

Rohrmann, Tim (2026). **Support structures for men working in ECEC - a long-term analysis**. Paper presented on the 34th Annual EECERA Conference, Funchal/Madeira, Portugal, 26.8.2026.

Abstract

This paper presents long-term research on a network of coordinators and leaders of working groups for men in ECEC in Germany. It traces the development of these structures over a period of 15 years to shed light on opportunities, challenges and barriers of continuous professional development. The research builds up on research on men in ECEC on national (Cremers et al. 2012, Rohrmann 2013) and international level (Peeters et al. 2015, Rohrmann 2020, Brody et al. 2021). The research combines quantitative analyses with a co-constructive framework and a participatory research approach. Results from continuous research were repeatedly discussed with expert members from the National network, leading to the further development of strategies and methods for supporting men on local, regional and national level. Quantitative surveys conducted annually inform about numbers, participants, and framing conditions of regional working groups for male practitioners. These are contrasted with analyses of documentations of expert group discussions from nationwide network meetings. The research is fully based on anonymized data. Research questions were developed from the network context, and results were led back to this context in a reflexive cycle. All participants agreed in the documentation and publication of results. Ethical consent was approved by the university's ethical committee. The results give evidence for the relevance of support structures for the development of a more gender-balanced workforce. However, these are highly dependent on regional conditions, and on individual engagement of coordinators and group leaders. The research informs stakeholders and policy makers about the importance of support structures for retaining male practitioners in ECEC.

Keywords

gender, male practitioners, mentoring, professionalization, continuous professional development

Presenter:

Tim Rohrmann, HAWK Hildesheim University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Hildesheim, Germany

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**Faculty of
Social Work and Health**

Hildesheim

Tim Rohrmann
**Support structures for men working
in ECEC – A long-term analysis**

34th Annual EECERA Conference
6.8.2026, Funchal, Madeira

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Point of departure

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*Male involvement in ECEC teams
as a means for the development
of gender equality in ECEC*



Support of male workers in ECEC

- Men continue to be a small minority in the ECEC work force (Rohrmann, Brody & Plaisir, 2021).
- Although attitudes of colleagues, managers, and parents towards men are generally positive, men experience barriers, stereotypes, and distrust.
- Strategies for more involvement of men have been developed during the past decades (e.g., Emilsen, Kjeldsaas & Friis, 2023; Haines, Nater & Chesny, 2026; Icken, 2012; Warin, 2018)
- Working groups of/for male ECEC workers are an important part of these strategies in several countries (Emilsen & Rohrmann 2013, Wilkinson & Warin, 2022; Rohrmann, 2013)

Long ago...

One of my first working groups for men in ECEC



*How were
support groups for men in ECEC
developed over time
in the context of Germany?*

Definition:

Working Groups for Men in ECEC

Working groups for men in ECEC are moderated groups where male ECEC practitioners meet regularly to discuss work-regulated issues.

Such groups are a relevant part of continuous professional development in ECEC.

Structures and topics of these groups vary widely across and within countries, ECEC systems, and ECEC providers.

While participants are usually males only, coordinators, moderators and leaders can be female.

Caring Masculinities

We analyse the support of male workers in ECEC in the context of *caring masculinities* in ECEC, as framed by the international project ECAROM:

- *Support gender equality*
- *Promote gender sensitive education*
- *Focus diverse masculinities*
- *Support engaged professionals*
- *Improve funding of institutions*

(Bernacci et al. 2022, Holtermann & Scambor, 2022)

Men in ECEC in Germany

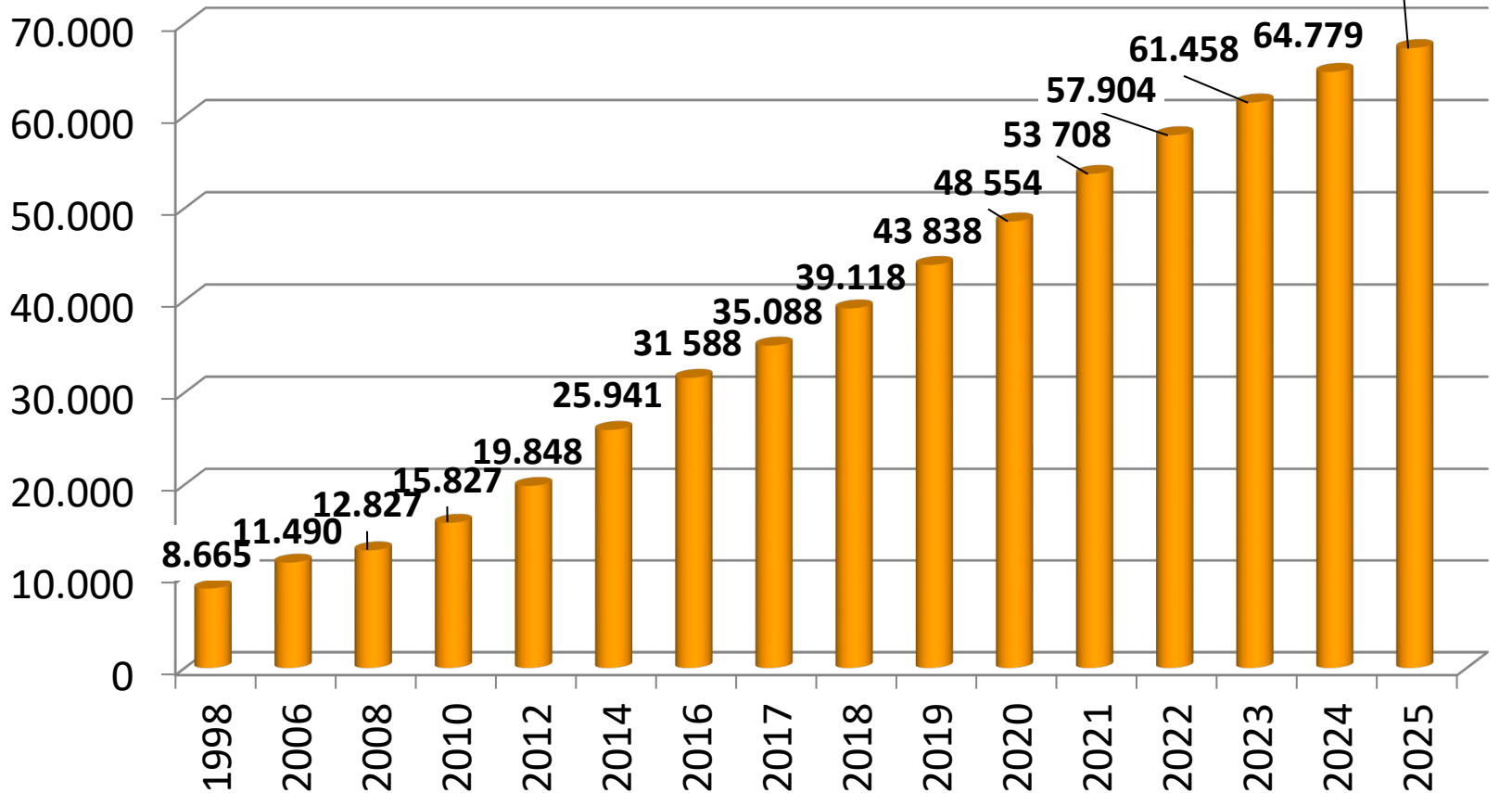
Two decades for more men in ECEC



Images from PR campaigns for more men in ECEC (*Mehr Männer in Kitas*) in Germany (2011-2013)
Rohrmann (2026): Support structures for men in ECEC

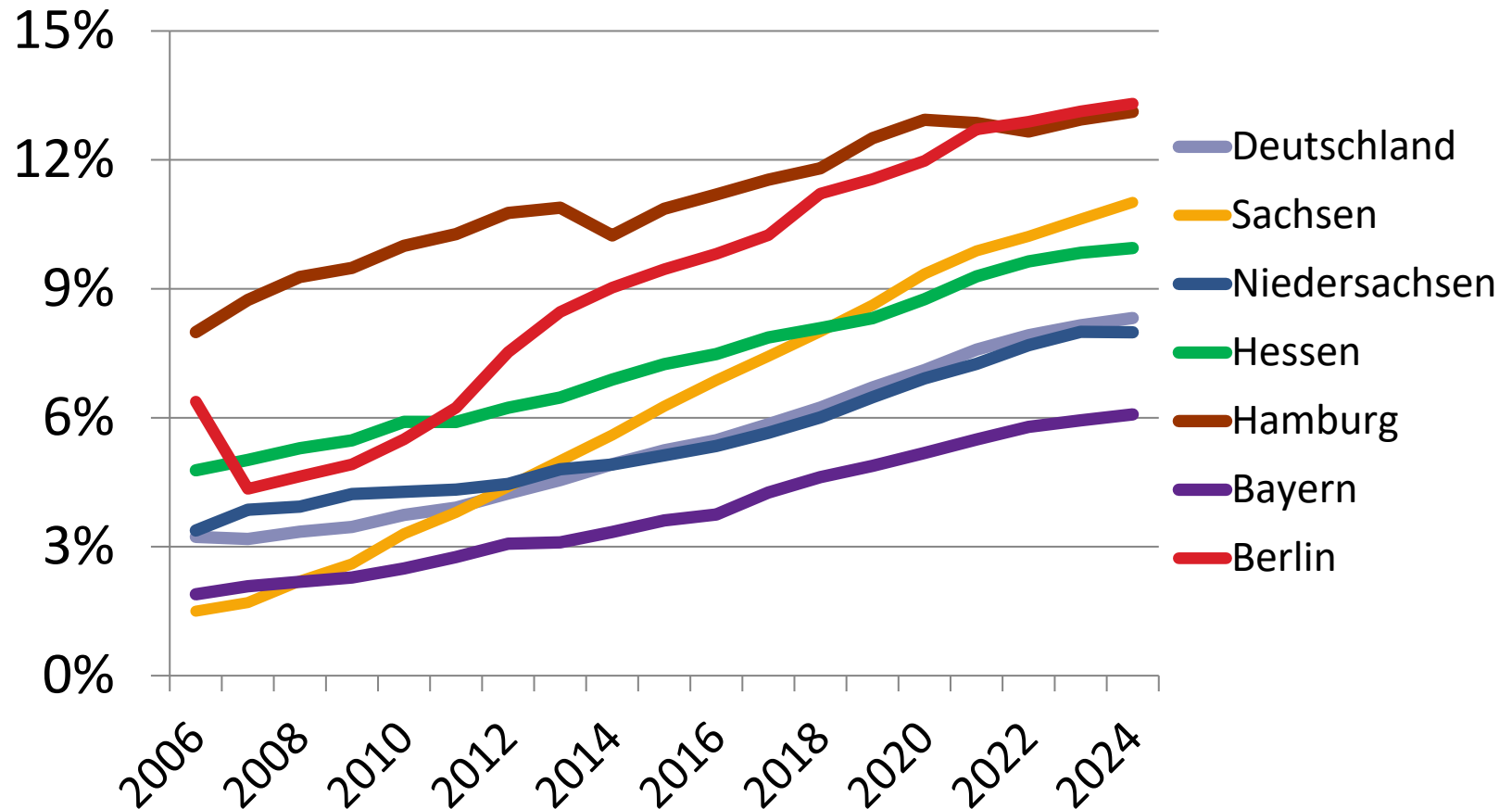
Men in ECEC in Germany

Absolute numbers 1998-2025



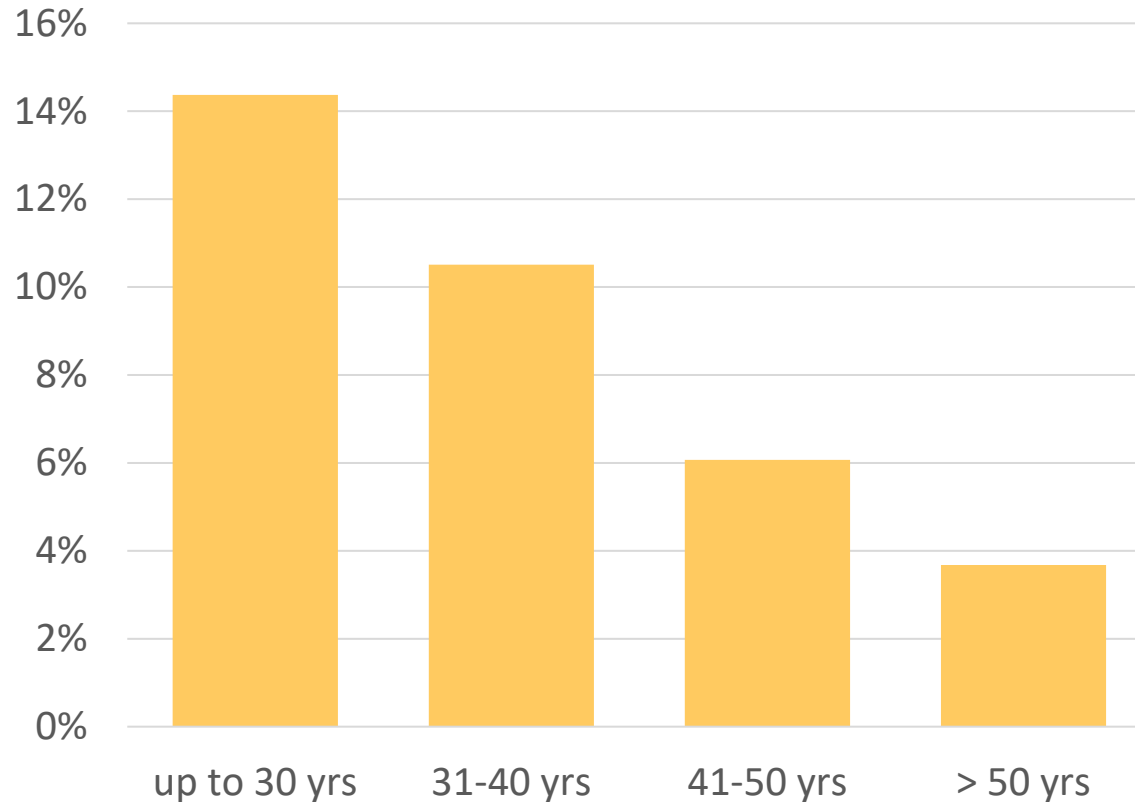
Source: Author's calculations, Statistisches Bundesamt (National Office of Statistics), 1998-2026

Men in ECEC in Federal states



Source: Author's calculations, Statistisches Bundesamt (National Office of Statistics), 1998-2026

Men in ECEC: Age groups



Source: Author's calculations, Statistisches Bundesamt (National Office of Statistics), 2024

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Methods

Methods & data sources

Multimethods approach:

- Quantitative Surveys
- Document analysis of workshop meetings
- Personal expert knowledge (1995-2026)

Quantitative Surveys:

- Short quantitative survey of regional working groups in Germany, provided by coordinators and leaders (2012, 2018, 2022, 2026)
- Country-specific analysis of international survey of men working in ECEC in the MoMEC project (McHale et al., 2026)

Workshops with stakeholders

Workshops with stakeholders as research method
(Hu 2024, Wilkinson & Warin 2022)

Document analysis (2012-2026):

- Notes of (bi-)annual network meetings of coordinators, moderators and leaders
- Notes of working group sessions in one regional working group (3-4 meetings annually)

Ethics & participation

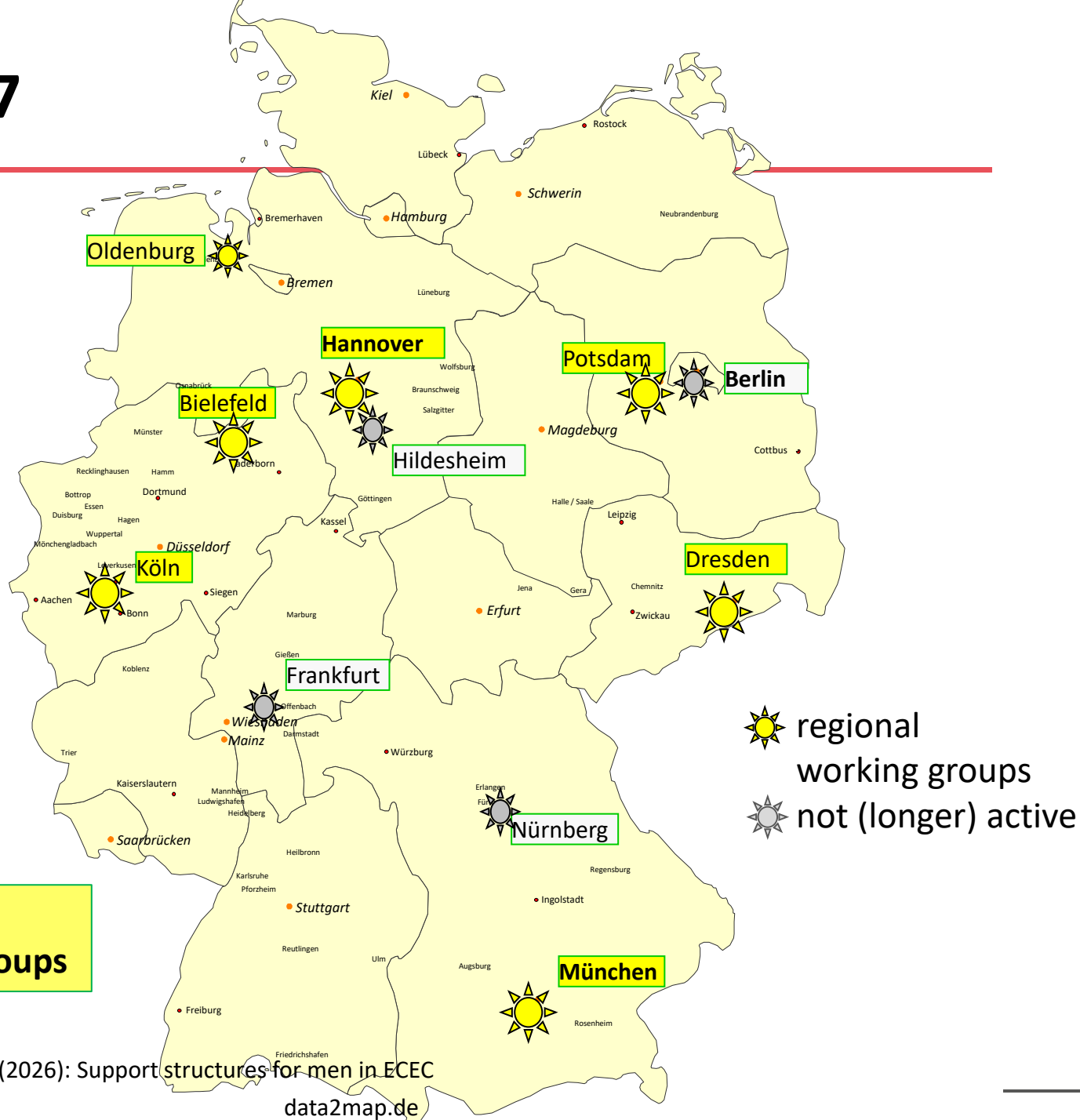
All survey data and results were anonymized.

All results of national surveys were discussed with stakeholders on annual network meetings.

Results were published with meeting notes.

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Results

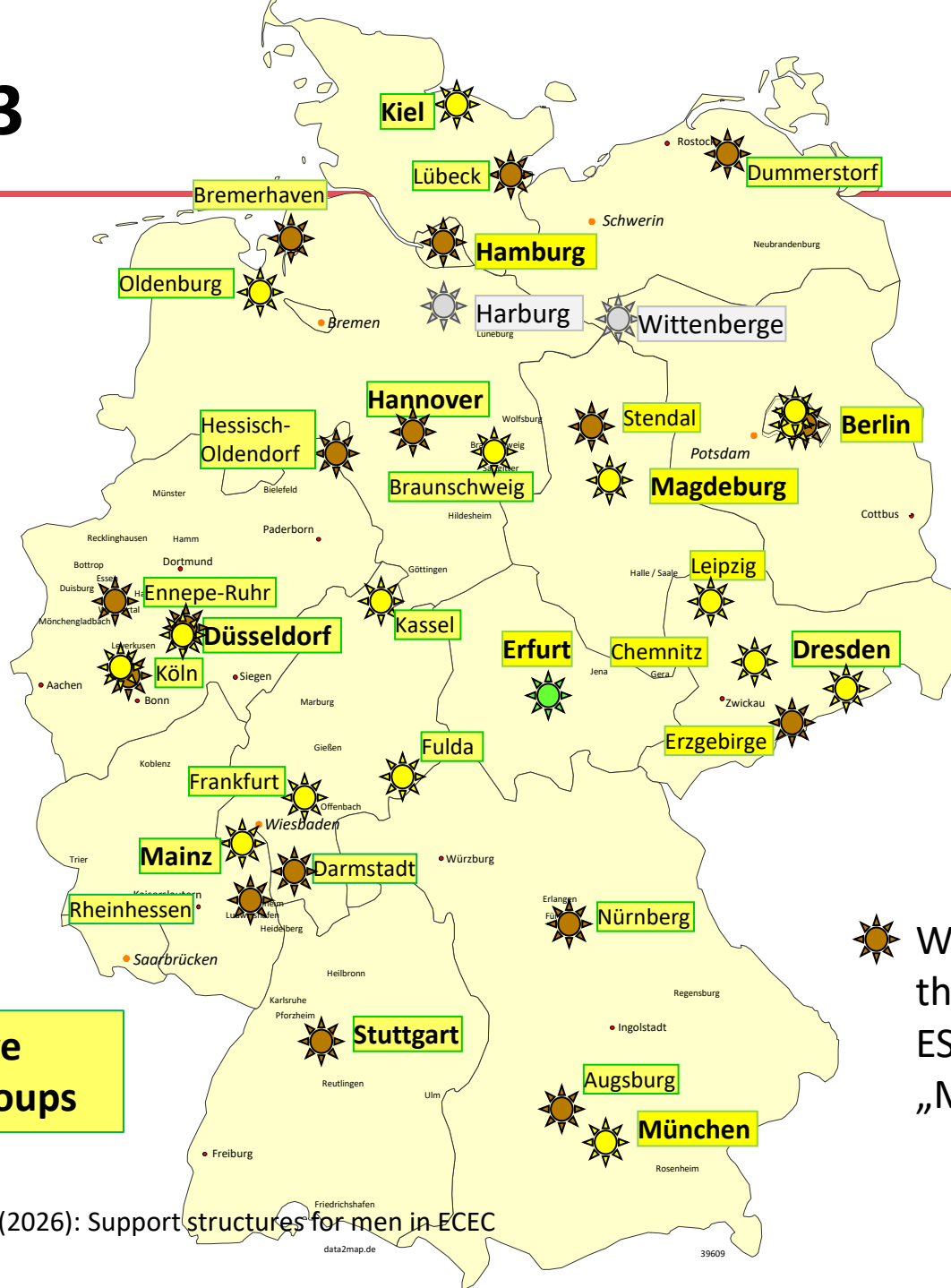


Surveys of working groups 2011-2026

A national exchange of coordinators and moderators of working groups was started in the context of the National Program „More men in ECEC“ (2011-2013).

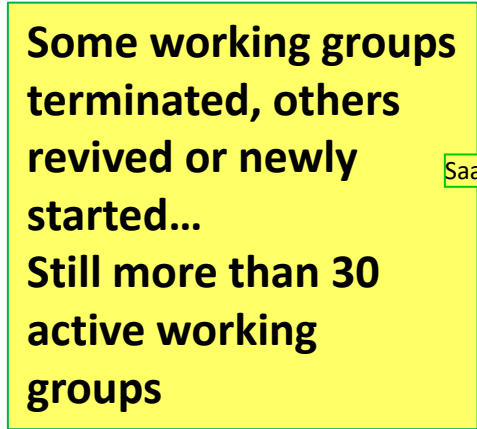
Results of a first survey were published in 2013 in a brochure with reflections and best practice examples for group work with male ECEC practitioners.





**ca. 35 active
working groups**

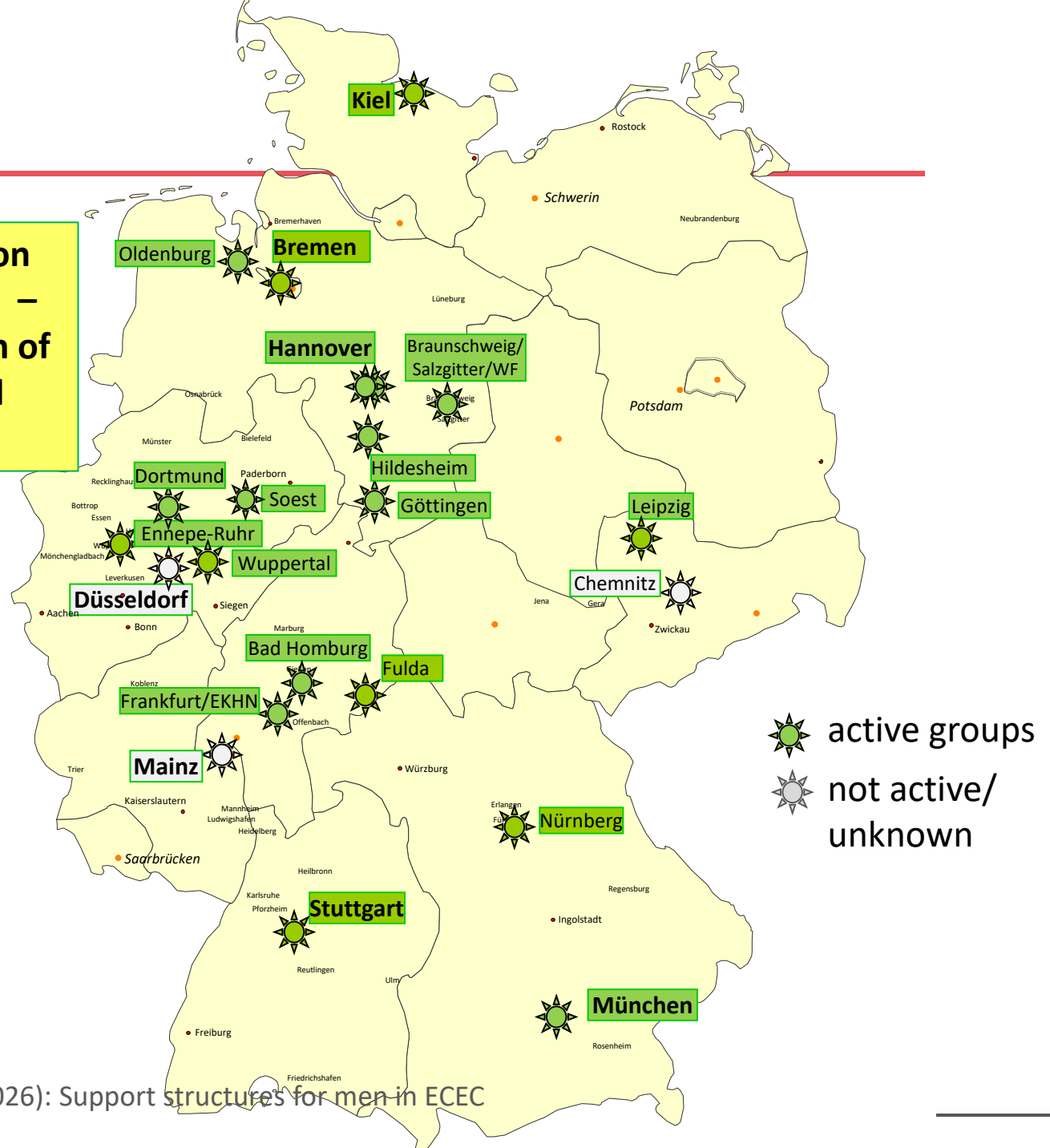
 Working groups in
the context of the
ESF model program
„More men in ECEC“



**Considerable decline
caused by the Covid19
pandemic –
only 8 active working
groups; more than 10
planned for 2021**



Stabilization on medium level – diversification of programs and settings





Participants

- On average, 11-14 men attend a working-group meeting.
- Numbers of interested participants who attend the working group at least occasionally are much higher. The range is quite large, spanning from 8 to 200 (!!) people, with an average of 30-50.

Duration and frequency of meetings

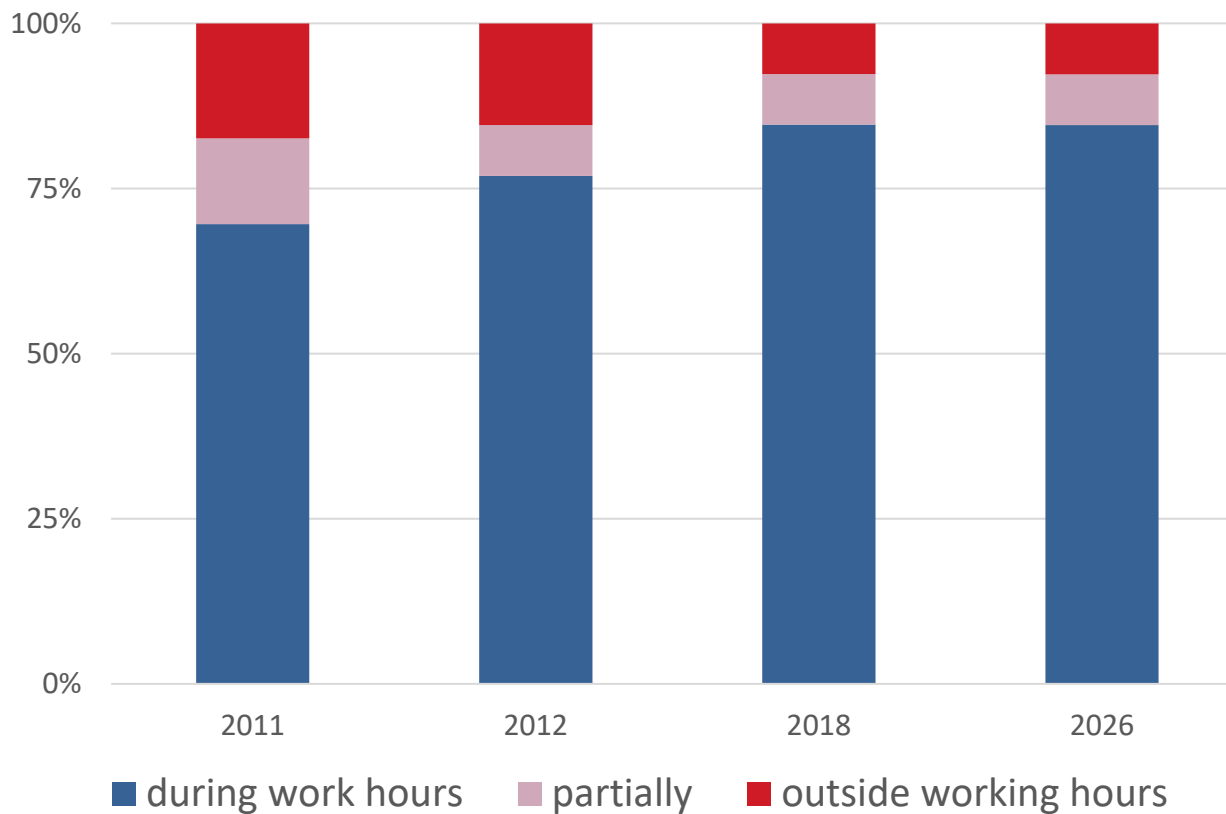
- Working groups meet on average three to four times per year.
- Meetings mostly last 3 to 4 hours.
- In some larger cities, shorter meetings are held monthly or bi-monthly.
- Some working groups combine regular meetings with an annual conference; some of these conferences are restricted to male professionals, while others are open to all genders.

Moderation and leadership

- Many of the first working groups originated from the initiative of educators themselves.
- Today, most working groups are moderated by an experienced pedagogue or a professional specialist.
- Some working groups are professionally facilitated (training, supervision).
- Only very few working groups are still organized by educators themselves.

Working groups are working hours

Working groups take place...



Approaches & topics

„Open“ approach

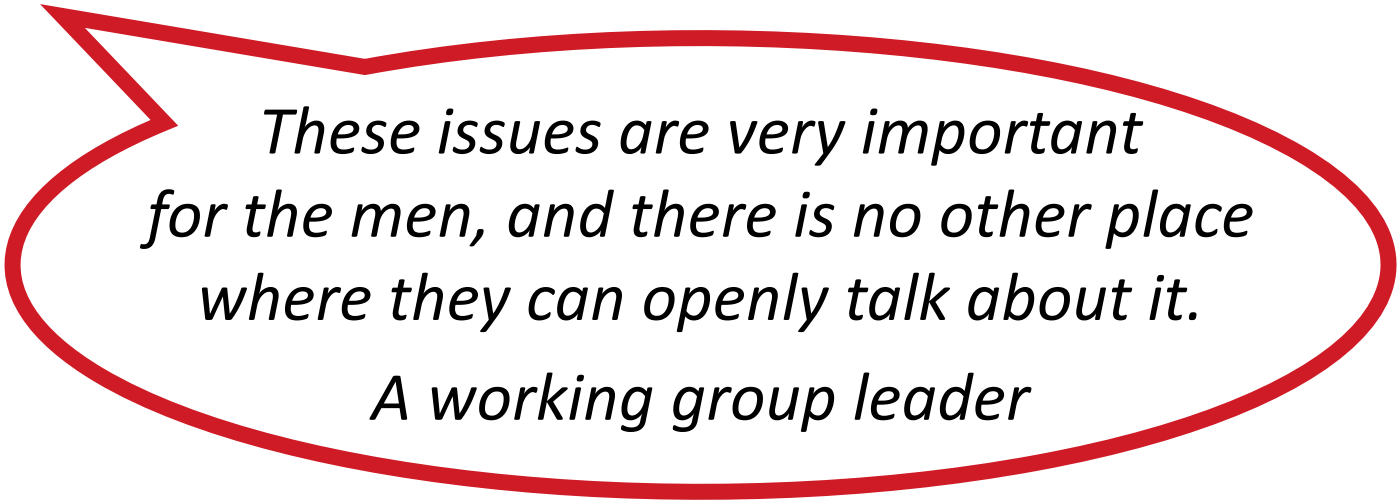
- exchange between colleagues (the „what’s going on“-round)
- recent incidents and experiences
- issues coming up in the group

Thematic approach

- content prepared by leader/moderator
- broad spectrum of topics and issues
- inspired by national network meetings

Two topics continue to be top issues:

- **Working as a man in a team of female colleagues**
- **General distrust against men in ECEC**



*These issues are very important
for the men, and there is no other place
where they can openly talk about it.*

A working group leader

Continuous challenges for male ECEC workers

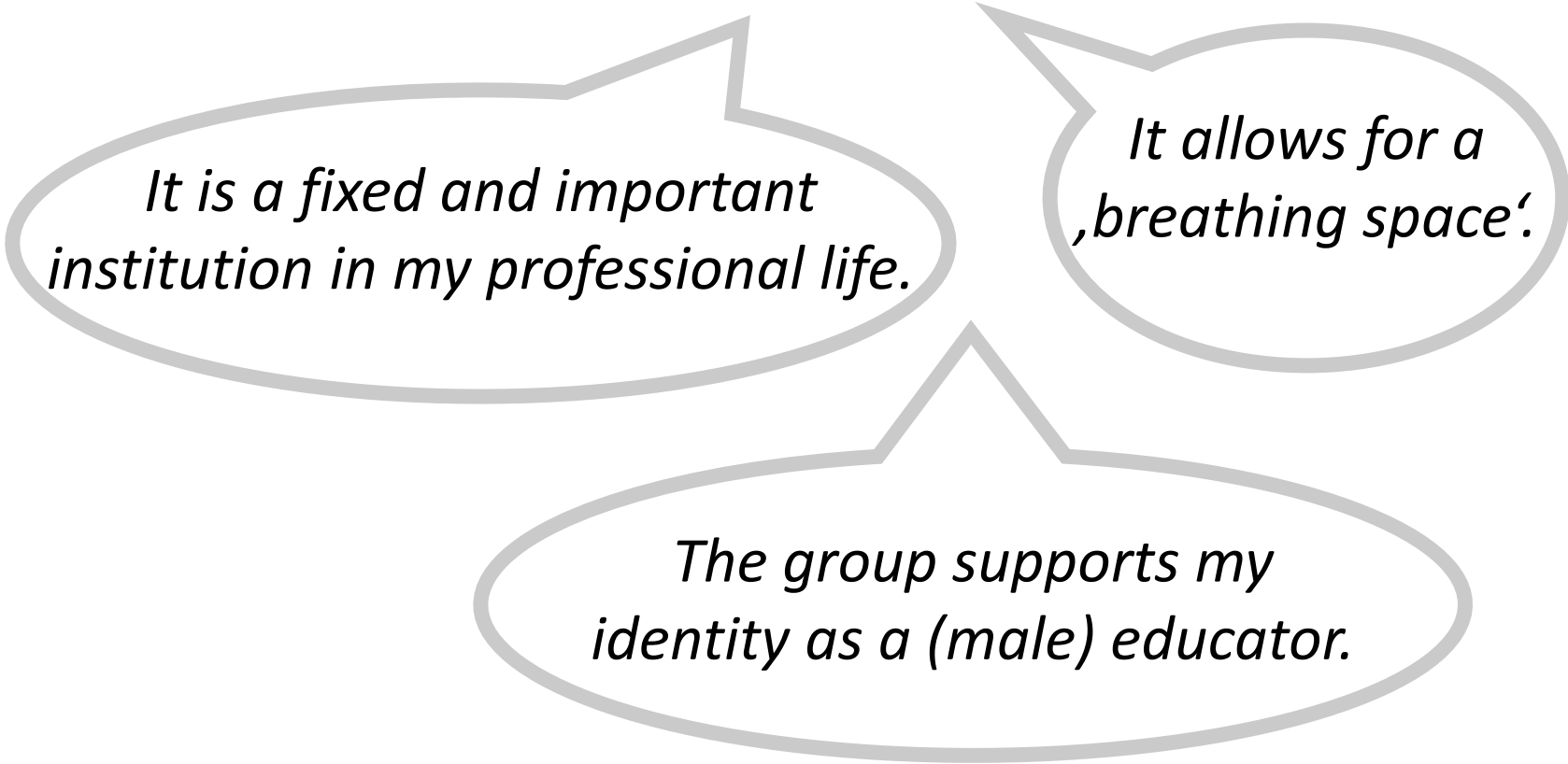
Document analysis of meeting notes prove

- Stereotyped expectations of female colleagues:
Gendered division of tasks and activities,
e.g. men do physical activities and „risky“ play
- Fear of pedophilia as constant threat:
Specific rules for men regarding toilet support and
nappie changing persist in some centers

These results mirror national and international research on specific difficulties of men working in ECEC.

Factors supporting retention

Working groups give constant and long-term support and strengthen men's professional identity.



It is a fixed and important institution in my professional life.

It allows for a 'breathing space'.

The group supports my identity as a (male) educator.

Factors supporting gender sensitivity

Participants highlight the importance of reflecting gender-related issues.

“What are we actually teaching boys unconsciously?”

You can be a man in a different way!

I intend to make myself and my female colleagues more consciously aware of gender aspects in our everyday actions.

Results of MoMEC survey (2025)

A vast majority of German respondents in the recent MoMEC survey (McHale et al., 2026) agreed that

- gender-specific mentoring would support men's retention when entering the ECEC field
- gender-specific networking would help promote gender balance in the ECEC workforce
- men would welcome support networks to navigate gendered issues in the ECEC workforce.

Mentoring opportunities at the workplace and connections with other male workers are equally relevant for the majority of respondents.

Arguments against men-only groups

However, not all men do agree. Some respondents oppose specific measures for men in general, or find them not necessary.

Some men feel uncomfortable in male-only groups – probably because of negative biographic experiences in male-dominated groups and contexts.

Some academics criticize that men-only groups might foster gender stereotypes, male dominance, and binary understandings of gender.

→ Gender reflexivity is crucial for professional development of working groups for men.

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A long-term project

Sustainable support structures

Moss (2003):

The goal of achieving a gender-balanced work force requires a positive policy for at least ten years.

Maybe much longer...



National networking

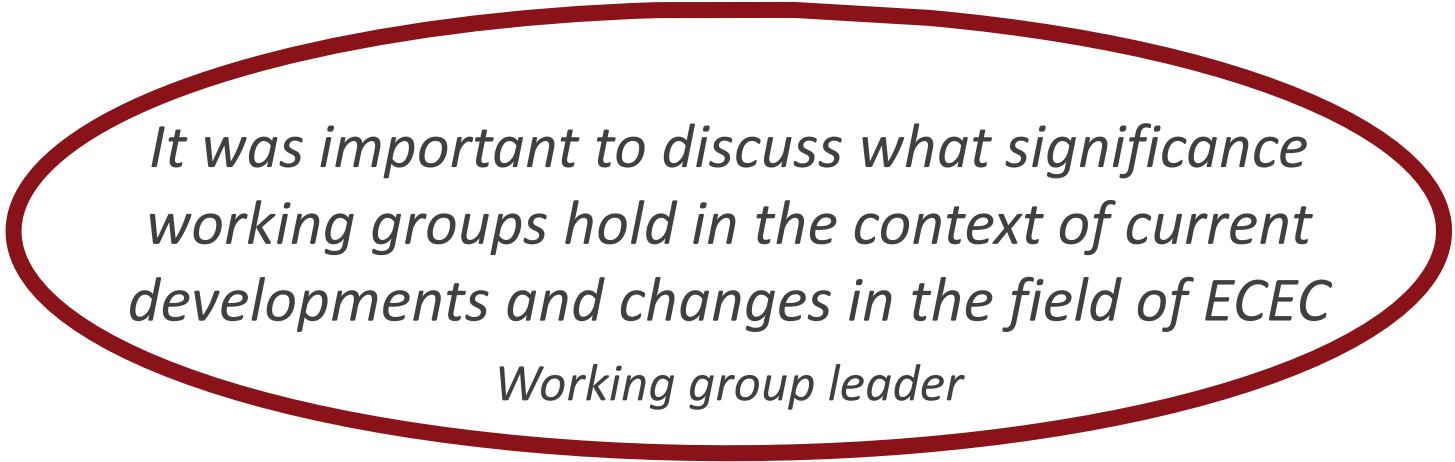


The national network of working groups for men in ECEC is member of the **National Forum Men** (Bundesforum Männer), a roof organisation for policy development supporting gender equality in the field of work with boys, men and fathers

<https://bundesforum-maenner.de/>

Networking topics

The National network brings together regional stakeholders who foster male involvement in ECEC. Participants highlight that many different topics - from staff recruitment to inclusion and gender equality for men in the workplace - are discussed.

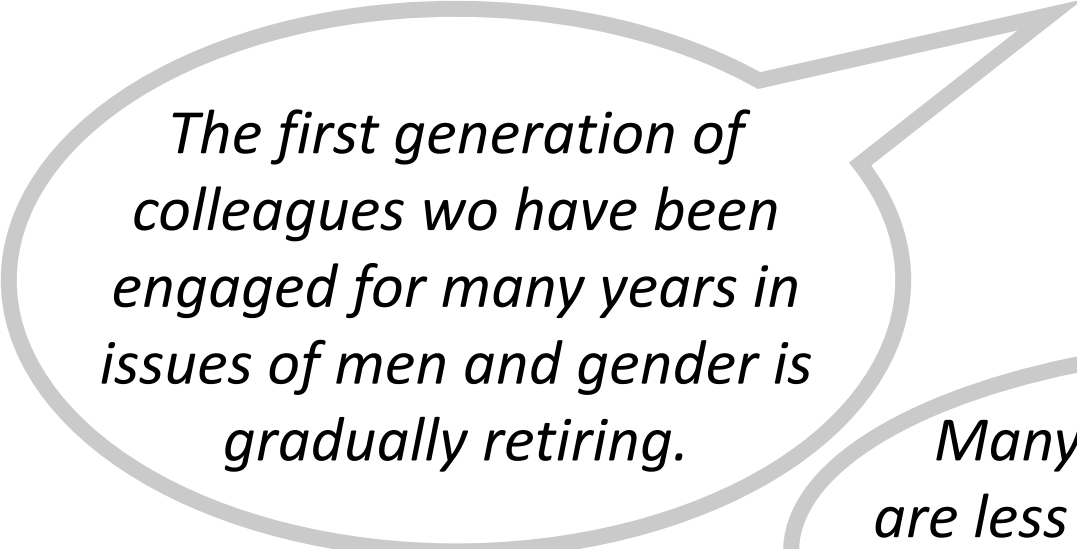


It was important to discuss what significance working groups hold in the context of current developments and changes in the field of ECEC

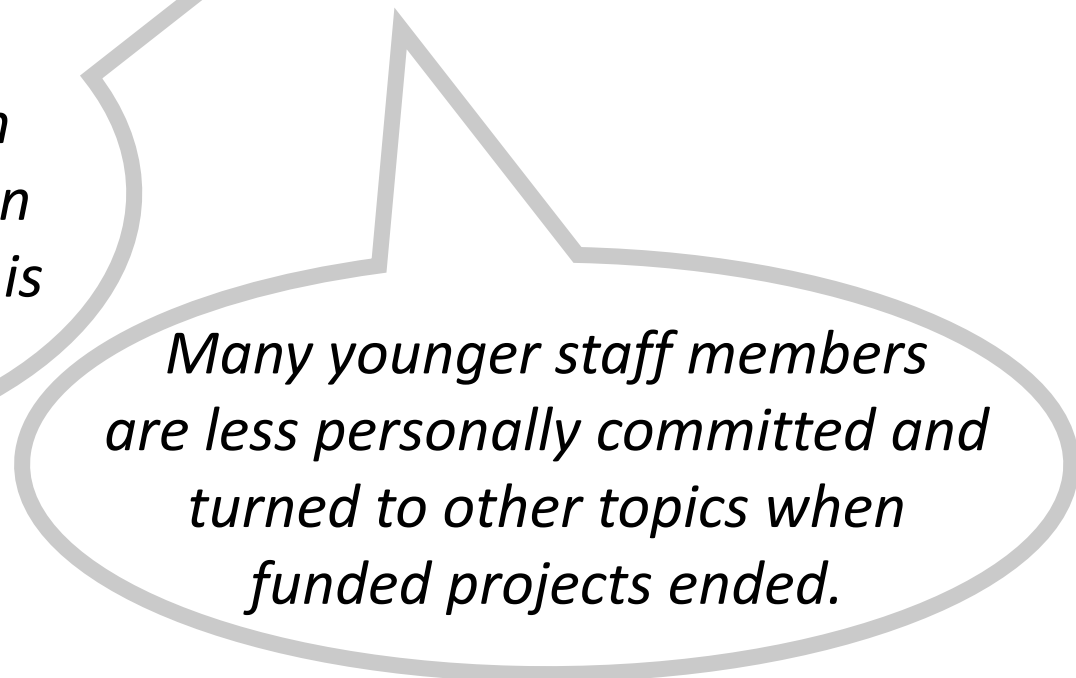
Working group leader

Structural challenges

Most working groups depend on the engagement of one single or few individuals. If these persons change their work place or retire, groups are not continued.



The first generation of colleagues we have been engaged for many years in issues of men and gender is gradually retiring.



Many younger staff members are less personally committed and turned to other topics when funded projects ended.

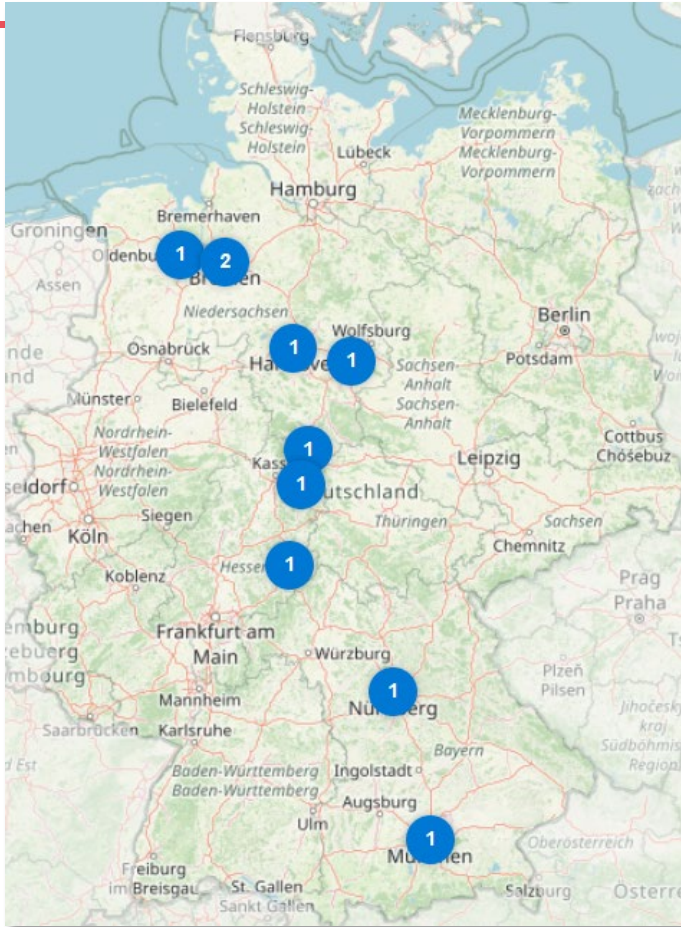
Best practice: provider's structures

- The municipality of **Hanover** provides funding for an ongoing projekt for men in ECEC, including a monthly meeting open to male workers from all providers.
- The municipality of **Munich** hosts a working group for male ECEC workers and other measures for recruiting men in the human resources department.
- In **Oldenburg**, a confessional provider offers a regular working group for men from all providers, including an annual conference for all gender, since 2006.
- In **Göttingen**, four main providers work together with the city's gender equality office since 2015 to provide a working group for men and an annual conference.

Conclusion

- Working groups for men in ECEC foster the retention of men and provide important spaces for professional development.
- Men-only working groups *can* and *should* be connected with approaches to gender equality and gender reflexivity in gender-mixed contexts.
- Coordinators, moderators and leaders of working groups profit from exchange and networking.
- Support structures must be secured over the long term in order to have a sustainable impact.

Website and sitemap



Member of
Bundesforum Männer



<https://gender-kindheitspaedagogik.hawk.de/de/maenner-kitas/arbeitskreise-fuer-maennliche-fachkraefte-kitas>

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Faculty of
Social Work and Health

Hildesheim

Contact

Prof. Tim Rohrmann

HAWK Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaft und Kunst
University of Applied Sciences and Arts

Faculty for Social Work and Health
Hohnsen 1 | 31134 Hildesheim | Germany

<https://t1p.de/h1vtf> · tim.rohrmann@hawk.de



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