Enterprises-MAY-22.pdf>

- ▶ Home care providers should be provided with, and have access to, a package of training, services and support to ensure that those starting and running such home businesses have basic care and first aid training, basic training on how to run a business (keeping/managing budgets, promoting services, establishing relationships with suppliers, etc.), how to register and stay registered, how and where to access seed funding, or operational financing.
- ▶ Guidelines should be developed for setting up, training and activities of childminders – this will help with understanding the stringent requirements.
- ▶ Integrate training for quality monitoring and mentoring of home-based care into regular education monitoring system.
- ▶ Provide an opportunity for one-off grants (either from state or donor budgets) to set up home-based services.
- ▶ Develop models for high quality private solutions to informal care, which are financially and socially sustainable.
- ▶ Ensure that national actors, which were previously not connected, are now connected so that women in home care have access to a holistic support programme (acceleration programme). This could mean, for example, that the mandate of certain actors, such as ODA, should be extended to coordinate and liaise with new partners working on skills development for carers. Thus, the ODA would be able to provide seed funding and a training and coaching programme for those interested in providing home-based family care services after completing the necessary caregiving training.

4.2. Area 2. Equal focus on quality of early childhood education and care for children aged 0–3

In 2016, the OECD review highlighted that a market-based approach to childcare leaves public authorities with less control over fees and less control over when and where services are provided. It determined that market dynamics can result in for-profit providers drifting away from less profitable areas, so that very young children in poorer neighbourhoods are sometimes left without any provision at all. This happened, for example, in England.¹⁹⁶

The English regulatory framework for the market-based approach focuses on how childcare is provided but not on its quality; there is no responsibility to ensure equality of access for children and parents or to ensure fair terms and conditions for childcare workers. As a result, NGOs note that the childcare system is characterized by inequalities of access, poor quality, financial instability and poor working conditions.¹⁹⁷

Currently, the new law on alternative forms of childcare, as well as existing laws and policies on early childhood education and care in Moldova, focus predominantly on the modalities, while standards for quality and inclusivity are not considered.

¹⁹⁶. https://www.oecd.org/els/family/Who_uses_childcare-Backgrounder_inequalities_formal_ECEC.pdf

¹⁹⁷. <https://www.childrenengland.org.uk/the-childcare-market-in-england>

The following steps are recommended to ensure that increased access and quality go hand-in-hand:

- ▶ **Intervention 2.1.** Operationalize pedagogical and “process quality” in terms of childcare activities for children aged 0–3 in alternative (and public) childcare services
- ▶ **Intervention 2.2.** Include regular monitoring of pedagogical and “process quality” in existing quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms
- ▶ **Intervention 2.3.** Ensure coordination among ministries and stakeholders for better quality
- ▶ **Intervention 2.4.** Ensure a smooth transition between 0–3 and 3–6/7 childcare to guarantee children’s uninterrupted early development

Intervention 2.1.

Operationalize pedagogical and “process quality” in terms of childcare activities for children aged 0–3 in alternative (and public) childcare services

At the moment, all regulations on alternative forms of childcare refer to structural standards for childcare for those aged 0–3 in relation to the sanitary, health and nutritional requirements, buildings and furniture, and the presence of activity plans. However, the pedagogical content of activities and the relevant learning/development processes are not specified in either the law or accompanying regulations. Similarly, no quality standards exist for public early childhood education and care or for ECEC for all ages (0–6). Therefore, the present moment provides an excellent opportunity to improve all dimensions of childcare across Moldova.

To ensure the quality of childcare for children aged 0–3, standards should be developed that govern quality (focusing on five dimensions: accessibility, staff and working conditions, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, and policy and financing), as recommended in the European Quality Framework¹⁹⁸) of childcare for this age group (and for early childhood education and care in general, including all ages).

In **Malta**, multiple stakeholder groups (including parents and service providers themselves) were involved in a consultation process to develop the **National Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care Services (0–3 years)**.¹⁹⁹ This document focuses on what all stakeholders should expect from a regulated ECEC service to ensure the overall wellbeing of all children.

The National Standards make particular reference to work-based services: *“Work-based services are provided within the building/premises occupied by an employer/group of employers in which employees actually work and where the building is exclusively used as a work hub. These centres are appropriately equipped, and used only for the provision of ECEC services to children of workers employed/engaged by that same employer/group of employers. Work-based centres need not have a separate main entrance but must be situated within the building/premises where employees actually work.”*

These standards also provide explicitly for work-based services organized by “a group of employers” which would address some concerns and recommendations from Moldovan stakeholders as well.

198. Anke van Keulen, Bureau Mutant (2016): 5 Steps to Quality. Training Package for Early Childhood Training Providers.

199. <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents/MFED%20National%20Standards%20ECEC%20Oct21.pdf>

The quality areas for which standards were developed include:

- *Quality Area 1: the quality of the learning environment* (most of which is already reflected in the new legislation in Moldova, but is here provided in more detail).
- *Quality Area 2: the quality of learning and care*. These standards are highly relevant for the Moldovan context as well (namely, they apply to work-based and centre-based ECEC) and include concrete indicators that the Moldovan government can utilize.

Intervention 2.2.

Include regular monitoring of pedagogical and “process quality” in existing quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms

Currently, the monitoring mechanisms for ECEC lack a focus on the quality of childcare provision. Furthermore, with the introduction of the alternative forms of childcare, the new service providers responsible for overseeing ECEC and recruiting ECEC staff (in the case of work-based employment) will not be able to assess the quality of the services themselves.

After the design and adoption of quality standards for ECEC for children aged 0–6/7, international practice suggests several types of monitoring instruments that can be rolled out:

1. *External monitoring*. Upon awarding a license to a private childcare provider, Local Education Authorities (LEAs) should monitor regularly whether the childcare setting and ECEC content are in line with the national standards. ANACEC of the Republic of Moldova has developed a methodology for the external evaluation of educational institutions. In accordance with these standards, the evaluation process has been going on since 2019–2020. Upon establishment of alternative childcare services these standards could be applied for their external monitoring.

Monitoring and evaluation systems vary a lot across countries due to the different governance models in early childhood education and care systems. Thus there are different ways in which responsibilities are shared among the national and sub-national levels and the level of autonomy that is invested at service level. Decentralized systems deploy more responsibility at the local level and use national regulatory policies (such as quality frameworks, standards) to guide the monitoring processes at the municipality level.

Quality assurance systems are based on quality standards (frameworks) and differentiate between basic requirements for the purpose of accreditation towards higher levels of quality, incentivizing quality improvement.

The Finnish **“Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care”** provide a theoretical and conceptual basis for quality evaluation at both the national and local level. They include a model for quality evaluation and development, general principles outlining the evaluation of ECEC and an extensive review of research on the constituting elements of quality in ECEC.

The **OECD's Starting Strong IV** report, focusing on Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, is a comprehensive report which provides many examples of:

- how quality monitoring systems are set up in different countries
- how monitoring systems are governed
- how the responsibility for monitoring is divided up in different countries
- what countries are monitoring
- how structural quality and process quality are monitored
- how evaluators/assessors are trained and on what topics
- how services are monitored (self-evaluation, internal evaluation, external evaluation) and what is monitored in the service.

In addition, UNICEF's publication **Quality Standards and Quality Assurance Systems for Pre-primary Education** provides guidance on setting up a quality assurance system with examples from different countries

Finland has created a national evaluation system for ECEC led by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC). The government has set quality indicators, such as "desired quality descriptions", which form the basis for the system. FINEEC's task is to conduct national external evaluations of ECEC and provide support for ECEC organizers in their statutory task of self-evaluation and quality management.

2. *Self-evaluation*. This type of monitoring is done by the childcare providers themselves (mostly applicable to employers who recruit childcare staff), to inform the employer or nursery staff to identify areas for improvement.

Self-evaluation tools that can be used at the service level differ greatly across countries. The aim of such evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of a childcare provider (its organization, character and activities) can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development.

In countries where quality standards are in place, self-evaluation is aligned with them. Usually, self-evaluation is accompanied by or includes a plan for quality improvement.

In the Belgian MeMoQ project (Measuring and Monitoring pedagogical Quality), the following steps were taken to set up a self-evaluation system:

- First, a pedagogical framework was developed with a wide group of stakeholders from policy, practice and research (the framework can be consulted in English here: <https://www.kindengezin.be/sites/default/files/2021-05/pedagogical-framework-english.pdf>)
- Based on that framework, scientific instruments for a baseline study were conducted (with a focus on process quality).

- ▶ Based on the framework and scientific instruments, an instrument for self-evaluation and an instrument for external monitoring were designed.
- ▶ As a result, the three types of instruments (scientific, self-evaluation, external monitoring) have the exact same content and are all based on the pedagogical framework, which is established in agreement with diverse stakeholders.

Self-evaluation may cover aspects related to:

- ▶ compliance with national regulations
- ▶ availability of resources, quality of the learning environment/staff environment
- ▶ curriculum implementation
- ▶ quality of staff
- ▶ management/leadership of the service
- ▶ collaboration between staff and between staff and management
- ▶ quality of interaction with parents and legal guardians
- ▶ working conditions (workload, professional development needs, salaries)

Some examples of self-evaluation tools include:

- ▶ Self-evaluation tools for staff in ECEC (Belgium):
<https://expertisecentrum.cego.be/resources/?lang=en>
- ▶ Centre templates for self-assessment, quality improvement plans and on-site consultation. (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Nova Scotia – Canada):
https://www.ednet.ns.ca/earlyyears/documents/quality_matters_centre_templates_en.pdf
- ▶ Self-Assessment Tool (Australian Children’s Education and Care Authority – Australia):
<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/quality-improvement-plans#SAT>

Intervention 2.3.

Establish effective coordination mechanisms among ministries and stakeholders

The international quality standards for ECEC from birth to school highlight the importance of close collaboration with all services working for children, including social and health services, education and local stakeholders. Such inter-agency alliances have been shown to be more effective if governed by a coherent policy framework that can proactively foster collaboration and long-term investment in local communities. The OECD warns of the limitations of coordinating bodies and cross-sectoral cooperation, as seen in countries such as Ireland or Korea, where ministerial boundaries remain an issue. In the absence of a lead ministry or agency with a sound knowledge of early childhood policy and a mobilizing agenda for young children, government finance departments may treat children’s services primarily from a labour market or public expenditure angle.²⁰⁰ This means that, in Moldova, the Ministry of Education should still carry a strong conceptual role.

200. OECD Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care.

The new Moldovan law assigns the responsibility for alternative childcare services for children aged 0–3 to the Ministry of Labour. However, other forms of childcare (public and private, and for ages 2–6/7) are overseen by the Ministry of Education. Compliance with sanitary regulations for all types of childcare is monitored by the Ministry of Health.

Coordination between the three ministries is crucial. While the Ministry of Labour may be in charge of setting up new forms of childcare, the quality of any form of education and developmental process should be overseen by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, as will be described below, children need to be able to smoothly transition from childcare services for 0–3 year-olds to those for 3–6/7 year-olds. Therefore, the standards, quality and pedagogy for 0–3 year-olds should align with those for 3–6/7 year-olds and ensure a smooth transition.

A clear coordination plan should be set up which outlines the responsibilities and communication modes among the ministries, but also between ministries and LEAs responsible for monitoring the execution of the new forms of childcare.

The **Coordination Plan** should be developed jointly by the main ECEC actors, such as the ministries, main education agencies, social partners and LEAs. The Plan should comprise concrete steps and actions. For example:

- Who are the main actors/representatives involved in coordination? Should they form a coordination council?
- How often should this coordination council meet?
- Who is responsible for organizing these meetings, preparing the agenda, and chairing the sessions?
- What are the other communication tools, channels and schedules for the working group?
- What are the specific actions and responsibilities to be performed by each actor?
- Who does each actor report to when executing their responsibilities?

Some countries have set up **cross-ministerial coordinating committees** or task forces. In countries with many ECEC actors (for example, multiple ministries or many NGOs with a substantial role) ECEC networks have been set up to connect and coordinate between actors.

- The Government of **Singapore** set up a **Pre-school Education Steering Committee**, with the Ministry of Education designated as the lead ministry. It seeks to coordinate pre-school education programmes provided by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Community Development and Sports. Through the joint committee, the two ministries have successfully developed a kindergarten curriculum, a joint training framework for pre-school teachers and accredited training courses.²⁰¹ Because there are three ministries with ECEC-related responsibilities in Moldova, a similar Steering Committee would be beneficial there as well, recognizing the conceptual leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research.
- The Office of the State Superintendent of Education in Washington DC, **United States**, set up a **State Early Childhood Development Coordinating Council (SECDCC)**, to improve collaboration and coordination among entities carrying out federally funded and District- funded pre-K and other early childhood programmes. Their meetings take place four times a year and past agendas are available online.
- In **Canada, Denmark and the United Kingdom**, the government has developed an over-arching strategy for children (including younger children), supported by an administrative unit and a Children's Committee at cabinet level.

201. Choi, S. (2003): Cross-sectoral Co-ordination in Early Childhood: Some Lessons to Learn, Policy Brief No. 9, UNESCO, Paris, France.

Intervention 2.4.

Transition between childcare for 0–3 year-olds and for 3–6/7 year-olds

Interviews show that parents are concerned whether the alternative care provision will focus on children's development, and not only basic care. However, if the services for 0–3 year-olds are to follow the quality standards mentioned above, there needs to be continuity between the ECEC provided for children aged 0–3 and children aged 3–6/7.

Therefore, Moldova could consider developing pedagogical guidelines and a holistic development perspective when providing care services for children aged 0–3, as has been done in other countries with split systems (as shown in the Box).

In **Italy**, there have been efforts to ensure smooth transitions between the two stages and uninterrupted children's development. Law 107/2015 and Law Decree 65/2017 established a committee that submits proposals and advises on the integrated system to the Minister. The committee is composed of experts and representatives of regional and local governments.

The committee recently issued two documents:

- The "*Pedagogical guidelines for the integrated system zero to six*" (*Linee guida pedagogiche per il sistema integrato zero-sei*) which defines both the cultural and pedagogical framework of the integrated system, proposing a unitary and holistic approach to the education of children from birth to six years of age, sketches the institutional and organizational framework of the system and suggests the main strategies to consolidate and qualify it.
- The "*National Orientations for early childhood educational services*" (*Orientamenti nazionali per i servizi educativi per l'infanzia*), which represents the first national pedagogical framework for provision for 0–3 year-old children. It was inspired by the main achievements so far at local level and discusses their relations with the pedagogical framework of *scuola dell'infanzia*.

Italy is also now establishing a "system of pedagogical coordination" throughout the country. A local pedagogical coordination team is to be created in each area under the coordination of municipalities. It will promote mutual acquaintance and collaboration between all ECEC services, plan shared initiatives for the continuous professional development of personnel, and outline an integrated vision of children's educational needs in the area.²⁰²

These teams already exist in the areas of the country where ECEC services are most widespread (northern and central Italy), but usually they involve only coordinators from educational services for 0–3 year-olds and pre-schools run by local governments or private associations.

Italy is also establishing integrated areas: *poli per l'infanzia*. Law Decree 65/2017 outlined the institution of integrated settings, named *poli per l'infanzia*, where one or more educational services for 0–3 year-olds and one *scuola dell'infanzia* will be opened within the same site or catchment area. This would make it possible to share organizational resources and promote continuity of access, relationships with parents, and children's experience, and might constitute a sort of meeting point for early childhood in the area. Particularly in areas where there are still no services for the under-threes, the opening of a spring class and/or a centre for children and parents close to a *scuola dell'infanzia* might help to build relations with the local community. Actually, in some areas similar projects for services for 0–6 year-olds already exist. Their functioning varies from having mixed-age classes to the common use of laboratories, playgrounds and other facilities between same-age classes. Professionals are involved in continuous professional development initiatives and collegial meetings.

202. <https://centri.unibo.it/creif/it/pubblicazioni/politiche-educative-per-l-infanzia>

To implement this intervention, the following actions could be taken:

- ▶ develop integrated quality guidelines for 0–6 year-olds and beyond;
- ▶ establish coordination centres under municipalities to discuss and implement collaboration between various ECEC providers and ensure pedagogical continuity.

4.3. Area 3. Supporting work-based childcare (especially in rural areas)

Work-based childcare can provide benefits to parents who wish to remain close to their children (for example, for breastfeeding) but who also wish to return to employment. While this form of childcare is not very common across Europe, there are examples from around the world.

- ▶ in Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, India, Jordan, Turkey, and Japan, the law requires corporations with more than a certain number of female staff to set up work-based childcare;
- ▶ in Brazil, various collective bargaining agreements require employers to provide work-based childcare.

While many Moldovan companies may benefit from (and are interested in) providing work-based childcare, they share a concern (especially in rural areas) that this effort might be more costly than any benefits that may arise from it.

To enhance the attractiveness and feasibility of work-based childcare in all regions of Moldova, the following steps are recommended:

- ▶ **Intervention 3.1.** Create a business case for work-based childcare
- ▶ **Intervention 3.2.** Create business networks (in rural areas), where multiple employers set up and share one childcare space
- ▶ **Intervention 3.3.** Encourage public–private partnerships between employers and LEAs

Intervention 3.1. Create a business case for work-based childcare

At the moment, Moldovan companies, especially in rural areas, generally express two concerns about work-based childcare:

- ▶ First, they have many questions and uncertainties about the costs, requirements and responsibilities they would have to take on. The new legislation provides quite detailed information in this regard. Therefore, there is a need to develop informational materials (guidelines and training, as well as advisory support) to inform employers about the legal provisions in clear and simple terms.
- ▶ Second, employers are worried about potential financial risks and lower profits due to setting up childcare at work. Therefore, they need to be informed of the costs, but also of the benefits that this approach can provide them.

The **International Finance Corporation** (IFC) prepared a report in 2018 on “Tackling childcare: the business case for employer-supported childcare”.²⁰³

According to the IFC, there are six ways in which work-based childcare can improve a company's productivity, including supporting the needs of a diverse workforce, improving recruitment, and helping to retain talent throughout the employee life cycle. Furthermore, businesses that invest in childcare can improve employee performance by reducing absenteeism, enhancing worker productivity, and increasing the motivation and commitment of their workforce. Lastly, it can improve the company's reputation.

All this evidence needs to be presented in a simple, easy-to-understand manner, tailored to the Moldovan context, so that Moldovan companies understand the benefits that this scheme offers to them.



As part of its Performance with Purpose 2025 Agenda, PepsiCo supports working caregivers in meeting the demands of their professional and personal lives. PepsiCo Pakistan has noticed that childcare centres have helped to attract and retain women in particular, and word-of-mouth referrals from both women and men who use this service help to increase staff utilization.

At Mindtree, which offers a range of childcare solutions for its employees, over 90 per cent of women return after maternity leave and over 87 per cent of mothers are still with the company a year after their return, even though India has one of the lowest labour force participation rates for mothers in the world.

The Bank of **Tokyo**-Mitsubishi UFJ, Ltd. realized a more than fourfold increase in

the number of women who continued in employment with the Bank when they became mothers: from 294 in 2007 (at the start of the Bank's childcare and gender diversity initiative) to 1,525 in 2016.

In **Germany**, where women are entitled to job-protected leave of up to three years per child, having a crèche for children under three reduces the time mothers take off for maternity leave. This can offer a similar benefits for Moldova. Researchers at the University of Heidelberg worked with German chemical producer BASF from 2006 through 2011 to establish a social return on investment (SROI) in their childcare facilities. BASF fully covered its investments in childcare facilities primarily because women with access to the crèche, on average, returned from parental leave three months earlier than other parents, worked more hours upon their return, and were less likely to have short-term absences.

203. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/cd79e230-3ee2-46ae-adc5-e54d3d649f31/01817+WB+Childcare+Report_FinalWeb3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu9vP-

In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs offers a “**Family-friendly Company**” certificate to companies that adopt family-friendly workplace practices:

- certification for companies, work–life balance, especially creating a work environment that supports women with young children;²⁰⁴
- 250 companies have such certification.²⁰⁵

Intervention 3.2.

Create business networks (in rural areas), where multiple employers set up and share one childcare space

International studies show that it is larger companies that tend to provide childcare services to workers. For example, in Vancouver, Canada, the median size of employers with workplace childcare centres was 1,750 employees. The City of Vancouver applied a model of 1 space per 100 employees to calculate the need for workplace childcare.²⁰⁶

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* noted that the nursery at Goldsmiths College, University of London was costing the university £70,000 a year in subsidies, but benefited only a tiny proportion of college parents with its 23 places (£3000 per child).²⁰⁷

Therefore, Moldovan companies interested in providing work-based childcare but with insufficient demand to justify the costs may benefit from provisions allowing them to set up a joint childcare centre with other employers in its neighbourhood. Shared crèche spaces among employers can provide a way to share (and therefore reduce) costs per employer.

In Chile, Jordan and Turkey, **childcare law explicitly allows employers to provide childcare jointly.**

“Pandurata Alimentos Ltda in Brazil collaborated with 10 other employers in the late 1980s to start the Amor y Paz nonprofit crèche close to its São Paulo factory. The partnership continues to be mutually beneficial; using an external childcare provider, Pandurata Alimentos Ltda can offer high-quality childcare with manageable administrative costs and liability concerns, and Amor y Paz benefits from having guaranteed clients and longstanding cooperation on fundraising and building community relations.”

The UK law on work-based nurseries also allows that “the facility can either be made available by the employer scheme alone, or it makes **joint provision with other employers** (and the partnership requirements are met). The partnership requirements include²⁰⁸:

- the employer must be included in the arrangements for providing the care;

204. <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/family-friendly-business-workplaces>

205. <http://www.ekvilib.org/en/work-life-balance/>

206. https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2018-61%20Workplace%20Childcare%20-%20What%20works%20for%20Vancouver%20children%2C%20families%2C%20and%20employers_Hunter.pdf

207. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2011/sep/30/workplace-nurseries-squeeze>

208. <https://www.rsmuk.com/insights/employment-matters/employment-tax/commercially-marketed-workplace-nursery-scheme-hmrc-clarifies-its-position>

- ▶ the premises where the care is provided must be on one of the employer's sites or on the premises of a commercial childcare provider involved in the partnership; and
- ▶ the employer must, at least in part, contribute to both the financial and management elements of the care provision.

While the employer does not need to be involved in day-to-day management or have direct responsibility for care of the children, for the management condition to be met the employer should have meaningful input and close involvement in such matters as hiring carers, the extent of the care, the conditions under which the care is provided, and the allocation of places.

The ICF noted the following **advantages of jointly setting up childcare services** among multiple employers²⁰⁹:

- ▶ shared investment and operating costs;
- ▶ opportunities for cost-effectiveness if each company has only low demand;
- ▶ high visibility;
- ▶ shared liability;
- ▶ can adapt to changes in demand within each company.

Intervention 3.3.

Create public-private partnerships between employers and LEAs

Multiple interviewees representing different stakeholder groups (including employers and LEAs) noted the potential value of public-private partnerships to share costs and responsibility, and enhance the quality and value of childcare.

Research shows that public-private partnerships assist employers by²¹⁰:

- ▶ linking businesses with child care resources and referral organizations that can offer both expertise and data to help employers create appropriate child care options for their employees;
- ▶ conducting surveys on employee child care needs;
- ▶ developing resources and "toolkits" for employers seeking to create or enhance family-supportive work life policies and programmes such as child care;
- ▶ conducting public awareness campaigns; and
- ▶ recognizing and rewarding employers and employees who support childcare in their workplaces and/or communities.

209. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/cd79e230-3ee2-46ae-adc5-e54d3d649f31/01817+WB+Child-care+Report_FinalWeb3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu9vP-

210. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED432399.pdf>

Schön Klinik in **Germany** partnered with the city of Neustadt to build a new on-site crèche on the hospital grounds for children younger than three. The company provided the land and paid most construction costs; the city has leased the property for 25 years and is responsible for all operations, including employing the childcare teachers. According to the crèche director, partnering with the local government significantly reduced the regulatory obstacles that Schön Klinik would otherwise have faced, reducing the planning and construction time to just nine months. Schön Klinik employees are guaranteed 10 of the 20 infant and toddler places. Users pay fees directly to the centre, and the city and Schön Klinik share any costs not covered by fees or federal and local subsidies.²¹¹

In the **Philippines**, a national policy was introduced to promote the establishment of day-care centres in the workplace, particularly in rural areas. As a result, more government offices and also private corporations provide full-day childcare programmes that match parents' working hours. Some of these are linked to the local government units of cities that are also the employers of public civil servants. The ESC programme has proved its cost-effectiveness over the years.²¹²

In the **United States**, employers in a town called Watford City, with a population of just 1,744 people at the time, were struggling to attract workers because little or no childcare services were available. The city collaborated with the local school district, county officials, the state and the business community to find a solution. City officials identified land for a new childcare facility and apartment complex for teachers and first responders, and a mix of public dollars and business donations allowed construction to commence. Within five years, a facility was opened with the capacity to serve up to 211 children.²¹³

Furthermore, to oversee this cooperation, the **North Dakota Early Childhood Council** was established by the legislature in 2021 (HB 1416). The group includes a mix of lawmakers, state agency heads and a variety of childcare providers (centre-based, home-based, religious-based providers) and parents.²¹⁴

The **Betriebliche Kinderbetreuung (Onsite childcare)** programme incentivizes firms to create daycare slots internally by paying €400 for each newly created full-time slot.

- it promotes the establishment of new, company-supported childcare (subsidy to employer for each child until 2 years of age);
- evaluation found a high return on investment in productivity,²¹⁵ but data show that the number of such daycare centres has not increased that much since 2015, and is still considered low (around 750).²¹⁶

211. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/cd79e230-3ee2-46ae-adc5-e54d3d649f31/01817+WB+Childcare+Report_FinalWeb3.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=IXu9vP-

212. https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/media/3731/file/PPP%20for%20ECCE_Eng.pdf

213. <https://www.csg.org/2022/10/13/how-and-why-states-are-partnering-with-businesses-on-child-care/>

214. <https://ndlegis.gov/assembly/67-2021/documents/21-0811-03000.pdf>

215. <https://www.familienservice.de/-/der-business-case-von-betrieblicher-kinderbetreuung>

216. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/321375/umfrage/anzahl-der-betrieblichen-kindertagesstae-tten-in-deutschland/>

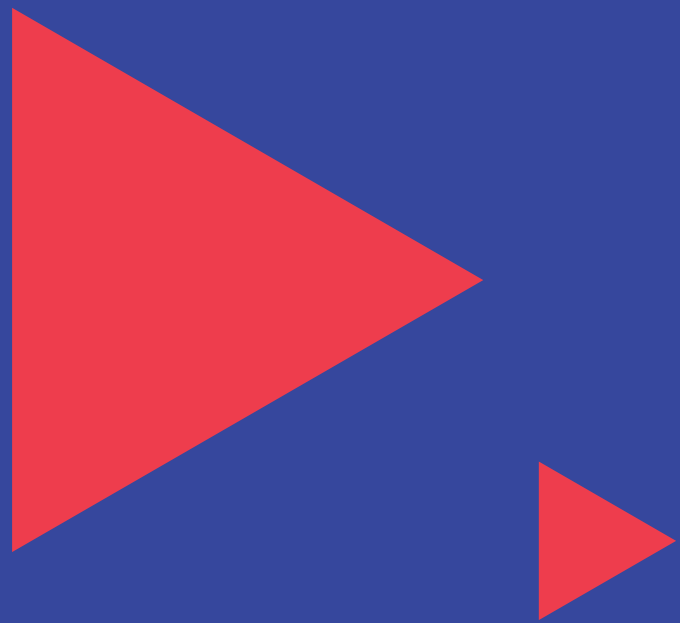
Also in the **USA**, the Texas Education Code encourages “Public-private prekindergarten partnerships” which include collaborations between local education agencies (LEAs, such as school districts), and private childcare providers (in this case for children 3 years of age, but it can easily be applied to younger children). They provide the following benefits²¹⁷:

Children and families	LEAs	Childcare providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Expanded educational opportunities for families of eligible 3- and 4-year-old children. ▶ Longer hours of care in more diverse settings and locations, and access to potential comprehensive services (for example, oral, physical, and mental health services; career or job assistance; family engagement programmes; nutrition services; social services/basic needs assistance; developmental screenings or assessments). ▶ Assisting children’s transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increased capacity to serve more eligible 3- and 4-year-old children and increase the number of children who are ready for kindergarten. ▶ A greater sense of community awareness of educational opportunities. ▶ Unique and specialized early childhood expertise of the early learning partner (for example, developmentally appropriate practice, health and wellness support). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ New, sustainable streams of funding for educational opportunities. ▶ Opening communication across the local early childhood community, increasing resources and shared professional development, and providing alignment of curriculum and assessments.

217. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/early-childhood-education/early-learning-public-private-partnerships>

▶ Part 5

Conclusion



5. Conclusion

In both rural and urban areas, **childcare demand** is affected by parents' financial resources, transport options, awareness, and social norms. In rural areas especially, factors such as distance, financial resources and high female unemployment mean that many women are not actively searching for childcare services.

At the same time, **childcare providers** regard the existing licensing procedures and sanitary standards as too stringent and as key barriers to formalization. Benefits gained from enrolment in social insurance do not weigh up against the difficulties perceived in the registration process. Therefore, the majority of childcare providers for children aged 0–3 are informal, mainly nannies and small home-based nurseries.

The **new Law on Alternative Care** and the accompanying *National Programme for Childcare Services for Children under 3 Years Old, 2023–2026* aim to enhance the availability of childcare services by offering additional, legal, types of childcare that better reflect the needs of diverse groups of families. The law is accompanied by detailed regulations explaining the responsibilities of providers, and updated sanitary standards, which are aligned with international standards.

However, the current MSA shows that **the mere introduction of alternative forms of childcare will not resolve the gaps between supply and demand** and will therefore not contribute directly to mothers' return to the labour market. There are still key barriers to overcome, related to:

- ▶ childcare providers' awareness of their responsibilities and (financial) opportunities;
- ▶ challenges for childcare providers in understanding and complying with regulations (realization of communication campaign, guidelines);
- ▶ financial support for parents to access new forms of private childcare;
- ▶ quality assurance of childcare provision aligned with international ECEC standards.

The interventions suggested in this report should form the basis for additional actions to support the implementation of the law and programme.

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► Research interview list

The interview programme included 19 interviews with 23 respondents. Additionally, two focus group discussions were carried out, one with six mothers who do not use childcare, and one with seven mothers who do use childcare.

Table 7. List of institutions at which interviews were conducted

No	Type of stakeholder	Institution/ Organization
1	Policymakers /government stakeholders	Parliament of Republic of Moldova, Standing Committee: Social Protection, Health and Family Committee
2		MoLSP, head of the demographic policies division
3		MoER, department
4	Local authority urban/ local authority rural	Department of Education, Youth and Sport from Riscani district (Chisinau urban)
5		Dancenii village (rural)
6	Social partners	National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova
7		National Confederation of Employers from RM (CNPM)
8	ECEC/childcare training providers / Education and Training Providers	Alexei Mateevici College (Pedagogical College) (VET)
9	Public childcare providers (rural and urban)	Kindergarten nursery school "Salcioara", Stauceni community
10		"Araş Păcuraş" kindergarten, Rosietici village, Floreşti district
11	Private childcare providers	Private kindergarten "Guguta", Codru community
12	Informal childcare providers/ nannies	One nanny from Bubuieci community
13		One nanny from the town of Ialoveni
14	Work-based childcare provider (urban and rural)	CS Panilino LLC (urban)
15		Asena Textil (rural and urban)
16	Family-based childcare providers/ services (urban and rural)	Stauceni (rural)
17		Chişinău (urban)
18	Women's rights/empowerment NGOs	Centre Partnership for Development
19	ECEC-specific NGO	Step by Step Association Moldova



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