

Inclusion in Childcare in Rotterdam, in the context of the Netherlands.

Notes

Rotterdam is a municipality that strives for inclusion by reducing the differences between the types of childcare. The focus lies on: integrating the different types of childcare and removing the distinction between people with jobs and those without, and between low-skilled and professional people.

Figures

Rotterdam has around 15,000 two to three-year olds. 10,764 of these children attend a pre-school and early education (VVE) centre. Rotterdam has 623 pre-school and early education groups, with around 14-16 children per group.

1. The situation in the Netherlands

The Dutch system has a strong part-time character, enhanced by the fact that many of the parents (mothers) work part-time. No other country in the world has such a high level of part-time work as far as parents – and especially mothers – are concerned. Of course, this really affects the daily work in childcare centres, where the staff (who also work part-time) deal with a lot of different children during the week.

As a result, pedagogical stability is a major point of discussion in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, about 30-40% of children under 2 years old attend childcare. But over 80% of two to four-year-old children attend either formal centre-based day care or pre-school before they enter the primary school system at the age of four (it is mandatory at the age of five, but nearly all children start school at the age of four).

Children can attend two main types of ECEC provisions before they enter primary school. The first consists of centre-based day care for children from zero to four years of age, with the main function of supporting parents and helping them combine work and care. However, over 50% of children under four only attend centre-based day care for two full days a week (NCKO, 2011) on average.

Because the main function is to support parents and help them combine work and care for children from zero to four years old, only children of working parents can attend such childcare facilities.

The childcare system is accessible for parents who both work.

The second type concerns pre-schools for two to four-year-old children, which, on average, are attended for two to four half days a week.

Socio-economically disadvantaged children, who may have low-skilled parents or are from non-Dutch speaking homes, are subject to a targeted policy that combats early educational deficiencies and offers an educational programme that is provided in pre-schools for four half days a week.

Children who are not considered to be “at risk” usually attend pre-school for two half days a week.

2. The "Harmonisation" case

We want all children in Rotterdam to be able to develop their talents. And that requires proper education. This "education" starts at a very young age. When a child is prepared properly at pre-school, he or she is ready to make a flying start at primary school. In the Rotterdam educational policy "Leren Loont! 2015-2018" (Learning Pays! 2015-2018), childcare and pre-school organisations, primary school boards and the municipality of Rotterdam agreed to harmonise the pre-school period, resulting in a single type of facility for all Rotterdam children from two to four years old. As the description of the situation in the Netherlands (see the first paragraph) already explains, until recently, there were two separate systems. The new, harmonised system is all about properly preparing all young children in Rotterdam for primary school.

The fragmented field

Rotterdam has a number of facilities that prepare young children for primary school and/or care for children while their parents are at work: pre-schools with a programme for pre-school and early education (also known as VVE), pre-schools without such a programme, day care centres with VVE, day care centres without VVE and childminders.

Through harmonisation, the distinction between pre-schools and day care will disappear: all facilities will offer the same high-quality care, and all toddlers can use it, no matter what their background is. There are two goals of harmonisation: on the one hand, every child is properly prepared for primary school in the same way; on the other hand, it prevents the segregation of target group children and non-target group children and children with working parents and children with parents who do not work. Another significant positive effect is that children no longer have to change day care if their parents find work or lose their jobs, and that the cyclicity of the system disappears. In the old system, parents without a job or households with one working parent were not eligible for childcare benefits.

The costs of these different types of day care are different for the parents, and the same applies to the quality that is offered with regard to learning through play. The number of hours that the children can attend the facilities varies drastically, from six hours a week in a pre-school without pre-school and early education to 50 hours a week in a day care centre. A relatively large number of "target group toddlers" – toddlers with a risk of language and developmental deficiency – attends playgroups. Another difference between the various types of day care is the fact that only toddlers with working parents may attend day care centres. Pre-schools are almost completely financed by the municipality and parents only pay a small contribution. Day care centres are funded by the government through childcare benefit and partly by parents.

Through the redesign of the pre-school period, Rotterdam wants to make sure that children are ready to make a flying start at primary school. We will continue to build on the investments made at many locations by pre-school organisations, school boards and the municipality in recent years: investments in the quality of pre-schooling and how it ties in with primary education.

One of the main reasons for harmonisation is that, in the current system, toddlers with a parent or parents who become(s) unemployed or is/are no longer eligible for childcare benefit can no longer stay at the day care centre, because it has often become too expensive. Harmonisation

means they can stay. Toddlers with parents who are not eligible for childcare benefits can also attend a day care centre or pre-school for a number of hours as long as they pay a net income-dependent parental contribution.

Core points of the new system:

- A single basic facility for all young children in Rotterdam, which prepares them for primary school through play.
- One type of harmonised pre-school facility with mixed groups of target group/non-target group children and children with employed parents and unemployed parents.
- All toddlers in Rotterdam between two and four years of age are entitled to six hours of childcare in a harmonised pre-school facility. Children aged 2.5 to 4 years who have been identified as a target group child by the YFC (Youth and Family Centre, who monitor all children from birth) are entitled to six hours of additional care in the same facility, so 12 hours in total. Working parents may purchase additional hours at the same location. Waiting lists will be a thing of the past. In 2020 children who belong to the target group are entitled by the Dutch government to 16 hours per week in a harmonised pre-school facility. Rotterdam starts with this offer in September 2019.
- Identical quality in all groups.
- One harmonised income-dependent parental contribution. Harmonisation is not just about harmonising quality and accessibility for all children, but also about harmonising the costs for parents.

3. Quality requirements and pre-school facilities

Before harmonisation, the quality requirements were different for each subsidised childcare facility. Since 1 January 2017, all pre-school and early education facilities have had to comply with the same quality requirements, including:

- The assignment of a student or graduate to each group. This may be a coach with a university of applied sciences degree, and/or a person currently studying at a university of applied sciences.
- The assignment of a graduate as a coach/video interaction coach to multiple groups for at least four hours per group per week, or the assignment of a student of a university of applied sciences as a teaching assistant in addition to an MBO (tertiary level) teaching assistant.
- If a group is not part of a continuous learning path and care structure within education, a care consultation has been arranged for the toddlers, with a transfer document for each toddler.
- The groups have a parental policy that ties in with the pre-school and early education method, with an annual analysis of the parental population and, based on this, a specific parental policy plan for each location.
- Organisations must comply with the arrangements set out in Rotterdam on 1 January 2015, relating to the way in which insight is gained into the output of pre-school education and the results of early childhood education. In 2016, in consultation with the municipality, organisations decided on the targets to be achieved at their locations based on the baseline measurement from 1 October 2015 and the single measurement from 1 October 2016.
- Organisations are continuously working on improving output-oriented work methods.

9. Indication of target group toddlers in Rotterdam

On behalf of the municipality, the YFC became responsible for the target group indication on 1 January 2015, and their doctor/nurse provides the parents with the pre-school and early education (VVE) indication letter for the target group child. Children in Rotterdam with a "target group indication YFC" are eligible for six additional hours of basic childcare on top of the standard six hours. This only applies if they use a harmonised pre-school and early education (VVE) facility. If the parents decide not to use a VVE facility, they will not be eligible for a subsidy from the municipality.

A child is a "target group child" for pre-school and early education (VVE) if the child attended the 14th and/or 24th-month consultation at the YFC, and:

- the parent who is the main carer has a level of education that is lower than the basic qualification (i.e. level 1 intermediate vocational training, lower vocational training, on-the-job training, pre-vocational secondary education or lower);
- the language spoken at home is not Dutch and the educational level of the parent who is the main carer is lower than level 4 intermediate vocational training;
- the toddler has been diagnosed with developmental problems by a paediatrician at the 24th-month consultation or later, or by the VVE organisation after observation within three months after placement or later (at a disadvantage compared to his or her peers in relation to the nationally recognised targets of the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO)).