



Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

info sheet

'It is essential to attract more people into the labour market. This aim will be achieved by following the course of an active employment policy, of making work pay and of measures to reconcile working life and family life, including the improvement of child care facilities; (...).'

Presidency conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 22 and 23 March 2005



WHAT is the context?

Due to demographic changes and the ageing of the population across Europe, childcare is an issue that is increasingly gaining attention. It is being debated in the context of how best to support families in raising their children and encourage women to enter the labour market. The current climate for children in the EU is characterised by a focus on children's welfare and an understanding that combating poverty and promoting social inclusion are still significant issues facing the EU. Increasing women's labour market participation has been recognised as an important aspect of counteracting the declining birth rates and ageing population in Europe. Improved provision of childcare services would also support families across Europe in achieving a better work-life balance.

WHY this research

In the light of increasing interest and debate on the issue, the Foundation initiated research into the childcare sector in the EU, with a specific focus on out-of-school care for children of mandatory school age (5 to 12 years). The research set out to explore employment initiatives in the sector that support the development of a qualified, high quality childcare workforce, and to consider the affordability and sustainability of this provision. The research looked at existing information on childcare services and gaps in the enlarged EU and identified measures at the national, regional and local levels. The research consisted of a desk review of the childcare sector across the EU25, in-depth analysis of case studies from six countries (Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the UK) and good practice case studies selected from the six case study Member States.

WHAT are the findings?

Childcare provision

- While European employment initiatives such as the Barcelona targets aim to increase childcare for younger children, there is no specific childcare policy in place for school-age children.
- Childcare provision varies widely across the EU, and Member States are at varying stages of addressing the need for better services.
- Lack of good childcare can be a significant barrier to women entering and remaining in the workforce.
- The main problems identified were lack of availability, high cost, inaccessibility, poor quality, and inadequacy in the timing of provision.

Employment opportunities

- While the childcare sector is expanding rapidly across the EU, the majority of jobs are not well paid and are often below the recommended pay levels.
- In Member States where most of the out-of-school care is provided by teachers, the pay and image of childcare workers tend to be higher.
- The issues of low pay, poor image, and poor working conditions are barriers to attracting potential workers to the childcare sector.
- The majority of people opting for childcare training are women.

- The lack of men and ethnic workers in the sector needs to be addressed, as the sector should support a mixed workforce that reflects the diversity of the children in care.

Working conditions and employment issues

- Current working conditions in the childcare sector differ in employment practices, opening hours, and coverage across the EU.
- The main employment issues are salaries, quality and access to jobs, opportunities for career progression and the often negative image of working in the sector.
- Overall, especially in Member States where the care is provided by poorly qualified staff and not by teachers, the employment conditions are not favourable to developing a vibrant sector.
- Due to the low pay levels in the sector, many people with good skills leave to pursue employment opportunities in other sectors.

Training and qualifications

- There is a wide variation in training and qualification levels in the childcare sector across Europe, with non-teaching qualifications the norm in some Member States and academic qualifications the standard in others.
- In many Member States there are only partial accreditation and regulation systems in place for childcare training.
- A minority of Member States have developed frameworks for benchmarking qualifications in the sector and developing pathways for career development, to help childcare workers progress into supervisory and management positions.
- Quality in training is a key starting point to providing better overall quality in the sector.



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WHAT now?

The current context for school-age childcare in Europe has been fixed nationally by family, employment, equality, education and social protection policies. While the need to support the care of young children under the age of five is continuing to gain recognition across Europe due to initiatives such as the Barcelona targets, the care of school-age children is not sufficiently recognised by public policy. There is a need for a comprehensive childcare policy to ensure that out-of-school childcare for school-age children is a positive experience for parents and children. This will in turn enhance policy developments concerned with strengthening the economy through increased labour market participation.

Childcare policy development should be pursued as a policy in its own right, rather than as an aspect of policies primarily concerned with promoting equal opportunities in the labour market or the reconciliation of work and family life. It is important, however, that public policy addresses the needs of children, parents, families and communities, and does not just view childcare from an economic perspective. Childcare services should aim to accommodate a diverse workforce and promote the successful integration of work and family life.

The development of a European framework would provide a structure for regulating quality and standards in private sector childcare provision. A European framework would also be a tool for regulating childcare training and providing benchmarks to ensure the quality of training provision. This would assist in professionalising childcare and raising the status of employment in the sector. Networking activities across the EU should be initiated to share good practice on the development of training and qualification structures in different contexts.

The provision of school-age childcare services varies extensively across Europe. Some Member States are providing good quality services with well-trained staff, while others are struggling to provide adequate services to meet the needs of the child and their parents. As school-age care as a whole is under-researched and under-represented in policy, further research in a number of areas would be desirable.

Further information

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Main report (from end June 06)

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef0632.htm>

Six national reports (AT, CY, HU, PL, SE, UK)

www.eurofound.eu.int/areas/labourmarket/childcare.htm

Foundation work on related issues

Sector Futures: Childcare services sector

http://www.emcc.eurofound.eu.int/sector_futures.htm