



School-age childcare in the EU

info sheet



WHAT is the context?

Childcare is gaining an increasingly high profile in European social policy. Improving the provision of childcare is a key way to encourage and facilitate women to enter the labour market, hence to achieve the Lisbon employment targets, which call for an employment rate of 60% for women to be achieved by 2010. Providing high-quality childcare is also a way to support families, facilitate a better work–life balance and – crucially – ensure the welfare of children themselves, as it is increasingly being recognised that poverty and social exclusion still affect many children in Europe.

WHY this research?

The issue of childcare has been extensively studied in recent years. However, the area of out-of-school care for children of schoolgoing age (between the ages of five and 12 years) has not attracted the same attention. This form of childcare includes any arrangement outside compulsory school hours that involves elements of physical care, socialisation, play and/or education. The Foundation has conducted in-depth research into out-of-school childcare, with a particular focus on developments in employment and good practice in the childcare sector. Its research has explored two key aspects of the issue: employment initiatives that support the development of a skilled childcare workforce, and the affordability and sustainability of provision for children living in disadvantaged areas (areas with a high density of households experiencing poverty and deprivation).

The services in the study include daycare centres, before- and after-school facilities in private, public and third sector settings, and other regulated and voluntary services. In addition to a literature review of the EU situation, the first phase of the research analysed the employment creation potential of childcare in Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the UK. The second phase, on the provision of childcare in disadvantaged areas, analysed the national situations in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Portugal and, once again, the UK.

WHAT are the findings?

Employment, training and services

- Overall, the childcare sector is growing across the EU. However, working conditions across the Member States studied vary in terms of employment practices, opening hours, and coverage.
- In Member States where teachers provide most of the out-of-school care, the pay and image of childcare workers tend to be higher.
- Across the EU, a variety of training schemes and qualifications are available, with qualified teachers providing care in some Member States, and less qualified non-teaching staff providing it in others.
- Childcare services should meet the needs of children and provide a variety of stimulating and engaging, age-appropriate activities. It is also essential that care meets the needs of families by offering flexible hours and affordable services.

Care in disadvantaged areas

- The facilities and services available to children in disadvantaged areas are often lacking or inadequate.
- The key characteristics of successful out-of-school childcare in disadvantaged areas are public sector support, community involvement and joined-up services.
- Out-of-school childcare services operate more successfully and have a greater impact if the local community is involved in developing and managing them.
- Families living in disadvantaged areas often have a number of problems that are best addressed in a holistic manner by care that works in partnership with other services, such as social services, education and health.



- In some areas, out-of-school care is used to address the particular problems facing families from ethnic minorities, which can help to improve children's attendance and achievement at school, provide language support and promote social integration.
- Out-of-school care is also provided for children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities or children who live in a household with such problems as domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse.

Social inclusion and equal opportunities

- Childcare services should promote the successful integration of work and family life.
- Employment growth in the childcare sector can help in providing equality of opportunity to all children and at the same time can boost the labour market participation of women.
- Issues of equality can be reflected both in terms of employment in the sector, and in the provision of services.
- The childcare sector should support a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the children in its care.
- There is a gender imbalance in the workforce which needs to be tackled: for example by creating incentives to recruit more men to work in the sector, and identifying role models who endorse the value of childcare as a career choice.

Perspectives of the social partners

Trade unions are in favour of improving the provision of out-of-school care for a number of reasons. Out-of-school care is seen to reap the following advantages: to benefit workers, boost women's participation in the labour market, improve opportunities for career development, reduce the stress experienced by workers with children, bring positive health outcomes to both children and parents and provide employment, especially in disadvantaged communities. Trade unions are also interested in improving the employment conditions and career opportunities of care staff.

Employers are similarly keen to see improved provision. In order to compete effectively, companies need a good quality, reliable and productive workforce. Out-of-school care can facilitate this by enlarging the pool of workers from which

employers can recruit. When workers have access to reliable out-of-school care they are also more likely to remain with their employer – a huge consideration when the costs of recruiting and training an employee are added up. Furthermore, increased employment in disadvantaged areas will result in higher household incomes: businesses in turn will benefit from the greater circulation of money in the local economy.

Governments stand to gain from ensuring the provision of good quality, affordable and accessible care – both generally and in disadvantaged areas in particular. The provision of such care can help governments meet their strategic objectives of poverty reduction, improved educational attainment, economic development, social inclusion, community safety, better health and work-life balance. It may also help them address the longer-term challenges of demographic change and global competition.

WHAT now?

Across Europe, lack of availability, high costs, inaccessibility, poor quality of service and inadequacy of provision characterise much of the childcare that is on offer. A key challenge for policy, therefore, is to support childcare throughout Europe that favours all children equally.

Initiatives that boost the quality and availability of care are welcome and should be supported to ensure that out-of-school care is an enriching experience that supports children's personal, emotional and cognitive development. Boosting the quality of care will, in turn, reassure parents that their children are cared for while they are at work, hence raising labour market participation and strengthening the economy.

Childcare policy development should be pursued as a policy in its own right; the social protection policy agenda is a key tool for ensuring that such policy development is undertaken in a child-centred manner.

Further information

Teresa Renehan, Information Liaison Officer: ter@eurofound.europa.eu
Main reports

Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0632.htm>

Out-of-school care services for children living in disadvantaged areas
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0752.htm>

National reports

These are available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/labourmarket/childcare.htm>

Other Foundation research

Information on another research project on the future of the childcare sector is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc>

The industrial relations aspect of childcare is addressed in *Reconciliation of work and family life and collective bargaining in the European Union: An analysis of EIRO articles* <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0606.htm>



Publications Office

Publications.europa.eu

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Wyattville Road, Loughinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland
Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00
Email: postmaster@eurofound.europa.eu
Website: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu>