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Admission requirements and choice of ECEC setting

ECEC for younger children (0-3)

Admission requirements are established at local level. Local authorities make priority lists in order to regulate admissions in case places available are less than the requests.

In general, families submit a request of admittance to ECEC services at the relevant local office, responsible for the organisation of ECEC services. Families have freedom of choice among the services of the same municipality and they may also indicate more than one option. It is usually possible also to submit the request to a different municipality and admittance is subject to conditions established at local level. Children with special educational needs have priority in theirs and in other municipalities.

ECEC for older children (3-6)

The description refers to State schools and to *paritarie* ^[1] schools (independent schools that, under certain conditions, have requested and obtained the parity to State schools)

Children turning three, four or five by 31 of December of the relevant school year can enrol in pre-primary school classes (*scuola dell'infanzia*). Upon request of the parents, and subject to specific conditions, it is also possible to enrol children turning three by 30 April of the relevant school year. To accept early enrolments schools must ensure they have places available and premises suitable for receiving children aged less than three years of age. Moreover, schools must have emptied all waiting lists and the Teachers' Council decided times and procedures for the inclusion of these children at school (DPR 89/2009).

Parents have freedom of choice of the school. The only limitations may be due to a lack of available places or to a lack of school staff assigned to each school by the School Administration. If the number of requests exceeds the number of available places, each school sets its own admission criteria.

Finally, it is possible to enrol children aged from 24 to 36 months to the so called 'spring sections'. This type of service has been introduced in 2007 (law 296/2006) to meet the needs of families where both parents are employed. These sections are mainly established at State pre-primary schools but can also be established at independent public and private settings for younger children. This type of provision is organised as a specific section with its own pedagogic plan, its own facilities and staff, according to national agreements signed by the Regions.

Group size and chid/staff ratio

ECEC for younger children (0-3)

Each municipality is responsible for the organisation of the educational services for this type of provision, in compliance with regional regulations. Therefore, the offer varies throughout the country.

In general, centre-based ECEC provision is addressed to children aged from 3 to 36 months. Municipalities may also offer services for children aged less than 3 months, usually at the presence of parents.

Children can be grouped according to their age or in mixed-age groups. In each group works one or more educators, depending on the number and age of children.

In fact, each Region establishes the staff/children ratio as well as the minimum and maximum size of groups. The staff/children ratio varies between 1:5 and 1:10 also based on the age of children (fewer children per educator in case of smaller children). The size of groups also varies among the Regions.

From school year 2020/2021, [educators](#) [2] in public settings must hold at least a Bachelor degree (ISCED 6 level) in education sciences specific for working in ECEC settings for younger children (D.Lgs 65/2017). There are no top-level regulations regarding staff qualification in other types of settings.

The presence of assistants and qualification requirements depend on regional regulations.

ECEC for older children (3-6)

State settings are organised into groups called 'sections'. Usually, sections group children of the same age. However, according to their organisational autonomy, schools can organise sections with children of different ages.

The general trend is to alternate activities carried out in a section with activities carried out by groups of children of different ages, thus creating heterogeneous groups. The aim of this approach is to stimulate the relationship between teachers and children, increase interaction among children and enable a better and wider use of rooms, spaces and materials.

The number of pupils per section ranges from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 26; however, under exceptional circumstances, the number of pupils may be increased to 29 (DPR 81/2009). Such limits can be lowered on the basis of various factors, such as the presence of pupils with special educational needs, the geomorphology of the territory, financial conditions and social disadvantages, availability of school staff.

Each class has two teachers who alternate and work individually in the morning or afternoon, except for the meal during which both are present. The teacher/children ratio, taking as a reference the maximum limit of children for each section, is 1:26.

[ECEC teachers](#) [3] must hold a Master degree (ISCED 7 level) obtained at the end of a five-year study programme in primary education sciences (Ministerial Decree 249/2010).

Independent settings apply their own rules and are not described here.

Annual, weekly and daily organisation

For children aged between 0 and 3 years, local authorities organise the ECEC offer and, therefore, it is not possible to provide detailed information on the organisation of time. In general, the organisation of the day and week guarantees a service which is the most suitable to meet the needs of families.

In State settings for children over three years of age, the school year starts on 1st September and ends on 31st August and educational activities can take place between 1st September and the 30th June. Every year, the Ministry of Education publishes the calendar for national holidays ([D. Lgs. 297/1994](#) ^[4]).

The Regions adapt the school calendar to local needs. In particular, they establish the dates for the beginning and end of the educational activities within the limits established at national level, the length of school vacations during national holidays and other local holidays ([D. Lgs. 112/1998](#) ^[5]). Every year, the Ministry publishes a summary table on its website, showing all regional school calendars.

According to central regulations, the weekly timetable for educational activities is 40 hours a week distributed on no fewer than 5 days ([DPR 89/2009](#) ^[6]). The timetable can also be extended up to 50 hours a week, as well as shortened to 25 hours a week, with activities in the morning only. Schools autonomously define what timetable models to offer, in accordance with their three-year educational offer plan ([PTOF](#) ^[7]) and regulations in force, taking into account the requests of parents and the availability of staff. In schools offering different timetables, children are grouped according to the timetable chosen by their parents at enrolment.

The School Council establishes the daily timetable (starting and finishing times) as well as the distribution of the weekly timetable on five or six days (Saturday included). Usually, both at the starting and finishing of activities parents have a time range for taking their children to/from school.

Out-of-hours reception of pupils before or after the school compulsory timetable is a service that can be provided by municipalities or financially supported by parents.

Table 1 – example of weekly and daily timetable in a school applying the typical 40-hour timetable on five days (Saturday excluded) and with the out-of-hours service available

LENGTH OF TYPICAL DAY, EACH DAY OF THE WEEK					
	Out-of-hours provision (before activities)	Activities (starting and finishing times in the morning)	Lunch break	Activities (starting and finishing times in the afternoon)	Out-of-hours provision (after activities)
Monday	7.30-8.00	8.00/8.45-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-15.45/16.00	16.00-17.00
Tuesday	7.30-8.00	8.00/8.45-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-15.45/16.00	16.00-17.00
Wednesday	7.30-8.00	8.00/8.45-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-15.45/16.00	16.00-17.00
Thursday	7.30-8.00	8.00/8.45-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-15.45/16.00	16.00-17.00
Friday	7.30-8.00	8.00/8.45-12.00	12.00-13.00	13.00-15.45/16.00	16.00-17.00
Saturday	-	-	-	-	-

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[5] <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1998/05/21/098A4235/sg>

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[7] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/glossary-32_en#PTOFGlossary