



# Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

## Austria

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This report is available in electronic format only

# Introduction

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on high quality childcare in Europe, both with respect to the sector's workforce and the changing needs of children and parents. There is a great need for measures to be introduced that support sustainable and formal job creation in care services for school-age children.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting to carry out a study on sustainable childcare services currently available for school-age children in the 25 Member States of the European Union (EU25). The study aims to support the debate on modernisation of care systems in Europe, to review existing information on childcare services and pinpoint gaps in the level of service in the enlarged EU, and to identify measures at national, regional and local levels to create sustainable childcare services for school-age children.

This report is one of six in-depth country studies that have been conducted in order to complement the more general review of childcare systems in the EU25. It contains three examples of best practice identified from current Austrian childcare initiatives. These include:

- innovative childminding initiatives: 'Mobile mothers' (*Mobile Mamis*) and 'Childcare on the farm' (*Kinderbetreuung am Bauernhof*).
- the non-profit organisation 'Family Business', which provides a variety of services to support the overlap of tasks between childcare workers and parents.
- afternoon care provided by Austrian schools.

Information was gathered through a combination of research and nine stakeholder interviews.

The report is structured as follows:

- 1 - Policy background:** This section concerns the development of current Austrian childcare policy.
- 2 - Childcare provision:** This section looks at the socioeconomic pressures on the Austrian childcare system.
- 3 - Childcare workers:** This section provides a profile of the childcare sector workforce, including job descriptions, working conditions and possibilities for career advancement.
- 4 - Creating sustainable childcare:** This section identifies gaps in childcare provision and the labour market situation and the working conditions encountered by childcare professionals.
- 5 - Case studies:** Best practice studies will be introduced.

Case study 1: 'Mobile mothers' and 'Childcare on the farm' projects

Case study 2: Family Business – Similarities between childcare providers and parents

Case study 3: Afternoon care in schools – Existing facilities and new jobs

In Austria, childcare first developed as a response to increasing female participation in industrial production in the late 18th and early 19th century. Children, who were still too young to participate in the work process themselves, frequently had to be left alone by working mothers. Consequently, the first childcare institution was set up in 1828 as a means to prevent child neglect, to prevent criminal behaviour and to equip children with the skills to become productive members of society. Initially, based on initiatives by non-profit organisations, which are mostly religious associations, such facilities expanded rapidly in the mid 19th century. Childcare for children from a middle class family background first became available in 1863 with the establishment of the first Fröbel-style kindergarten, which emphasised valuable educational activities to enhance children's spiritual development. Austria was one of the first countries to formalise childcare regulations by establishing a legal framework for the kindergarten system in 1872. The law required that nurseries for children of working class families be gradually transformed into kindergartens. Subsequently, public kindergartens began to emerge as well as childcare provided by non-profit organisations, resulting in the dominance of non-profit organisations and public provisions which is typical of the childcare sector in Austria today.

### Requirements of the Austrian childcare system

The Austrian childcare system has to respond to a variety of requirements, which are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: *Pressures on the Austrian childcare system*

Circumstance/Development	Pressure	Effect on childcare demand and supply
A dramatic increase in the number of people dependent on the population of working age over the next 50 years. <sup>1</sup>	In order to sustain a high living standard and social security system it is important to encourage economic activity.	Potentially positive impact on childcare supply in order to encourage female participation.
Activity among women with young children is rather high. Simultaneously, women remain the main providers of household work and care.	It is difficult for women to combine work and care.	Positive impact on demand for childcare provision.
Informal childcare does not suffice as a substitute for formal childcare provision.	There is a clear need for formal childcare provision.	Positive impact on demand for childcare provision.
As a consequence of traditional views on the family and the female role model, many women feel a strong responsibility to provide childcare themselves.	Women try to balance work and care by working fewer hours.	Negative impact on demand for childcare provision.
Austria displays a trend of decline in the population of the numbers of younger children.	Numbers of children may be insufficient to form groups in institutional childcare in some (particularly rural) regions.	Positive impact on demand for alternative forms of childcare (such as childminders).
About half of all families with children have one child only (Statistics Austria, Haushalte, Familien).	There is an increased relevance of childcare facilities in promoting social learning.	Positive impact on demand for childcare provision.
About 10% of Austrian households with children are lone parent households (Eurostat, 2004). Simultaneously, economic activity is high for lone female parents.	Balancing work and care is even more difficult for lone parents. These parents may also need increased support in their educational role.	Positive impact on demand for childcare provision and a newly arising demand for different services.

Source: *Ecotec Research and Consulting*

<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the old-age dependency ratio (the population above 65 years of age as a percentage of the population of working age) will rise from the current 22.8% to 53.2% by 2050. The total dependency ratio (of the young and older people) will thereby rise to 74.6%.

## Recent policies affecting out-of-school childcare

Childcare coverage rates for different age groups reveal that traditionally in Austria there has been a strong focus on pre-school care provision. On several occasions, the reason quoted for the predominance of pre-school childcare is its function in preparing children for regular schooling. Traditionally, this has caused an above average willingness to supply childcare places from the public sector and simultaneously justified ‘giving their children away’ in the eyes of parents.

A focus on pre-school childcare can also be observed in recent childcare policies.

Between 1997 and 2001 the Austrian government spent ATS 1.2 billion (€87.2 million)<sup>2</sup> – the so-called ‘Kindergarten billion’ – to increase the number of childcare places. About the same amount of money was provided by Austria’s nine provinces. Of the 32,188 additional childcare places created, two thirds were for children aged between three and six years (OECD, 2003). The provision of childcare for school-aged children was not as positive as had been desired.

This changed when a 2002 survey on ‘Household management, childcare and care’ (*Haushaltsführung, Kinderbetreuung, Pflege*) showed a lack of 90,000 childcare places, almost half (46,400) of which were for children of school age (Statistics Austria, 2003). In 2003, the Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Protection of the Consumer initiated a commission on needs-oriented childcare and set up meetings to discuss the issue and draw up an action plan. A methodologically different survey of current and prospective childcare gaps was commissioned, which identified 18,154 missing childcare places, of which 10,323 were for school-age children. There remains ongoing controversy concerning which of the two projections best reflects the situation in the Austrian childcare system.

Irrespective of this controversy, the initiatives yielded a number of decisions on policies and projects which are also reflected in the National Action Plan for 2004 and are currently under implementation. These include:

- the financial support of pilot projects on innovative forms of childcare. This concerns projects that encourage cooperation across municipal and provincial borders or the provision of childcare for mixed age groups.
- the government’s decision on a new day-care law, which will enter into force in 2006–2007. The law requires that schools provide childcare when at least 15 children are registered for it. So far, in 2006, the possibility for more than 15,000 childcare places was created (see case study 3).
- an improvement in matching the needs of parents with the most suitable childcare providers through the creation and extension of the services of an Internet portal. This portal (<http://www.kinderbetreuung.at>) is operated by the non-profit organisation ‘Family Business’ and is highly successful (see case study 2).

<sup>2</sup> Austria joined the euro zone and introduced the new currency in 2002; the exchange rate for the Austrian Schilling (ATS) is set at ATS 1 = €0.07267, €1 = ATS 13.7603.

## Government responsibilities

Strong decentralisation is perhaps Austria's second most distinguishing feature next to the prominent role of non-profit organisations. The 1962 School Organisation Act declared institutional care to be the responsibility of the nine Austrian federal states (*Bundesländer*): Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Vorarlberg and Vienna. This has resulted in nine standards of childcare<sup>3</sup>. Yet, decentralisation is regarded as favourable in Austria as it allows for greater flexibility in meeting local needs.

However, decentralisation also impedes the development of alternative forms of childcare which have developed only after the legal reform in 1962, such as childminders and children's play groups. The latter arose in the aftermath of student riots in 1968 based on the initiative of parents who wanted to offer an alternative to institutional childcare. These groups were organised as a form of self-help and emphasised the self-dependent development of children. The problem that arises from decentralisation for children's play groups becomes apparent in the case of the Burgenland and Styria, where this form of childcare has been ruled out by prohibition and very high training and facility requirements<sup>4</sup> respectively. Moreover, for both play groups and childminders (which became more popular in the 1970s), quality standards and training requirements vary substantially from one federal state to another.

In line with the Austrian regulation of childcare, federal funding for childcare is unusual, but possible, as is evident from the 'Kindergarten billion'. Generally, however, states are responsible for issuing guidelines on parental fees and municipalities eventually decide on the amount of fees to be paid. As a consequence of different subsidy practices, childcare costs to parents vary across the country. On average, parents in Austria must pay 15% of the total childcare cost, while municipalities cover 60–70% of the costs and the states meet 15–25% of the costs, respectively.

## Types of provision

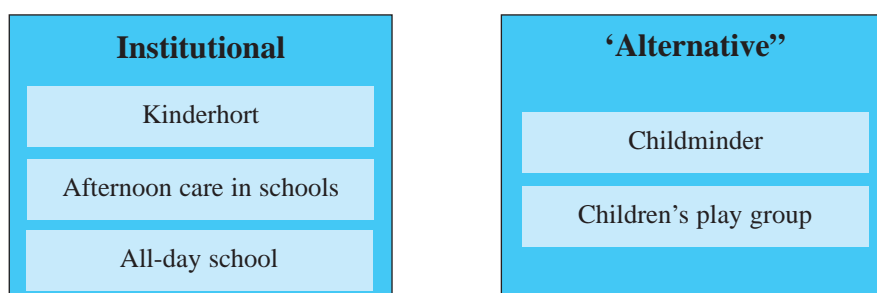
The most frequent forms of childcare for school-age children in Austria into alternative and institutional childcare provision are categorised in Figure 1 below. Among institutional forms of childcare for school-age children, the so-called 'Kinderhorte' have the longest tradition; Kinderhorte are after-school care clubs and frequently referred to as 'Horte'. Furthermore, since the mid 1970s a number of schools have offered care services to school-age children, either in the form of afternoon care or alternating with school activities in the framework of full-time schools. In addition, since the late 1960s, alternative forms of childcare have developed and increased in importance, such as children's play groups (most of these originate from parents' initiatives) and childminders.

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<sup>3</sup> One exception here is the uniform standard for educators.

<sup>4</sup> In Styria, children's playgroups are required to only employ trained kindergarten and Hort educators and requirements made concerning the quality of facilities are highly cost intensive (BÖE, 2004).

Figure 1: Types of childcare for school-age children in Austria



Source: Ecotec Research and Consulting

### Formal institutional childcare

In 2004, in Austria there were 1,078 Kinderhort establishments, the majority of which was either run publicly (55%) or by publicly subsidised non-profit organisations (38.5%) (Statistics Austria, 2005). Kinderhorte are specialised childcare centres, which generally target children of school-age, but can also be set up to care for children of a much wider age range. The form of childcare services provided is principally similar to pre-school childcare delivered by kindergartens, not at least, because Hort educators receive the same basic training as educators in kindergarten. As kindergartens, Kinderhorte promote the personal development of the child, including creativity, understanding of and orientation to societal norms and values, as well as social skills. These elements are central to children's leisure activities in the Hort. In these leisure activities, children also have the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities, such as handicrafts, playing, music, reading, cooking and computer literacy. A degree of importance is also assigned to letting children spend time outdoors. A key point of distinction vis-à-vis kindergartens consists in the fact that Hort educators place equal emphasis on homework supervision and support, including exam preparation.

Childcare provided in schools is most frequently provided in one of the following forms:

1. All-day schools – care and leisure activities and schooling alternate throughout the day. As a consequence, it is not possible for pupils to participate only in school activities.
2. Schools providing afternoon care – schooling and care activities are kept strictly separate. As a consequence this form is more demand-oriented: registration is voluntary and pupils can choose the days they want to attend.

Care provided in both school forms generally comprises three elements: intensifying knowledge and practising techniques taught during official school time; time for individual learning activities (including homework and exam preparation); and leisure time (including lunch provision) (see also case study 3).

In addition, children can be sent to boarding schools, which provide the possibility for students to live in school facilities and offer a variety of learning and leisure activities. Frequently, boarding schools are also designed to promote children's special talents, such as sports boarding schools.

### Formal non-institutional childcare

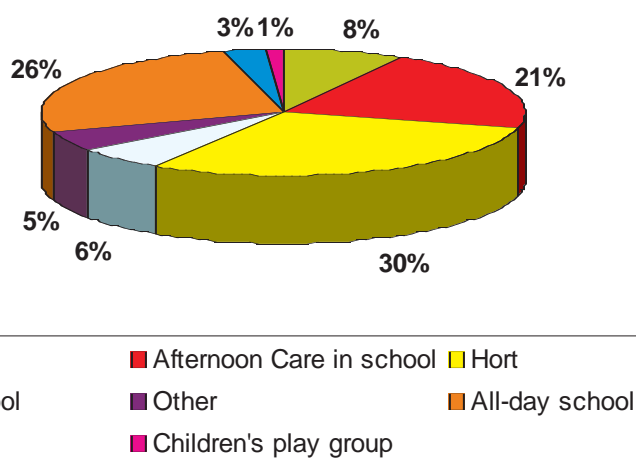
Professional childminders provide childcare services in a family-like environment. They are required to be licensed by the local authority, they have to fulfil training requirements in line with provincial standards, and they can either be self-employed or work for a non-profit organisation. Traditionally, children have been cared for in the childminders' home, but there are exceptions to this rule (see also case study 1 on the 'Mobile mothers'). In comparison to other forms of childcare, childminders place a comparatively higher emphasis on caring for the children in a real-life family situation than to plan and prepare activities geared to promote specific aspects of child development.

More than 4000 children are currently being cared for in 336 children’s play groups across Austria (<http://www.kindergruppen.at>). Depending on age, groups comprise between six and 15 children. While the kind of activities undertaken by children’s playgroups is generally comparable to those of the Kinderhorte, the teaching emphasis is different. The involvement of parents is strongly encouraged. This does not only refer to decision-making on care related issues, but also parental participation in care-related activities as well as organisational or practical tasks, such as meal preparation or doing repairs. Moreover, children’s playgroups emphasise the child’s right to decide which activities to take part in. The same applies to letting children do activities in their own way. Increasing parents’ freedom of choice, children’s play groups are highly appreciated and regarded as giving ‘good impulses’ to the Austrian care and education system.

### Childcare coverage rates and the forms of care

According to the 2004–2005 childcare statistics<sup>5</sup>, 18.4% of six to nine year olds and 8% of 10 to 13 year olds attend childcare<sup>6</sup>. Figure 2 shows that Kinderhorte, all-day schools and afternoon care provisions account for almost 80% of childcare for six to 14 year olds. Kindergartens are also represented in this figure as some children attain the school age (six years) during the year, but will have to wait until the beginning of the next school term, before they can officially start school<sup>7</sup>.

Figure 2: *Prevalence for different types of childcare provision*



Source: *Adapted from Statistics Austria, 2003.*

Note: *Numbers refer to children being in childcare at least once per week.*

<sup>5</sup> Including 2003 data on childcare provision by childminders, children’s playgroups and schools.

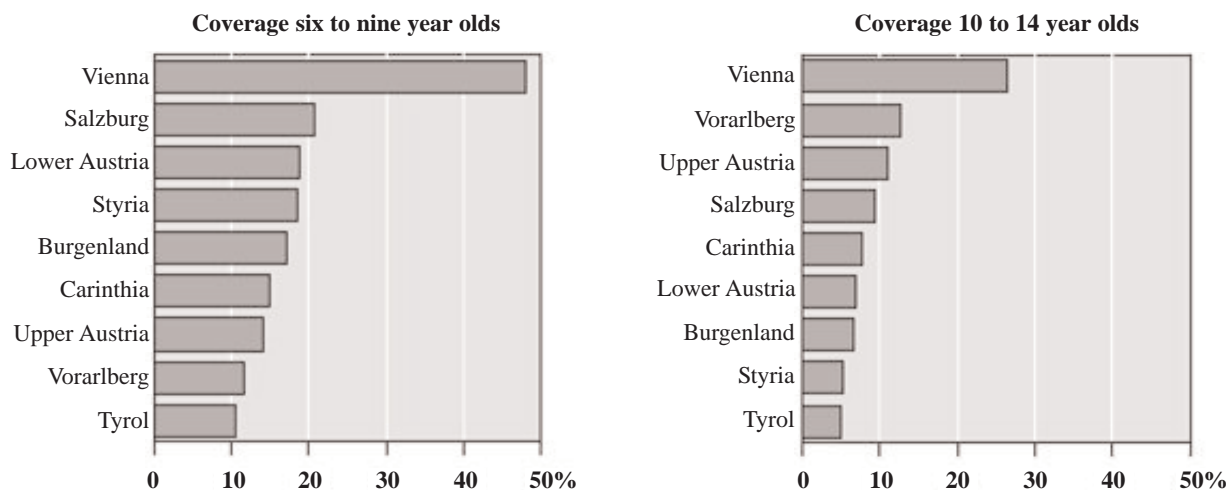
<sup>6</sup> Respective child populations have been estimated here as the average of the 2003–2005 prognoses (Statistics Austria, *Bevölkerung im 21. Jahrhundert* [Population in the 21st century]).

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, school-age children’s choice of childcare type tends to depend on the children’s age. For children aged 10–14 years, attendance at boarding schools, all-day schools and children’s playgroups is comparatively more prevalent than for younger children, who are in contrast more likely to attend a Hort than older children.

### Regional differences in coverage

Regional differences and especially the stark contrast between Vienna and the remaining eight Austrian states are a recurring theme in Austrian childcare provision. This is also strongly reflected by Figure 3 which illustrates regional differences in childcare coverage for school-age children. In Vienna, 48% of children aged six to nine years and 27% of children aged 10 to 14 years receive some form of childcare. These figures are twice as high as those in the state with the second highest coverage rate.

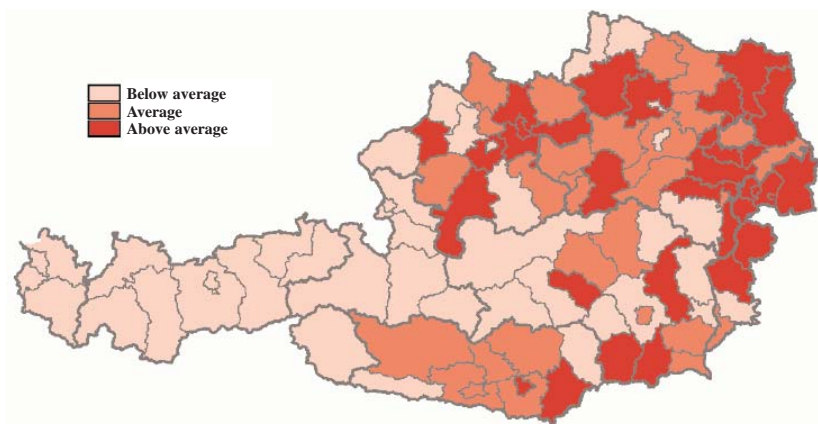
Figure 3: Regional childcare coverage of school-age children



Source: Statistics Austria, 2003.

The 2004 prognosis of future childcare demands reveals that within the federal states there may be wide variations in childcare provision as reflected by coverage rates (Figures 4 and 5). Results produced specifically for Tyrol confirm the issue of local differences. Of the 39 Hort facilities available in Tyrol in 2003, some 18 were provided by the city of Innsbruck alone. In contrast, in the political districts of Reutte and Kitzbühel, no Hort was available. In addition, public transport between districts was insufficient to allow parents and children to commute<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 4: Childcare coverage for children aged six to nine years by political districts



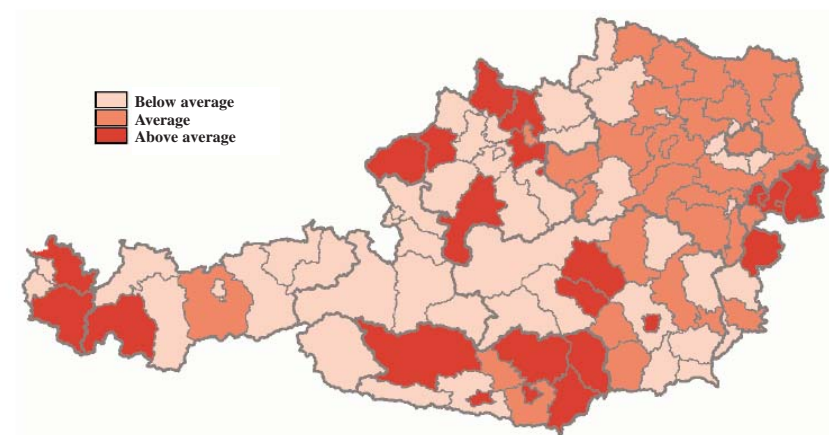
Source: Statistics Austria, 2004.

Note: Thick grey lines mark federal state borders and thin grey lines mark borders of political districts.

<sup>8</sup> Childcare in Tyrol, see Zoller-Mathies, October 2003.



Figure 5: Childcare coverage for children aged 10–13 years by political districts



Source: Statistics Austria, 2004.

Note: Thick grey lines mark federal state borders and thin grey lines mark borders of political districts.

### Opening hours and closures during the year

Discrepancies between Vienna and the remaining states are also reflected in the opening times of childcare facilities. Table 2 summarises these differences for Kinderhorte and mixed age groups. Strikingly, in Vienna service availability is much better than in other Austrian states for both types of facilities; opening hours are longer and facilities are open for more weeks per year.

Table 2: Opening hours and weeks of operation: Horte and mixed age group facilities

		At least 50 weeks/year	Less than 41 weeks/year	Before 7.30am	At least until 5pm
		<i>% of facilities</i>			
Kinderhorte	Vienna	82.3	2.8	87.2	89.7
	Other Austria	10.4	27.5	9.1	71.1
Mixed age groups	Vienna	66.5	0.6	90.6	87.1
	Other Austria	16.8	18.3	43.3	30.4

Source: Statistics Austria, 2005.

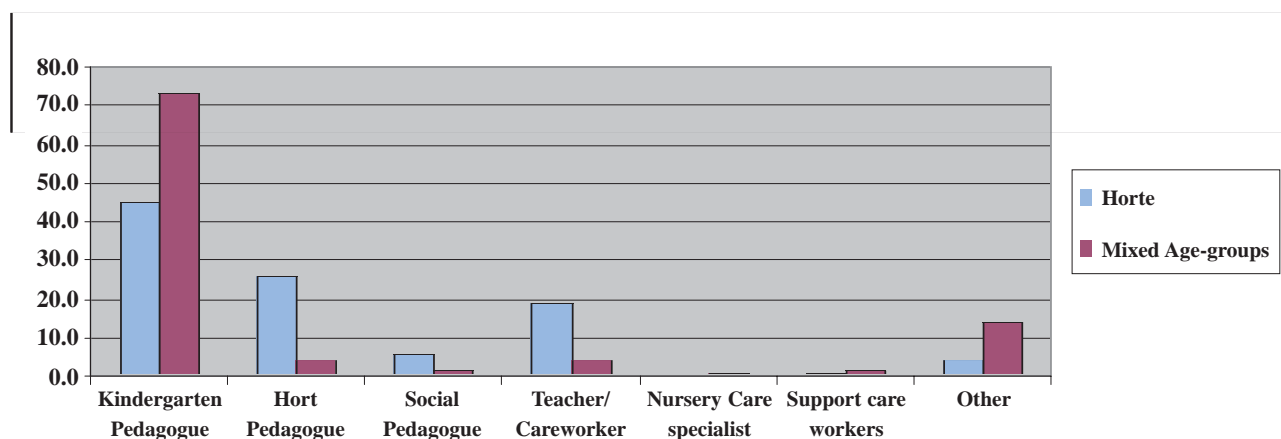
Note: 'Other Austria' excludes Styria

No data was available for this report on the availability of other forms of childcare mentioned above. In relation to afternoon care in schools, this report only refers to federal regulation, which requires schools to open until at least 16.00 (the upper limit for opening hours being 18.00). Boarding schools by definition care for children during all of their free time (if required). Obviously childminders are the most flexible resource, with availability varying on an individual basis.

## Availability of jobs

In total, of the approximately 18,300 childcare workers in Austrian institutional childcare (for all age groups) there are about 15,500 kindergarten teachers, 950 Hort educators, 250 social workers and 760 school teachers (Statistics Austria, 2005). As Figure 6 shows, the strong domination of kindergarten teachers does not only apply to mixed age groups, but also to Hort. The possibility for kindergarten teachers to be involved in care for school-age children is determined at the federal level. Normally, it is required that, if no Hort educator can be found, vacancies should be filled with similarly qualified people.

Figure 6: Care provision in Hort and mixed age groups by educational background (%)



Source: Statistics Austria, 2005.

Note: The notion of 'pedagogue' embraces several job categories in childcare that refer to kindergarten teacher, educator and social worker in English.

In addition to institutional care workers, in 2003, in Austria, some 11,606 children were cared for by childminders, of whom about one third are of school age (Statistics Austria, 2005). Moreover there are more than 700 care workers in children's play groups (<http://www.kindergruppen.at/>).

## Job descriptions

### Kindergarten teachers

While kindergarten teachers learn to work in pre-school care, in their training they can specialise to become a Hort educator (and thus also provide care for school-age children). In general, both types of educators are prepared to help children develop physical strength and dexterity, and the capacity to integrate into a group and expand their social skills. For Hort educators, the supervision of homework plays an important role. The training provided for both types of educators also incorporates positive interaction with parents, and administrative skills such as creating monthly and annual teaching plans.

### Social workers

Social workers have a much broader job description than kindergarten and Hort educators, which also explains why they are not so well represented in the childcare sector. They work with the physically or mentally handicapped or other persons with special needs, like drug addicts). They also work with youth welfare services (caring for children and

youths with family problems) and provide specialised advice to people who encounter problems in their work, school or family lives. In providing childcare services, they promote children's personal development, supervise learning activities (homework), plan and implement leisure time activities, and encourage parental involvement.

### **Childminders**

Childminders offer childcare services which are comparable to the care provided by parents themselves. In this regard close cooperation with parents is encouraged. Activities for the childminder are strongly inspired by the family context, and include playing and eating with children, but may also include the supervision of homework and typical household activities, such as shopping.

### **Care workers**

Children's group care workers are required to emphasise children's autonomy in deciding about activities they want to pursue in their leisure time. These carers must carefully observe children and respond to their needs. As a consequence, care workers also offer children a choice of activities to participate in rather than prescribing their daily programme and strive to give children the possibility to pursue these activities in their own individual way. In addition, the job requires the involvement of and close cooperation with parents during care time.

## **Training, qualification options and training organisations**

Kindergarten and Hort educators are trained by a five-year special school at the upper secondary level or a two-year special training college at post secondary level<sup>9</sup>. The former offers the specialisation 'Hort educator' after the second year of training. In addition, separate training institutes<sup>10</sup> offer the same education options to students aspiring to become social workers. Importantly, and in contrast to the large majority of European countries, training for childcare workers is not offered at university level or equivalent. As a consequence, training institutes frequently cannot offer their students the possibility to gather experience abroad (for example, through exchange programmes). Perhaps even more importantly, lacking the status of having received a tertiary level training (such as university education), Austrian childcare educators have very limited possibilities to work outside Austria.

Childminders are either self-employed or work for a non-profit organisation. Generally, state regulations require childminders to have gained qualification in specialised training, which in some instances also includes continuing to train once working as a childminder. Training is offered by a number of non-profit organisations such as the 'Hilfswerk' (relief organisation), 'Volkshilfe' (social services organisation) or 'Katholischer Familienverband' (Catholic family association) as well as some smaller such organisations. In line with different federal regulations, training standards vary strongly and as a consequence the typical duration of training ranges from several evenings up to several months of course work. It is difficult to establish and earn recognition for 'the childminder profession', because no uniform job and qualification profile exists. This also inhibits the interregional mobility of childminders. Innovative initiatives like the project 'childcare on the farm' try to change this (see case study 1).

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<sup>9</sup> The Austrian term for these training institutes is 'Bildungsanstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik' and 'Kolleg für Kindergartenpädagogik', respectively.

<sup>10</sup> The Austrian term for these training institutes is 'Bildungsanstalt für Sozialpädagogik' and 'Kolleg für Sozialpädagogik' respectively.

Regulations applying to care workers in children's playgroups are also somewhat ambiguous. Due to this, one of the main objectives of the Federation of Austrian Children's Play Groups (*Österreichischer Bundesverband Elternverwalteter Kindergruppen, BÖE*) is to harmonise these regulations. This includes the training cycle provided by non-profit organisations, which is only officially recognised in some provinces. Training is available to trained educators as well as persons without a prior recognised degree in education.

## Salary levels

The consultations revealed that salary levels in childcare could be better, particularly for those starting in the profession<sup>11</sup>. In the case of educators, this applies more to job starters, while seniority can go along with substantial increases in pay. Comparing the starting salary for primary school teachers (€22,311 per year) with respective monthly salaries of care workers, as listed with the Austrian labour market service (*Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich, AMS*) (Table 3), it seems that salaries of teachers are significantly higher than that of childcare workers. However, data are based on two different methodological approaches which makes it difficult to confirm this<sup>12</sup>.

Table 3: *Income ranges for job starters in childcare professions*

Job title	Income range for job starter (gross monthly)
Kindergarten/Hort educator	€1,100–1,450
Social worker	€1,160–1,304
Children's group care worker:	€1,035–1,170
Childminder	Estimated at €298 per child (40-hour work week)

Source: *Rötzer-Pawlik, 2004*.

According to Statistics Austria, the average gross income for employees in Austria currently stands at €25,830 for men and €15,380 for women. While again methodologies may differ from those of the AMS data source, it can tentatively be concluded that childcare workers earn an income, which comes rather close to the average female earnings. Being a strongly female dominated profession could thus also be a strong determinant of the relatively low incomes in the childcare sector.

Childminders – in accordance with relatively short training – also earn less than other childcare workers. Table 3, above, suggests an average gross salary of €298 per child for a 40-hour work week. However, it is important to note that childminders cannot take an income of this level for granted. They are exposed to a comparatively higher degree of uncertainty with respect to their level of earnings as incomes always depend on the number of children cared for and the number of hours of care provided. At the same time, it is very difficult for childminders to optimally use their working time. For example, if a childminder in Salzburg wants to work 40 hours per week, she could obtain her maximum income if she managed to find six children (the statutory maximum in Salzburg) who she could care for simultaneously for 40 hours in that week. However, this situation can only very rarely be achieved, because parents have very distinct preferences regarding the times they require a childminder for. The low number of children cared for more frequently

<sup>11</sup> While respective data is not available for childcare workers, income levels for teachers of different levels of seniority illustrate this point. In general, the starting salary of a primary school teacher amounts to €22,311 per year and increases by one third after 15 years in service. Top salaries are double the entry salary level.

<sup>12</sup> For different levels of school teachers, differences in entry salaries are definitely much smaller, with primary school teachers receiving only 4% less than a lower secondary school teacher and 5% less than an upper secondary teacher (OECD, 2005).

restricts a childminder from earning the net salary of €1,000, which Lisa Schirl from the Centre for Childminders (*Zentrum für Tageseltern*) in Salzburg regards as an acceptable sum to compensate the childminders' work. As a consequence, she demands that all childminders should be employed by a non-profit organisation and be entitled to a fixed base or minimum income and an additional flexible income that is determined by the amount of children and hours of care provided.

## **Childcare workers in the labour market**

While it is difficult to find comprehensive data on the labour market situation for such a specifically defined professional group, interviewees painted a pessimistic picture of the labour market for childcare. The AMS only provides data on the incidents of childcare workers having registered as unemployed in the past five years. Results are summarised in Table 4 below. Data indicates an increasing trend of unemployment in recent years (except for childminders). According to the AMS, social occupations have suffered a rise in unemployment. Numbers of unemployed have increased by 22% between 2000 and 2004 for the 'social workers' group and by 36% for the category 'educators and care workers'.

Table 4: *Average number of persons in childcare professions registered as unemployed*

Type of facilities	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Childminders	175	161	172	175	163
Hort educators*	25	35	39	42	56
Kindergarten teachers	434	445	460	452	490
Social workers	68	94	119	131	157
Children's group care worker	0	0	0	8	16

Source: *Rötzer-Pawlik, G., Soziales, 2004.*

Note: \* *Summarises all personnel caring for children in Kinderhorte.*

Raphaela Keller, Vice-President of the Professional Association of Kindergarten and Hort Educators, paints a different picture from the above presented data. She states that currently between 8,000 and 10,000 trained kindergarten and Hort educators cannot find suitable jobs. This differs from official statistics, she explains, because many educators are forced to pursue alternative employment if they cannot find a job in their field of expertise. Their incapacity to find a job in their field is not covered by official statistics.

## **Working conditions**

### **Institutional childcare**

There are possibilities to work part-time in childcare facilities. However, it should be noted that, particularly in Horte, part-time work can be involuntary as an out-of-school specialisation prohibits a 40-hour work week. An exception to this rule are a number of public facilities that provide both kindergarten and Horte services and allow Hort educators to work in the kindergarten during school hours.

Like in most care professions, pressure of work can sometimes be quite high, especially during 'peak times' when a large number of children are being cared for simultaneously. However, it is not unusual for one educator to care for 25 children or more at the same time.

Several interview partners have pointed out that children become 'more demanding', and there is a need for support mechanisms in caring for children. First, this concerns closer cooperation between childcare facilities and schools. Several interview partners agreed that the lack of such cooperation is very strongly related to a perceived hierarchy of educators, with kindergarten and Hort educators being many times perceived as ranking lower than school teachers. This

'class system' of educators strongly restricts the exchange of information exchange, although this would be crucial for better understanding of and dealing with children's problems and difficulties. Secondly, the perceived need for support relates to the desire for having additional personnel. On the one hand, this concerns people specialised in dealing with 'problem children' or who could advise care workers on specific aspects of their function. On the other hand, especially in schools, there is a demand for experts in organisation and development who would encourage schools to 'go with their time' and promote teamwork among teaching staff.

### **Childminders**

From the perspective of the childcare system, the main objective of childminders is to provide care for children that cannot be delivered by institutional care facilities. It is thus normal that childminders will be expected to work irregular hours and deal with changing work pressure throughout their working day and week. In addition, childminders do not only complement other childcare facilities during 'normal office hours', but are usually available to take care of children during early morning and late afternoon and evening. In special cases, care services are even offered overnight, at weekends or for holidays. While this trend allows greater flexibility for parents, it can be an unfavourable position for the childminder, especially if they have to organise their care schedule themselves and not in cooperation with a non-profit organisation. However, childminders are generally in a favourable position to determine themselves when and how much to work. The high demand for childminding services is the key condition for being able to choose who to work for and care times that optimally suit the childminder's needs.

### **Career possibilities**

Interview partners agree that career possibilities are rather meagre for childcare workers. On the one hand, this is as a consequence of a very flat hierarchy. Among trained educators, the only true possibility for promotion is to take up a management position. Raphaela Keller chooses an illustrative example to point out the limited possibilities for childminders to move up the career ladder: 'in Vienna there are 470 Kindergartens and Horte – that is the same number of managing positions. To this you can add 10 regional managers. This results in very few promotion possibilities for the approximately 6,000 educators employed'. On the other hand, there are very few possibilities for career advancement among such educators outside of the childcare facility. In general, the only option is to train to become a teacher.

### **Description of careers in childcare**

#### **Institutional childcare**

Interviewees agree, almost unanimously, that childcare work is highly appreciated among society, because 'it is perceived as necessary' and parents are very grateful for the assistance provided by care workers. In general, people view childcare work as a great contribution to society. In an almost paradoxical way, this contrasts with people's perception of the skills required for becoming a childcare worker. Quite often people form the opinion that 'it is not really rocket science' and thus childcare workers (especially those for younger children) are frequently termed 'aunties', i.e. a substitute for family members who look after children. According to interview partners, the term 'education' (Bildung) plays a key role in society's judgement of the quality of teaching professions and it is generally thought that education is provided by schools, but not by childcare facilities. Interviewees have stated that they would find it desirable if childcare workers were more regarded as 'teachers' for children's personal development (which they in fact are), in order to increase their societal status.

Like all educators, childminders are highly regarded by parents, who recognise the value of their work. However, people often believe that the work of childminders is 'easy'. For example, the 'Mobile mothers' – working in children's homes – are frequently requested to carry out household tasks in addition to childminding, but without receiving additional pay.

# 4

## Creating sustainable childcare

### Improving the standard of childcare employment

Both representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, emphasise two main requirements for sustainable childcare: assisting the work-life balance of childcare workers and pursuing an educational concept. Martina Staffe, from the Ministry of Social Security, also emphasises that these objectives must simultaneously coincide with opportunities for children to engage in recreational activities. Moreover, she points to the importance of offering parents the opportunity of being involved in care decisions.

### Gaps in employment and difficult working conditions

It has been previously mentioned that professional childcare workers do not enjoy a very favourable labour market position. For example:

- there are indications of substantial hidden unemployment among educators;
- the fact that childcare workers do not receive university-level training impairs labour mobility and reflects a negative reputation of childcare workers;
- there is no uniformed standard for the qualification of childminders and the uniform training for children's group care workers is not officially recognised in all Austrian provinces;
- earnings of childcare workers are too low and childminders in addition face substantial financial insecurity;
- looking after large groups of children and also an increase in children with special needs results in additional work pressure;
- the skills needed for working in childcare are not highly valued by society in general.

### Tackling gaps in employment and difficult working conditions

#### Unemployment

The increase in childcare facilities provided by schools would inevitably relate to increased employment. However, if hidden unemployment among educators reflects in the region of between 8,000 and 10,000 people, the additional creation of jobs will not be sufficient to meet demand for posts. For the additional 15,368 new care places in schools in 2005–2006, the Ministry of Education estimates that 250 additional teaching jobs are being created.

Job creation measures, in particular, exist in the childminding sector, where unemployed educators can be absorbed to enhance the newly arising demand for a more flexible form of childcare. Examples are the 'Mobile mothers' and 'Childcare on the farm' projects, which are described in the case studies presented below.

#### Training

##### *Educators*

Interviews reveal that there is a strong perceived need to review the current training programmes for educators. Raphaela Keller, Vice-President of the Professional Association of Kindergarten and Hort Educators, requires that all educational professions (including primary school teachers) are trained by one institution. The idea of such a move is to promote the emphasis on education in care professions and the emphasis of care in educational professions and also establish a relationship between the different educators who play a role in a child's education.

Another requirement is to improve the level of education for kindergarten and Hort educators and to provide university level courses which would increase the status of these posts. However, this will not happen in the near future as recent political developments reveal. Rather, the educational gap between childcare workers and other educators is reinforced by the establishment of eight colleges conforming to the 1999 Bologna Declaration on higher education<sup>13</sup>, from which teachers receive a university-level qualification, but from which childcare workers are excluded.

Shifting childcare specialisation to university level would also give students the option of delaying career decision-making. At present, students have to decide at 14 years of age if they want to enter a childcare college. It is possible that this move could also help to increase the ratio of men to women in childcare sector, as the resistance among boys in choosing a care occupation is likely to change as they get older.

Another advantage of modular training at university level would be that it offers the possibility to specialise in certain care modules, such as parental involvement, language education for migrant children, law, youth work, and more general courses that respond to the development and problems of society.

#### *Childminders and children's play group care workers*

Both alternative childcare forms suffer from the fact that working conditions and training requirements vary as a consequence of decentralisation. Although Austria's Federation for Children's Play Groups has developed its highly popular and thorough childcare training programme in order to create a clearly defined professional profile for care workers, the programme is not recognised in all Austrian provinces. Therefore, it would make sense for the nine Austrian provinces to define standard childcare provisions.

For childminders, the situation is even worse, because so far initiatives to develop standards and training have not progressed much. An exception is the Hilfswerk project 'childcare on the farm' which did not only pilot a new innovative form of childminding, but it also developed a uniform 200-hour training programme that will remain in place for future childminders in several provinces. Yet, as far as a formal qualification is concerned, the term 'childminder' still means very different things throughout the Austrian provinces.

#### **Working conditions**

With respect to working conditions of childcare workers, a clear need has been expressed for measures that:

- increase incomes for all types of childcare workers;
- provide income security for childminders (such as the introduction of a basic minimum wage);
- reduce the size of groups needing care;
- more recreation times for childcare workers;

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<sup>13</sup> In June 1999, 29 European Ministers of Education made a joint declaration in Bologna, Italy, to reform the structure of the EU higher education system and to create overall convergence of the existing systems in the respective countries by 2010, aiming for a common framework of readable and comparable degrees, undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, ECTS-compatible credit systems, a European dimension in quality assurance, in order to promote the free mobility of students. The declaration aims to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education. More information on the Bologna Declaration is available at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf>.



- raise awareness of the working conditions of care workers, in particular childminders;
- make teachers aware of their responsibilities regarding childcare (for example, child development);
- increase cooperation between schools and care facilities;
- provide additional personnel to give professional advice to care workers and complement their work by helping them deal with 'problem children'.

## **Shortages in the provision of childcare**

### **Need for more childcare places**

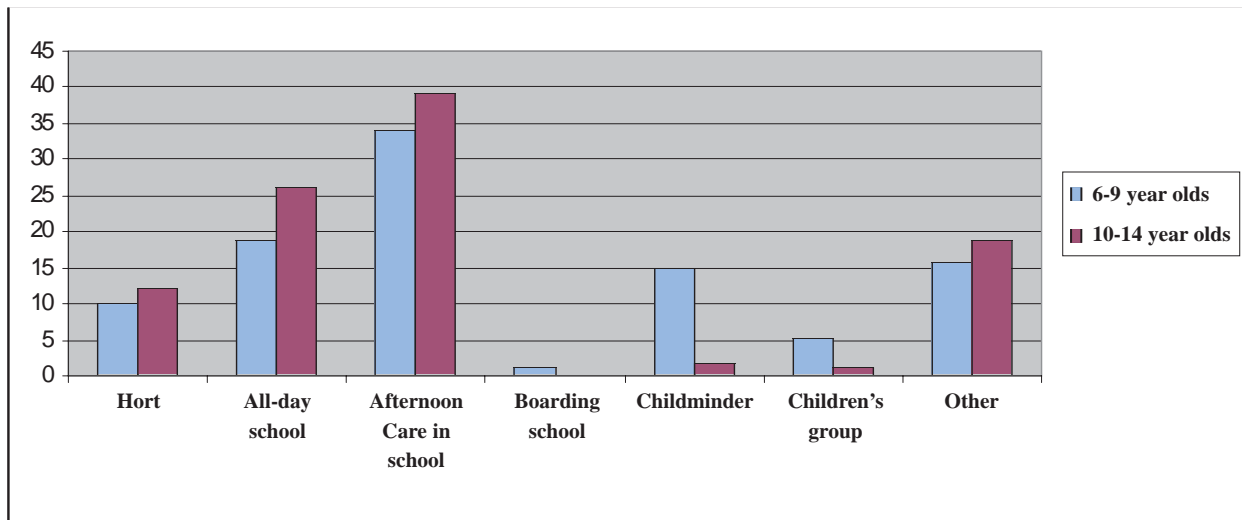
As previously indicated, the Austrian government has presented two different studies on gaps in the childcare sector in the last three years. The first is the survey 'Microcensus 2002' (Statistics Austria: Household management, childcare and care, Microcensus results, September 2002), which identifies the need for 89,400 additional childcare places, of which 46,500 are for school-age children. Objections from several provinces to these outcomes led the Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection to commission a new study, called 'Prognosis of future childcare demand' (Statistics Austria, 2004). According to this study, there is a need for 18,154 additional childcare places, of which 10,323 are for school-age children. Most interviewees think this number is too low.

What will happen in the future is not yet entirely clear. While child population will continue to diminish, several interview partners also predict that 'additional supply will create additional demand'. This could be a possible trend, especially since Austria is still a very traditionally-minded country and the willingness to put children into childcare may rise as the practice becomes more commonplace. Moreover, informal childcare will likely decline further as family members, especially grandmothers, will have a higher economic activity as well. As a consequence, Fritz Bauer from the Upper Austrian Chamber of Labour finds that over the medium term, childcare places should be created for at least 50% of all school-age children.

### **Need for different types of provision**

Demand for additional childcare facilities is mostly directed at all-day schools and afternoon care in schools (Figure 7), which speaks for a continuation of the current pattern of childcare provision. However, expanding the childminder system should be considered as a better alternative to extending opening hours for institutional childcare, according to Alice Pitzinger-Ryba from the 'Family Business' association. She quotes the example of one Hort in Salzburg which extended opening times from 18.00 to 20.00: 'Now only one child is sitting there alone with the childcare educator. This cannot be in the interest of children, educators or financial sustainability of the system. In this particular case an expansion of the childminder system would certainly be a better alternative'.

Figure 7: Need for additional childcare facilities by type ( % )



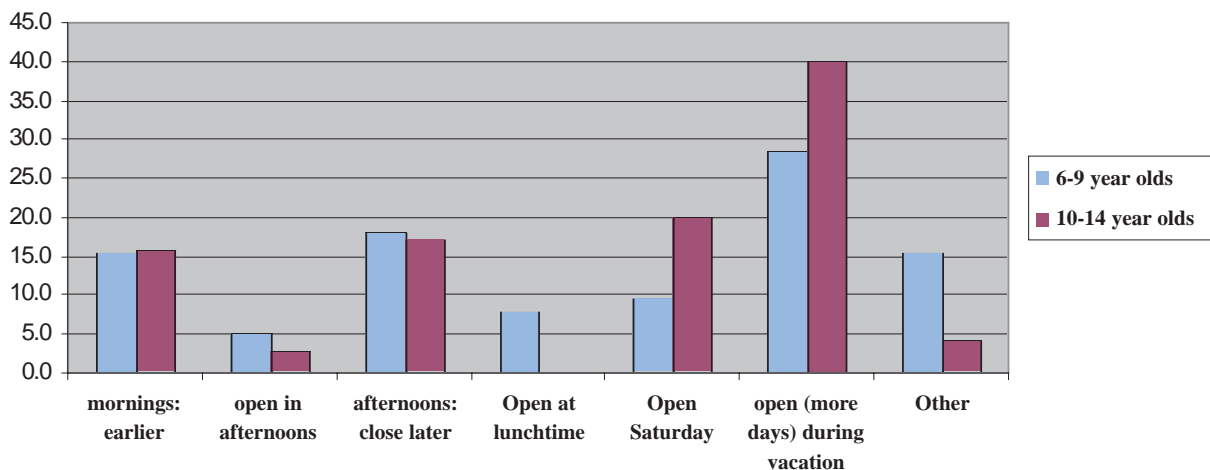
Source: Statistics Austria, 2003.

Note: For the age group of six to nine year olds, approximately 5.5% of children require additional kindergarten or nursery facilities. This is factored in the 'other' category.

### Need for different opening hours

In general, the need for different opening hours for childcare services is still frequently expressed. According to the September 2002 microcensus survey, up to 13.9% of parents with school-age children (six to 14 years old) in care institutions indicated they were dissatisfied with current opening hours. Figure 8 shows that most of the parents concerned would wish for better childcare facilities during school holidays.

Figure 8: Wish for different opening hours per childcare type and age group



Source: Statistics Austria, 2003.

Interestingly, there is also a strong desire for childcare facilities on Saturdays. In all, it seems that most parents are happier with the length of opening hours in the afternoon than in the morning. They are also generally satisfied with childcare provision over lunchtime. Distinguishing by childcare types, only about 84% of parents were satisfied with opening hours of Hort and children's groups respectively. Rates were significantly higher for afternoon care in schools (92.6%) and childminders (96.6%).

### **Quality, access and prices of care**

It is very difficult to make any general statement on the quality and affordability of childcare, because regulations and circumstances differ across the nine Austrian provinces and they also differ across the various childcare types. If satisfaction levels with different aspects of childcare facilities, except opening hours, are requested, the highest amount of dissatisfaction (17.5%) can be found among parents, whose children attend a children's group. However, Table 5 shows that this is entirely due to the higher cost of this service.

Table 5: *Reasons for dissatisfaction among parents (other than opening hours) by childcare type (%)*

Type of facilities	Dissatisfaction with quality	Difficult to access childcare facilities	Childcare too expensive	Lack of facilities for taking children/ bringing them to care facility
Hort	24.2	12.9	46.9	15.9
Afternoon care in schools	32.4	13.5	32.6	21.5
Boarding school	0	0	100	0
Childminder	0	37.9	0	62.1
Children's group	0	0	100	0

Source: *Statistics Austria, 2003*

The same costs are true for boarding schools, with which only 6.3% of parents showed their dissatisfaction. About 10.1% of parents are not happy with Hort facilities and 5.5% of parents are displeased with afternoon school care – mainly due to the quality and price of facilities. Some 96.9% of parents are satisfied with services delivered by childminders and the low level of dissatisfaction relates entirely to aspects of access. Interestingly, satisfaction with a full-time school is comparatively high at 96.3%.

Group sizes and other quality characteristics of childcare differ by region. In Vienna, the maximum group size per educator in institutional care amounts to 28 pupils, and facilities have to provide separate rooms for study and leisure activities (OECD, 2003). The average group size for children's playgroups is much lower at 12 children. Each federal state also determines the maximum number of children that can be simultaneously cared for by childminders. In Salzburg, for example, this amounts to six children maximum. While institutional care exhibits at least some minimum standards because of a unitary regulation on the training of educators, the same does not apply to alternative forms of care.

As funding regulations are a matter for the provinces, costs and affordability vary strongly between them. Parents' median payments on childcare services, including lunch, amounts to about €30 for school-age children. Yet, costs range from €0 in Vorarlberg to €184 in Vienna (Statistics Austria, 2003). On average, the parental fee makes up for only 15% of total childcare costs in Austria and equals a mere 5% of average production of employee earnings (APE), which represented €23,963 in 2002. Prices are roughly proportional to the length of service and low-income families are usually entitled to varying degrees of additional childcare subsidies (OECD, 2003).

## **Tackling shortages in the childcare sector**

It can be concluded that in Austria, there is a need for more childcare places, more flexible forms of childcare, longer opening hours of existing services and – though this can unfortunately not be specified – lower costs and a higher quality of service in some forms of childcare.

Current measures outlined earlier only partially address these issues. The expansion of so-called ‘innovative’ childcare initiatives and care provided by schools will be able to absorb a large number of additional children. However, no specific measures to create more flexible opening times have yet been taken. At the same time, alternative forms of childcare have to be promoted further, because they are not well reflected in provincial regulations. There are no indications that childcare will become cheaper in the short term, and the strong emphasis on an educational concept in care provided by schools may be sufficient to reduce concerns about the quality of childcare.

### Case study 1: ‘Mobile mothers’ and ‘Childcare on the farm’ projects

By means of redefining the childminding profession, a small number of remarkable initiatives have created new forms of childcare in Austria, which are not only strongly oriented to perceived needs of parents and children, but are also effective in creating additional employment and income in the childcare sector. Two highly successful initiatives discussed here are the ‘Mobile mothers’ and the project on ‘Childcare on the farm’.

#### Non-profit organisations: the hub of innovative childminding services

Publicly subsidised non-profit organisations are the main players in innovative childminding services. The Austrian ‘Hilfswerk’ (relief organisation) is, with 7,370 employees, one of the most important providers of social services in Austria, which includes the organisation of a network of 1,400 childminders who care for approximately 8,400 children. The Hilfswerk manages the European Union EQUAL project ‘Childcare on the farm’. It also takes responsibility for the mobile mothers project. Being operational in Lower Austria only, the latter project is operated by the Hilfswerk’s local branch, alongside two other non-profit organisations. The Hilfswerk is generally responsible for training childminders and running the childminder network. Moreover, its services include the supervision and support of childminders employed by the organisation. This also includes individual advice if childminders encounter specific problems and the provision of casualty and indemnity insurance.

#### Description of the initiatives

Through promoting and expanding the childminding system, both projects increase the flexibility of childcare provision. However, the advantages of both projects go beyond this. The ‘Mobile mothers’ offer parents even greater flexibility, because they take away the worries about dropping off and picking up children from school and so on. This is a great relief for parents, as packing together clothes and toys is not a task for them anymore. At the same time, the fact that mobile mothers care for children in a familiar environment is comforting for both parents and children.

‘Childcare on the farm’ responds in a very different way to the perceived needs of parents and children. The project was developed in response to the fact that especially in rural areas there are frequently too few children in close proximity to each other for providing institutional childcare. At the same time, the project aims to exploit the unique benefits the farm environment can bring to childcare provision: plenty of space for play and many opportunities for experiencing nature and animals as well as to observe a real-life work situation.

The two initiatives provide an increasing amount of families with childcare services. The ‘Mobile mothers’ currently provide childcare services to about 220 children a month. In addition, about the same amount of children is believed to be cared for on childcare on the farm projects throughout Austria.

#### Development of the initiatives

The ‘Mobile mothers’ were initiated in 2002 after the Lower Austrian ‘Family study’ had shown that there was a very strong demand for additional childcare services in a family-like environment. The initiative has built on the experience with the so-called ‘flying nanny’ initiative that had started already in 1997, which aimed to reintegrate unemployed educators back into the labour market. While this project was initially managed by another non-profit organisation, the Association for youth and employment (*Verein für Jugend und Arbeit*), it merged with the ‘Mobile mothers’ in 2005.

The ‘Childcare on the farm’ project started its first training session in Graz in November 2003. The last training programme has recently been concluded in Vorarlberg. However, in the future, farmers will also have the possibility to undergo childminder training specifically developed for them, since the respective modules now form part of the training options offered in respective provinces.

Both project directors perceive a strong future demand for childminding services. This, on the one hand, relates to the flexibility of the service, and, on the other hand, to the fact that the number of children is currently decreasing, thereby making it even more difficult to form groups in institutional care services.

### **Good practice**

Evidently, both initiatives reveal good practice, because they respond in a flexible way to perceived childcare needs. In addition, for both initiatives a strong emphasis is placed on guaranteeing an adequate quality of childminding services. As mentioned before, however, an additional and important benefit of both services is their contribution to job and income generation.

#### *Job creation*

Both initiatives have economically beneficial effects on the providers of childcare. According to Petra Metterlein from the non-profit organisation Hilfswerk, unemployed teachers regard working as mobile mothers as an opportunity to stay active and increase their experience in working with children. Ms Metterlein states that only few 'mobile mothers' are 'traditional' childminders who merely switched to the new scheme. Obviously, being a mobile mammy is attractive to a different target group. This certainly is also due to the fact that the mobile mothers project offers other people the possibility of becoming a childminder, who have traditionally not been given the opportunity, namely people who do not have the space to care for additional children in their own home. Currently, some 88 mobile mothers are working throughout Lower Austria.

Evidently, the project 'childcare on the farm' addresses a very different target group and thereby a particular economic problem that is widely present in Austrian rural areas. Agricultural activity is still highly important for the prosperity of these regions, but as a consequence of structural change, many farmers often need a second job in order to attain an adequate income. Childminding is one of the few activities farmers can pursue on the farm premises and thereby allows farmers to continue agricultural activity while gaining some supplementary income. Thus far, the project has trained 111 farmers and demand for the relative training continues to rise. The following are currently available to farmers wishing to pursue this challenge:

- support in writing up an application for a child minder license;
- ongoing advice and support in starting up a new job;
- regular training updates;
- casualty, liability and social insurance.

#### *No quantity without quality*

In line with childminding regulations of the separate Austrian provinces, childminders need to be licensed and are subject to controls by local authorities. In addition, in its role as the organisation responsible for the projects, the Hilfswerk has set up its own control system. Recognising the need for additional safety requirements, the responsible social insurance organisation advised all participating farms on the necessity of additional safety measures on their premises, for example the need for additional handrails.

Mobile mothers should be below the age of 50 years and have at least one child themselves. The maximum number of children to be cared for is based on the childminder's experience, the availability of space and the ages of the children. Up to a maximum of seven children may be looked after, including their own children, or a maximum of four children of pre-school age.

In line with regulations in Lower Austria, childminders in the mobile mothers programme are well trained. Training includes modules on communication skills, working with special needs children, educational science and psychology, but it also addresses the role of the childminder, which is helping mobile mothers to deal with conflicts of interests (for example, when parents pressure the childminders to also assume tasks of a 'household aid'). Mobile mothers are also obliged to participate regularly in skills updates; up to 20 training units will be run annually.

Being a nationwide initiative, 'childcare on the farm' explicitly addresses the problem of regionally diverging training requirements for childminders in Austria and aims at the creation and nationwide establishment of a consistent job description for the childminding profession. This will mean a uniform curriculum and support materials for such a 200-hour training programme (80 hours of which are practical lessons) as was developed and used in Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria und Vorarlberg. In Upper Austria, a total of 33 farmers graduated from the shorter training course. The training addresses a wide variety of topics ranging from nutrition and hygiene to first aid. Although the training does not measure up to a teaching programme for kindergarten or social education, it is very well adapted both to the funding reality and also to the work situation of the childminder and flexibility of the schemes. The emphasis in childminding is on looking after children and accompanying them in a real-life situation with a comparatively lesser emphasis on educational activities. Also, it is important not to make the barriers for entry to childminder training too high by offering courses which are too time-intensive.

#### **Further information**

Some general information on the 'Mobile mothers' can be obtained from the website of the Lower Austrian 'Hilfswerk', available at <http://www.noehilfswerk.at>. Information for this case study was provided by Petra Metterlein from the Lower Austrian Hilfswerk organisation.

Further information on the EQUAL project 'Childcare on the farm' is available at the following web page <http://www.kinderbetreuung.at/bauern/>. Additional information used in this case study has been offered by Walter Marschitz from the Austrian Hilfswerk.

## **Case study 2: Family Business**

This case study looks at the similarities between the roles of childcare providers and parents.

#### **Organisational background**

Another non-profit organisation that is dedicated to advancing childcare provision in Austria is the 'Family Business' association, which was founded in December 1998 by the Austrian Family Alliance. Being also one of the initiatives currently promoted by the Austrian federal government, Family Business engages in a range of activities all of which enhance the smooth overlap between the demands of parents and children on the one hand and the supply of childcare on the other. A surprisingly extensive service is offered by only seven dedicated employees, all of whom have at least one child themselves. The services offered range from the running of a popular au-pair service to the regular update of a comprehensive childcare database. Moreover, Family Business gives parents personalised advice on their childcare choice and dedicates itself to analysing childcare provision and gaps in this provision in Austria. In addition, the intensive networking activities of this organisation enhance communication between parents, providers, sponsors and local authorities.

## Description of the initiative

### *Childcare database*

It is the objective of Family Business to create an inventory of all types of institutional and alternative childcare available in Austria with the aim of providing families with the best possible advice regarding childcare options in their respective provinces. Although Family Business depends on the notification of newly established childcare providers, their database comprises more providers than are identified by official statistics. Parents can access this database by means of an easy-to-use search engine on the association's website [www.kinderbetreuung.at](http://www.kinderbetreuung.at). Importantly, the database offers much more information than addresses; rather, the collected information aims to give parents a very specific image of the nature of service delivered by a specific provider.

### *Personalised advice*

Family Business employees help parents to locate the childcare provider suitable for their child, taking the individual situation of the family into account, for example whether a child's development is in line with what is typical for its age group. In a personal consultation, advisors give the parents a detailed introduction to the various care types, explaining the differences between those and weighing up the benefits and drawbacks for their child. Between 15 and 20 parents are advised in this way by Family Business each day. Quite often consultations with parents last up to one hour, because many parents have little prior knowledge about the different options available and how each of these matches their needs. The discussion also requires careful reflection on a variety of aspects specific to an individual family, such as the envisioned work-life balance as well as what the family perceives as the most desirable way of caring for their children. It is often the case that parents have not thought about these issues in depth and end up depending on the childcare form chosen.

### *Networking on all levels*

In general, it is common for Family Business to respond to perceived needs in a flexible and pragmatic manner. This also applies to their networking activities in the course of their ongoing contact with providers, local authorities and parents. If, for example, in their communication with childcare facilities they learn that groups have to be closed due to an insufficient amount of children, they investigate alternative options for these children and also advise the childcare facility concerned on possibilities to merge with another nearby facility. Moreover, if employees of Family Business learn about urgent problems of childcare providers, they will mediate in communication with local and regional governments or use their contacts to find sponsors (i.e. if no funds are available for new toys or special equipment).

### *Analysis*

While Family Business leaves the scientific analysis of the childcare sector to the official bureau for statistics, it engages in a more practically oriented analysis of demand and supply with the aim of helping to develop new care models. A recent example for this kind of research was a competition for the 'most innovative childcare institutions' in Austria in order 'to show what is possible' by means of examples of best practice.

### *Au-pairs*

An increasingly popular service of Family Business is the au-pair network. The popularity of the service derives from the costs advantage of the non-profit organisation vis-à-vis profit oriented providers (au-pairs cost €60 a week for 25 working hours) with a simultaneous emphasis on good matching of skills to family needs and quality of au-pairs. The quality of au-pairs is assured by Family Business through obligatory references, including references on care experience. If au-pairs have previously worked in Germany, which is quite often the case, the organisation also inquires into parents' experiences there. If au-pairs come from neighbouring countries, the association also tries to arrange a meeting between the family and the prospective au-pair to provide both parties with the opportunity of getting a little inside knowledge before deciding to work with each other. Throughout an au-pair's stay, monthly meetings and excursions are arranged,



not only as an added benefit for au-pairs, but also to receive feedback on working conditions and possible problems. Simultaneously, parents can at all times give feedback and receive advice concerning problems with au-pairs.

### **Development of the initiative**

'Family Business' was founded in December 1998 by the 'Austrian Family Federation' (*Österreichischer Familienbund*) and aspires to become the dominant association providing high-quality childcare services in Austria. While increasing demand for the organisation's services certainly has brought Family Business closer to the attainment of this goal, problems in collaboration with individual provinces are seen as an obstacle. On the one hand, this concerns issues of funding. Although the federal government as well as Lower and Upper Austria and Tyrol are strong contributors to the initiative, Carinthia and Vienna do not yet offer any financial support. However, an even greater concern is the actual collaboration with federal states. Vorarlberg and Carinthia, for example, have resisted the introduction of a childcare hotline through Family Business and rather want to provide this advice themselves. Increased cooperation between different states in supporting the initiative would enhance its possibility to optimally serve parents and children.

### **Good practice**

In conclusion and reflecting on the above, good practice displayed by the Family Business association includes an astonishing amount of highly detailed matching of families with the most helpful services for them:

- the database on offer includes sophisticated information on more childcare facilities than are covered by official statistics;
- advice to parents is tailored to their specific situation;
- improvements in Austrian childcare provision are encouraged by analyses carried out;
- the association's employees assume the important role of a mediator between childcare facilities and public administration; and
- the organisation provides an increasing amount of childcare itself by running a well-functioning au-pair service.

### **Further information**

Information on the services offered by Family Business can be obtained from the website <http://www.kinderbetreuung.at>. Information for this case study was collected during an interview with Alice Pitzinger-Ryba, General Manager of Family Business.

## **Case study 3: Afternoon care in schools**

This case study documents the provision of afternoon care in schools. It looks at existing facilities providing care and the possibility of new jobs.

### **Development of the initiative**

Care provision by schools is not a new initiative in Austria. Responding to strong social pressures and educational expectations, individual schools in Austria were allowed to 'experiment' in providing full-time care in school facilities since 1974. Subsequently, however, there were no significant developments in this form of care and all-day schools only brought the provision of care into the regular school system in 1994. Since then, Austria has been successful in expanding the capacity of care services provided by schools: the number of students using schools as a care facility has more than doubled, from its original level of about 23,000 in 1994–1995. Increasing demand for such facilities has led the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture to endorse a new law on day care which will come into force in 2006.

### Organisational background

In accordance with this new law, all obligatory schools for the first eight years of schooling (Pflichtschulen) are required to inform parents about the possibility of day care and investigate demand for care provision. Day care has to be provided whenever at least 15 students (also from different classes and age groups) are registered for it by their parents. School/care activities have to be provided during weekdays and generally not during holiday periods. Learning activities are financed by the Austrian government and the states, while parents have to finance leisure activities their children engage in. Associated costs amount to €80, excluding lunch costs, for five afternoons of day care in federal grammar schools. Other school forms, including elementary schools (*Volksschulen*), secondary schools (*allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen*) and special needs schools (*Sonderschulen*) generally adhere to this €80 guideline.

### Description of the initiative

Since the first initiatives in the 1970s, there were two forms of day care delivered by schools:

- all-day day schools (*Ganztageschule*)
- afternoon care provided by schools (*Tagesheimschule*, e.g. Kinderhort establishments).

In all-day schools learning, care and leisure activities alternate throughout the day. Therefore, attendance at care and leisure activities is compulsory for all students. In contrast, schools providing afternoon care separate school and day care activities, as a consequence of which it is possible to make attendance voluntary and flexible, so that children can also join on individual days. Generally, the second form of care is more favourable for parents as it allows them to have childcare tailored better to their family needs. Moreover, parents highly appreciate that they have the choice but are not obliged to send their children to an all-day school.

The use of an educational concept is emphasised in the provision of childcare by schools. Care activities are guided by the objectives to encourage and support the learning process, to promote social learning and creativity, to provide meaningful leisure activities and to facilitate recreation. Schools are required to provide three types of care activities. In subject-related learning activities they intensify knowledge and practice techniques, which students have been introduced to during regular school hours. As a rule, no new knowledge is acquired in afternoon care. Moreover, children have to spend part of their time on individual learning activities, such as homework and exam preparation. The remainder of the day children can spend on leisure activities, including lunch, which can also be organised in cooperation with local sports, music and computer clubs.

### Good practice

The provision of childcare in schools has a number of advantages. First, no additional facilities for childcare need to be created, as school facilities are being put to good use. Secondly, children will stay in an environment which they are used to and where they feel comfortable, and parents can be sure that children will have finished their homework before going home. Thirdly, teachers have the chance to get to know their pupils in another, less formal environment; it is a perfect opportunity for teachers to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of children and they can address individual needs during care time more easily than in the school context.

Expanding childcare in schools has also a favourable effect on job creation, for both teachers and care workers. While subject-related learning activities have to be supervised by a teacher, kindergarten teachers, Hort educators and social workers may also be brought in to supervise the preparation of homework and leisure activities. According to Andreas Schatzl from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, one of the main reasons for regarding the recent expansion of childcare in schools as a positive initiative was because it improves the overall employment situation, especially for

young teachers who can more easily access a teaching position and gather experience in afternoon care (see Table 6). In order to bridge the transition to the enforcement of the new day care law, during the current school year 2005–2006, there is provision for 15,368 new childcare places which creates jobs for an additional 250 teachers<sup>14</sup>.

Table 6: *Additional day-care places and teaching positions, 1 September 2005*

Federal state	School year 2004–2005	Additional places	Additional teaching positions
Burgenland	1,613	369	6
Carinthia	2,754	703	11
Lower Austria	4,018	3,535	57
Upper Austria	4,242	3,080	49
Salzburg	1,902	748	12
Styria	4,262	2,343	38
Tyrol	890	1,440	23
Vorarlberg	3,172	604	10
Vienna	29,187	2,545	43
Total	52,040	15,368	250

Source: *Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2005*

### Notes of caution

While the pursuit of an educational concept is ideal, it is in several instances not regarded as an accomplishment of care activities in Austrian schools. A number of interviewees had a more sceptical view on this issue. One main criticism relates to the fact that frequently in schools children are merely ‘looked after’ rather than actually ‘cared for’. This is also regarded as a consequence of teachers emphasising ‘knowledge provision’ in their work, rather than child development. One interviewee in particular emphasises that care provided in schools is not yet adapted to suit children from socioeconomically disadvantaged and migrant family backgrounds. According to this interviewee, very little was done to use afternoon care to balance out differences in the learning progress. These shortcomings can be linked to the limited finances available for an expansion of this day care option.

Moreover, while at first glance, funding of the school/care initiative sounds like a lot, in fact this issue has raised serious concerns at federal state and local levels as new resources have to be developed for the obligatory provision of afternoon care in schools. National funding is restricted to full finance for five hours of subject-related care or 50% finance for 10 hours of independent learning per week. In addition, the new childcare law does not foresee any subsidies for necessary operational adjustments in schools, for example lunch provision. States have to create additional resources to finance their share of the new care obligation and no funding solution has so far been suggested for necessary constructional adaptations of school buildings to the new care requirements. A small-scale Upper Austrian study on the economic feasibility of afternoon care in schools shows that this care type generates enough benefits to cover the costs of provision through increased employment among parents, teachers and care workers as well as the general increase in purchasing power that would result from such higher employment. In order to identify financing options for the new school model, it is thus advisable to look into the new income sources that it will generate.

### Further information

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture has published information on childcare provided by schools online at the web page <http://www.dieneueschule.gv.at>.

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the Ministry could not provide information on additional demand for other types of care workers.

# Conclusions

The analysis has revealed that in the near future Austrian childcare for school-age children faces two major challenges:

- a substantial need for more childcare for school-age children as well as different forms of childcare;
- the trade-off between the creation and maintenance of favourable working conditions for childcare workers and accomplishing financial sustainability and affordability of childcare.

Certainly, there is an obvious need for more childcare places in Austria, which is most likely larger than recent analysis suggests. Irrespective of the current debate on exact numbers of additional places needed, it is clearly discernible that the Austrian government now assigns a much higher status to childcare for school-age children than several years ago. The intended expansion of childcare provided in schools is only one example of new the government's new outlook on the matter.

However, while the number of childcare places grows and demand for more flexible opening times increases, a care programme has to be planned accordingly rather than offering 'more of the same' initiatives currently available:

- first, in some states (Bundesländer) and localities across Austria, the need for more childcare is higher than in others;
- secondly, depending on local characteristics, more institutional childcare and longer opening hours will not always be the miraculous remedy to satisfy increasing demand for childcare.

For example, in rural areas it will be increasingly difficult to find the critical number of children in close proximity to each other to make institutional childcare worthwhile. At the same time, only few children in institutional childcare would really make use of opening hours until 20.00. Therefore, a respective lengthening of opening hours would neither be feasible nor desirable from the perspective of the child. In such instances, a systematic expansion of the childminder system could have great benefits, since it is suited to accommodate small groups of children at unusual hours and is in place to complement institutional childcare; the 'Mobile mothers' and 'Childcare on the farm' provide excellent examples of best practice in this regard. However, since the pursuit of an educational concept has been long recognised as a priority in the country, Austria still has to set out a clear definition of the minimum standards for childminding in this respect. This especially concerns the training requirements for childminders, which currently varies and obstructs the establishment of childminding as a generally recognised profession. This recognition would also help childminders to develop a common profile and concentrate their efforts to improve the difficult working conditions.

For institutional childcare, it is not 'more of the same' that is required to see improvements. The new Day Care Law (*Tagesbetreuungsgesetz*) creates a basis for the rapid expansion of care places and puts the structures for the pursuit of an educational concept firmly in place: the 'new school' has to provide both learning and care activities. However, it has been suggested that additional measures will be needed to put this general structure in operation. Respective comments revolve around making it clearer that equal value is given to education and care as complementary factors in child development. These measures would include the establishment of a university level training institution for all educators which would offer basic education for all care workers and would allow those workers to specialise in various modules for teaching and childcare professions. According to a number of interviewees, this would have the added benefit of eliminating invisible barriers between teachers and care providers and, thereby, would encourage cooperation between schools and other care institutions.

As previously outlined, the second major challenge is to find a balance between the creation of jobs and favourable working conditions for childcare workers and safeguarding both financial sustainability and affordability of childcare. The current expansion of afternoon care in schools provides a good example for the difficulty encountered in trying to reach such balance. While the increase in the amount of childcare places has to be regarded favourably, a potential threat

to the success of the initiative is that so far it has not been clarified how provinces are to create the additional resources to finance their share of the new care obligation. In addition, there have been no suggestions regarding how to finance necessary constructional adaptations of school buildings. A small-scale Upper Austrian study on the economic feasibility of afternoon care in schools shows that this care type generates enough benefits to cover the costs of provision through increased employment among parents, teachers and care workers as well as the general increase in purchasing power that would result from such higher employment. In order to identify financing for the new school model, it is thus advisable to look into the new income sources that it will generate.

Moreover, the case of childminders in Austria illustrates the trade-off between creating additional, highly flexible and affordable childcare services on the one hand and improving the working conditions of childcare workers on the other. For childminders, a basic minimum income and the related increased income security would imply a significant improvement of working conditions. However, these improvements would be directly transferred to a higher cost of childcare provision, which in turn could result in affordability problems for parents.

This is also the case for trained educators. Even though their wages are also regarded as relatively low, educators frequently face a high and increasing level of work pressure. As a consequence, it is not only an increase in the amount of childcare workers that is currently required in line with childcare expansion, but also an increase in incomes in the childcare sector. Simultaneously, there is a demand for the employment of specialised staff to advise care workers in their daily work situation and provide active support in addressing 'problem children'.

All these measures will make childcare more expensive and as a consequence question the affordability of the services available for parents. Moreover, the benefits of additional childcare provision would need to be looked at in conjunction with identifying financial support in the future.

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