European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

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Authors: Angela Elniff-Larsen, Melissa Dreyling and Jenny Williams
Research institute: ECOTEC, UK
Research group: Joanna Pickering, Mattias Wihlborg and Barbara Orthodoxou, ECOTEC, UK, Pia Steffens, ECORYS, Netherlands, Krisztina Manyik, ECORYS, Hungary, Katarzyna Matuszczak, ECORYS, Poland
Foundation project: Sustainable care services
Research managers: Gerlinde Ziniel, Robert Anderson, Barbara Gerstenberger, Greet Vermeylen

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Wyattville Road, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland - Tel: (+353 1) 204 31 00 - Fax: (+353 1) 282 42 09 / 282 64 56
email: postmaster@eurofound.eu.int - website: www.eurofound.eu.int

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Wyattville Road
Loughlinstown
Dublin 18
Ireland
Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00
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Foreword

Childcare is a topic of much debate in the enlarged EU due to demographic changes and an ageing population. To date, the EU has been generally supportive of developments in childcare policy, although as policy has traditionally focused on children of pre-school age, the provision of care services for school-age children after school hours and during holidays varies extensively across the 25 EU Member States. Some Member States provide quality provision with well-trained staff, while others are at varying stages of creating better services for children and parents.

Against this background, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions initiated research into the EU childcare sector, focusing on out-of-school care for children of mandatory school age (five to 12 years). The research aims to fuel the current debate on modernising childcare systems across the EU, and to encourage policymakers to review existing childcare information, pinpoint gaps in services and identify support measures to develop childcare jobs.

The report argues that quality in training may be a key starting point to providing quality in the childcare sector in the EU. The report identifies that targets to improve quality of life, to combat exclusion and discrimination, to promote childcare employment and better wages and to strengthen social cohesion cannot be achieved without standardising childcare policy across Europe. The report reveals that poverty still exists across the EU and employment growth in the childcare sector could lead to increased labour market participation of women as well as men.

The report explores examples of good practice and we hope that these will pave the way for policymakers to review the framework for equal opportunities and social inclusion and address the significant variations in employment standards in the childcare workforce across Europe. 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.

By examining key themes in the ongoing dialogue regarding out-of-school childcare and by looking at examples of current policy priorities, we hope that the report's findings provide a picture of the existing state of childcare development across the EU. In addition, we hope that the report can contribute to shaping EU childcare policies aimed at solving existing problems in the sector, increasing labour market participation and promoting a better work–life balance.

Jorma Karppinen
Director

Willy Buschak
Deputy Director

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Introduction

This report examines developments in employment in childcare services for school-age children in the 25 EU Member States. The study aims to support the debate on the modernisation of care systems in Europe, to review existing information on childcare services, to pinpoint gaps in the level of service in the enlarged EU, and to identify measures at national, regional and local levels which are assisting the development of employment opportunities within this target group. This report is essentially a job creation study exploring attempts to create quality and sustainable childcare services for school-age children and employment in the childcare sector.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the study was twofold: to support the current policy debate by documenting policy developments in the provision of out-of-school care for children of mandatory school age (five to 12 years of age) across the EU, and to provide examples of implementation in a variety of delivery contexts in both the EU15 (the 15 EU Member States prior to enlargement in 2004) and NMS10 (the 10 new Member States which joined in 2004). It was considered important to carry out research into the care possibilities for children aged five to 12 years, as it is an area of childcare provision which has not been widely researched to date. However, the research identified slight variations between Member States, owing to differences in the school starting age across the EU. The report considers the extent to which these developments represent high-quality and sustainable childcare provision.

The research aims to explore employment initiatives in the childcare sector designed to support the development of a qualified, high-quality childcare workforce, and to consider the affordability and sustainability of this provision.

The objectives of the research are to:

- pinpoint gaps in current research and policy developments;
- identify good practice in employment developments in affordable, high-quality childcare;
- explore how developments in childcare services support the promotion of equal opportunities in employment;
- identify gaps and shortages in the supply of childcare for school-age children across the EU and how this differs between Member States;
- highlight policy issues for future research.

Methodology

The study methodology comprised:

- A desk review of the childcare sector across the EU25. The review explored childcare for school-age children as a whole, but paid particular attention to children of mandatory school age. The overview examined and analysed policies, literature and reports from sources such as EU governments, unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- In-depth analysis was conducted on six case study Member States – Austria, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom – and six national reports were drawn up providing

thorough research on childcare policy, provision of care, employment features, future trends and sustainability issues. This included desk-based research and interviews with key stakeholders such as policymakers, parents, teachers and practitioners. This report uses research findings from these six Member States to reveal key themes, trends and issues which are used to compare and contrast childcare provision.

- Good practice case studies were selected from the six case study Member States to exemplify how policy can be implemented in practice. These case studies were produced in the context of each of the six Member States and are used in this report to illustrate different types of current out-of-school childcare provision, after-school care systems and policies.

Main themes

The study focuses particularly on childcare provision for children of mandatory school age. It looks at the quality of services currently available and employment opportunities in the childcare sector.

In addition, the study examines key themes in the ongoing dialogue regarding out-of-school care and looks at examples of current policy priorities to create a picture of the existing state of childcare development. The childcare workforce demonstrates significant variations in employment standards across Europe.

The report explores:

- the skills and experience required in childcare jobs and the status of childcare careers in different Member States;
- the provision of childcare by sector, comparing and contrasting the employment conditions and rights of those employed as paid childcare workers to those in the voluntary sector;
- how societal and cultural expectations and traditions influence whether childcare costs are met by the state or parents;
- how employment conditions affect many organisations and people, including governments, employers, the voluntary sector, parents and teachers;
- variations in training and qualification structures implemented by Member States to provide different standards of care;
- employment growth and service developments in the childcare sector in relation to current gaps and shortages in provision;
- the direction of childcare services for school-age children and future needs for the sector.

Case study selection

The six case study Member States were selected to demonstrate childcare systems for school-age children in different contexts and at various stages of development. For example, Sweden was selected because its policies are often used as a representation of best practice in childcare, while Cyprus was chosen because of its unique system of schooling and childcare for school-age children. Case study areas were also selected to explore variations between EU15 and new

Member States. The case studies illustrate how childcare for school-age children is provided in practice and how it 'brings to life' good practice by revealing the uniqueness in current forms of childcare services for school-age children. References to the case study examples are frequently made throughout this report to highlight different childcare developments for school-age children in a variety of different contexts.

The selected case studies represent a variety of different types of out-of-school services, ranging from adventure playgrounds in the UK, to school day rooms in Poland, and mobile childcare services in Austria. These studies have been integrated into the report to demonstrate various forms of good-quality out-of-school childcare provision and to highlight unique aspects of individual services. A full list of the case studies, including a short description of each and references to them in this report, is provided in Annex 1.

Policy context

The European Union and childcare policy

In general, policy across the European Union has been largely based on economic motives to strengthen the economy. However, there has been an increasing realisation of the need to develop social policy at European level. As a result, the EU has not only promoted equality of legislation, but also of community policies. For instance, there has been an increasing emphasis on promoting gender equality and offering equal employment opportunities for men and women: European directives have been set on equal pay, maternity leave and parental leave, equal treatment of men and women at the workplace and in the area of social security. However, it is important to note that family policy, as an overall concept across Europe, is still developing and there is not yet a common understanding of the concept of family policy (Bahle, 2005).

The European Council and Commission recognise the importance of ensuring suitable childcare services as an essential step towards achieving gender equality and increasing female labour market participation. Targets for childcare set during the Barcelona summit in 2002 extended previous targets set on female employment rates in the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. However, only labour market-related targets could be set at European level: well-being and educational targets must be set at national level. The development of childcare policy by the EU has, therefore, been focused on generic employment issues, rather than service developments or user needs. However, the EU has provided practical and financial assistance to significantly increase investment in childcare initiatives across the EU in order to raise service delivery standards. The European Social Fund has been used in a number of Member States to support existing childcare places, to increase the number of childcare facilities and to improve the quality of childcare services to meet the diverse needs in employment, education and training.

The Barcelona targets were primarily designed to address the needs of parents with children of pre-school age, rather than the needs of parents with children of mandatory school age. The targets were intended to influence childcare services by helping Member States to remove barriers to employment for women. There is currently no European-level childcare policy directly supporting children of mandatory school age. National governments have reached various stages in establishing priorities to meet the demand for childcare places for pre-school children, but only a few are starting to address the needs of school-age children. Childcare policy for children of

mandatory school age remains in the development stages in most Member States, although some of the 10 new Member States have yet to begin development work in this area. The EU was established on the principle that social progress and social convergence resulted from economic integration. This historical standpoint, with social change resulting from economic change, has resulted in limited policy development from a societal perspective, which leaves the problem to national governments to address. The urge to develop childcare policy at European level has, therefore, been largely driven by the need to increase women's labour market participation rather than developing high-quality childcare provision to aid children's social and personal development.

European childcare policy developments have emerged within the context of a broader range of employment-related policies concerned with the reconciliation of work and family life, equal opportunities, and social protection. These are outlined briefly below, and explored in more detail in Chapter 1.

Reconciliation of work and family life

National governments are becoming increasingly aware of the need to move beyond simply meeting European targets and implementing childcare policy for children aged under 15 years. Governments need to assess childcare provision more critically, considering issues concerned with the actual content and quality of childcare services. A key aspect in improving childcare provision is to integrate childcare policy into a broader set of policies around the reconciliation of work and family life for men and women (Pavan-Woolfe, 2004). However, most governments are unfortunately still focused on simply providing childcare services and have not yet successfully integrated child policy into employment and family policies.

By widening the context of childcare, it is possible to consider a broader range of employment issues that impact on the demands for childcare services, such as parental leave, care services for other dependants, flexible work patterns, job sharing, part-time work, and the balanced sharing of domestic tasks and family responsibilities between men and women. Childcare provision cannot be developed in isolation and should be explored in the context of other systems that interact with the care of children and the family unit. This will ensure that childcare policy developments support the protection of women's and men's rights and help stimulate active participation in the labour market.

Childcare is, therefore, a central component of policies concerned with the reconciliation of work and family life, and improving the quality of family life by enabling parents to work and achieve a higher standard of living for their children. Good childcare provision for children of all ages can help families manage the complex demands of parenthood. Quality childcare impacts on the quality of life for parents, families and communities. Although the motivation for childcare policy development has been led by demands to strengthen the economy by increasing women's labour market participation, quality of life issues significantly impact on women's labour market participation and are central to offsetting the current declining birth rates and ageing population across Europe. Quality of life is a substantial issue because the extent to which women can enter the workforce is determined by the support available to help balance the demands of caring for children with employment demands.

The quality of childcare provision, therefore, does not impact solely on the children attending care facilities, but also affects their parents and communities. The needs of children, their parents and communities have been poorly represented in policy debates to date. Similarly, the quality of employment for childcare sector workers has received limited consideration in policy documents. The debate on the quality of childcare provision needs to be broadened to include a consideration of employment conditions in the sector. In all, the creation of employment in the childcare sector and childcare provision should be developed to meet the needs of:

- children;
- families with and without children;
- communities;
- childcare workers.

This report questions the extent to which these key stakeholders are currently considered in the development of childcare provision, and the implications this has for the development of a high-quality childcare system that offers both rewarding employment and stimulating out-of-school childcare services.

Social protection and equality

Current EU social protection and equality policy sets the foundations for the protection of workers' rights across Europe. According to the European Commission, social protection systems have an important role to play throughout the EU in underpinning the development of society and the economy and to support individuals and families (European Commission, 1999). Social protection policies are intended to strategically reduce poverty, promote social and civil dialogue, create jobs and address regional and social disparities. The new EU social agenda (2005–2010) focuses on providing equal opportunities and jobs for everyone and ensuring that EU economic growth and job opportunities benefit everyone in society.

The EU framework for equality (commonly referred to as the Employment Directive) plays a key role in counteracting discrimination in society. It aims to curb discrimination in the workforce, with measures designed to combat discrimination on the basis of age, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief. The framework will help to set minimum anti-discriminatory standards throughout the EU by 2006 through the implementation of key objectives such as sexual orientation regulations and amendments to existing regulations on sexual discrimination.

Age-defined childcare policy priorities

Traditionally, childcare policy and provision in the EU25 has focused on younger children, to provide pre-school care for children from birth to five years old. This is the result of a complex mixture of cultural influences and political structures. The focus on younger children is not surprising given the fact that the European childcare policy debate has focused more on how to increase women's labour market participation. Therefore, providing childcare for younger children has been prioritised because it is more difficult for mothers of pre-school children to return to the labour market than for mothers with school-age children. Significant variations in the level and quality of care for school-age children are evident across the EU25, and the question arises as to whether children should be cared for by family or professionals. The care of younger children is less contested, given their need for constant supervision. The issues are much more complex in

agreeing appropriate forms of childcare for school-age children, as they may be viewed as needing limited supervision in certain Member States, while other Member States place greater emphasis on providing safe and stimulating activities for older children.

The policy focus on younger children has resulted in limited policy development for school-age children to date in many Member States. This has resulted in a marked distinction between the extent of childcare provision available for children of pre-school age and those between the ages of five and 12 years. Even in Member States at the forefront of policy development for older children, policies are very recent and continue to be developed. Some of the old Member States, such as the UK and Sweden, have the most developed childcare policies for school-age children, but these have also only emerged in the past few years. For example, in the UK, the Labour government is currently exploring the role of breakfast and after-school clubs as a means of extending childcare provision. Overall, out-of-school childcare is gradually becoming established across the EU15, as the system is being reshaped to provide services for children up to the age of 12 years, and in some instances, up to the age of 14 years. In contrast, developments in childcare services within a market economy in new Member States have been poor to date. Although developments are, therefore, most evident within the EU15, key challenges remain in all EU25 Member States, with families requiring ongoing or further support to deal with a variety of additional issues affecting the family. These issues include: helping to support families to achieve a decent standard of living; developing a system of social assistance; and providing advice on family planning and helping families avoid unwanted births.

Culture

The care of children of all ages is heavily influenced by culture and history. Current childcare systems across Europe represent a mixed variety of provision. The childcare sector does not provide a simple employment structure, as it is affected by social perceptions and traditions unique to each Member State. Cultural issues affecting the development of the childcare sector include:

Family – the integration of the family unit, the respective roles of the mother and father in childcare, and the extent and perception of lone-parent families all affect the demand for and use of childcare services. The composition of the extended family unit also varies across Europe. In southern Europe, for example, the extended family strongly influences the nuclear family and shapes how childcare services are used by parents and determines who looks after children when parents are at work or in education or training.

Role of the female – perceptions that women should not work and should stay at home to look after children remain common in some Member States. Such perceptions particularly occur in eastern European countries, where prior to the fall of communism, childcare was delivered as a centralised, standardised service for all children. Since market forces have dominated eastern economic systems, government ideologies have changed, resulting in the progressive delivery of childcare provision. The decrease in childcare places has been accompanied by declining opportunities for women to secure paid employment, limited availability of part-time jobs and unsuccessful measures to reintegrate women returning from leave back into employment.

Image of the child – perceptions of the child's role and function in society are integral to developments in childcare provision and the standard and delivery of childcare services in each

Member State. The extent to which children are valued by a society and seen as part of a family unit and responsibility is taken by the government for childcare have implications for the provision of out-of-school childcare. An OECD thematic review of early childhood education and care policies and provisions in 12 Member States noted that policies are 'embedded in cultural and social beliefs about young children' (OECD, 1998).

Expectation – perceptions of 'quality childcare' vary among Member States in relation to the age of children. The extent to which childcare provision represents a high-quality service is heavily influenced by cultural values and the history of childcare provision within the national context.

Function – the function of childcare also varies by Member State; in some countries it is primarily viewed as an extension of education provision, while other Member States perceive that childcare provides more informal activities through unstructured play. In many Member States, like Cyprus, childcare has a strong educational focus and is viewed as an extension of the school day. In other Member States, for example Hungary, childcare activities are focused on encouraging children to enjoy sports and other cultural activities.

Defining childcare for school-age children

This report employs a number of working definitions to classify key characteristics of childcare provision.

There is no widely accepted definition of childcare for school-age children because of the varying approaches used across the EU. The difference between childcare and primary school is often unclear, increasing the confusion about what does and does not constitute childcare.

The European Commission network on childcare used the following definition of childcare for school-age children in their 1996 report (Meijvogel and Petrie, 1996) that comprehensively reviewed out-of-school childcare services available in the EU Member States:

> *'services which take over the responsibility for children when school is over but parents are not available – whether because they are working or for other reasons.'*

For the purposes of this study, childcare for school-age children has been similarly defined as:

> *'any arrangement for school-age children outside compulsory school involving elements of physical care, socialisation, play and/or education.'*

It is recognised that childcare for school-age children can encompass provision for children aged three to 18 years, depending on the definition employed by each Member State. For this study, attention is focused on children aged five to 12 years, but consideration has been given to variations in school ages across the EU25. For example, children can start formal schooling from the age of three years in Spain, compared to the age of seven years in Latvia, Estonia and Sweden. The provision of childcare can include a range of services such as day-care centres, breakfast and after-school clubs, holiday clubs and other regulated services. Furthermore, the division between school time and after-school activities can often be blurred. This is because what some Member States term 'after-school' time is actually considered to be 'in-school' time by other Member States. For example, in Cyprus the official public school day ends at 13.00, whereas the school day in the UK ends at 15.30.

Quality of life

Quality of life issues are currently part of the EU's social policy agenda. The agenda encompasses key issues such as employment, economic resources, family life, community life, health and education. The debate is central to and underpins all discussions on employment and services within the childcare sector. 'Quality of life' takes into account the impact of deprivation and income inequalities on families, work life, and social networks. It also considers how these elements influence life satisfaction, happiness and a sense of belonging in the community. 'Quality of life' will be discussed in this report in reference to how it impacts on both the lives of parents and children.

Formal employment

Formal employment is considered to be secure positions with wages, providing national insurance, health and safety protection, and an employment contract. The increasing number of people being employed in the childcare sector has fuelled debate around working conditions and the importance of formal employment. However, informal employment also plays a significant, but unclear role in the childcare sector. In many Member States, the use of maids, friends, and family members as informal carers for children of all ages impacts on the sector. However, because informal care is difficult to quantify and track, further research is necessary to determine its impact across the EU and in each Member State.

Job creation

'Job creation' is a term used very broadly in this report in reference to employment developments. It refers to the expansion of the childcare sector and the creation of new jobs which offer formal and secure waged employment. Job creation is very simply the end-result of the economic development process. A key challenge for the childcare sector is to combine economic growth with the creation of more and better jobs.

Characteristics of out-of-school childcare

Childcare is intended to provide a safe place where children can be looked after when parents are unable to provide care. Quite often after-school childcare is provided informally by extended family such as grandparents. In some Member States, such as Denmark, the formal childcare system plays a significant role in caring for children. In formal centres and 'after-school clubs', school-age children are provided with a range of academic or recreational activities that are designed to keep them safe and stimulate their growth and development in a variety of ways. Examples of typical activities provided by these services include language lessons, help with homework, sports, playing computer games, baking or visiting a museum.

Jobs in childcare

In some Member States such as Austria, after-school childcare is often provided by trained teachers, which is not the case in other Member States such as the UK, where childcare staff have a lower level of training. Job duties tend to focus on providing a variety of educational activities or recreational activities such as sports or arts and crafts. Individuals who work in after-school care often cite the chance to work with and get to know children and parents as the most rewarding aspect of their job. There are a variety of job titles for individuals providing childcare for school-age children in the NMS10 and EU15, including childminder, social worker, after-school care teacher and playgroup leader.

Key findings

Out-of-school childcare across the EU25

Chapter 1 describes the current climate for children in the EU and explores key social and economic developments affecting family structures. By examining the current childcare climate in relation to past research, common trends are revealed. For example, childcare provision continues to vary significantly across the EU, and Member States are at varying stages of addressing the need for better childcare services for school-age children.

The current situation for children in the EU has been set by a focus on child welfare and an understanding that combating poverty and promoting social inclusion are still significant issues which the EU must address. Increasing women's labour market participation has been recognised as an important part of counteracting the current declining birth rates and ageing population in Europe. Childcare is a key component in increasing women's labour market participation rates, as the lack of childcare options can be a significant barrier to women entering and remaining in the workforce. Key problems with childcare services across Europe include a lack of availability, high cost, inaccessibility, poor quality and inadequacy in the timing of provision. Families across Europe are finding it increasingly difficult to combine work with busy family schedules. Therefore, a key challenge for policymakers is to support families in achieving a better work–life balance.

Policy developments in the case study Member States

Chapter 2 chronicles the policy priorities that have steered the development of childcare services and employment opportunities in the sector across several EU Member States. It reveals that childcare policy does not focus on school-age children and in many Member States the emphasis continues to be on protecting, rather than caring for, children. The research did not uncover any EU-wide family, employment or social policies that directly targeted the care of school-age children. However, there are positive developments that impact on younger children, such as the Barcelona targets set during a summit in March 2002. Even though the policy deficiencies were highlighted, it is important to note the existence of a plethora of good practice provision for school-age childcare across Europe. The existence of such good practice provision is well placed to support the trend in policy towards an increasing recognition of the need to support childcare services in general.

Working conditions and employment issues

Prevailing working conditions in the childcare sector are explored in Chapter 3, highlighting the variance in employment practices, opening hours of childcare services, and the level of childcare provision across the EU. These working conditions give rise to a number of employment issues concerning salaries, quality and access to jobs, opportunities for career progression and the often negative image of working in the childcare sector. Overall, in many Member States where teachers do not provide out-of-school care, the employment conditions are not favourable to enhance the development of a high-quality service.

Training and qualifications

Chapter 4 considers the existing training and qualification base in the childcare sector, and it considers the extent to which these support the development of employment opportunities in the sector. In some Member States, non-teaching qualifications support a pool of trained staff in

childcare services for school-age children. However, in many Member States, academic teaching qualifications are the main types of training available. The system does not support the training of non-teaching staff in the same way. As the childcare sector is growing, in many Member States the demand for childcare employment is increasing. There is a need to provide appropriate quality training and qualifications to match this demand. The research pointed to difficulties in defining quality and standards of training and this was a factor in the variety of qualifications found across Europe. This may indicate a need to consider the establishment of a European framework to regulate childcare training and provide benchmarks to ensure good-quality provision.

Gaps and future needs

Gaps in existing childcare provision and future needs for the development of the sector are identified in Chapter 5. It proved difficult to determine current gaps in provision as the research was more lateral than vertical. Key gaps included the insufficiency of opening hours, and the lack of rural and wider urban provision in certain Member States. Cost, sustainability, quality, and access to services were also highlighted as potential problems, as were the lack of both people from ethnic minorities and men working in the sector. As mentioned previously, the quality and lack of training and qualifications are also problematic.

In the future, provision of services will need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of parents in an increasingly flexible workplace. The rapid expansion of the sector has also highlighted the significance of wider quality issues in the sector. Recognition of social protection and equal opportunities are also integral components in ensuring the future quality of childcare provision.

Conclusion

The provision of childcare services for school-age children varies extensively across Europe. Some Member States are providing quality provision with well-trained staff, while other countries are struggling to provide quality services to meet the needs of children and parents. As childcare for school-age children is generally under-researched and under-represented in policy, further research is required in a number of areas.

Policy provision for childcare 1

This chapter examines the current EU policy context for addressing childcare for school-age children. It begins by reviewing the current climate in the EU for addressing children's overall welfare. The chapter positions the current policy dialogue alongside the development of childcare services for school-age children and explores the interface between childcare policy and broader EU debates around social exclusion, women's labour market participation, and the concept of the family. Finally, this chapter highlights previous research on school-age childcare across the EU.

Although this report highlights the gaps in current school-age childcare provision across the EU, it is important to recognise that the EU has been generally supportive of the development of childcare policy and practice, although to date this support has primarily focused on children of pre-school age. In addition, EU developments have made a significant contribution towards enabling women to participate in employment, education and training. In recent years, EU funding has specifically assisted national governments in increasing investment in childcare initiatives designed to improve and extend childcare provision, and enhance the quality of childcare services to help parents balance work or education with family needs.

Situation of children in the EU

The climate for children across the EU has been largely set by policy focusing on children's rights and welfare. However, over the past decade children's issues have increasingly entered into European discourse. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child made a significant contribution towards the development of child-centred policy. The convention formed the underlying basis for '*A children's policy for 21st century Europe: first steps*', published by the European Children's Network (EURONET) in 1999. Since then, the EU has experienced economic and political change, including the introduction of the single currency and enlargement to 25 Member States.

Although enlargement has provided new opportunities for economic growth, many children living in the new Member States will still experience high levels of poverty, discrimination and exploitation. Changing political climates and social change may also negatively impact upon the EU's efforts to strengthen policies designed to safeguard children's rights. Social change is a continuing process, with the EU facing demographic shifts on an unprecedented scale as a result of common trends such as increasing life expectancy, a declining population of working age, and falling birth rates. These demographic changes will potentially negatively impact upon the development and resourcing of children's services across the EU.

Social exclusion

Despite being among the wealthiest regions in the world, child poverty has not been eradicated in the EU, with approximately one in 10 children living in a household with unemployed parents. Child poverty and social exclusion have increased significantly in many EU Member States during the past 20 years. Moreover, child poverty is linked to a number of other welfare issues such as violence, homelessness, health inequality and educational disadvantage. EU social policy developments have gradually evolved since the 1970s, resulting in highly developed modern-day social protection systems that safeguard people against the risks of inadequate incomes arising from unemployment, ill health and invalidity, parental responsibilities, old age or the loss of a

spouse or parent. They also guarantee access to services that are essential for a dignified life, such as health provision.

Combating poverty and promoting social inclusion, therefore, remain key challenges for the EU, despite the advances made by social protection policies. A high proportion of EU citizens continue to consider themselves poor and view their net income as inadequate to provide a comfortable living (European Commission, 2003). As a result, social protection and employment measures are limited in their ability to guarantee adequate income and resources to preserve the quality of life of many citizens in the new Member States. Reducing poverty thus represents a policy challenge for most of the new Member States. This is partly due to the complex impact of social exclusion and the multi-faceted nature of deprivation which are not high on the policy agenda, such as reducing unemployment and family breakdown, which constitute two major factors leading to social exclusion.

Women's labour market participation

Gender equality has been a fundamental EU principle for many years. This is evidenced by directives on equal pay, maternity leave, parental leave, social security and equal opportunities in the workplace. The current EU targets for women's labour market participation and childcare have no legislative force, and are essentially a quantified set of targets. However, target-setting has helped to stimulate reforms and represents a major success of the European Employment Strategy (to be discussed further in Chapter 2). Even though Eurostat Labour Force Survey figures indicate that women's employment rates are increasing and the employment gap is declining, female unemployment remains high.[1]

Demographic changes include a reduction in fertility rates over the last 15 years. This is attributed to the number of children parents can realistically support, rather than a reduction in the desired number of children (Pavan-Woolfe, 2004). Parents commonly cite the lack of childcare facilities as a disincentive to having children. Women often leave the labour market because childcare facilities are not available, too costly, inaccessible, of poor quality, or are of an inadequate standard. In general, Eurostat figures indicate that women without children are more often employed than women with children (Eurostat, 2003). Therefore, increasing women's labour market participation is essential if the EU is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010.[2] Improved childcare facilities will not only encourage women back into the labour market, but will also help address problems associated with an ageing labour force and declining birth rates.

Cultural differences also impact on women's labour market participation. In Scandinavian Member States, for example, women's employment reaches over 70%. In contrast, southern EU Member States record much lower participation rates for women; for example, Greece and Italy report less than 50% of women participating in paid work outside the home (King, 2005). However, there are indications that attitudes towards women's participation in the labour market are changing across the EU. Indications include:

[1] Eurostat European Union Labour Force Survey, 2003. Further information on the methodology of the survey is available at http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/dsis/employment/info/data/eu_lfs/index.htm.

[2] This is one objective of the Lisbon Strategy set out by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000.

- rising female employment rates in the past five years;
- sustained increases in the number of women pursuing higher education, holding top-level jobs and entering politics;
- increasing evidence that men are sharing domestic responsibilities, including childcare.

The case study below is an example of a childcare programme located in Wales in the UK that is designed to increase women's labour market participation.

The Genesis project

Rhondda Cynon Taf, Wales, United Kingdom

The Genesis project provides free childcare to parents with the aim of increasing the economic activity of parents in disadvantaged areas, while simultaneously reducing the number of children affected by poverty. The project specifically targets women, but the resources are available to parents (men and women) throughout the area who wish to access training, learning or work opportunities. The project achieves this by working alongside parents, helping them to explore and realise their aspirations through the provision of free childcare which is supported with guidance and counselling.

In addition to providing free childcare for children of all ages, the project works with parents to help them explore long-forgotten hopes and aspirations. The project supports parents by providing or identifying appropriate training courses or work opportunities. The programme values the community it serves and offers volunteer opportunities as another way of building project capacity and helping parents develop their work-related skills.

Further information: http://www.rctearlyyears.org.uk/

In recent times, research in the UK has begun to examine the impact of after-school programmes on increasing parents' labour market participation. Current research by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions is examining the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot Programme, which is designed to help parents of school-age children attend work. As the programme is still in the pilot phase, final results are not yet available. Initial research into the implementation phase indicates that it is too early to assess the extent to which the pilot programme is 'ensuring the local supply of places in affordable, accessible childcare' and disseminating childcare information (Barnard and Knight, 2005). Moreover, the programme appears to be making a positive impact on parents by establishing contact with lone parents and other parents in a non-threatening way through their children's schools.

Concept of the family

Any consideration of employment developments in childcare services needs to be set in the context of the family in Europe. A variety of traditions and changing histories influence family structures across Europe. Family relationships vary across Europe and variations in government–family relationships have led to the development of different family policies across the EU (Bahle, 2005). However, despite this diversity in family structures, a number of common trends are evident across the EU:

- fewer marriages are recorded;
- marriages are taking place later in life;
- couples are having children later in life;
- couples are having fewer children;
- higher rates of marital breakdowns are evident;
- increasing numbers of non-marital unions are emerging;
- one-parent households are on the increase;
- a decline in fertility levels is apparent;
- the population is ageing.

These trends are changing the concept and structure of families across the EU. As a result, families are finding it increasingly difficult to assume their role in, and contribute to, society as they are experiencing increasing economic and social demands (Fotakis, 2005). European societies are currently searching for policies that embrace the changing needs of the economy and society but that also respect and enable men and women to make different family life choices and live in a variety of family formations. In new Member States in central and eastern Europe, the family plays a particularly important role in society, and families are also supported by the state. The challenge for childcare policy at the European level will, therefore, be to effectively interact with variations in the 'family' concept across Europe, and to be adaptable to support the development of services in line with current and future trends in family structures.

School-age childcare in the EU

A comprehensive review of school-age childcare services was published in 1996 by the European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities. The situation was described thus:

> *'A number of Member States have a strong proactive policy and high levels of provision, notably Denmark, France and Sweden. In other Member States, services in recent years have been increasingly from a low baseline (for example, Luxembourg and Portugal); in some cases (for example the Netherlands, the Flemish Community in Belgium and the UK) in response to short-term government initiatives to promote services. A few Member States show little sign yet of significant development of formal school-age childcare services, for example Ireland, Italy and Spain' (Meijvogel and Petrie, 1996).*

The review noted that childcare provision at that time included many delivery models, such as: organised family day care; school-based provision (which may or may not be part of the education system); childcare centres; and care integrated with younger children. Services were managed by public authorities or private organisations or a combination of both. In most Member States, childcare provision was delivered as part of the welfare system, although in some Member States (Belgium, Denmark and France), the education system was directly involved in managing childcare for school-age children. Most welfare systems across the EU required parents to pay a proportion of costs, which were means-tested according to family income and circumstances.

The European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities review concluded that there was no 'one way' to deliver childcare for school-age children across the EU. Similar conclusions can be drawn regarding provision in 2006 – a

variety of different delivery models are currently providing care for children before school, after school and during school holidays. Many factors affect the type of provision implemented in any given context, including history, politics and culture. A uniform or blanket approach cannot be adopted as providing the 'best' childcare service across the EU, and consequently a single definition cannot be applied to determine the quality of childcare services across Europe.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how children are currently situated in the EU. The welfare of children is currently an issue of great concern across the EU because of high levels of poverty and the continued need for greater social inclusion. Family concepts across Europe are significant because the variations in family relationships influence family policy and have implications for the need and take-up of out-of-school childcare in different contexts. Families also have to deal with a variety of key demographic shifts such as increased life expectancy and decreasing birth rates, which impact on the need to increase women's labour market participation. This examination of the current climate for children across the EU provides a foundation for considering attempts to create quality and sustainable childcare services for school-age children and employment in the childcare sector.

The EU climate described above also provides the background context for exploring policy developments for childcare for school-age children in Chapter 2. The following chapter examines current policy areas across the EU that impact on childcare services for school-age children. Specific policy examples from EU15 and new Member States will be used to exemplify key themes in existing childcare policy.

Childcare policy priorities 2

The previous chapter explored the broad EU policy climate and situated the provision of school-age childcare services in the current European context. This chapter examines key themes within current childcare policy and draws on examples of current policy in the EU15 and new Member States and considers the future direction of policy development in this area. The chapter explores these themes at a national level, and explores the extent to which these measures are addressing the needs of employers, parents and children across the EU. The first part of this chapter will address meeting the needs of parents and employers by looking at:

- EU-level employment, family, and social protection policy;
- national labour market participation policy.

The second half of the chapter will address meeting the needs of children through:

- EU-level policy in child welfare;
- national-level policy themes such as the focus on pre-school children, the emphasis on education, the lack of provision for school-age children, good practice, and future trends in developing child-centred policies.

The chapter concludes by highlighting the need for policy development relating to school-age children across the EU.

The current context for childcare for school-age children in Europe has been set by policy priorities focused on the family, employment, equality, education and social protection. There are no current policies in the EU25 which directly impact on the provision of childcare for school-age children. However, there are several key employment initiatives which set the climate for childcare policy for school-age children and set childcare targets for children under the mandatory school age.

Meeting the needs of parents and employers

The following policies have been developed to address demand-side issues from parents and employers to facilitate labour market participation.

Employment policy

Lisbon Strategy

The Lisbon Strategy is a key European policy setting the context for childcare across the EU, but does not directly impact on the provision of childcare services. Its significance is in setting the stage for economic growth and employment, in which women play a key role. The 2001 Lisbon strategies[3] of economic, social and environmental renewal have a combined EU aim of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010', with sustained growth, more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion (Presidency Conclusions, 2000). An environmental dimension was added explicitly to the Lisbon Strategy as a result of the Gothenburg European Council (Presidency Conclusions, 2001).

[3] Comprising the Lisbon Strategy agreed at the Lisbon Council of Ministers in March 2000 and the sustainable development strategy agreed at the Gothenburg Council of Ministers in June 2001.

The conclusions of the 2005 Brussels European Council reiterate the need for urgent action to relaunch the Lisbon Strategy, with a renewed focus on growth and employment, and identify the following core strands:

- Article I: Knowledge and innovation as engines of sustainable growth;
- Article II: Making Europe an attractive area in which to invest and work;
- Article III: Growth and employment making the way for social cohesion.

The renewed Lisbon Strategy proposes to focus efforts on delivering stronger and lasting growth and creating more and better jobs. It calls for action to deliver growth and competitiveness, to make Europe a more attractive place to invest and work in and to facilitate innovation. However, it has been suggested that without investment in gender equality, social cohesion and sustainable development, including strong policy commitments in these areas, the EU will not reach its economic goals (European Women's Lobby, 2005). Gender mainstreaming is a central part of this process and increasing women's labour market participation is an important component in achieving economic growth and increasing competitiveness across the EU. Providing adequate childcare services is a key mechanism to enable a higher rate of women's labour market participation. Without childcare provision, many women are unable to enter or return to the labour market.

A major goal at the Lisbon summit was to raise women's employment rates to 60%. Improving childcare facilities (for children under the mandatory school age) throughout the EU was one of the mechanisms identified to reach this target. Gender equality was a priority in all EU policies and actions, encouraging national governments to use European Social Funds to begin to help alleviate gender inequalities and boost women's participation in under-represented areas of the labour market, such as science and engineering. Since the Lisbon summit, results have indicated that employment targets have not yet been achieved, the women's employment level has not reached the interim target of 57% and European economic growth has been limited (King, 2005).

European employment strategy – Barcelona targets

The European employment strategy has impacted on childcare by promoting the reconciliation of work and family life. In accordance with the Conclusions of the European Council of Barcelona (2002), the European Employment Strategy has provided quantitative objectives for increasing the availability of childcare provision across the EU (Fotakis, 2005).

The EU formulated targets for childcare during the Barcelona summit as a follow-up to the Lisbon targets concerning the participation of men and women in the labour market. The importance of childcare services was recognised by the European Council and Commission by identifying suitable childcare services as an important component in achieving gender equality and increasing women's labour market participation. The targets include removing disincentives to women's labour market participation and striving to provide the following for their families by 2010:

- 33% of children aged under three years must have access to a form of childcare;
- 90% of children aged three to the mandatory school age must have access to a form of care.

The 2002 Barcelona summit set targets for children up to mandatory school age. This means that childcare issues are commonly the responsibility of national governments. However, the Barcelona targets set the climate for discussions about further targets for childcare for school-age children.

Family policy

In keeping with employment policy, there are no family policies that directly include childcare for school-age children. There is no official definition of the family at the European level and family policies are developed, defined and implemented within national remits rather than by the EU (European Commission, 2002). Family policy generally refers to policy which impacts on relationships between the family and society or relationships among family members. This encompasses initiatives such as childcare, family leave, child benefits, marriage, and parental leave.

National family policies vary widely across Europe, despite family structures changing in similar ways (Hantrais, 2004). Cultural diversity has also led to varying styles of family policy development despite most European Member States dealing with similar problems associated with low fertility, rising child poverty and low employment rates (Kaufmann, 1994). Most Member States have been unsuccessful in tackling these issues through family policies. Although there is considerable scope for European family policy development, the addition of 10 new Member States into the EU may limit the potential for a common European model, resulting in greater diversity across Europe. At present, there is not even a common European understanding of the fundamental concept of family policy (Bahle, 2005).

With regard to younger children, pre-school childhood policies include maternity and parenting benefits. Maternity benefits are some of the oldest family benefits in Europe and are evident in all European Member States as a result of EU policy directives. However, European policy development concerning childcare services for children over the age of five years is clearly lacking. The southern EU Member States view the resolution of family and work as closely connected to low birth rates and high employment, rather than arising from a lack of resources because women are prioritising family care over labour market participation.

Social policy

The European Commission's Social Policy Agenda, published in June 2000, is part of an integrated approach towards achieving economic and social renewal, as outlined in the Lisbon Strategy. It seeks to ensure a positive interaction between the EU's economic, employment and social policy goals and is designed to act as a benchmark for annual employment reports published by Member States. The Social Policy Agenda states that 'quality of work includes better jobs and more balanced ways of combining working life with personal life'. A communication from the Commission entitled *Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality*[4] supports this aim alongside the Lisbon Strategy, and was reinforced by the goals expressed at the subsequent Nice and Stockholm summits (European Commission, 2001). The Social Policy Agenda, therefore, provides a broad framework for addressing quality, and promoting quality in working conditions.

[4] COM (2001) 313 Final of 20 June 2001 from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

Quality is central to the modernisation of the European Social Model. The communication identifies indicators to measure the performance of Member States on work–life balance issues. It further states that the social partners are the main instruments for delivering work–life balance targets, the European Employment Strategy (launched in 1997 and updated by the 2003 Guidelines for Member States) and associated legislation. Possible work–life balance indicators could be the proportion of workers with flexible working arrangements, opportunities for maternity and parental leave and their take-up rates, and the scale of childcare facilities for children of pre-school and mandatory school age. The 2003 update of the Social Policy Agenda demonstrates broad progress against these objectives, but further action is needed to achieve quality in social policies.

Equality

In order to promote equality in practice, the EU has implemented specific action programmes since the 1980s which have had a substantial knock-on effect. Every European Council since Essen has emphasised the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women, together with combating unemployment, as the primary task of the EU and its Member States. The Commission is committed to making an active contribution to this goal, mobilising all European policies towards this end.

Against this background, the European Council adopted the fourth Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (1996–2000) in order to continue the work of previous action programmes since 1982. This programme is designed to strengthen legislation, effectively develop the principle of mainstreaming, and to support and organise specific measures to promote equal opportunities.

The case study below is an example of a childcare programme in Hungary which promotes equality by focusing on the needs of the Roma community.[5]

Józsefvárosi Tanoda Foundation

Budapest, Hungary

The tanoda, meaning 'a place for learning', was founded in 1997 by a small group of people who dedicated themselves to the successful integration of Roma children into mainstream society while maintaining their Roma identity. The initial strategy was extended to consider the present and future educational needs of the Roma population living in the 8th district of Budapest.

The need for a programme designed to help Roma children to successfully complete secondary school is underlined by the high unemployment rate among Roma people. The foundation offers afternoon and weekend activities for its pupils. A stimulating environment for learning is created for children who lack such an environment at home. The programmes provide development activities in mathematics, literature, history, foreign languages and computer literacy and aim to draw children's attention to the rich sources of knowledge around them. The programmes also aim to familiarise children with the universal and Hungarian Roma cultures.

http://www.romacentrum.hu/modell/oktatas/jozsefvarosi/tanoda.html

[5] The Roma people are an ethnic minority group in Hungary.

In 2000, the EU Council Directive 2000/78/EC[6] established a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. Commonly known as the Employment Directive, it is designed to end discrimination at work and during training on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief. This sets a framework to ensure minimum anti-discriminatory standards throughout the EU by 2006. Key directives include:

- The appearance of the first regulations relating to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and religion. These regulations came into force in December 2003;
- Amendments to regulations relating to discrimination on the grounds of sex which were phased in from July 2004. Amendments include the introduction of a consistent definition of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation across all strands of equality legislation;
- Combating age discrimination, which is now covered by the European Employment Directive 2000/78/EC, with legislation to be introduced in the UK by 2006;
- New legislation from Europe, which is already leading to changes in the legal and institutional framework for equality work. Legal protection on the grounds of race or gender is no longer sufficient. There is now a focus on diversity within these target groups. Equality is a central aspect of the European EQUAL programme. The EQUAL programme is financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and aims to increase employability by encouraging and supporting innovation and sharing of solutions between Member States.

Women's labour market participation

In many Member States after the Second World War, increasing numbers of women entered the workforce. Childcare became an important issue during this time. In Member States such as Hungary, informal childcare or other forms of childcare were virtually non-existent and childcare centres performed much of the childcare. Although current EU childcare policy often stems from child protection issues, it remains focused on helping women increase their labour market participation.

Calls for greater labour market participation among women have gradually increased in the EU15 since the 1960s. For example, in Sweden, as demand for female labour increased during the 1960s, there were growing calls for a major expansion of childcare facilities. A special commission, the National Commission on Childcare, was appointed by the Swedish government in 1968 to submit proposals for a childcare system capable of meeting social, educational and supervisory needs in Sweden. The work of the 1968 National Commission had a considerable impact on the direction of Swedish childcare provision. The educational principles and ideas formulated by the National Commission still apply today. Similarly, Spain and France also developed child policy around the family to help increase women's labour market participation. In France, current childcare policies have been shaped by concerns about the birth rate, the economic situation of lone parents and large families, the changing demands of the labour market and equal opportunities goals, and social exclusion related to increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity in the population. In Spain, the IV National Gender Equal Opportunities Plan (2003 and 2006) and the Employment National Plan of Action represent key policies promoting the reconciliation of work and family life.

[6] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0078:EN:HTML.

The policy impetus on increasing women's labour market participation in the EU15 is highlighted by UK policy developments during 2006. The UK Department for Education and Skills completed a review of the children's workforce strategy during this year. The strategy focuses on improving recruitment, retention and the quality of practice, bringing services together around the needs of children, young people and families, and strengthening leadership, management and supervision in this area. The strategy highlights the need to establish a more professional workforce in the early years and to tackle problems facing the social care workforce. To further increase women's labour market participation in the UK, measures were also included in the 2006 budget to promote the development of childcare services to support work–life balance by establishing a new capital grant to help small and medium-sized employers establish workplace nurseries. Up to GBP 8 million (€11.72 million)[7] will be made available per year in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 for this purpose.

Policy developments designed to increase women's labour market participation in the new Member States have also emerged in recent decades. For example, in Poland, the Sectoral Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development' (which constitutes a key element of the National Development Plan 2004–2006[8]) aims to ensure sufficient conditions for the development of human resources through education, training and work. The general objective of the Sectoral Operations Plan has been realised through partial objectives strengthening equality of opportunities in the labour market. *Priority 1 – Active labour market policy and professional and social integration policy* will be carried out through a number of measures, particularly *Measure 6 – Professional integration and reintegration of women*. This measure focuses on promoting equal access to the labour market for both men and women, creating effective lifelong learning, and introducing flexible forms of employment to support the reconciliation between a professional career and family life.

However, the declining child population in Europe has also impacted on childcare policy developments. This is most evident in Hungarian childcare policy. The permanent and large-scale decrease in the number of children has been a noticeable factor in Hungarian demographics since the late 1990s, presenting a key challenge for the public education system. This has led to the deterioration of the optimal use of school space, causing problems in size and cost efficiencies and inevitably forcing school administrators to introduce rationalisation measures. Hungarian schools were forced to find an immediate solution to the escalating cost of education arising from pay rises and the need to improve infrastructural conditions to provide after-school childcare.

Meeting the needs of children

A number of policies have been designed to address supply-side issues by providing a secure and safe environment for children.

Child welfare/protection policies

In many Member States the origins of childcare initiatives began with a focus on child welfare and the protection of vulnerable children. The safety of children has been a key influence in childcare policy development in many contexts.

[7] All sterling rates have been converted to euro at GBP 1 = €1.46494; €1 = GBP 0.68262, as at 20 June 2006.

[8] The Polish National Development Plan 2004–2006 was adopted by the Council of Ministries on 14 January 2003.

Developing links between childcare protection policy and quality standards in the sector tends to be more highly developed in the EU15. For example, the UK's current child protection policy, described in the Children Act 2004, emerged from a Green Paper published in 2003 that set out a range of key principles and measures to transform the way that services for children and young people are planned and delivered in England. Many of the current requirements for childcare arrangements and activities developed from concerns over child safety explored in the Green Paper.

The Green Paper was a direct response to the Inquiry Report into the killing of Victoria Climbie (Laming, 2003), which identified gross failures in the agencies responsible for safeguarding child welfare. As a result, the report made over one hundred recommendations to improve child services and inter-agency activity in the UK. Despite Victoria Climbie being cared for by an unregistered childminder at times during her stay in London, the recommendations did not directly consider the role of out-of-school childcarers. However, since the publication of the Green Paper, the resulting Children Act 2004 sets in place the legislative 'spine' for reform, introducing a statutory duty for the government and others to work in partnership to achieve objectives. Other actions identified in the 2004 Act include the requirement to move towards a single statutory local Children and Young People's Plan, to create a Director of Children's Services, and to appoint a Lead Council Member for Children.

The UK Children Act 2004 improves the general framework for the safe care of children, including the registration of childminders and other carers. The Ten Year Strategy (HM Treasury, *et al.*, 2004) has developed a vision built on the aforementioned Act and report. This vision has a direct influence on the provision of childcare in the UK, as outlined below:

- choice and flexibility: parents should have greater choice in balancing work and family life;
- availability: for all families with children aged up to 14 years who need it, an affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare place that meets their requirements;
- quality: high-quality provision with a highly skilled childcare and early-years workforce, among the best in the world;
- affordability: families should be able to afford flexible, high-quality childcare that is appropriate to their needs.

Current UK policy provides a framework in which childcare for school-age children can develop through its focus on choice, availability, quality, and affordability of services. The framework has helped create an atmosphere for effectively dealing with issues relating to the future direction of childcare.

In contrast, child protection policy has been more inconsistent in the new Member States. Hungary has been one of the most proactive new Member States to develop policy in this area. Hungarian childcare policy originated from child protection concerns and most current childcare policy primarily deals with the protection of children rather than the quality of childcare provision. The 1997/31 Childcare Act in Hungary mainly focuses on the care of children 'at risk', but also sets out a variety of additional childcare initiatives, including commitments to provide all children with equal opportunities for development, and to improve the professional status of all childcare

workers. The Hungarian Act XXXI of 1997 also focuses on the protection of children and its associated regulations outline the duties of different authorities in identifying children at risk, providing help for their families, taking children into care and looking after children in care.

Hungarian child protection policy was further strengthened in 2000 through the introduction of the National Family Policy Principle, which is designed to enhance the standard of living for Hungarian families, promote security in family life, and encourage population growth. The introduction of the scheme ensures that the right to family allowances does not depend on family income, but is a civil right that supports the rearing of children. The new Hungarian government formed after the last national elections in 2002 introduced changes so that well-off people were no longer given social benefits for rearing children, and to ensure that support would only be given to parents below a certain income level.

Families in Hungary are considered responsible for bringing up their children and policy recognises that sometimes they may need assistance. The democratically elected government's policies since the change in the political system in 1990 have reflected this attitude. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed quite soon after it was issued in 1989. Today, the legislative framework is in place in Hungary. Therefore, Hungary is an example of a new Member State which has been developing childcare policy over the past decade. However, Hungarian childcare policy for school-age children still requires development, as the process to date has focused on child protection issues and the care of younger children.

Childcare policy for school-age children is still in the development stages in most new Member States, as priorities were focused primarily on child protection issues in the past. For example, in Cyprus, the Social Welfare Services began in the 1950s under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. Childcare policy provided by Social Welfare Services was mainly focused on child protection issues, adoptions and delinquency, rather than childcare services. Between 1962 and 1972, children under six years of age were the primary policy concern. Following this, in 1968, the Youth Services were founded to develop a cohesive approach to addressing youth issues. From 1972, the function of Social Welfare Services broadened to provide services that would improve child and family welfare. Social Welfare Services systematically inspect and supervise childcare provision, including day-care facilities, in accordance with the current Children Law. There is no current policy for care standards in Cyprus for school-age children.

Similar to Cyprus, many other new Member States are also in the preliminary stages of moving policy beyond child protection towards quality of childcare services. In Slovakia, the government is struggling to simply keep childcare centres open. Information and policy on the care of school-age children is difficult to find in many of the new Member States, it if does indeed exist. This highlights the challenges that many new Member States face in providing safe and stimulating childcare services for school-age children.

In Cyprus, because the quality of private services is not well regulated by the authorities, parents tend to rely on word of mouth and recommendations from other parents to help assess the quality of schools providing care facilities after school hours. Below is an example of a well-established private school in Larnaca, which has an excellent reputation among parents.

G + E School
Larnaca, Cyprus

The G + E school is a private institute based in Larnaca that provides group lessons to children aged between eight and 17 years during out-of-school hours. Lessons are offered in English, French and mathematics. Lessons cost €44 a month per subject for a total of eight hours of teaching, and they are delivered to groups with a maximum of 10 students.The institute is registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture but the owner of the school stated that visits from the ministry are infrequent. When interviewed, the owner of the school explained that 'high-quality education is provided and the standard is maintained through the parents and pupils'. Parents rely on word of mouth from other parents and on the good pass rates of pupils. Thirteen-year-old pupils follow the equivalent of the English language GCSE (Cambridge exams) and are passing with B grades. The school's owner believes that this is the best advertisement for the school and reflects the high standards achieved. Formal advertising is minimal, with an annual mail-out of flyers to supermarkets and private residences every August.

Pre-school children policy focus

Children of pre-school age are generally viewed as the group in most need of care facilities, therefore many Member States have yet to extend national policy to encompass the care of older children. The emphasis on childcare for pre-school children is common across both the EU15 and new Member States, but this trend needs to be addressed.

For example, in Austria, childcare coverage rates for different age groups reveal that there has usually been a strong focus on pre-school care provision. Several interviewees attributed the predominance on pre-school childcare to its function as school preparation for children. Traditionally, this resulted in the public sector developing this type of provision and simultaneously justified parents 'giving their children away' to enable them to take up work.

A focus on pre-school childcare in Austria can also be observed in more recent childcare policies. Between 1997 and 2001 the Austrian government spent ATS 1.2 billion (€87.2 million)[9] – the so-called 'Kindergarten billion' – to increase the number of childcare places. About the same level of resources was provided by Austria's nine provincial authorities. 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-age children has yet to be prioritised in Austria.

Similarly, in Poland, for example, younger children remain the primary focus and childcare policy has yet to be extended to include the care of older children. In recent years, public interest in childcare services has turned more towards strengthening the provision of nursery schools rather than that of out-of-school education and care establishments for children older than five years. The need for affordable and good-quality nurseries dominates the public debate on equal access for women to the labour market. In this context, the provision of care services for children aged six to 12 years is not prioritised, with more concern focused on the supply of nursery places. However, government programmes provide some evidence of intended future childcare policy development for children aged six to 12 years.

[9] 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.

Although few Member States are at the forefront of developing policy for school-age children, there are excellent examples of good practice in this area. In Poland, policy is focused on younger children; however, good practice is evident in programmes that provide services for school-age children, and cater for diversity in their population. The case study below outlines an after-school programme for primary school children which integrates special needs children into extracurricular activities with other children.

Integration fun club IKAR
Kraków, Poland

Integration fun club IKAR was set up in one of the largest primary schools in Kraków in the Lesser Poland (*małopolskie*) province in southern Poland. The Marshal J. Piłsudski primary school no. 149 provides extracurricular activities aimed at integrating special needs children into the education programme of the public school. The club's objective is to create an integration-friendly environment and to support teachers in overcoming fears concerned with providing care for disabled children. At the same time, the club aims to teach the school staff how to cope with and solve childcare issues, and to help all children to develop and progress by involving parents, local authorities and the administrative body of the school to support such initiatives.

The club has proved to be a successful initiative for all children with varying abilities to work together in harmony by developing an awareness and sensitivity among children and adults of the needs of disabled children. The club also allows for the early recognition of pupils requiring special needs. The club provides both a centre for children's extracurricular activities and creates a feeling of being useful for the community among the children. The club also supports children with special needs in their integration into the local community. The Integration fun club IKAR was identified at the meeting of the Education Initiatives Forum as an example of good practice in the provision of out-of-school care services.

Further information: http://www.idn.org.pl/edukacja/fio/ikar.htm

In Hungary, childcare is administered by the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, alongside child welfare, child protection and social welfare services. Since 1997, childcare has also been part of the child protection system, as described by Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children and the administration of guardianship. As stated in the Education Act of 1993, education is identified under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, and since a large proportion of children stay in school after compulsory classes for after-school care (*napközi*), the ministry is also very involved in providing childcare for school-age children. Childcare policy development in Hungary is thus shared between two ministries – the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The disadvantage of this arrangement is that Hungarian childcare policy for mainstream school-age children is not given priority at government or local levels. Evidence from background information and interviews with ministry employees suggests that childcare for mainstream school-age children is not a priority for either of the ministries. Lack of clarity in responsibilities between the ministries is a compounding factor: the Ministry of Education tends to concentrate on education matters, while the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities focuses on the protection of children at risk. As a result, childcare for mainstream school-age children is neglected in both Hungarian ministries.

Although childcare for school-age children is not prioritised at policy level, care services are partially funded by the Hungarian government. The majority of local governments in Hungary maintain cultural centres for the benefit of the public. The system is similar throughout the country, with regional differences (particularly financial resources) leading to a range of programmes and costs charged by these cultural centres. The following case study describes a Hungarian cultural centre that is 75% funded by the local government and provides services for school-age children.

Zeg-Zug Children's House
Budapest, Hungary

The local government of the 14th district of Budapest (with a population of 120,000 people) maintains two cultural centres, one of which mainly offers adult programmes, while the other, the Zeg-Zug Children's House, offers activities for children. Around three-quarters of the programmes offered target children, mainly those of school age, and there are also several activities for children from birth to six years old. The centre is situated in a middle-class neighbourhood, and families living nearby can afford and look for good-quality children's programmes. The Zeg-Zug House offers a wide variety of after-school and weekend activities for school-age children.

Although, in theory, professional control of the centre is exercised by the local government, in practice the centre has complete freedom to design and run its programmes for children. The house continuously monitors the demand for the programmes on offer and the range of activities will change to meet changing demands, provided the facilities and finances are available. All activities are adapted to suit children of different ages and abilities. The house also works in close cooperation with the Association of Visually Impaired People.

Further information: http://zeg-zug.uw.hu/

In the Czech Republic, childcare has historically been viewed as a support mechanism for families in brining up and educating their children, in preparing children to attend compulsory schooling, and to help improve children's physical and mental capacities. However, no information was available on childcare policy for children of school age. This may be because of the greater emphasis on preparing younger children for school in the Czech Republic.

Policy emphasis on education

In many Member States, policy is focused on children's education and is, therefore, centred around supporting children's educational development. Although policy and resources are driven by economic demands, at the national level governments have implemented childcare resources to support, reinforce and extend education programmes. This represents a significant development across the EU25. For example, up until the 1950s in Belgium, childcare was directed towards the physical well-being of children. In recent years, the importance of children's development has been recognised. Playful learning is also being emphasised as an important part of childcare provision in existing Belgian childcare policy.

Childcare provision for older children represents an extension of the school day in many Member States, such as the extended services currently being provided on school sites in the UK. Similarly, current policy in Poland reflects this focus on links with educational activities. In Poland, the Education Development Strategy 2007–2013[10], published by the Ministry of Education in August

[10] http://www.men.waw.pl/oswiata/biezace/strategia_2007_2013.pdf (in Polish).

2005, highlights future developments of the new education system, which will offer pupils regular classes and a wide range of after-school activities organised in cooperation with other educational institutions and NGOs. In terms of teacher training, the strategy emphasises the need for reviewing and developing training programmes to include out-of-school childcare and extracurricular care.

In Sweden, although childcare is an integral part of social and family policy, increased emphasis has been placed on the educational policy aspect as childcare has expanded and now reaches more children. The desire to emphasise the educational orientation of childcare is reflected by the transfer of childcare policy from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996, and the Social Services Act that previously regulated childcare being replaced by the Education Act in 1995. The aim of transferring childcare to the educational sector was largely to build on the close educational links between pre-school, compulsory school and out-of-school childcare (Gunnarsson, *et al.*, 1999). The Swedish Education Act specifies that the task of childcare for schoolchildren is to complement the school, in terms of both time and content, and to offer children meaningful recreation and support in their development.

The educational focus of policy is, however, not necessarily to the detriment of childcare for school-age children. In some cases it can help to integrate leisure activities into day school that are typically only after-school services. The Swedish case study below is an example of an innovative approach to combining the school day and leisure-time activities.

Milstensskolan School
Täby, Sweden

Milstensskolan is situated in Täby, near Stockholm, and is a private school with integrated leisure-time centres and pre-schools. The school operates from 08.30 to 14.00. During leisure time, organised activities are mixed with free activities in order to stimulate and develop children's creativity. Activities are undertaken both indoors and outdoors and the school's gymnasium is available for use during leisure-time activities. The children also have access to school computers during the afternoons. Each day ends with a common calm activity such as reading aloud or listening to music.

A distinguishing feature of Milstensskolan is that it has gone one step further in the integration of schools and leisure-time centres. The two activities are provided in the same facilities, but the leisure-time activities are also provided during school hours. The initiative was inspired by studies in the United States which showed that play, sports and being in motion improves the coordination of children's movements and helps them to develop good physical and psychological stamina.

Further information: http://www.milstensskolan.se/

In Hungary, the Education Act of 1993, Act XXXI of 1997 on the protection of children, and their associated regulations governing the system of administration and inspection, define the minimum criteria of, educational content of, quality standards of and access to kindergartens, after-school care, childcare, respite care and long-term care services.

The Education Act addresses kindergarten education and care in great detail, but for school-age children the emphasis is on education. The act refers to after-school care in several instances and recognises that:

- the working hours of the afternoon care teachers can amount to 23 hours per week;
- pupils have a right to take part in after-school care;
- after-school care is carried out by qualified teachers;
- schools must provide after-school care as requested by parents.

Overall, out-of-school childcare policy in the majority of Member States is focused on education and school care is sometimes viewed as an extension of the school day. However, some out-of-school care programmes have created a balance of school time and after-school care by integrating after-school care into primary education. The case study below is an example of a programme in Hungary that effectively combines afternoon care with formal schooling.

József Attila Primary School
Budapest, Hungary

After-school care is such an integral part of primary education in Hungary that it is viewed by the relevant authorities as education rather than care. József Attila Primary School is an eight-grade primary school where pupils enter grade one at age six or seven years. After formal schooling ends the children partake in a variety of supervised activities such as outside play on the school grounds, homework sessions, arts and crafts, singing or dancing. The after-school programme ends at 16.00. Pupils who are not picked up by parents at 16.00 stay with a teacher and continue play activity until 17.00 and can remain with a teaching assistant until 18.00.

Gaps in provision

Very few Member States have implemented policy that encompasses childcare for school-age children. Owing to the lack of childcare policy for school-age children, some Member States are in the process of researching current gaps and have identified the need to increase care for school-age children. The trend in public policy towards highlighting the lack of provision is most evident in the EU15. In Austria, for example, a 2002 survey on 'Household management, childcare and Care'[11] showed a shortfall of 90,000 childcare places, more than 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 to draw up an action plan. Another survey on current and prospective childcare gaps identified 18,154 missing childcare places, of which 10,323 were related to school-age children. The accuracy of the two surveys and the questions as to which most accurately reflects the situation in the Austrian childcare system are heavily contested.

Good practice in the provision of out-of-school care

Although there is a lack of adequate out-of-school provision, in many Member States good-practice examples for policy development for school-age children exist.

[11] Haushaltsführung, Kinderbetreuung, Pflege, Results of the September 2002 microcensus in Austria.

In Poland, for example, the Education Act of 1991[12] is the most important document regulating education and childcare. In relation to children aged six to 12 years, the act presents a framework for the responsibilities of primary schools and for their role in providing extracurricular activities, general education and care establishments. According to the act, '*the education system ensures the conditions for development of pupils' interests through provision of extracurricular classes and out-of-school activities as well as creation of habits of spending their free time*'. A basic role of the Polish school is therefore to provide extracurricular classes, which are assessed and accepted by its 'Educational Council' – a body consisting of teachers and parents of pupils.

Sweden is often considered the 'gold standard' for childcare and out-of-school care has been a policy priority for three decades. Out-of-school care has traditionally been a cornerstone of Swedish family/social policy and educational policy. This is reflected in the dual function of childcare, which aims 'to support and encourage children's development and learning, and help them get a good start in life' and also 'to enable parents to combine parenthood with employment or studies', thereby constituting a prerequisite for equality in society (Swedish Institute, 2004, p. 1). The Swedish Education Act (1995) specifies:[13]

- that the task of childcare for schoolchildren is to complement the school, in terms of both time and content, and to offer children meaningful recreation and support in their development;
- the forms of childcare to be provided for children up to and including the age of 12 years and the tasks they are to perform during care time.

Swedish local authorities have to provide high-quality out-of-school childcare without unreasonable delay[14] and as close to the child's home or school as possible.[15] This applies to all children whose parents are working or studying or who need childcare support. It also applies to those children who are assessed as being in 'need of special support',[16] irrespective of how their parents are occupied. Quality standards are set by local authorities and childcare employees are required to have met a training standard and demonstrate experience meeting children's needs in terms of both care and providing stimulating educational activities. Childcare groups must also be an appropriate size, and premises must be well suited for the chosen activities.

Future trends

A significant trend in many Member States is an increased focus on children's needs. Although it is a positive sign that Member States are recognising the need to support childcare services, childcare for school-age children is lacking from the policy level through to the implementation level.

Even though gaps in childcare policy have been pointed out in various Member States, some countries are forging ahead in the development of childcare policy for school-age children. In

[12] The Education Act of 7 September 1991 (with future amendments up to 2005), published by the Ministry of National Education in Poland.

[13] The 1995 Education Act legislates all forms of childcare and schools, but dedicates a chapter (chapter 2a) specifically to out-of-school childcare services. The act is available at: http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/15/38/1532b277.pdf (in English, 202Kb PDF).

[14] Normally within three or four months of the parents having applied for a place.

[15] The 1995 Education Act does not specify a specific distance from the home or school.

[16] This group is not clearly defined – it may include children with disabilities or children with other problems such as difficulties concentrating or psychological disorders (Swedish Institute, 2004).

Austria, the national childcare policy background has been characterised by the prominent role of non-profit organisations and decentralisation of childcare regulations (except for regulations on the training of educators). In addition, a traditional emphasis on pre-school childcare is strongly recognisable. In Austria, two programmes illustrate the trend in policy development of putting more emphasis on meeting the needs of parents and children. These are the promotion and expansion of the childminding system, designed to increase the flexibility of childcare provision. Both programmes go beyond promoting flexibility in childminding provision, as demonstrated in the best-practice case studies below.

Mobile mothers – Austria

The 'Mobile mothers' offer parents even greater flexibility, because they take away the concerns about dropping off and picking up children from school or out-of-school activity. This is a great relief for parents, as packing together clothes and toys is not a task for them any more. At the same time, the fact that mobile mothers care for children in a familiar environment is comforting for both parents and children.

Further information: http://www.noe.hilfswerk.at/

Childcare on the farm – Austria

'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 difficulties in rural areas where there are frequently too few children in close proximity to each other to provide institutional childcare. The project aims to exploit the unique benefits the farm environment can bring to childcare provision: lots of space for play and many opportunities for experiencing nature and animals as well as to observe a real-life work situation.

Further information: http://www.kinderbetreuung.at/bauern/

In Cyprus, there is no current policy support for school-age childcare. The National Action Plan for Employment (2004–2006) mentions the extension of its only form of public provision to children of all ages (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance). Childcare for school-age children is a relatively new concept in Cyprus and it is more accurately described as extended schooling. Traditionally, the public school day in Cyprus has ended at 13.00 and working families relied on informal childcare provision provided by their relatives. The family continues to provide informal care for children, but during the last two decades there has been a marked increase in the demand for and availability of childcare services (unusually provided by the private sector) for both pre-school and school-age children, particularly as the female employment rate continues to rise. Families use both formal and informal childcare options such as family members or maids. Cyprus joined the EU in May 2004 and subsequently introduced policies supporting the reconciliation and balance between work and family life. Cyprus is an example of a Member State beginning to lay foundations for the development of childcare services for school-age children.

After-school care in Cyprus is formal schooling that continues after 13.00 when public school ends. The all-day public schools provide schooling for children aged nine to 11 years and currently there is no public provision for children aged six to eight years. The expansion of public all-day schools has been proposed and should be available in the near future. Below is an example of the most well-established all-day public school in Cyprus.

Mazotos Primary School
Larnaca, Cyprus

Mazotos Primary School began operating in 2001 as one of the first all-day schools established in Cyprus. Pupils who attend this all-day school are aged nine to 11 years. All pupils have the option of attending the facility from 07.30 until 16.00.

In afternoon sessions there are two teachers present, usually one male and one female teacher, but occasionally two female teachers. After lunch the children take part in various activities such as sport, computers, English and art. The children stay behind because they 'want to do something interesting'. Most of the activities have an academic flavour; this also tends to characterise Cypriot after-school care as parents place much emphasis on academic achievement.

NGOs are another option for childcare for school-age children in Cyprus offering various programmes to help families sustain a balance between work and family life. They offer less expensive after-school care after the end of the school day at 13.00 and can remain open until 18.00. NGOs also offer a lower-cost alternative to private childcare provision during school holidays. The case study below is a good practice example of an NGO provider in Cyprus.

Children's Centre
Nicosia, Cyprus

After-school activities are provided for children between the ages of seven and 12 years. Opened in 1990, the centre continues to offer services every day and also during school holidays. The provision of holiday care is regarded as a good-practice measure, which distinguishes the centre from most other schools as holiday care is difficult to find and rarely available in Cyprus. The Children's Centre is subsidised by government funding but parents also pay for using the centre. At present parents pay about €87 per month for each child. This cost includes an afternoon meal after the school day and supervised care.

The after-school programme begins with lunch and then pupils are given help to complete their homework. Multiple indoor and outdoor activities are offered to the children until 18.00. Activities include arts and crafts, indoor and outdoor sports, and music. There are two childcare staff employed by the centre for every 15 children in attendance.

In Poland, the most important and coherent document reflecting the main directions and trends in current and particularly future policy towards children is the National Action Plan for Children 2004–2012, '*Poland for Children*', which was issued by the Ministry of Education in 2004. Several bodies, including governmental administration, NGOs, the Polish National Committee of UNICEF and the Ombudsman for Children Bureau, established this action plan in a cooperative effort. It sets out objectives and directions for actions up to 2012 in four policy areas that are considered problematic and most important for improving the situation of children in Poland, notably:

- promoting a healthy lifestyle;
- ensuring quality of education;

- supporting the family;
- protecting children against harassment and violence.

The plan has been implemented through various actions and measures reflecting its aims and objectives, including:

- the development of best practice examples in the area of extracurricular out-of school activities;
- increasing and improving the dissemination of courses on offer;
- creating local educational councils aimed at developing the care system in conjunction with local partners (such as municipal authorities, NGOs and cultural centres).

In Poland, the Education Development Strategy for 2007–2013 lists a number of challenges in the fields of education and childcare which will need to be addressed in the near future (Ministry of National Education Poland, 2004). In the area of childcare, problems which need to be addressed include:

- the threats to childcare and child rearing as a result of globalisation;
- an increasing number of children and young people requiring special, intensive and individualised care in well-organised establishments;
- increasing inequalities between children from urban and rural areas in terms of accessibility to different cultural, out-of-school facilities.

The strategy highlights that schools currently only offer compulsory classes and are therefore ineffective in terms of meeting contemporary wider educational and childcare needs in Poland. As a result, schools should take on the following responsibilities in the future, namely to:

- provide for homework supervision with teachers, including special needs classes, and offer access to libraries or computer laboratories in the afternoon after compulsory classes;
- propose different activities for children outside school hours, i.e. more extracurricular classes and out-of-school activities; these should be organised in cooperation with educational establishments and NGOs and target the cultural and social development of children;
- support and motivate pupils and provide advice for talented pupils;
- strengthen their role as the local centre of culture, continuing education and social activity, thus enhancing the idea of 'open schools'.

In the UK, the Childcare Bill (2005), which is currently before Parliament, aims to transfer responsibility for childcare provision to local authorities. This follows on from the Children Act (2004) and introduces new changes making local authorities responsible for choice, availability, quality and affordability in childcare services for children from birth up to the age of 14 years. The bill represents forward thinking and key developments designed to provide safe and stimulating childcare services for school-age children.

Conclusion

In both the EU15 and 10 new Member States, policy for school-age children is still in the development stages. Some Member States are still setting policy in the area of child protection and have yet to develop childcare policy for school-age children. As many of the EU15 and new Member States have been focusing much attention on child protection and childcare services for young children, they still need to specify how to provide safe and stimulating out-of-school care for school-age children. The future, however, is looking more positive as many Member States are working towards new policy measures and some countries have already laid the foundations for policies focused on out-of-school care for school-age children. Age is a key variable affecting childcare provision, with resources still focused on pre-school services to some extent due to social protection concerns. However, as demand for childcare is growing and an increasing interest in the topic fuels the debate, policy around provision for school-age children is moving up the agenda.

Working conditions and employment issues

3

This chapter explores the type of childcare services currently available for school-age children across Europe, drawing on evidence from the six case study Member States. This will demonstrate the type of working conditions and employment opportunities currently offered in the childcare sector. The chapter will then consider employment issues in the sector and identify areas in need of improvement.

Current EU childcare sector

This section outlines the coverage of the current childcare sector and explores variations in opening hours of childcare services. The structure of employment within the current EU childcare sector will then be considered, exploring working conditions such as the range of jobs, typical duties and salaries available in the sector.

Availability of childcare services

Childcare provision across Europe is both expanding and declining, depending on the national context and the age range of children. In many Member States, childcare services for younger children are being extended to meet the Barcelona targets mentioned in Chapter 2. However, in some new Member States the provision of childcare is in fact being reduced, partly owing to declining birth rates. In contrast to the new Member States, services in the EU15 tend to be more established and offer increasing diversity, such as in Denmark, Sweden and the UK.

Childcare is one sector within the broad employment category of household services which is experiencing growth overall. Household services are defined as those services provided by public or private organisations (including the voluntary sector), which substitute unwaged work that is carried out in the home with paid work (Cancedda, 2001). This conversion from household work into paid jobs in household services is evident to varying degrees in all industrialised Member States. Childcare is one of the two subsectors of household services in which employment growth is most extensive. The growth of the childcare sector can be largely attributed to women's increasing labour market participation. The exception to this is Finland (and potentially other Nordic Member States) where childcare growth is less apparent. The increase in home-based childcare (i.e. childminders) is particularly evident. There is also potential for the expansion of jobs in out-of-school clubs for children of elementary and secondary school age.

Opening hours

The opening hours of childcare services vary greatly between Member States, as does the level of service provided. As a broad trend, provision is generally more comprehensive in the EU15, although gaps are evident in the opening hours of childcare services in some original Member States such as the UK and Austria. Swedish parents benefit from longer opening hours. For example, 74.5% of Swedish six- to nine-year-olds are registered in leisure-time centres. Most centres are open all year round and offer flexible daily opening hours to suit parents' working hours or study commitments, or the needs of the child. Generally, centres are open between 07.00 and 18.00. Although a declining type of Swedish childcare, providing services for only 1% of six- to nine-year-olds, family day-care facilities also operate during these hours. In contrast, opening hours of childcare services are much shorter in some of the new Member States. In Poland,

childcare provided by schools as extracurricular classes is only available once or twice a week, usually for two to four hours in the afternoon up to 18.00. Services are also limited to term time, as they are staffed by teachers.

Provision is also commonly more comprehensive in urban areas and cities than in rural areas. For example, Vienna enjoys longer and more flexible opening hours than the Austrian provinces. Similarly, municipally run open leisure-time centres in Austria, which provide out-of-school care for 10- to 12-year-olds, open for 21 hours or more per week, compared to the shorter opening hours of centres in rural areas. Although this is the only type of out-of-school childcare available to 10- to 12-year-old children in many Swedish municipalities, open leisure-time facilities were only available in 68 of Sweden's 290 municipalities in 2004, representing less than a quarter of all municipalities (National Agency for Education Sweden, 2004).

Employment types

Employment in the European childcare sector is quite varied, with jobs ranging from teachers employed by the public and private sectors to self-employed childminders.

Job descriptions and typical duties

In order to support a work–life balance for parents, the sector needs to create employment positions that enable parents to balance work with parental responsibilities. In many Member States, childcare employment focused on school-age children is structured around activities provided in schools or in centres to complement school lessons. For this reason, many childcare jobs are teaching posts or similar positions in after-school programmes. Staff requirements generally focus on providing educational activities or a variety of recreational activities such as sports or arts and crafts. A small proportion of after-school childcare is provided by college-level qualified teachers in OECD Member States such as Hungary. However, as these teachers often combine afternoon care with regular morning teaching, by the afternoon they can be less inclined to be as inventive as dedicated childcare workers.

Job titles ascribed to individuals providing childcare for school-age children in the EU25 include:

- childminder;
- children's group care worker;
- after-school care teacher;
- recreation organiser;
- family care worker;
- educator and organiser of cultural activities;
- nanny;
- after-school club leader;
- playgroup leader;
- leisure-time teacher;
- family day-care provider;
- social worker;
- special needs educator.

In Austria, there are a variety of job titles, including: kindergarten teachers, social workers, childminders and children's group care workers. While kindergarten teachers receive training to provide pre-school care, they can then specialise as a Hort educator[17] and thus also provide care for school-age children. In general, both types of educators are trained in children's development and can help children to develop their physical strength, dexterity and communication and social skills. Homework supervision is an important aspect of the childcare provided by Hort educators. The training available for both types of educators also incorporates positive interaction with parents and administrative skills such as creating monthly and annual childcare teaching plans.

Austrian social workers have a broader job description than kindergarten and Hort educators, and are less well represented in the childcare sector. They work with physically or mentally disabled children or children who require intensive support or special needs, like those with social problems. Social workers also work with the Youth Welfare Services and provide specialised advice for parents who encounter problems in their work, with children and the school, or in their family lives. Social workers support children's personal development, supervise learning activities (homework), plan and implement leisure-time activities and encourage parental involvement in their children's lives.

Austrian childminders offer childcare services comparable to the care provided by parents themselves. In this regard, close cooperation with parents is encouraged. Activities carried out by the childminder are influenced by the family context and include playing and eating with children, but also include homework supervision and typical household activities. In contrast, the role of children's group care workers in Austria is to develop children's autonomy in deciding about activities they want to pursue in their leisure time. Children's group care workers must carefully observe children and respond to their needs rather than direct activities. Care workers offer children a choice of activities to participate in rather than prescribing their daily programme and they allow children to pursue these activities in their own individual way.

In Poland, staff employed in educational and care establishments providing out-of-school activities for six- to 12-year-old children are usually fully qualified teachers (as stipulated by Act No. 95/1991 on education and the Teacher's charter). According to the directive on care and upbringing establishments, teachers work as 'form teachers' or 'form tutors' in these establishments. In addition, specialists (without a teaching qualification) and administrative personnel make up part of the staff (Ministry of Social Policy Poland, 2005). Childcare may also be provided by volunteers. In 2000, some 1,144 form teachers/tutors were employed in Polish out-of-school education and care establishments.

In Poland, educators and organisers of cultural activities work in establishments which have a statutory aim to provide cultural activities in youth cultural centres. Activities are organised through various clubs, day rooms and workshops. Cultural centres offer activities for all children, including children aged six to 12 years. They are run by government or self-government bodies under the direction of the Ministry of Culture. According to interviews with government representatives, the provision of activities outside school hours is relatively limited for children

[17] Kinderhorte, frequently referred to as 'Horte', are specialised after-school childcare centres. Hort educators generally care for school-age children in these establishments.

aged six to 12 years in these centres. School day rooms are a common form of childcare service for school-age children in Poland; they aim to offer services to children, involving their parents and the community. Below is a good-practice example of a school day room in Poland.

'My Place' – A day room programme
Podlaskie, Poland

The day room programme 'My place' provides care for children aged eight to 13 years who live in the *Podlaskie* province in northeast Poland. In 2005, the Polish Children Youth Foundation (PCYF) launched this programme with the financial support of the PZU (Polish insurance company) Foundation. It covers 13 existing day rooms in the *Podlaskie* region. The programme aims to develop and create accessible, good-quality day rooms for children in small urban areas.

Activities are adapted to the age group of participating children and to the availability of local staff, and parents are encouraged to help organise activities. The day rooms offer activities in discovery clubs, where children have the opportunity, for example, to carry out science experiments in physics, chemistry or biology, to breed small animals (to help children learn to take responsibility), to learn first aid, and to do handicraft activities such as modelling. Parents' involvement in leading different activities plays a key role in the programme.

In Sweden, staff in out-of-school childcare services include childminders, family childminders and leisure-time teachers. The majority of staff employed are leisure-time teachers. Traditionally, leisure-time teachers were responsible for children of school age during the part of the day that they were not in school. Since schools and leisure-time centres have increasingly been integrated, the role of the teacher has changed. Most leisure-time teachers welcomed the role change, as they now care for children for a greater proportion of the day and can follow their progress more closely. This development has led to more full-time employment among leisure-time teachers. A reported downside is a reduction in the time available to plan care activities.

Out-of-school childcare in Cyprus differs as the standard public school day normally ends at 13.00. Teachers provide the after-school services, which are mostly privately funded. Childcare jobs in Cyprus are considered to be teaching positions. The Ministry of Education and Culture employs all teaching staff, including those working in all-day schools. Teachers working in small businesses offering private lessons are employed by the owners, who are themselves qualified teachers and are educated to university level. Teachers working in all-day schools have civil servant status and are university graduates.

The Cypriot childcare sector is also unusual as domestic workers and maids are often informal childcare workers. This is not formally tracked in childcare labour market statistics, but it accounts for a significant proportion of Cypriot childcare services. Out-of-school services are not offered to all children in Cyprus, and in cases where parents do not opt for private provision, children are cared for by relatives, foreign maids or other adults. This type of care is unregulated, and there are concerns about the quality of care offered by untrained foreign maids who rarely speak the children's mother tongue. The average monthly salary of foreign house maids is around €350 and the employer covers accommodation, national insurance, medical fees, food and clothing

expenses. In terms of childcare, the maid is always at home and looks after the children when parents are unavailable.

Children not attending afternoon childcare facilities are cared for at home by the maid. In such cases, levels of care provided vary, depending on the age of the child and what tasks the family has asked the maid to do. It is often the case that maids take young children out for walks or bike rides, whereas older children watch videos or play independently while the maids complete the housework.

Childminders

Across the EU25 there are a variety of childcare jobs and positions, making it difficult to generalise about a typical childcare job or job title. However, it is worth noting that childminders are a common form of private childcare provision in many Member States. This role is a flexible way to supplement after-school care (if it exists) or to provide care in the absence of other services. Childminders offer services comparable to care provided by parents, consequently close cooperation with parents is encouraged. Activities provided include playing, homework supervision and household activities such as shopping.

In the UK, childminders are self-employed and work flexible hours. Interviews with childminders in the UK revealed that a key benefit of the job was the potential to work flexible hours. Many childminders have children of their own and combine care for them with caring for other children. In the UK, childminders are formally trained and are registered. In other Member States such as Hungary, childminding is an informal type of care provided by friends and relatives. Childminding is a common practice in Hungary; activities of the childminder include collecting children from school, taking children to afternoon sport or music activities, or looking after them at home. Hungarian childminders often work in the black-grey economy: they have not registered with the relevant authorities, are paid cash-in-hand, and they do not declare their earnings or pay taxes on their income. In this regard, the Hungarian childcare system needs to be regulated in order to assess the demand for childminders, to control the quality of care and to introduce safety measures.

Working conditions

Working times

In many Member States childcare employment is only part time, as breakfast and after-school clubs are not offered on a full-time basis. This is unfortunate for those who would prefer full-time work. In order for childcare for school-age children to evolve to meet the demands of workers, the care structure would need to be reviewed. For example, if it was possible to combine all-day care for younger children with after-school care for older children, this would enable more staff to work full time.

In Austria, part-time work in childcare facilities is common. However, many Horte childcare workers would like to work full time but are unable to as the requirement for an out-of-school-specialisation prohibits a 40-hour working week. Full-time work is available in public facilities that

provide both kindergarten and Horte services, enabling Hort educators to work in the kindergarten during school hours.

Work pressure can be very high in the Austrian childcare sector, particularly during 'peak times' when a large number of children require simultaneous care. It is not unusual for one educator to care for 25 or more children at the same time.

Several interviewees admitted that children are becoming 'more demanding', and they felt that childcare workers required additional support, in the form of closer cooperation between childcare facilities and schools. Interviewees viewed the lack of such cooperation as being related to a perceived hierarchy among educators, with kindergarten and Hort educators having a lower status than schoolteachers. This 'class system' of educators restricts the exchange of information which would enhance understanding and consistency in the care provided to children with problems or requiring special needs. Interviewees also stressed the need for additional Austrian childcare workers, particularly trained specialists who could work more effectively with 'problem children' and who could advise other care workers on specific aspects of their job. There is also a demand among childcare workers for school organisation and development experts to organise school-based childcare and promote teamwork among teaching staff.

Salaries

A key indicator of working conditions in any sector are the salaries that workers receive. Salaries are an important aspect of securing a good-quality lifestyle. However, salaries in most of the childcare sectors are relatively low, the work is often only part time and in many cases also insufficient to provide a good standard of living. Ways of increasing salary levels in the childcare sector should be a prime consideration. In interviews, most childcare staff, especially childminders, emphasised the need for wage increases in the sector. They believed that the value placed on the sector's workers by society reflected their rather low wage levels.

The low income levels in the Polish childcare sector contribute to the reduced interest among men in employment opportunities in the sector. This is a trend across Europe and has thus resulted in a predominantly female workforce in the childcare sector. This characteristic is criticised by some NGO leaders providing out-of-school activities in Poland, who expressed concern that the lack of male role models in the sector impacted negatively on the quality and relevance of activities on offer for boys and those with behavioural or truancy issues at school. Salary issues are therefore closely associated with the image of the childcare sector, which is discussed in the employment issues section below.

In Austria, interviews revealed salary levels in childcare to be inadequate, particularly for those workers entering the profession.[18] This concern was particularly highlighted for job starters, while substantial pay increases were reported by workers in more senior positions. Comparing the starting salary for primary school teachers (€22,311 per year) with respective monthly salaries for care workers as listed in the Austrian labour market service (*Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich*, AMS) (see Table 1 below), it is evident that teachers command significantly higher salaries than childcare

[18] 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.

workers. However, data is based on two different methodological approaches, which makes it difficult to draw a direct comparison.[19]

Table 1 Income ranges for Austrian job starters in the childcare sector

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 in Austria currently stands at €25,830 for men and €15,380 for women. Although different methodologies have been used to make these calculations, it can tentatively be concluded that the income of childcare workers is similar to average female earnings in Austria. The female-dominated nature of the childcare profession could be a strong determinant of the relatively low incomes in the childcare sector.

In Hungary, the status and salaries of the childcare workforce are problematic areas which need to be addressed. Childcare has always been considered a low-level and low-paid job. The professionalisation of care work is being supported by new forms of education, as well as updating and extending the knowledge base of Hungarian childcare workers. However, it is difficult to increase salaries across the childcare sector, and it will continue to receive a low status as long as other young people are able to earn three or four times more in other sectors.

The non-profit and private sectors are not strongly represented in Hungary. The majority of Hungarian workers in all occupational groups are public employees. The salaries of these employees are stipulated in the public employees' wage table, differentiated by qualification and their length of service in the public sector. Although public employees in Hungary normally have a permanent contract, salaries are very low. Low wages reduce the prestige of the childcare sector and its capability to attract a good-quality labour force. Interviewees uniformly viewed wages for childcare workers as inadequate. In comparison, although the wage gap between junior teachers and national average wages is wider than that between senior teachers and national average salaries, Hungarian teachers are rewarded for length of service, gaining a significant salary increase every third year, by progression into a higher salary band.

Pay levels are too low within the childcare sector to compete with other services in the private sector, and consequently many people with good skills leave the sector to pursue employment opportunities in other sectors. As a result of a reform in September 2002, Hungarian kindergarten teachers received a 50% salary increase, but the salaries of childcare workers still remain lower than in the private sector. Consequently, the childcare workforce in Hungary is ageing, which is a cause for concern. In addition, the status of childcare workers is quite low in Hungary. Although kindergarten teachers are trained at college level, they work significantly longer hours and receive

[19] For different levels of schoolteachers, 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).

lower salaries. According to the Hungarian Background Report (OECD, 2002), 'kindergarten teachers, as the lowest link in the institutional system of public education, have the lowest rank both in terms of salaries and professional recognition'. This implies that foundation-level education – a key level of education for disadvantaged groups – is still underestimated in Hungary. In these circumstances, it is likely that the sector will experience future recruitment problems and that teachers will leave the childcare sector to work in other sectors for higher remuneration. However, salary pressures may lead managing institutions to reduce the expansion of kindergarten and after-school service access, and may trigger a further wave of 'rationalisations' in childcare service provision.

Despite UK childcare workers being well trained and at the forefront of child protection issues, they tend to be paid low salaries, with many workers only receiving the national minimum wage. A self-employed childminder who was interviewed for this project described her income as 'supplementary' income. She did not view her childcare earnings as a salary, because it constitutes such a small amount of money. The interviewee cares for two school-age children to earn extra money while caring for her own children. This is a common practice confirmed by other childminders consulted. The interviews highlighted low pay as the primary concern among childminders in relation to working conditions.

UK childcare workers based in rural areas commonly report lower income levels than those working in urban areas. In addition, childcare workers based in rural areas travel greater distances to get to work than their urban equivalents, which costs even more money. Therefore, rural childcare centres often experience difficulties in recruiting staff, especially as the majority of openings are only part-time positions. Rural childcare centres often operate on a 'shoe string' budget and, therefore, can only afford to pay staff low salaries.

Table 2 below summarises the weekly incomes of childminders and related occupations and playgroup leaders/assistants in the UK. These are the SOC2000[20] categories for which the Labour Force Survey (LFS) collect information. The table also provides comparative income data for nursery nurses who may care for school-age children as well as pre-school children in out-of-school services provided by the childcare centres as described above.

For the purposes of the survey summarised in the following table, 'childminders and related occupations' include au pairs, childminders and children's nannies, while 'playgroup leaders/assistants' include play leaders, playgroup assistants and playgroup leaders. The table includes the average weekly incomes of all UK childcare and related personal services employees, primary and nursery education and teaching professionals, nursery nurses and educational assistants for comparison. The final rows provide comparative figures for all UK employees and female employees.

A number of observations can be made from the above data:

- the full-time weekly incomes of childminders and related occupations and playgroup leaders/assistants is less than half the incomes of professionals working in both primary and secondary education;

[20] Standard Occupational Classification 2000.

- childminders' incomes are roughly equivalent to educational assistants working in classroom settings;
- all childcare workers' full-time weekly incomes are significantly lower than those of all employees and all female employees;
- incomes are generally lower for female workers when compared to all employees, but childcarer incomes, a predominantly female workforce, are significantly lower than those in the all-female employees category.

Table 2 UK childcare workers' weekly incomes (to nearest €)

Job title	Average weekly income	Part-time weekly income	Full-time weekly income
Childminders and related occupations	276	188	369
Playgroup leaders/assistants	199	164	424
Childcare and related personal services	254	193	378
Primary and nursery education teaching professionals	763	421	842
Secondary education teaching professionals	823	413	898
Nursery nurses	306	197	376
Educational assistants	240	195	379
All employees	611	234	737
All female employees	454	230	613

Source: Annual survey of hours and earnings, Office for National Statistics UK, 2004.

A recent study (Rolfe, *et al.*, 2003) found low pay was 'a particular problem when combined with long hours worked in private day nurseries'. Long and unsociable hours were also considered to be problematic, although 'short and dispersed hours suited some people in particular circumstances [for example those] who combined their childcare job with other work'. The study reported that childcare 'workers in most settings complained of the low status of the work, in particular the perceptions of people from outside the sector that the work involves "playing" with children'.

Low salaries are also evident in the Swedish childcare sector. The monthly salary of leisure-time teachers and childminders in Sweden is significantly lower than that of primary school teachers and slightly lower than that of pre-school teachers (see Table 3 below). However, interviewee Anna Tornberg, who is responsible for issues concerning childcare for school-age children at the Swedish Teachers' Union, stated that gaps in salary levels have started to equalise in recent years. Leisure-time teachers and pre-school teachers have experienced the highest increases in salary levels. Moreover, in some municipalities, staff in school, pre-schools and out-of-school childcare services have the same starting salary. The Swedish Teachers' Union is trying to equalise differences in compensation levels and envisages that the new integrated educational programme will hopefully help to achieve this. The relatively lower monthly salary for childminders reflects their lower qualification level.

The table below sets out the monthly salary in municipal childcare/schools in Sweden.

Table 3 Average monthly salaries in municipal childcare jobs in Sweden, November 2004 (€)

	Newly employed	Experienced	All
Childminder	1,679	1,814	1,793
Leisure-time teacher	1,939	2,075	2,043
Primary school teachers	2,106	2,523	2,398
Pre-school teachers	1,991	2,106	2,085

Source: SALAR, 2005.
Note: Median salary means that 50% of the individuals within the group have a salary that is lower than or is the same as the median salary.

In Cyprus it is difficult to accurately determine the salaries of childcare workers because the childcare system is largely based on educational programming and informal care, rather than on more traditional childcare services. In general, teachers (who provide out-of-school educational courses) are paid well; however, those who often care for children informally are not paid a subsistence wage. Informal care for children is most commonly provided in middle-class homes by domestic household staff who are not trained to care for children, but often provide childcare as part of their daily activities. These individuals are quite often immigrant workers and are paid a very small wage to cook, clean and care for children.

Employment issues

The current structure of employment in the EU childcare sector gives rise to a number of issues. This section explores these issues with particular reference to employment developments and opportunities, the image of childcare workers, and quality of available services.

Employment developments and opportunities

Despite the rapid expansion of the European childcare sector overall, growth remains focused on extending childcare provision for pre-school children. For example, in the UK the Sure Start initiative has been introduced to fund growth in childcare services for children from birth up to 14 years of age. The Sure Start programme is designed to meet the National Childcare Strategy by aiming to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities by:

- increasing the availability of childcare services for all children;
- improving health and emotional development of young children;
- supporting parents in their family role and in their aspirations towards employment.

Sure Start has a strong focus on young children, but impacts on children up to the age of 14 years through a variety of initiatives. The Sure Start programme supports the growth of the UK childcare sector by providing information and advice on careers in childcare and by providing business support services such as training programmes.

Research carried out in the six case study Member States did not reveal any discrete job creation initiatives in the childcare subsector for school-age children. Although some countries reported elements of initiatives implemented to stimulate job growth in the provision of childcare for school-

age children, these were uncommon. Childcare policy for school-age children is largely still in the development stages and there is a natural time lag between policy development and the implementation of job creation initiatives. Emerging evidence suggests that out-of-school care will become a growth employment sector, given that women with school-age children are continually being encouraged to increase their labour market participation and will therefore increase the demand for childcare services for older children.

The expansion of the childcare sector in some Member States has created opportunities for current childcare workers to broaden the scope of their jobs rather than create new jobs in the field. In Hungary, for example, the supply of teachers exceeds demand for them. The number of students entering higher education, including teacher training colleges, has increased steadily over the past 15 years. The majority of students gaining a teacher's degree find employment in other sectors of the economy, although a large number of newly qualified teachers would prefer to work in primary school education, including after-school care. Similarly, there is also a surplus of recreation organisers in Hungary. The Hungarian government does not find it necessary to introduce job creation initiatives in the childcare sector, preferring to redeploy teachers to fill positions. Although there is no shortage of teachers applying for childcare jobs, 'afternoon care teachers' are regarded by colleagues, parents and often by themselves as 'lower rank' teachers. In Cyprus, all-day public schools are in the process of expanding to cater for children of all ages and to meet the need for more public childcare provision.

The expansion of the childcare sector can create other problems for staffing services. For example, in the UK the government set ambitious targets to provide two million childcare places by 2006 (HM Treasury, *et al.*, 2004). This planned rapid expansion of the sector has resulted in a dramatic shortfall in the requisite number of childcare and early-years workers, with significant shortages of childcare staff being reported in some areas of the UK. An executive director interviewed revealed that currently in Wales it is proving difficult to fill childcare positions due to insufficient availability of suitably trained childcare staff. Difficulties are most acute in rural areas owing to access issues, lower pay levels and part-time hours of positions. The director of Childworks.co.uk stated that 'the childcare industry is facing a crisis. By 2006 there will be a shortage of 175,000 childcare staff, and as an industry this is something we must tackle now' (Childworks, 2003).

As the childcare sector continues to expand across the EU, it is vital that new jobs created provide an adequate income and work–life flexibility.

Image of childcare workers

A positive image of childcare work is an important factor in attracting people into the childcare sector. Images of childcare jobs are mixed across the EU. Positive images of childcare work are most apparent in Member States where childcare workers work closely with teachers. With less association with teaching, childcare work is generally viewed as unskilled labour.

In Poland, the image of a career in childcare is connected with teaching. Teachers are perceived by Polish society as belonging to the most 'fair and reliable' (Public Opinion Research Centre, 2001) professional groups, alongside scientists and nurses. Childcare workers, therefore, benefit from a high social status. However, this status is contradicted by the relatively low remuneration of childcare workers compared with other professions, which has a negative impact on careers in the

sector. Moreover, the lack of coherent and accessible training schemes for childcare workers also negatively affects the image of childcare sector careers held by young graduates from teacher training colleges.

The Austrian stakeholders interviewed unanimously agreed that childcare work is highly respected and viewed as a positive contribution to Austrian society. Childcare 'is perceived as necessary' to enable parents to pursue employment opportunities. This is not translated into high-level skills being required by the sector. Paradoxically, people's perception of the skills required to work in childcare in Austria are low; as a result, childcare workers (especially those for younger children) are frequently termed 'aunties', and are regarded as a substitute for family members who look after children. According to the social partners interviewed for this study, 'education' (*Bildung*) plays a key role in society's judgement of the quality of teaching professions. In general, people believe education is provided by schools, but not by childcare facilities. Consequently, interviewees stated that it would be beneficial for childcare workers to be regarded more as 'teachers' for children's personal development, in order to increase their status in society.

In Cyprus, women are strongly represented in all aspects of childcare, particularly at the pre-school level. Interviewees stated that professional teachers, whether they are working in Cypriot schools or within the 300–500 private institutions, are highly regarded and parents value their work. The parent–teacher dynamic has changed in recent years as parents have more autonomy to choose their child's educational path, and increased participation in parents' associations is also evident among parents. Quite often, many teachers are pressurised by parents and questioned over childcare provision. Parents exert control over private childcare provision as they can withdraw their child and choose another provider.

Despite most childcare workers in Sweden, particularly leisure-time teachers, having the same or equivalent educational background as pre-school and compulsory schoolteachers and their increasingly combined work, the status of a career in the Swedish childcare sector is still lower than a career in the school sector. This is largely attributed to lower salaries in the childcare sector, but also to inferior working conditions, in terms of planning time and holidays. This lower status of childcare workers is also because many people do not understand the role of such educators and the benefits of additional educational activities for children. An interviewee from the Department of Education at the University of Gothenburg revealed that significantly fewer students on the new teaching programme choose to specialise in leisure-time activities and this was viewed as a reflection of the lower status associated with childcare workers.

In the UK, childcare staff are not generally associated with teaching. Interviews showed childcare staff felt that their jobs are not viewed as a 'real' profession, as they are just 'watching' children. Childcare staff in the UK reported feeling undervalued, underpaid and overworked.

Male childcare workers

A job in the childcare sector is regarded as a more feminine role in most Member States. Childcare has traditionally been viewed as 'women's work', and the majority of people employed in the sector are women. The traditionally low status and female image associated with childcare workers has resulted in a low percentage of men being attracted to working in the sector.

Table 4 below depicts that less than a fifth of childcare workers in childcare institutions with shared management in Sweden are men. The proportion of men only working in Swedish leisure-time centres is 18.9% while the proportion of men working in leisure-time centres and other activities (such as pre-schools) is slightly lower at 14.9%. The proportion of men only working in leisure-time centres is slightly higher in childcare institutions with separate management, at 20.7%, but the proportion of men involved in more than one activity is significantly lower, at 5.9%.

Table 4 Childcare workers in Sweden by sex, 2004

	Number of workers	Women	Men
Childcare institutions with shared management			
Leisure-time centres only	12,700	81.1%	18.9%
Leisure-time centres and other activities	16,863	85.1%	14.9%
Childcare institutions with separate management			
Leisure-time centres only	556	79.3%	20.7%
Leisure-time centres and other activities	353	94.1%	5.9%

Source: National Agency for Education Sweden, 2004, report 260.

Table 5 below extends the above analysis, illustrating the number of childcare managers in all forms of Swedish childcare for children aged one to 12 years and the proportion of men and women employed. Notably, a slightly higher proportion of managers are men compared to the overall proportion of male workers.

Table 5 Childcare managers in Sweden by sex, 2004

	Number of managers employed	Women	Men
Childcare (children aged one to 12 years)	8,290	80.0%	20.0%
Public	5,921	76.1%	23.9%
Private	2,369	89.6%	10.4%

Source: National Agency for Education Sweden, 2004, report 260.

Sweden does not have a centrally developed plan to encourage men into the childcare profession, but such initiatives are being developed on a smaller scale by individual municipalities.

Quality issues

Service quality can easily be sidelined as the majority of the EU is focusing on providing or increasing childcare provision. Many EU15 Member States, such as the UK and Sweden, are able to regulate and maintain high-quality services because they have more established childcare sectors. New Member States are more concerned with simply providing services and do not yet have the resources to evaluate and enhance the quality of provision. The safety of children is the first priority in all childcare services.

The service quality issue is increasingly being raised in relation to the Barcelona targets for childcare services. Key scholars such as Peter Moss and Janneke Plantenga advocate the need to look beyond just setting childcare targets to addressing quality issues in childcare services. Concerns include whether childcare services are holistic and meeting the needs of children, families and communities. This view supports the child, the entire community (including those parents who are not working) and serves many purposes and possibilities (Moss, 2005). The care of children is, therefore, viewed as part of a broader approach to working with children and their upbringing in a community. Europe has strong traditions that support elements of this approach, such as educational and child-focused early-years services providing 'children's spaces'.

A single definition of quality services does not exist, as indicators of quality are determined by a range of culturally based values. Member States across the EU have very different histories and cultural values toward childcare. Any examination of childcare services needs to appreciate and celebrate this diversity.

Although quality indicators are in the early stages of development in many Member States, some programmes are more advanced. The Hyndland after-school programme in Scotland is an example of a programme focused on providing a quality service by its effective use of ongoing consultation with children and parents.

Hyndland after-school club
Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom

Since 1992, the Hyndland after-school club has been providing childcare services before and after school to children aged four to 12 years. The club operates from the former dining hall of Hyndland Primary School, in the Partick district of Glasgow, Scotland. Afternoon sessions for the children run from 15.00 to 17.45 during term time, and between 08.00 and 17.45 during school holidays. Children are collected from school at 15.00 and brought to the club. A breakfast club opens from 08.00 to 09.00 on school days and has an average attendance of 21 children.

The programme is commonly cited as a best practice example of childcare provision and was recently profiled in a London newspaper. The director of the centre considers activities to be 'nothing out of the ordinary', but the programme's use of ongoing consultation with parents and children to adapt childcare provision to meet needs makes this programme unique. By understanding the needs of participants, the programme is able to provide services that are specifically geared towards children of various ages with very different needs.

Further information: http://www.hyndlandasc.org.uk/

In Hungary, the sharp decline in the economy in the early1990s took its toll on the quality of childcare and education staff. In particular, low pay in the childcare sector for kindergarten and primary school teachers as well as recreation organisers appears to be having a major impact on current recruitment practices. In the first decade after the economic transition, recruitment for childcare positions was not difficult. The drastic decline in the number of children and thus in employment opportunities meant that trained childcare workers were in competition for jobs and

could easily be recruited. There are still a large number of applicants whenever an employment opportunity for an after-school care provider or recreation organiser arises, but it has been the case that the professional quality of applicants is often far from satisfactory. During the three-month trial period (compulsory before Hungarian childcare workers are given a permanent employment contract), skill levels of applicants often prove to be inadequate and the vacancy has to be readvertised.

Conclusion

The childcare sector is growing in many Member States due to increasing initiatives and European targets, and women's increasing participation in the labour market.

In order for the childcare sector to support a high-quality workforce, it needs to address key employment issues such as the poor image of careers in childcare, low pay, and poor working conditions. Most Member States are still exploring these issues and are not yet at the point of creating employment initiatives. At present, activities are being focused on promoting work and opportunities in the childcare sector. EU governments need to promote job creation by first addressing the poor salaries, the negative image of childcare sector careers, lack of training and poor working conditions in the sector if employment levels are to be maintained and suitably qualified workers recruited to support the expansion of the sector.

The next chapter on training and qualifications will make the case for improving working conditions by equipping childcare workers with skills and formal recognition of their competencies. These measures are designed to help formalise the quality of jobs, improve access to childcare jobs and enable childcare workers to gain more secure work.

Training and qualifications 4

This chapter explores variations in the ethos of training and current training provision available for people wishing to work in childcare sectors in different European contexts. Current training standards seem to be determined by types of childcare provision and requirements in different sectors and countries; this results in a plethora of qualifications and levels of accreditation for childcare workers. Having explored these issues, the chapter will provide conclusions, particularly concerning the monitoring of childcare training standards.

Training standards

Level and types of training

The level of training available to childcare workers varies greatly across the EU. While training is most common at the tertiary level, there is often less training available in the new Member States. In some Member States such as Poland and Hungary, it is common for trained teachers to provide after-school care in schools. In others countries such as the UK, trained non-teaching staff generally provide care in schools or at out-of-school centres. However, out-of-school care that takes place in private homes (generally by childminders) is usually not provided by staff who are trained to a recognised accreditation or to degree level. In Hungary, for example, childminders are not required to have any qualifications. In the UK, childminders are required to undertake training courses to become licensed to provide childcare services. In Austria, training for childminders is offered by a number of non-profit organisations. However, training standards vary significantly according to different federal regulations and as a result it is difficult to establish recognition for 'the childminder profession' because a uniform qualification profile does not exist.

A key variable affecting the level and type of training available for childcare workers is the position of childcare workers themselves. For example, in Poland, most out-of-school childcare provision and vacation childcare and education activities for six- to 12-year-old children are staffed by primary school teachers who are required to have a higher education qualification. All teachers must have either a Bachelors or Masters degree, or a non-university type higher education to diploma level, following three years' study. All Polish lower secondary education level teachers should have a Bachelors or Masters degree and all teachers must also complete a course providing psychology, education and specific didactical skills. This course has a minimum duration of 279 hours and also requires practical work experience of at least 150 hours. However, specific training for childcare workers providing out-of-school care in Poland is very limited, being confined to several programmes in the organisation and education of social and cultural activities (educator and organiser of cultural activities for children); seven training schemes in the management of school trips and outings; 24 training courses in care and upbringing education (including one course on extracurricular classes activities); and 22 training schemes for class tutors delivering summer camps.

The following case study is an example of a Polish day room at a primary school that employs teachers with higher education degrees to provide activities during and after school.

In Austria, the most common childcare workers, 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. The former offers students the option to specialise and train as a 'Hort educator' after the second year of training. In addition, separate training institutes offer the same education

options to students aspiring to become social workers. In contrast to the majority of European Member States, training for Austrian childcare workers is not offered at degree level or the equivalent. As a consequence, training institutes frequently cannot offer their students the possibility of work experience abroad, for example through exchange programmes. Austrian childcare workers have very limited possibilities to work outside Austria, as their level of training falls below tertiary-level training such as a university-level course.

School day room – Primary school no. 23
Płock, Poland

Primary school no. 23 runs a day room which offers a variety of extracurricular activities for children aged seven to 15 years during and after school. The programme responds to the needs of both children and parents and provides many activities within groups in different subject areas such as mathematics, music, art and languages. A qualified teacher with a higher education degree looks after each group. In addition to care and educational activities, the day room also organises annual methodological conferences for teachers from the entire Płock region that focus on didactic aspects of education. The day room is open from 07.00 to 17.00 during term time, but does not provide activities during weekends.

Further information: http://www.sp23.plocman.pl/start.html

In contrast, Swedish childcare staff employed in out-of-school services tend to be very well trained, as is evident in the case study below.

Ostergardsskolan
Skurup, Sweden

Staff qualification levels are generally high and seven of the 11 staff members have a relevant higher education qualification. The remaining four childminders have an upper secondary school education. To some degree, this relatively lower level of education among the childminders is complemented by several years of experience of working with children. Two of the childminders are dedicated to working with special needs children.

Training levels have in fact declined in some Member States in recent years. For example, in Sweden, although municipalities are expected to equip all leisure-time centre staff with a higher education teaching qualification (specialising in care for a particular age group), a large proportion of staff are not educated to this standard. The proportion of staff with a teaching qualification has particularly decreased in leisure-time centres. During most of the 1990s, nearly 70% of all leisure-time centre staff had a teaching qualification. However, since 2000, this proportion has decreased steadily. In 2004, just over 60% of all staff held a teaching qualification (Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), 2005). Qualification levels of childcare workers are also significantly lower in private leisure-time centres, with less than half of the workers having a teaching qualification.

Qualifications and sector frameworks

In Member States where teachers commonly work in out-of-school programmes, university-level qualifications are common. In Cyprus and Hungary, for example, because out-of-school services are provided mainly by teachers, it is common for out-of-school care to be provided by university-level trained teachers. In Hungary, after-school care staff commonly hold four-year university or college degrees that include academic study and practical experience. Table 6 below is an example of the teaching and other qualifications held by staff in Hungarian out-of-school programmes.

Table 6 Required qualifications for childcare workers in Hungary

Childcare workers	Required qualification
After-school care teacher	College degree after four years of education at teacher training colleges.
Recreation organiser	College degree (four years of education) in colleges offering a specialisation in recreation organising. A university-level recreation organiser degree can also be obtained in Hungary.
Special needs educator	Four-year degree in a college for special needs education.
Family care worker	University or college degree in social education, special needs education, psychopedagogy, psychology, kindergarten teaching, teaching, theology, medicine, or mental health, etc.
Childminder	No required qualification for childminders.

Source: Ministry of Education.

A few Member States have developed comprehensive sector frameworks to benchmark qualifications in the childcare sector and develop pathways for career development to help childcare workers progress into supervisory and management positions. In the UK, there are a range of childcare qualifications, including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Council for Awards in Education (CACHE), Edexel, City and Guilds (C&G) and Open University awards. The main UK childcare qualifications are listed in Table 7 below; however, these types of qualifications may differ from those in other Member States.

Table 7 Qualifications of childcare staff in the UK

Level	Award	Other information
Basic qualifications	CACHE Foundation award for caring for children	1 year full-time level 1 study
	CACHE Certificate in childcare and education	1 year full-time level 2 study
	C&G Progression award in early years care and education	Level 2. 120 hours of practical assessed childcare
	Introducing Childminding Practice	12 hours. First unit of Certificate qualification (see below)
Level 3 qualifications	CACHE Diploma in childcare and education	2 years' full-time study
	BTEC National diploma in early years	18 units of practical work-related projects and assignments
	NVQ level 3 in early years care and education	A range of mandatory and optional assessed units
	Certificate in childminding practice	3 units: the introductory unit (see above) plus 60 hours Developing Childminding Practice, and 60 hours Extending Childminding Practice

Source: Sure Start, 2005.

Units of qualifications can be studied in the workplace, in colleges and other educational settings, and some programmes can be studied through distance learning such as the Introducing Childminding Practice course. Some employers, such as nurseries, may cover training costs, while in other situations the individual will bear the training cost, such as studying towards childminding qualifications.

The following case study is an example of a programme in the UK that offers a variety of support services for staff, including training qualifications.

London Play adventure playgrounds
London, United Kingdom

London Play is a voluntary organisation that runs more than 80 adventure playgrounds across London. Adventure playgrounds provide school-age children with free places to play in London's busy, urban environment. Most adventure playgrounds have quiet places for children to read or do homework and many offer access to computers. Some have after-school clubs which provide a formal childcare option for working parents.

London Play also runs a Play Together Project which helps support staff in a variety of ways, including:

- help with quality assurance schemes;
- training courses for playworkers and management committees;
- advice and support in accessing new funding opportunities;
- help in developing inclusive practices for disabled children and other marginalised groups;
- help in identifying gaps in local play services and developing services to provide for unmet needs.

Further information: http://www.londonplay.org.uk/index.html

In the UK, the Sector Skills Council is leading the development of a comprehensive sector framework for childcare. The recent Ten Year Strategy For Childcare highlights that 'key explanatory factors' for better-quality childcare are 'staff with higher qualifications, trained teachers working alongside less qualified staff, [and] staff with a good understanding of child development and learning' (HM Treasury, *et al.*, 2005). However, despite this recognition of the need for a workforce qualification target, it has yet to be developed in the UK.

It is more common for EU Member States to have partial accreditation and regulation systems in place for childcare training. Informal childcare workers are particularly vulnerable to receiving unaccredited training. For example, training for childminders and children's group care workers in Austria is not consistently regulated; consequently, training standards vary significantly between regions. This issue is closely related to career progression opportunities within the childcare sector. Employment opportunities in the childcare sector are explored in more detail in Chapter 5. For example, Austria demonstrates limited career advancement opportunities across the childcare sector.

However, there are good practice examples within current childcare systems of initiatives enabling childcare workers to gain additional qualifications, as the following Swedish case study demonstrates.

Milstensskolan
Täby, Sweden

Milstensskolan was established in 2000 and integrates childcare services provided by schools and leisure-time centres. This enables education and leisure-time activities to be provided in the same facility and during school hours. Milstensskolan dedicates between one and two hours of the school day to leisure-time activities with one of the teachers. The initiative was largely inspired by studies in the US that revealed that play, sports and being in motion improves the coordination of children's movements and helps them to develop good physical and psychological stamina, and also stimulates the development of the brain and its capacity to learn new things. The 'integrated school day' helped to break up the day and has been highly successful to date. Children find it easier to concentrate and all pupils are reaching the national educational targets of achievement. The initiative has also been praised by the leisure-time teachers. First, it has allowed them to work with children for a greater proportion of the day and in different settings, which in turn has created greater security and continuity in the services provided. Secondly, the initiative has allowed leisure-time teachers to work with all children, not only the ones that attend the leisure-time centre. Thirdly, it has allowed more of the leisure-time teachers to gain full-time employment.

To help staff implement these new tasks, the school has encouraged further training. For example, Britt-Marie Sundstrom, one of the leisure-time teachers, recently attended university courses such as 'Basic chemistry' and 'From Bamse (a Swedish cartoon character) to Kafka'. Both courses were worth five points at university, which is equivalent of a quarter of a semester.

Further information: http://www.milstensskolan.se/

Informal childcare

Although the informal care of children is not a focus of this study, it is important to recognise its potential impact across the childcare sector, especially in the new Member States. Informal care consists of paid or unpaid work by friends, family or others not classified as formal childcare workers (such as maids). In the UK, for example, a recent study by the Department for Education and Skills indicated that childcare provision was more likely to be of an informal nature and that grandparents were the most commonly used childcare providers (Woodland, *et al.*, 2002). In Cyprus, childcare for school-age children is often provided by maids who are untrained and unregulated in childcare services. Maids are not considered formal childcare workers and are therefore not tracked and do not have the same protection and employment rights as formal workers. In the EU15 and other new Member States, it is common for grandparents and friends to care for school-age children. Informal services such as these can be difficult to track, therefore their impact on the sector is unknown. It is also important to note that informal services impact on the ability of women to undertake paid work or re-enter the workforce, and such services can often be the only form of affordable childcare available to these women.

Quality standards and regulation

The extent to which training is regulated varies greatly across the EU. For example, in Austria, the training of educators is strictly regulated. In Poland, the 2004 directive of the Ministry of National Education on detailed principles of conducting educational supervision clearly defines quality standards for out-of-school education establishments. The school's administrative body monitors

these quality standards and ensures that they are met. Schools and other public and non-public out-of-school education establishments are inspected approximately once every five years. They are assessed on key concepts such as strategic management, internal quality measurement systems, operational management and organisation of educational programmes. In Sweden, the Education Act states that out-of-school childcare should be provided by staff that are so well trained or experienced that they can satisfy children's needs by providing both care and stimulating educational activities. This is further specified in the general recommendations for leisure-time centres which state that Swedish municipalities should aim to employ staff with a higher education teaching qualification (specialised for the age group they will work with). Despite this specification, a large proportion of Swedish childcare staff are not qualified to this level.

Regulating the quality of childcare is challenging in a sector that is continuing to develop to varying degrees across the EU. It is not surprising that there are currently no EU-level frameworks for benchmarking quality in childcare services owing to the range of elements involved in setting a quality standard. Member States are all at different stages of addressing quality issues in school-age childcare services. Provision of services is insufficiently advanced in some Member States to be channelling resources into quality issues, while other Member States recognise the complex elements associated with developing quality standards. In interviews with stakeholders in Sweden, some of the determinants of overall quality include the training of staff, the staff to child ratio, the size of children's groups and the quality of childcare facilities. These characteristics could be adopted as key indicators to measure the quality of childcare services in the future.

Although Sweden recognises the need to address quality issues, there has been a significant deterioration in the quality of childcare services for school-age children in recent years. This is a result of both budgetary cuts and difficulties in attracting suitably qualified staff into the sector to meet the increasing demand for out-of-school childcare in Sweden. A recent evaluation by the Swedish National Agency for Education stated that 'the budgetary cuts have won over the pedagogical ideals and resources have been cut to such an extent that good quality no longer can be guaranteed' (National Agency for Education Sweden, 2004). The central government has responded to this criticism by taking a number of steps to assure the quality of Swedish childcare provision. For example, government grants have been introduced and allocated for the recruitment of staff in leisure-time centres and schools. The first grant was given in the 2001/2002 academic year and the National Agency for Education recently published an evaluation of the impact of the grant on the provision of services.

Monitoring standards

Monitoring standards is not a focus of this report, but the link between monitoring and quality provision should be highlighted. Moreover, monitoring standards in childcare services would help to maintain quality provision and attract a high-quality workforce. This monitoring of standards would also help safeguard working conditions across the childcare sector.

Conclusions

European framework

A European framework, if developed, would be a tool to regulate childcare training and provide benchmarks to ensure the quality of training provision. This would assist in professionalising

childcare and raising the status of employment in the sector. As many school-age childcare providers are trained teachers, there is also potential to link childcare and education frameworks, producing benefits for both sectors. In those Member States where childcare is mainly provided by non-teaching staff, it is particularly important to strengthen training standards in order to help raise the status of the childcare profession. Regulating training would help ensure that children are provided with quality services designed to best meet their needs. Policymakers should be encouraged to accredit training provision with formal qualifications where possible to help raise the status of childcare sector jobs and promote the mobility of workers across the EU.

Career paths

Considering the establishment of a European framework as outlined above would help develop career paths in the childcare sector. This would enable childcare trainees to map out their own career path to gain the skills and qualifications required to progress into supervisory and management positions. In both the EU15 and NMS10, assistance with career development in the childcare sector is lacking. Promoting careers in the childcare sector through the development of career paths will also help increase diversity among the childcare staff base by attracting a wider variety of people into the sector's workforce. Career paths would also help promote a more positive image of the sector, by demonstrating progression opportunities. Several EU15 Member States, such as the UK, offer some assistance in career development. For example, the Sure Start initiative in the UK offers information and guidance on careers in the childcare sector, but focuses mainly on working with younger children. There would also be scope for cross-border career and exchange opportunities.

Equal opportunities

The majority of people opting for childcare training are women. Increasing the representation and participation of men in the sector should be a priority, to ensure the occupation appeals to both genders and generates a balanced workforce. A survey conducted in 2003 by Mori Social Research Institute in the UK indicated that the key benefits of men working in childcare include: children being cared for in a mixed gender environment; providing positive male role models for children; helping to ensure the childcare profession reflects society as a whole; and increasing the number of people working in childcare. However, interviewees for this study also identified key barriers to men working in childcare, such as: risks of pedophiles; parents not wanting their children to be looked after by a man; the low status of the childcare profession; and low pay. Staff providing childcare services should reflect the diversity of children receiving services; therefore, increasing the participation of men and people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the childcare profession should be a priority.

Information, advice and guidance

Comprehensive information, advice and guidance are essential to promote employment opportunities in the childcare sector, and to demonstrate typical career paths to young people considering their career options. Equal opportunities considerations, such as ensuring access to people with disabilities, and the use of community languages and appropriate terminology and imagery, should underpin the development of information, advice and guidance materials and systems. This is an important aspect of maintaining and developing a high-quality childcare sector, drawing on a well-trained and diverse employee base. Culturally sensitive information, advice and

guidance could help reduce shortages in staff diversity, encouraging men and women from different community backgrounds to explore employment opportunities in the childcare sector.

In conclusion, it is clear that there are a variety of training and qualification standards for the provision of childcare for school-age children across Europe. Training tends to be more developed in Member States where care is provided by trained teachers. Where care is provided by other types of care workers, training and qualifications often do exist, but are less likely to be comprehensive and well regulated. The training and qualifications debate raises key questions regarding the need for the development of a standard framework across Europe to help ensure better training and qualification of staff providing out-of-school childcare. The most logical way to further develop the sector would be to develop a standardised framework to regulate childcare training and provide core benchmarks to ensure the quality of training provision, and facilitate the mobility of childcare workers across the EU. This is clearly a difficult task because of cultural diversity in the provision of services and the differences in quality standards across the EU25. Moreover, establishing key indicators to help standardise the sector would help raise the profile of training opportunities and jobs in the childcare sector. Regulating training and qualifications across the EU would help improve working conditions in the sector by equipping workers with widely accepted skills and formal recognition of their competencies.

5 Gaps and future needs in childcare provision

Existing childcare systems demonstrate a range of fundamental gaps both in the organisation and distribution of current service provision, and in the content of training and employment-related opportunities. These issues suggest there is a need to improve both the level and quality of job creation initiatives in the childcare sector across the EU. There is also scope for the service to be more user-led in what kind of childcare options it provides, where these are provided, at what price and through what types of activities.

However, an important warning should be added here. Although significant gaps are evident in current childcare provision, this must be seen in the context of this sector undergoing rapid expansion. In real terms, out-of-school childcare is at record levels in many Member States. In 2004, for example, Swedish childcare provision recorded its highest enrolment figures, with 75.5% of all children aged six to nine years and 10.2% of all children aged 10 to 12 years enrolled in out-of-school childcare. (These figures exclude children attending open leisure-time facilities which do not record enrolments.)

Current service provision

Capacity of current provision

Assessing the extent of gaps within the capacity of current childcare provision is complex, and an area often contested within Member States. For example, although it is generally accepted that there are capacity issues in the number of childcare places available in Austria, the extent of the problem is disputed. A key reason for this is that some service provision is monitored more closely than others. In Sweden, for example, open leisure-time centres which provide out-of-school childcare for 10- to 12-year-old children do not monitor the number of children attending, as they are not required to enrol children.

The limited understanding of current gaps in provision makes it difficult to provide evidence for the need to expand the childcare sector or increase funding levels in the EU. It is also difficult to estimate capacity issues, as informal childcare provision remains prevalent across the EU25, particularly in Member States with lower income levels, and this source of childcare provision is not monitored in any systematic way either within Member States or across the EU.

In some Member States, such as Austria, gaps in provision appear to be a significant problem, whereas in Sweden this is not a concern. In Austria, the government has presented two different studies on gaps in the childcare sector in the last three years. The first is '*Mikrocensus 2002*' (Statistics Austria, Household management, childcare and care, Microcensus results, 2002), which identifies the need for 89,400 additional childcare places, of which 46,500 relate to school-age children. Another study called '*Prognosis of future childcare demand*' claims there is a need for 18,154 additional childcare places, of which 10,323 relate to children of school age (Statistics Austria, 2004).

In the UK, a recent survey carried out by the Department for Education and Skills indicated that nearly a quarter (24%, or about 1.3 million) of families surveyed experienced some form of unmet demand for childcare during the previous year (Woodland, *et al.*, 2002). The survey included

children aged 14 years and under, and unmet demand was considered to be defined as occasions when the parent wanted or needed childcare, but could not get it.

In Sweden, access to childcare for school-age children is at its highest levels and almost all local authorities are now fulfilling their obligations under the Education Act to provide out-of-school childcare without undue delay. As a result of this near 'full coverage', it is relatively unusual for Swedish parents to mention lack of supply as a reason for not securing childcare places. However, a recent survey by the National Agency for Education revealed several other reasons identified by Swedish parents for impeding their ability to secure the childcare services they want, with cost being the primary factor (National Agency for Education Sweden, 2001).

There are also key gaps in some Member States in the provision of childcare services for ethnic minorities. In Hungary, for example, Roma people represent 6% of the total population. In recent times, much debate among the public and media has focused on education and care equity issues, and the Hungarian government recognises the importance of tailoring provision to meet the unique needs of the Roma community and promoting inclusive childcare options.

Austria, Hungary and Sweden all recognised the need to extend and diversify childcare provision. However, these are complex issues and are not always backed up by extensive research. There is a clear need to enhance understanding concerning current provision across the EU by developing monitoring and reporting systems. Improving monitoring information systems across the EU and developing common indicators of children accessing different types of childcare provision will be an important part of this.

Opening hours

More flexible opening times of childcare services are required in most Member States. In Austria, for example, requests have been made for childcare services to be opened for more weeks per year. This would also entail the need for more flexible forms of childcare, such as childminders who would be willing to work unsociable hours. Overall, childcare provision is more comprehensive for children under 10 years of age. For example, a significant gap in the provision of suitable activities for children aged 10 to 12 years is evident in Sweden. Children in this age group are often included in the same groups as six- to nine-year-olds, which may not always be suitable and stimulating for the older schoolchildren. Moreover, when 10- to 12-year-olds are integrated with six- to nine-year-olds, they often receive little attention from childcare staff, as six- to nine-year-olds take up most of their time. A further complication is that activities in leisure-time centres are often geared towards the needs of six- to nine-year-olds. Combined with the financial burden of childcare, a general trend can be discerned that parents choose to leave older children on their own during the afternoons.

The case study below illustrates a Swedish initiative designed to improve childcare provision for 10- to 12-year-olds.

Childcare services are not extensive enough to meet the needs of parents. In some Member States such as Austria, there are programmes available for parents either before or after school. Furthermore, in many Member States childcare during holidays and weekends can be very difficult to find. However, in Hungary, during the summer holidays day-care camps (*napközis tábor*) are organised in most schools. Well-off local governments finance a greater number of summer camps;

however, municipalities with a restricted budget offer less childcare services during holidays. Parents in the UK and Cyprus also report difficulties in locating affordable childcare options during holidays and weekends.

Ostergardsskolan
Skurup, Sweden

Ostergardsskolan piloted a separate activity for 10- to 12-year-olds in the spring of 2005. A whole new 'house' was created for this age group. The positive reports from the pilot scheme resulted in the programme being implemented on a permanent basis in the autumn of 2005. Childcare staff have been able to provide activities that are better suited for this age group. Children are encouraged to develop their independence and are allowed to go home with a friend after school if parental consent is given.

The school has dedicated two qualified staff members to work with the 20 pupils in the leisure-time centre for 10- to 12-year-olds. One of these is employed as a leisure-time teacher and has a higher education degree, while the other is an educated social worker/childminder who has been employed largely to take care of special needs children who attend the leisure-time centre.

Urban and rural provision

A significant distinction is evident in the level of childcare provision in urban and rural areas across the EU. Provision is often most comprehensive in large cities, such as that enjoyed by residents in Vienna, Austria. In more rural areas across the EU, rural childcare provision is more patchy because of a variety of factors, including difficulties filling childcare jobs owing to their location, lower pay and part-time working hours. In Hungary, few shortages are reported in the urban childcare sector, and jobs are relatively easy to fill. However, there are some shortages in after-school care teaching posts in some rural areas of the country. In other Member States such as Poland there are significant gaps in childcare provision in urban areas.

Childcare provision is particularly sparse in the new Member States. This is caused by a number of factors, including the lower level of resources often available to regional governments with low populations dispersed over a large geographical area, and the increased unit costs of provision and access. The result is that some primary schools have been closed in areas where the birth rate for this age group has declined and there is a lack of suitably qualified staff to provide childcare services. However, out-of-school childcare provision could be established at relatively low cost by adapting the infrastructure of the closed schools. Changes in government and spending priorities could also reduce gaps in childcare provision.

Multi-faceted nature of gaps

Current gaps in childcare provision arise as a result of numerous factors which often combine to compound parents' dissatisfaction with current provision. This is highlighted by Table 8 (overleaf) which shows parents' discontent with childcare services in Austria.

The prevalence of these factors in accounting for gaps in current provision varies by Member State. In Sweden, for example, consistent increases in group sizes are the main cause for concern in the

quality of childcare provision. In 2004, the average group size in leisure-time centres was 30.1 children, nearly twice as many children per group as in 1990, as Table 9 below demonstrates.

Table 8 Reasons for dissatisfaction among parents (other than opening hours) by childcare type in Austria (%)

Type of facilities	Dissatisfaction with quality	Difficult to access childcare facilities	Childcare too expensive	Lack of facilities for taking children/ bringing them to a 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.

Table 9 Average care group size in Swedish leisure-time centres, 1990–2003

Year	Average number of children in groups
1990	17.8
1995	23.7
1996	24.1
1997	26.2
1998	29.4
2002	34.1
2003	30.1

Source: National Agency for Education Sweden, 2004, report 248.

In this context, the question arises as to how long a child should be placed in childcare. In addition, it is interesting to note where the family and social orientation fit into this picture. Some childcare services (primarily in Scandinavia) are now being offered from 06.00 to 20.00 to meet the needs of parents. However, it is not clear if this is indeed a quality provision or a cause for concern for the well-being of the child.

Affordability

The cost of childcare is a significant barrier to accessing childcare services in many Member States. The extent of this issue is exemplified by parents in Sweden, with more than a third of parents of children aged six to nine years citing this as the most common reason for not being able to access their chosen childcare facility and resulting in them giving up a childcare place. To combat this, Sweden implemented a system of maximum fees in 2002 to improve the affordability and accessibility of childcare for school-age children.

It can be difficult to assess the issue of affordability due to variance in regions across the EU. In Austria, for example, it is very difficult to make any general statement on the quality and affordability of childcare because regulations and circumstances differ across the nine provinces

and between different types of childcare. However, a recent survey in Austria indicated that 46.9% of parents viewed childcare to be too expensive in Hort programmes and 32.6% of respondents indicated that after-school care was too expensive in schools. A staggering 100% of parents viewed the expense of boarding schools to be excessive (Statistics Austria, 2003).

Employment and working conditions

Issue of unemployment

Issues of affordability are compounded when a parent's employment status changes. In Sweden, for example, only 44% of unemployed parents accessed childcare services. This can be partly attributed to the fact that many municipalities do not offer childcare places for children to unemployed parents or parents on leave. Indeed, in 1998, children in 60% of the municipalities lost their out-of-school childcare place when one of their parents became unemployed and only 30% of the municipalities accepted children of unemployed parents into out-of-school childcare (National Agency for Education Sweden, 2001).

Shortages in employment

Although it is difficult to assess current gaps in the provision of childcare, employment shortages are evident in the childcare sector in some new and EU15 Member States. However, in Poland, the supply of childcare workers, especially of teachers, is much higher than actual demand. This is mainly due to demographic changes and the resulting decrease in the number of primary school-age children.

However, in some EU15 countries there is a growing need for more childcare provision and employment shortages are evident. As policy for school-age children continues to develop, the need for further provision and staff to provide services should increase. In the UK, the current childcare strategy set challenging government targets to provide two million childcare places by 2006, resulting in a dramatic shortfall in childcare and early years workers (HM Treasury, *et al.*, 2004). Some areas across the UK are now reporting significant shortages in qualified childcare staff.

Assessing the current extent of shortages across the EU may prove difficult, owing to the lack of consistent and reliable monitoring information. Shortages in childcare provision tend to show corresponding shortages in jobs and available workers. However, the size of the childcare sector is stagnating in some Member States such as Hungary, which does not report shortages in the sector and jobs are relatively easily to fill.

Training and qualifications

In Austria, there is a general perception that all childcare workers should be qualified to at least tertiary level, and that all education professionals should be trained by specialised schools. Currently, Austrian childcare workers are commonly known as 'the lesser educators' in comparison with teachers. Raising the level of training received by Austrian childcare workers would enhance their status and bring their profession more in line with that of teachers. Research carried out in Austria identified a need for greater cooperation between schools and childcare providers and for additional personnel specialised in advising care professionals in addressing the requirements of

special needs children. The deteriorating level of training and qualifications emerging in Sweden in recent years is particularly concerning, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The demand for good-quality childcare training is increasing across the EU. For example, government representatives in Poland emphasised the high demand for good-quality childcare training. The lack of training opportunities was identified as one of the major factors impeding the development of effective childcare provision of childcare establishments outside the school system. This issue was due to the fact that most Polish childcare training programmes are funded by a local authority or school, usually with restricted financial resources. This reinforces the reliance on existing teachers to provide a significant proportion of childcare provision in Poland.

Equal opportunities

As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a need to increase the participation of men and members of ethnic groups as childcare workers across the EU. At present, the female-dominated childcare sector is apparent across the EU, as the majority of childcare workers are women.

The employment of members of ethnic minorities also needs to be increased in the childcare sector. Language training for immigrant workers can be a significant issue in Member States such as Cyprus. In order for Member States to meet the diverse needs of children from different ethnic backgrounds, staff should be employed who represent or are sensitive to the unique needs of different ethnic communities. In Hungary, for example, the government is working to promote the social inclusion of Roma children and families through childcare provision.

Provision through the use of minority languages is also an aspect of equal opportunities. Developments such as Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin in Wales in the UK are a model of good practice.

Job creation

There is an overall lack of specific job creation initiatives in the childcare sector. This report adopts a broad definition of job creation as the expansion of existing employment in the childcare sector rather than the specific creation of new positions. However, a minority of good-practice job creation initiatives were identified, and could potentially be replicated in other EU contexts; examples of good practice in this area are given in the Austrian case study below.

'Mobile mothers' and 'Childcare on the farm' projects
Austria

The childminding projects 'Mobile mothers' and 'Childcare on the farm' both adapt the traditional childminding concept to respond more flexibly to parents' needs, while simultaneously creating additional employment and income. These initiatives are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

Further information: http://www.noe.hilfswerk.at/
http://www.kinderbetreuung.at/bauern/

Many good projects and models were identified during this research and it would be worthwhile compiling a database of these for networking and information sharing.

Future needs

This section explores key issues for consideration in training the future workforce and employment and job creation initiatives in the childcare sector. These considerations arise as a result of the gaps in current provision described in the previous section, and projected trends for childcare requirements in the future. The section explores future needs in relation to job creation, training and qualifications, and employment and working conditions.

Job creation

The childcare sector overall represents a growth employment sector, which requires further job preparation as well as job creation. However, planning the capacity of the sector and demand for services is a complex process owing to widespread demographic change in the EU. The rapid expansion of the childcare sector in some Member States has also led to concerns about quality standards and regulation of services. Issues around skills and qualifications also need to be examined, as the focus is changing on what is most desirable in childcare workers. Denmark, for example, is in the process of re-evaluating the training and qualification base of its educators and teachers. These issues are explored in more detail below.

Developing flexible provision to meet demographic change

Population levels and age distributions are undergoing significant change in the EU, and this is expected to continue in decades to come. For example, Austria reports a declining child population and this could lead to excess local capacity if provision is planned rigidly. This also highlights the importance of equipping childcare workers with transferable skills to enable them to work in growth employment sectors, such as caring for older people, in response to demographic change in the future.

Ensuring quality in large group size

Group size constitutes a key consideration in developing quality childcare services in the future. Group size or carer-to-child ratio in formal childcare systems is currently inhibiting the assurance of quality provision in some Member States. For example, childcare in Austria is often provided in groups of 25 children. Similarly, the key issue that needs to be addressed to improve quality in the extension of Swedish childcare systems, according to leisure-time teachers and experts, is to reduce the average group size and improve the staff-to-child ratio. Additional funds need to be allocated to out-of-school care to enable this to happen. Although provision is dependent on public resources and spending priorities, there is an opportunity for employment expansion in the childcare sector.

The case study below demonstrates a good practice example of how Sweden has tried to address the issue of large group sizes and to reorganise provision to provide good-quality childcare to a larger number of children.

Nya Varvets Skola
Gothenburg, Sweden

As a result of the rapid expansion of the Swedish childcare system and severe cutbacks in municipal budgets during the 1990s, many leisure-time centres in Sweden have been faced with larger groups and a lower staff-to-child ratio in recent years. As a result, many leisure-time centres have had to reorganise their services for school-age children. In 2004, Nya Varvets Skola responded to this problem by introducing separate groups for children aged six to seven years and children aged eight to nine years. The new system enables children aged six to seven years to play in smaller groups while the older children play in slightly larger groups. Although the larger groups for older children are not ideal, these children attend the leisure-time centre less frequently. Older children are allowed to sometimes go home with friends or return home if they have parental consent, as they are more able to play independently than younger children and need less supervision.

The new system allocates two members of staff to work with each group of children aged six to seven years, while three staff members work with the older children. The younger children now receive out-of-school care in groups of 20 to 22 children, while there are up to 45 children per group in the older age bracket.

In addition to creating smaller groups for younger children, the initiative has also enabled activities to be streamlined for the different age groups. Teachers are able to work with the older schoolchildren in a different manner and give them greater responsibility for their actions to help aid their personal development. Having smaller groups for the younger schoolchildren also makes the transition from pre-school less traumatic for six-year-olds.

Although the new system has only been running for a year, childcare staff have already noticed improvements in the level of positive integration with the children.

Further information: http://www.nyavarvetsskola.se/

A key aspect of ensuring quality to underpin future job creation initiatives in the childcare sector is the development of comprehensive information, advice and guidance services, both for people wishing to access training and employment in the sector and for parents selecting childcare provision. The case study below demonstrates how a project in Austria is developing this approach.

Family Business
Austria

'Family Business' is a non-profit organisation and provides a variety of services to facilitate the matching of families with the most suitable childcare providers based on the needs of parents and their children. The services offered include a comprehensive internet-based childcare database that parents can use to identify a suitable childcare provider for their child. The project provides high-quality personalised advice to parents on the advantages and disadvantages of different childcare providers in Austria. In addition, the intensive networking activities of this organisation enhance the level of communication between parents, childcare providers, sponsors and local authorities.

Further information: http://www.kinderbetreuung.at/

Training and qualifications

Professional training needs to be tailored more specifically to the needs of the childcare sector. In Poland, for example, there is a high demand for good-quality qualification and training programmes for childcare workers. Parents are increasingly requesting additional childcare services which include more emphasis on education and learning. Polish parents consider extra classes and activities outside school hours as a means to support the academic and personal development as well as future professional career of their children. The Polish authorities recognise that graduates in education, primarily trained as teachers, are not well prepared for providing the range of childcare provision required. The Polish government is currently planning improvements to education and teaching programmes at universities to provide specific childcare training and ultimately improve the quality of provision. The case study below illustrates good practice in the development of a specific training programme for Polish childcare workers.

'My place' – A day room programme
Podlaskie, Poland

The day room programme 'My place' was established in 2005 to develop good-quality out-of-school childcare in urban day rooms for children aged eight to 13 years to aid their personal development. The programme was designed to create awareness among parents and day room staff of activities carried out in urban day rooms, as well as to encourage their participation in these activities.

Two technical training courses for childcare workers form part of the programme. Several childcare workers from each day room participate in the training, including teachers/tutors, parents and volunteers. The initial training course at the start of the programme trained childcare workers in designing high-quality programme content. It covered the following subject areas: how to work with parents; how to develop activities for children of various abilities and behavioural levels, not just for 'well-behaved girls'; ways of engaging with children and encouraging them to participate in a wide range of activities; developmental psychology of children of all ages; and how to effectively promote the day rooms in the local community. The training course also explored examples of other programmes for children aged eight to 13 years which could be adapted for individual day rooms.

The second training programme was to be carried out five months into the programme and was designed to train childcare workers to make modifications to the programme design based on experience to date and any emerging issues. Training of childcare workers in the next phase of child developmental psychology techniques and encouraging cooperation between day rooms in the local area were also to be part of the second session.

Support meetings were planned to offer childcare workers employed in and developing day room services the opportunity to exchange experiences, to create networks between programme leaders, to develop a range of new day room activities for future implementation and to receive advice in their work.

Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities issues emerge as a consequence of cultural barriers and limitations within current policies and initiatives to alleviate these barriers. Future training and job creation initiatives in the childcare sector will therefore need to promote equal opportunities and inclusion. This is increasingly important given the expansion of the EU and the policy drive to promote the mobility of workers across the European Union.

The increased participation of women in the European labour market has provided a steady supply of childcare workers in many Member States. However, the current predominance of female childcare workers raises concerns, and there is a need to safeguard the sector from being regarded as a low-skilled, low-paid sector. Initiatives need to be designed to encourage more men to access work in the childcare sector. There are a range of European programmes piloting family-friendly employment initiatives (such as the EQUAL and IDELE programmes), and these suggest a number of positive approaches to training local communities to create better-quality childcare for their local environment.

Ethnic minority issues, such as the need for language training for immigrant workers and the Roma community, are being developed to extend equal opportunities in Hungarian childcare provision.

Social protection

Social protection is an important issue in formalised employment, as previous chapters have highlighted. Future services will need to expand and develop to accommodate a diverse workforce and promote the successful integration of work and family life. Poverty is still a significant issue across the EU and employment growth in the childcare sector could be a component of increasing labour market participation for women and men. It is also important to note that informal childcare is unregistered and not formalised by contracts or employment rights across the EU. As a result, it is difficult to estimate the extent of informal childcare provision, as this is not monitored in any systematic way. Therefore, the impact and protection of informal childcare services is another important factor in the future development of childcare services for school-age children across the EU.

Conclusion

The current state of gaps and future needs of the childcare sector across the EU is very difficult to assess because of a lack of current and reliable monitoring information. A variety of influential factors impact on the current and future needs of the sector. In some Member States there appears to be significant gaps in the provision of services, while in other contexts shortages in provision are less clear. The lack of training standards, the low income of workers, hidden informal employment and high cost of services are also significant issues. Although the childcare sector is growing in most Member States, this is at different rates, and provision is actually stagnating or in decline in several of the new Member States. Increasing employment opportunities must follow the need for increased service provision and the childcare sector is encouraged to develop employment creation initiatives that promote flexibility, high quality and protection of employee rights.

Conclusions 6

This study has:

- identified gaps in current research and policy development for this sector;
- documented good practice in employment developments in affordable, high-quality childcare;
- explored how developments in childcare services support the promotion of equal opportunities in employment;
- highlighted the need for special attention to be paid to recognised socially excluded groups such as Travellers and minority language groups;
- identified gaps and shortages in childcare supply for school-age children across the EU and how this differs between Member States;
- established a need for resources for networking and exchange of good practice;
- highlighted policy issues for future research.

The key lessons emerging from the research can be summarised as follows.

Role of public policy in childcare services

During this research, no specific school-age childcare policy was uncovered. It was revealed that childcare policy for school-age children is either in the developing stages or not yet developed across much of the EU. While some EU15 Member States have policies in place that could potentially impact on school-age children, most new Member States are still much more focused on the care of younger children. Many Member States are still focusing on more urgent priorities, such as protecting children's welfare and caring for young children to enable mothers to enter the labour market. It appears that many Member States are moving in the right direction to address the needs of school-age children in the future.

The current context for school-age childcare in Europe has been set nationally mainly by family, employment, equality, education and social protection policies. European employment initiatives such as the Barcelona targets aim to increase childcare for younger children. However, most childcare considerations are set in an economic context and the primary feature in current policy is the focus on increasing women's labour market participation. The quality of life issues surrounding childcare can be easily neglected because of the significance of childcare economics. 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. Mapping legislative develops in this area is beyond the scope of this research, but is recommended as an area for future research to chart the holistic development of public policy for school-age children.

A policy area in need of development are the conditions for accession to the EU. This is essential to ensure that an acceptable level of quality and safety are present for the care of children in those countries wishing to join the EU.

There is also a need for a support organisation or influential person to ensure that out-of-school childcare moves up the policy agenda in the EU and does not remain in the shadow of pre-school provision.

Quality of childcare services for school-age children

As many Member States are still struggling to provide childcare services, the quality of services is often secondary to the provision. This is rather unfortunate because quality childcare is an important part of creating an excellent quality of life for children across Europe. It is important that childcare services are able to meet the needs of children and provide a variety of stimulating and engaging age-appropriate activities. It is also essential that provision meets the needs of families by offering flexible hours and services at an affordable price. Defining the issue of quality across the EU is extremely difficult because of varying cultures and each country's ability to provide childcare services. While determining the quality of childcare services was not a focus of the research, it is still recognised that quality is a central component of any consideration of working conditions in the childcare sector. Setting a quality standard across Europe could potentially help regulate and promote quality standards across the childcare sector, but it would be a difficult task. It would also place the child as the central focus of the care to be provided.

Employment opportunities in the childcare sector

As a whole, the childcare sector is growing across the EU, although the majority of jobs are not well paid, and are often below the recommended pay levels. In Member States where teachers provide most of the out-of-school childcare, the pay and image of childcare workers are higher. In other contexts, childcare pay does not provide a sustainable wage and the sector does not have an image of offering good-quality employment. Some childcare jobs such as childminders offer flexible schedules, but provide poor pay. Many of the jobs in the childcare sector are also part time and finding full-time work can be challenging. Career possibilities are also discouraging in the sector and advancement is difficult because of the lack of management positions.

The variance in employment standards in childcare across the EU makes it difficult to assess if employment in the sector supports a work–life balance for families. However, in many Member States, it does not appear to be very supportive of a quality life. Low pay, the poor image of working in the sector and poor working conditions are key areas to be addressed in the promotion of the childcare sector across Europe. Unfortunately, many Member States do not have initiatives designed to increase and support employment in the sector. Perhaps by beginning to recognise potential weaknesses in employment conditions in the sector, a natural progression may be that more Member States will support quality employment in childcare services for school-age children in the future.

Training and qualifications

Across the EU, a variety of training and qualification programmes are available in the childcare sector. In some Member States, university qualified teachers commonly provide care, while in other contexts less trained non-teaching staff provide the majority of childcare services. It is more common for Member States to have partial accreditation and regulation systems in place for childcare training. On the whole, apart from the Scandinavian countries, the childcare workforce does not represent a highly trained sector; therefore, it struggles to pay a subsistence wage to many of its employees. In order for the sector to provide a better wage and support a quality workforce, it is important to provide accredited training and relevant qualifications for workers. Standardising

training and qualifications across the EU could substantially increase the quality of employment and provision of services in the childcare sector. A European framework could be considered as a way to support the development of a quality, integrated, trained and more mobile workforce. Networking activities across the EU15 and NMS10 could be initiated to share good practice on the development of training and qualification structures in different contexts. These networking activities could also provide an important opportunity to explore demographic imbalances in relation to labour supply and demand in different Member States, and explore the development of flexible training structures and mechanisms that can be adapted according to fluctuation in demand. Benchmarking standards in training and qualifications in the sector would also help address growing concerns about the quality of care services.

Lobbying activities are encouraged to promote the findings of this research in the European agenda, to explore the potential development of a European framework to help regulate and promote quality in training and qualifications development in the EU, and to assist the mobility of workers across the EU. A European framework would empower individuals to develop their own career paths, and to realise their potential in diverse childcare labour markets across Europe, helping to redress the demographic imbalance in the workforces of some Member States.

Quality in training may be a key starting point to providing wider overall quality in the sector in the EU. The next step may be to carry out further research into the unique methods of providing services across the EU and further examination of a quality standard in childcare provision.

Social inclusion and equal opportunities

It is important that childcare services accommodate a diverse workforce and promote the successful integration of work and family life. Poverty is still a significant issue across the EU and employment growth in the childcare sector could be a component of increasing labour market participation of women as well as men. Current EU equality policy sets a good climate in which to view childcare services. It is important that equality issues are addressed not only in employment, but also in the provision of services. It is key that the sector supports a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the children attending childcare facilities. At present, the sector is struggling to provide socially inclusive employment and services across the EU as a whole. Identifying incentives to recruit men to work in the childcare sector and to identify role models to promote the value of childcare as a career option are possible measures to improve the gender balance of the childcare workforce.

Social protection

The focus on child protection in childcare services was the impetus for promoting policy to regulate services in some Member States. The safety of children in care is clearly the first priority of provision. However, another important aspect of provision is providing a stimulating and engaging environment for children of all abilities and backgrounds. It is important that any exploration of the types of childcare provision does not forget the important context of child poverty and the importance of the family in the EU.

Gaps and shortages in supply

In some Member States, gaps in employment and services are apparent, and in other countries it is difficult to determine. In Member States where policy is supportive of increasing childcare provision, there tends to be greater growth in services. Current provision varies across the EU, but is often insufficient to meet the demands of parents. Services can vary regionally and rural areas are more likely to suffer from gaps in employment and in the provision of services. Some Member States are starting to provide more flexible services with extended hours and weekend and holiday care to meet the needs of parents and children, but other countries offer inadequate provision to support parents' needs for extended services.

It should be noted that systematic, published national-level assessments of childcare demand, both demographically and geographically, were not available to inform this research in most Member States. Childcare resources should undergo 'rural-proofing' in all Member States to ensure the unit cost of rural provision is accurately identified and adequate resources are identified for the provision of rural childcare.[21]

Creating affordable and sustainable childcare

Sustainability of childcare services can be a significant problem in under-resourced Member States and regions. In childcare services, the key factors that impact on sustainability include:

- *Affordability* – in many cases, parents cannot afford the services available, so underpinning cost is a factor, as is the way the provision is constituted. This is particularly relevant to socially excluded groups and those with issues trying to re-enter the activity market.
- *Supply and demand* – this is not well matched in many Member States. In many EU countries the supply cannot meet the demand for services, while in other countries there are too many workers and not enough employment. There is scant evidence of relevant research into supply and demand issues and correlating the two. This may be a first step in ensuring optimum use of scarce resources. A recent longitudinal study of local childcare markets in the UK funded by the DfES demonstrates a successful approach to increasing knowledge in this area to help inform future policy development.[22]
- *Quality* – resources are often inadequate to provide quality services that meet the need and demands of children and parents.
- *Work–life balance* – employment and services do not often meet parents' needs for flexible services to help balance busy working lives with family life; a proviso here is that the life balance of the child needs to be looked at also.
- *Training* and *qualifications* – the variety and scope of training plus the divergence of academic and non-academic credentials makes it difficult to assess the quality of the childcare sector; there is scope for a core skills framework that can be added to, in order to reflect culture and diversity in the EU. An information source that catalogues the types of training and support available would also be a bonus for less advanced Member States.

[21] 'Rural-proofing' is a strategy used in the UK by government agencies such as the Commission for Rural Communities and the Countryside Agency to safeguard quality and access in the provision of rural services.

[22] *Local childcare markets – A longitudinal study*, available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/SSU2005FR016.pdf.

- *Low pay* – this is an issue in most Member States and is an issue across the childcare sector as it is in the broader care sector. Wage rates are a factor in sustainability, as these are often the prime fixed cost. Ways have to be found to ensure that workers are paid appropriately in line with sustainability of provision. Again, pay is linked to the perception of the tasks and research needs to seek out ways of upgrading the image of childcare jobs in practical ways.
- *Providers' business skills* – the extent to which childcare providers are able to adapt to market conditions, both in terms of filling childcare vacancies and developing flexible staffing strategies to meet childcare demands.[23]

There is limited evidence of sustainability in the childcare sector outside of private sector and community/cooperative ventures. If businesses are to be sustainable, it is important that they have access to revenue and capital grants. The future of the childcare sector is dependent on the factors mentioned above in addition to broader social and fiscal trends such as the economic climate, unemployment rates and demographic changes such as a fluctuating birth rate. Therefore, there are a number of outstanding needs in employment development in childcare services for school-age children:

- identifying resources or a minimum investment per child;
- longer-term planning, such as 10-year strategies;
- exploration of different methods of providing provision and mainstreaming services;
- more creative thinking and innovation in respect of care provision.

The consideration of developing a European framework would also provide a structure to regulate quality and standards in private sector childcare provision.

In conclusion, there are a number of inter-related policy areas in need of further research. Moves towards childcare policy development from the supply-side perspective are welcomed and should be enhanced to ensure that out-of-school childcare for school-age children is an enriching experience, and that it supports the child's personal, emotional and cognitive development. This focus will, in turn, support the implementation of demand-side-led policy developments concerned with strengthening the economy through increased labour market participation and by reassuring parents that their children are well cared for while they are at work. Childcare policy development should therefore 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. The social protection policy agenda is a key aspect of ensuring that childcare policy development continues to be further developed as part of a child-centred approach.

[23] ibid.

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Annex:
Case studies

Programme name	Location	Type of service	Age group	Page no.
The Genesis project	Wales, United Kingdom	Public provision of free childcare opportunities to encourage women and men back into employment in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area of Wales.	All ages	13
Józsefvárosi Tanoda Foundation	Budapest, Hungary	Privately funded foundation offering afternoon and weekend activities for Roma children.	11–18 years	20
G + E School	Larnaca, Cyprus	Private institution that provides lessons to groups of children after school hours.	8–17 years	25
Integration fun club IKAR	Kraków, Poland	Public provision offering extracurricular activities aimed at integrating children with special needs into the education programme of the public school alongside other children.	6–12 years	26
Zeg–Zug Children's House	Budapest, Hungary	Publicly funded centre offering leisure activities for children of all ages.	All ages	27
Milstensskolan private school	Täby, Sweden	Integrated private school providing leisure-time activities during the school day.	Up to age 12 years	28, 55
József Attila Primary School	Budapest, Hungary	Public funded after-school programme providing a range of activities at a local primary school.	6–14 years	29
Moblie mothers	Austria	Publicly subsidised non-profit organisations providing care for children in their home environment.	All ages	31, 64
Childcare on the farm	Austria	Publicly subsidised non-profit organisations providing childcare services in rural areas on farm premises.	All ages	31, 64
Mazotos Primary School	Larnaca, Cyprus	Public all-day school providing a variety of educational and fun activities.	9–10 years	32
Children's Centre	Nicosia, Cyprus	Non-governmental organisation providing lower-cost after-school activities and holiday care.	7–12 years	32
'My place' day room	Podlaskie, Poland	Non-profit school day room providing a range of after-school developmental activities.	8–13 years	38, 67
Hyndland after-school club	Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom	Privately funded club providing a range of before- and after-school activities. The club also offers childcare activities during school holidays.	4–12 years	48
School day room Primary school no. 23	Płock, Poland	Public school day room providing a variety of extracurricular activities for primary school children before and after school.	7–15 years	52
London Play adventure playgrounds	London, England	Voluntary organisation providing free adventure playgrounds across 18 London boroughs with supervised play activities after school, at weekends and during school holidays.	4–16 years	54
Ostergardsskolan	Skurup, Sweden	Public leisure-time centre offering a variety of leisure-time activities to various age groups.	5–12 years	52, 61
Nya Varvets Skola	Gothenburg, Sweden	Public school providing leisure-time activities suited to various age groups.	6–13 years	66
Family Business	Austria	Non-profit organisation providing a range of activities to help match families with the most suitable childcare workers to meet their required needs for their children.	All ages	66

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

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Childcare is moving to the forefront of social policy within the EU. Yet, in the face of increasing demand for more and better provision of childcare services, it is clear that there are huge gaps in current provision and problems in attracting people to work in this area. This report focuses on the availability and need for out-of-school care for children aged 5 to 12 years. Based on research across the 25 EU Member States, it points to the wide disparities existing in this sector across countries and the varying approaches taken by the Member States to address the issue. It reviews the current EU policy context for addressing childcare for school-age children and identifies good practice employment initiatives in the sector. Finally, it argues that improving the quality of the training and qualifications of workers is a key starting point to enhancing employment possibilities and ensuring overall quality in the sector.

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