

# The Childcare System in Slovenia

**Seminar reports:**

**23-24 September 2008, Ljubljana**

Organisation of exchange of good practices on  
gender equality



*This project is supported by the European Commission Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013) and was established to support the implementation of the objectives of the EU in the area of employment and social affairs and thereby to contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy Goals in these fields.*

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## **THE PROJECT:**

### **Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality (ref: VT/200/054)**

#### **Introduction**

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2006, the European Commission adopted the Roadmap on Equality between women and men, which identifies six priority areas of action that the Commission is committed to implementing. The Roadmap represents the Commission's commitment to driving the gender equality agenda forward, thus reinforcing its partnerships with member states. Acknowledging that gender equality policies are vital to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness, the Commission and the Member States have also agreed that the time has come to make a firm commitment at European level to the promotion of women's employment and the consequent enhancement of their work- life balance, as well as an equal share of family responsibilities between women and men. To this end, the Member States have also adopted the European Pact for Gender Equality.

The Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality is therefore an effective learning instrument which can provide impetus towards and contribute to the achievement of gender equality in Europe.

#### **Project methodology**

The exchanges are organised as a rolling programme, dedicated to two Roadmap themes per year. Each theme will be assessed and disseminated through exchange seminars hosted each time by a different EU member state or EEA country to showcase one of their good practices. . Governmental representatives of EU member states and other stakeholders will attend the seminars to engage in the debate, which will be based on country reports prepared by country independent experts.

The two themes chosen by the Commission and the EU member states for 2008 are 'childcare' and 'parental leave'. The first seminar, on childcare, will be hosted by Slovenia. It will take place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 23 and 24 September. The second exchange will be hosted by Iceland in Reykjavic on 23 and 24 October and the topic will be parental leave.

The biannual thematic and interactive seminars will provide an opportunity for the stimulation of debate and the exchange of experiences between governmental representatives, independent gender equality experts and other relevant stakeholders.

The ultimate aim of the project is to facilitate the dissemination of good practices on gender equality in Europe and thereby enhance greater prosperity for all concerned.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**NATIONAL REPORT ON THE SLOVENIAN EXPERIENCE OF  
CHILDCARE PROVISION**

**by Božena Devčič and Sonja Lokar**

## 1. Introduction and definition of childcare

In this national report on the Slovenian experience of childcare provision, we will describe our predominantly public preschool childcare system and its impact on the equality of women and men and on their work life balance.

The Slovenian childcare system was set up in socialist times to enable women to take on full-time employment and to be economically independent. By the 1970s, care for preschool children of working mothers had been established, enabling the best possible socialization, development and preschool education of all children.

These two main goals of childcare provision were reinforced by changes made to the system in the nineties. The first change was the new Constitution (1991) which reiterated *de iure* gender equality (article 14), including the duty of the state to make this freedom possible (article 55), and explicitly obliged the state to protect “family, motherhood, fatherhood, children and youth and create circumstances necessary for such protection” (article 53). <sup>1[1]</sup> Secondly, the resolution on family policy in 1993 (Resolucija o temeljih oblikovanja družinske politike, Ur.list RS, 1993) reinforced this orientation.

On an institutional level, in the mid-nineties, family policy, social and labour-related gender equality issues (relations between spouses and unmarried partners, parents and children; state policy towards children, adoption, foster care, parental insurance and parental rights, connected with this insurance, as well as parenthood and children benefits) became the mandate of the Ministry for Labour, Family and Social Affairs, while the issues of childcare and preschool education became the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Sports.

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<sup>1[1]</sup> Source: Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, 1991

## **2. Data on the extent and provision of childcare and gender equality in particular in the labour market**

In EU member states the predominant model is one in which childcare facilities are divided into care and pre-school institutions, the former being for children from the ages of 0 to 3, the later for children from 3 till school age. In Slovenia we have an integrated or universal model: our kindergartens cater for children from under 1 till 6, when they enter primary school.

Our kindergartens are an integral part of the educational system, catering for all children whose parents want it, from the end of their parental leave (usually when the child is 11 months old) to the child's entry into mandatory primary education (at the age of 6). In 2006, in the first age group of children in childcare there were: 28.7% up to one year, 53.1% up to two years and 70.1% up to three years. In the older age groups there were: 81.8% aged four, 66.3% aged five and 4.7% aged six. The most common form of childcare facility in Slovenia is the public kindergarten, which accepts children from 7-11 months to 6 years of age; these are either independent institutions or form part of a primary school.

According to the Report on Equality between Women and Men 2008 (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0010:FIN:EN.pdf>), in 2006, Slovenia's employment rate for women in the 15-64 age group was 60.1% - exceeding the Lisbon target - and the employment rate for women with dependant children was 84%, and as high as 86.2% in the age group 25-49 years. (Source: Statistični letopis 2007). (The Lisbon Summit agreed targets of female participation at an average of 51-60% by 2010.)

Due to the low level of the majority of wages and lower benefits connected with part-time work, the majority of women work full-time, even though research at the beginning of 2000 showed that every third woman and every tenth man wanted to work part-time in order to better balance private and professional life. (Černič-Istenič, 2001:88, in Černigoj Sadar, Kanjuo Mrčela, 2006). In 2007, only 12.1% of employed women and 8.2% of employed men had worked part-time (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0010:FIN:EN.pdf>).

On average, women outnumber men at graduate and postgraduate level (in 2004 63.2% and 56.4% respectively) but they are still concentrated in lower paid feminised sectors such as the retail trade, tourism, education, administration and care work, and on average they earn only 92% of the average male wage. (Source: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0010:FIN:EN.pdf>)

Another specific Slovenian characteristic is the fact that motherhood relates to higher employment rates for women. In, 2006 the employment rate of mothers with children below 12 was 6 percentage points higher than that of women without children. (Men with children below 12 had 10.6 percentage points higher employment rate than men without children). (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0010:FIN:EN.pdf>)

Between 2000 and 2007, the overall unemployment rate in Slovenia oscillated between 7.7% and 5.7%. From 2001 till 2006 the absolute gender gap in unemployment rates had risen from 0.5 to 2.2. (Source: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0010:FIN:EN.pdf>). By 2007 women's unemployment rate had reached 6.8% , compared with 4.8% for men. (Source: Workforce Survey, 2007/1, Slovenian Statistical Office).

The highest proportion of unemployed women is to be found in the expanding group of young, highly educated (graduate) women, who in 2004 made up 63.6 % of all the unemployed in this group.

In the last four years, Slovenia has seen a growing proportion of pre-school children included in childcare, which has been growing by an average of 2.1 percent points per year – seen in Table 1. In the school year 2006/7, 64.8% of all preschool children in Slovenia had a place in publicly subsidised childcare. If this annual growth could be raised by an average of 3 percent points per year, Slovenia would meet the EU set targets for 2010. (Ministry of Education, Portorož, 2007, Statistical Information No 43, 2007). The growing numbers of children attending public child care can be seen in Table 2, which shows that just over 80% of children of four years of age were in childcare.

There is no doubt that in Slovenia, a well-developed network of public childcare enables women with small children to a great extent to enter and retain full-time employment, but it seems that it has very little impact on the employment possibilities for young women without children, for example, resulting from hidden discrimination in job recruitment. .

**Table 1: Number of children and their share of included in childcare**

School year	All pre-school children	Share of included in childcare
2002/03	58.968	57,1%
2003/04	54.515	60,6%
2004/05	54.815	61,4%
2005/06	57.134	63,6%
2006/07	58.127	64,8%

Source: Ministry of Education and sport, Portorož 2007

**Table 2: Children included in childcare in Slovenia in school year 2006/7, by age**

Children	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years
No. of children	5.281	9.619	12.241	14.657	15.458	871
Share	28,7	53,1	70,1	81,8	66,3	4,7

Source: Statistical information No. 43, 2007

**Table 3: Children included in childcare in the school year 2006/7 by the length of the programme:**

Length of the programme	Number of children included
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All day programme	55.318
Half day programme	2.670
Shorter programmes	139
Total	58.127

*Source: Statistical information No. 43/2007*

### **3. National policy provisions, including funding, on childcare**

#### **Description of the measure**

The most common form of childcare facility in Slovenia is the public kindergarten, either as an independent institution or as an additional facility in a primary school. Kindergarten departments are also organised in institutions for the children with special needs and in hospitals. There are also some kindergartens in big malls offering short-time care while parents are shopping. Companies with organised kindergartens for their employees are rare and are an exception to the rule.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Sport, Slovenia has 105 independent kindergartens, 183 within primary schools and 20 private, out of which 18 were established by the Catholic Church. (Source: Ministry of Education and Sport, Portorož, 2007)

In Slovenia, the majority of children in childcare follow a full-day programme. Childcare facilities operate every working week day throughout the whole year; some of them also open on Saturdays. Working hours are set up by kindergarten councils in accordance with parents' needs. Working hours of publicly subsidised kindergartens vary from a minimum of 9 to a maximum of 16 hours per day; most of them are open from 10 to 11 hours per day, starting from 5.30 or 6.00 am, closing at 16.00 or 16.30 pm.

Kindergartens offer all-day programmes, half-day programmes (4 to 6 hours per day) or shorter programmes (240 to 720 hours per year).

In general, Slovenian public childcare facilitates the full-time participation of the majority of working women in employment.

### **Financing and affordability**

In Slovenia, the state is responsible for the development at national level of general goals and principles for childcare and preschool education, while funding and financing is mostly left to the local communities. Local communities may establish public childcare facilities, while legal entities as well as private individuals are allowed to establish private childcare facilities, under which they are obliged to fulfil specific conditions if they ask for public subsidies.

The conditions for publicly subsidised childcare facilities are:

- They have to be open to all children.
- They have to employ educators and assistants to educators for the implementation of programmes in accordance with legal requirements.
- They have to implement at minimum half-day programmes and include at least a number of children requested for two childcare units.

**The share of the GDP spent on publicly subsidised preschool childcare is 0.65%.**

Today's financing system has been in place since 1996, when Article 25 of the Law on Kindergartens defined the following sources for their funding:

- Public state sources
- Sources of the founder
- Parents' contributions
- Donations and other sources

Public childcare facilities are financed out of local community budgets, state budgets and from parental contributions. Local community budgets finance the difference between the economic cost of the programme and parental contributions, the wages of all employees, the material costs of the kindergarten and the costs of investments

in real estate, equipment and maintenance of the facilities. Based on data from the Ministry of Education and Sports (from February 1, 2007), 68.4% of the programme was financed by the local community budget and 31.6% by parents' contributions. Local communities cover their share of the costs only for children whose parents are permanent residents, or for temporary residents of the community where at least one parent is paying income tax in Slovenia.

The State budget pays for the following (after special consent of the Ministry):

- The costs of kindergartens in hospitals – full price, when the hospital is covering the whole country, and half of the price for others.
- Units for childcare and preschool education within institutions for children with special needs, established by the State.
- Higher costs in the units where education is organised bilingually, and for the units of Roma children.
- Part of the costs for investment in real estate and equipment in ethnically mixed areas.
- The development of pre-school education (Article 29).

Amendments to this Law from September 1, 2008 introduced the rule that the state budget and not the parents will pay parental contributions for the second and every subsequent child, so long as they are in the pre-school childcare system at the same time. The Law also introduced gradual reduction of parental contributions. From January 1, 2010 the State will cover 50% of parental contributions for 5-year-old children, from January 1, 2012 for 4-year-old children, and from January 1, 2014, for 3-year-old children.

Subsidies for preschool childcare and education programmes are a very important element of financial support for families. There are two legal acts prescribing parental contributions for childcare services: the Law on Kindergartens and the Decree on Parental Contributions for programmes in kindergartens. Every year, parents have to request the subsidies from public sources in the community of their residence, on a special form which requires they provide data about family members, incomes and property. Based on these data the community decides what percentage of the economic price of the programme in which the child is included,

parents will have to pay. Parents receiving financial benefits according to the social security legislation received do not have to make a financial contribution. Every year parents are distributed in specific payment clusters according to the monthly income on a family member in comparison to the average wage in Slovenia and according to their property.

The scale of payments has eight levels. Parents contribute between 10% and 80% of the economic cost of the programme. This means that local communities are subsidising at least 20% of the economic cost of the programme for all families with children in the public childcare system. Some richer communities give additional subsidies to the parents. The system is not very well balanced and this presents difficulties for the poorer communities and their residents. Poorer communities have great difficulty in providing parents with additional subsidies. At the same time the parents in such communities have lower incomes than in the richer communities – so they contribute less for the programme than the parents in the richer communities. Thus poor communities are obliged to finance more money from their budgets in order to finance the programmes in the kindergartens than the richer communities, which have more parents in the higher levels of the payment ladder.

Some general data on parental fees - contributions in 2007:

- 5.9% of children were excused payment
- 21.2% of parents paid 10% of the economic price of the programme
- 61.5% of parents were placed in the first three levels of payment, so that they paid a maximum of 30% of the economic price of the programme
- 38.5% of parents were placed from the 4th to the 8th level of the payment scale
- On the 8th level of the scale there were 5.4% of all parents
- Average monthly payment for a child was 107.59 EUR
- The highest parental contribution for the child in the first age group (1-3 years) was 308.6 EUR, and for the child in the older age group: 227.6 EUR

*(Source: Ministry of Education and sport, Portorož 2007)*

The general conclusion with regard to affordability is that affordability depends too much on the possibilities of local communities, and parental contributions are too high, especially for those parents with middle and higher middle class incomes.

## **Quality**

The size of the childcare group and children-staff ratios have a great impact on interactions between children, children and adults, on the quality of learning and playing, on communication, use of speech, expression, etc. (White book on education and learning, 1995). Research has recommended that the size of the childcare group should be smaller than 14, and that children/staff ratio not higher than 7:1 (Bahovec, 1996, in Devčič, 2005). However, in Slovenia, kindergartens do follow these recommendations. The Law on Kindergartens stipulates that the size of the group in the first age group should not be bigger than 12 children, in the older age group not more than 22 children. (Article 17). In exceptional circumstances the local community can raise these numbers for an additional two children. In the case of the first age group, two adults have to be present for at least six hours per day, in the older age group for at least four hours per day. In the school year 2006/7, in Slovenian kindergartens there were 7.346 educators and assistants to educators, which gives the ratio of one adult for eight children. (Source: Statistical Information, 2007)

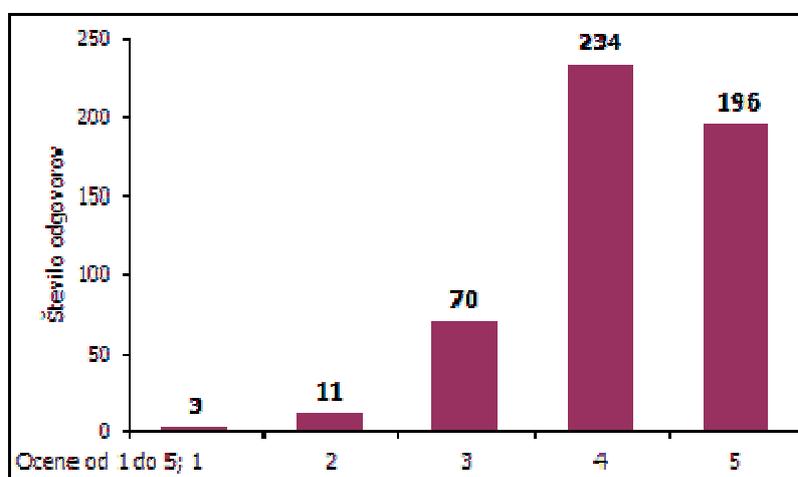
The standards of quality for Slovenian kindergartens are defined in the Curriculum for kindergartens, and were accepted by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education in 1999 as a national childcare policy, which defines the organisation of children and adults in the kindergarten. A new curriculum for kindergartens which has been gradually introduced from 1993 (Source: Conception of public kindergartens, 1993) brings more flexibility, more individualisation and some new theoretical approaches, for example, Step by step, Waldorf and Montessori programmes.

This Curriculum covers six crucial spheres of activities: movement, art, language, society, nature and mathematics. The goals in each sphere are given as a framework and offer professional guidelines for the activities and substances to the educators. Each activity has only global and essential goals, examples of activities are adjusted to the needs of the children and to the characteristics of the environment where implemented.

The services offered by Slovenian public kindergartens were evaluated as being of good quality by different political stakeholders in the qualitative analysis of public childcare in 2005 (Devčič, 2005), as well as by the parents of the children included in the kindergartens in the polling carried out by the Court of Accountancy in 2006.

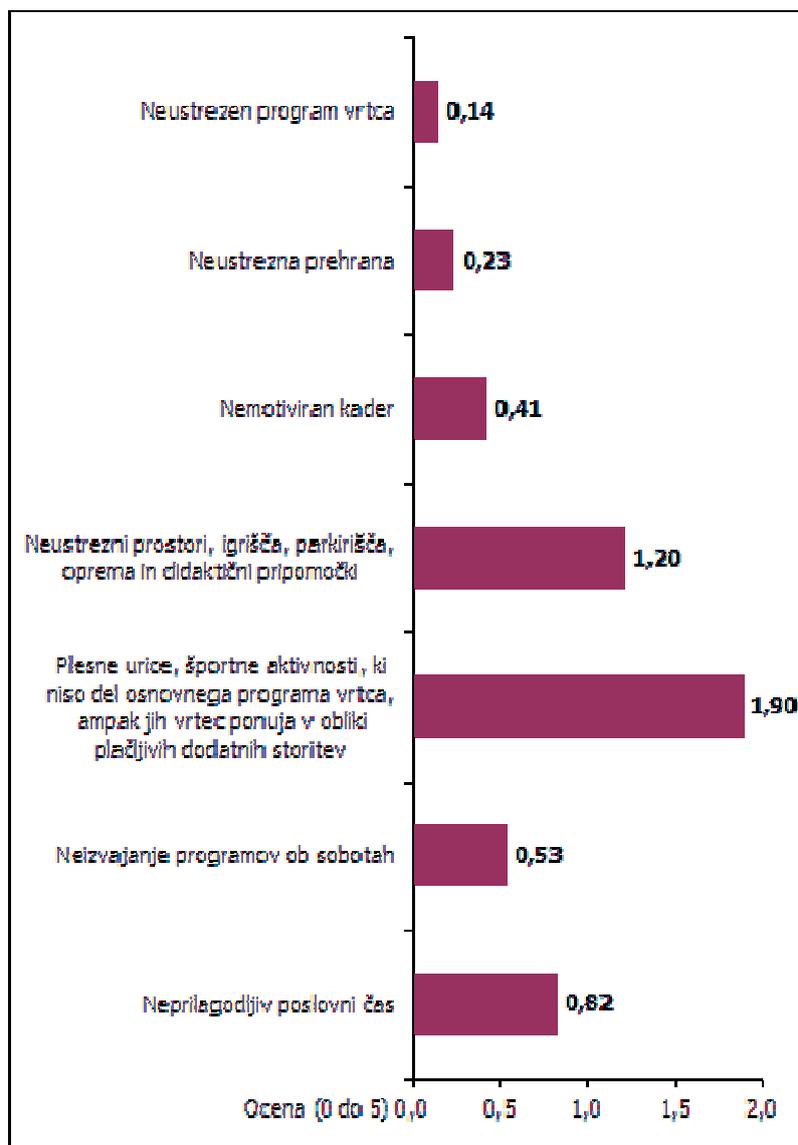
542 parents of preschool children who used public childcare facilities responded to the polling of the Court of Accountancy and gave the following answers:

How satisfied are your children are with their kindergarten?



Key: 1=not satisfied, 5= very satisfied

## Deficiencies of public kindergartens



Key: : 0 – not a deficiency, 5 – the most serious deficiency

Neustrezen programme= inappropriate programme

Neustrezna prehrana= inappropriate nutrition

Nemotiviran kader=non motivated staff

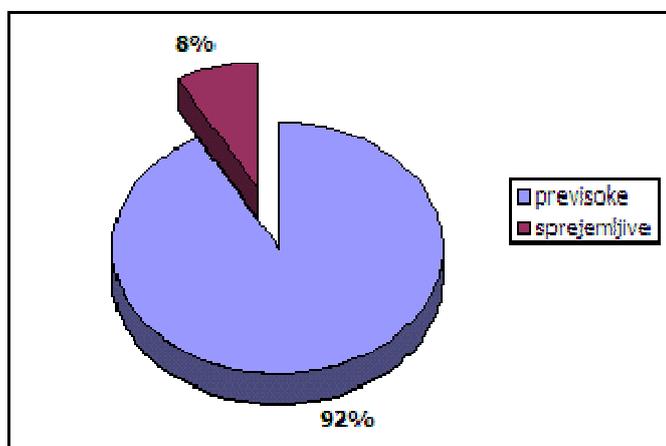
Neustrezni prostori, igrišča, parkirišča oprema in didaktični pripomočki=inappropriate facilities, playgrounds, parking lots, equipment, didactical apparels

Plesne urice, športne aktivnosti...= dancing hours, sport activities which are not included in the basic programme of the kindergarten but have to be additionally paid

Neizvajanje programme ob sobotah= No programmes at Saturdays  
Neprolagodljiv poslovni čas= inflexible opening hours

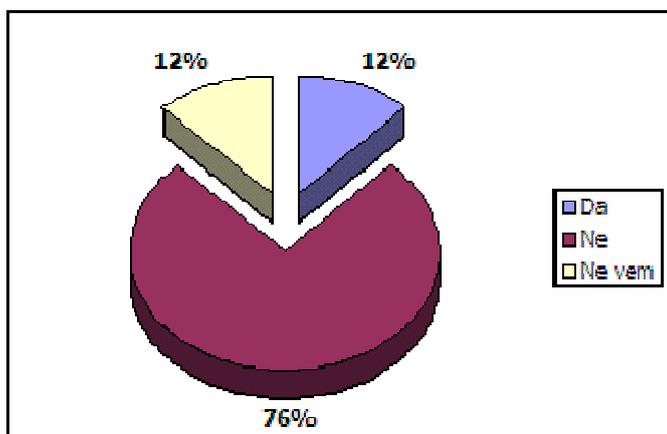
What most annoyed parents was having to make additional payments for dancing classes, language courses and sport activities. 69% of the parents who responded thought that these activities should have been included in the basic programme of the public kindergarten.

**Do you think that the differences in prices for programmes of the same value in public kindergartens are too high or acceptable?**



*Key: Blue: too high ; violet: acceptable*

**Do you think that existing legislation allows for a fair distribution of parents in defined paying slots, according to their income and property?**



*Key: White: Don't know; Blue: Yes; Violet: No*

<http://www.rs-rs.si/rsrs/rsrs.nsf//K39D2B445CE220117C125720A002CC866?openDocument>

## **Accessibility**

In its Revision Report of the Court of Accountancy in 2006, concerning public childcare and pres school education, accessibility was evaluated as the poorest and the least effective element of the public childcare system.

This report stated that, in Slovenia, in school year 2005/6, 32,699 pre-school children did not take part in any public forms of preschool care and education. Nearly one third of these children were trusted to uncertified private child minders. The government reacted with a change in the law providing for a simple procedure for the formal registration of childminders, but they were not included in a public system of pre-school care and education.

The status of childminder is given to a self-employed person who has the education required for pre-school educators or assistants to preschool educators. The latter have the right to take care of children from 0 to 3 years of age, which in fact lowers the qualification standards required for staff dealing with this age group in public kindergartens ([http://www.mss.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/predsolska\\_vzgoja/](http://www.mss.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/predsolska_vzgoja/))

These child minders are not obliged to implement the prescribed Curriculum, and the parents who are forced to use this type of childcare because of the lack of public childcare facilities are not eligible for subsidies from public funds. The Law on Kindergartens formally stipulates that all parents have the right to freely choose the programmes for their preschool children, but at the moment there is insufficient capacity in a large number of small, mostly rural local communities and in the capital Ljubljana itself for such choices to be realised. Another barrier is the relatively high cost of the programmes for many parents of middle-class incomes.

Based on the aforementioned, we can suggest that:

- National legislation and the support of the state budget are not strong enough to ensure equal level of accessibility of public childcare services to all parents and their children who need it, especially in the poorer local communities or in the

communities where there has been rapid population growth due to new housing and an influx of young families, or in the capital with its huge influx of daily commuters.

- Not all parents who are in need of childcare have easy access to the public or publicly subsidised private childcare facilities close to their home or their working place. If they do not get a place, they can not profit from the state subsidies for their pre-school child. Private child minders are not properly included in the public childcare system.

### **Integration with other policies**

As described above, in Slovenia publicly funded childcare facilities are predominantly provide full-time childcare, which largely meets the needs of parents working full-time standard working hours. However, their working hours do not accommodate any parents' needs outside of standard working hours. If parents need childcare in the late afternoon or at night they have to pay for private arrangements or depend upon the solidarity of grand parents and other relatives, which they often can do due to the style of life where primary and secondary families live close to each other in a small country.

In Slovenia, women workers, when pregnant and nursing, as well as permanently employed parents, are well protected against discrimination on the basis of sex or care for the children (Source: Labour Law). In practice, women working full time and with permanent working contracts do not have many problems in returning to their job after their family leave. The problem exists only for young women who mostly work on short contracts. They cannot get a full time permanent job contract, and their short working contracts are not extended as soon as they become pregnant. This is the most common approach and a very difficult one to prove, of sex-based discrimination in Slovenia. It does not prevent women working, it prevents them becoming mothers! (Source: Report of the Advocate for Equal opportunities of Women and Men, 2007).

The active employment policies of the Slovenian Labour Office have no special programmes that aim for the inclusion of mothers in the labour market, as women in Slovenia simply do not give birth before they secure full-time, socially protected jobs. Slovenia has, however, generous social policy provisions, which help parents with children with special needs and disability, enabling them to either integrate into average kindergartens or schools, or specialised institutions for such children.

The most disadvantaged women and children are Roma women and their children. There is no reliable data on the Roma community in Slovenia. At the last census in 2002, 3.246 persons selected this ethnicity, a few more men than women. Data from the Centres for Social Care are different, estimating that there are up to 6.500 Roma in Slovenia. This population is generally very young, and based on estimates about half of the Roma population is made up of people younger than 18 years. Roma have the highest rate of illiteracy and the lowest levels of education and formal employment (13.4 % of people who declared themselves as Slovenes by nationality finished higher or university education, but only 0.5% of Roma; 48.5% of all ethnic Slovenes said that they were employed, but only 11.4% of Roma. There were 2.7% of Slovene women who declared themselves as housewives, but 4.1% of Roma women). In recent years the Slovenian government has developed special programmes for young Roma women in order to help them to finish at least primary school education, and they have started to include Roma children in public childcare. Roma children are included in some of the 40 childcare facilities, some are in their own Roma settlements, with only Roma children, others are in units of Roma children in Slovene kindergartens, and in some kindergartens. Roma children are also included in the units of ethnically mixed groups.

The main challenges are:

- How to overcome the Roma traditional lifestyles and their fear to let their small children out of their families to be raised in the majority culture that they mostly do not trust.
- There are not enough educated Roma women who could become Roma educators, to take over the care for Roma children in all types of the

kindergartens. The solution was found in provisional training of Roma women for assistants of educators who are then employed in kindergartens with Roma children on the basis of public works. These Roma assistants to educators help Slovene educators in the kindergartens, serve as interpreters, and help Roma children to learn Roma and the Slovene language. Unfortunately this type of employment can last only for one year, after which a new Roma assistant to educator has to be trained and employed. This situation is difficult for all sides and affects the continuity of the implementation programme.

- Research proved that Roma kindergartens in their settlements show better results, Roma children from these kindergartens progress better later on in the ethnically mixed schools, than Roma children included in mixed kindergarten units, but this solution is not acceptable from the point of view of interculturalism, which is required to improve the relationship between the Slovene and Roma communities, where plenty of really nasty racist incidents and conflicts have occurred.

Sources:[http://www.uvn.gov.si/si/manjsine\\_ozroma\\_narodne\\_skupnosti/romska\\_etn\\_ica\\_skupnost/](http://www.uvn.gov.si/si/manjsine_ozroma_narodne_skupnosti/romska_etn_ica_skupnost/) Urad za narodnosti, Romska etnična skupnost; Popis 2002, 5 Prebivalstvo, verska, jezikovna in narodnostna sestava prebivalstva Slovenije, Statistični urad RS

#### **4. Childcare provision as part of broad policies on the reconciliation of work, private and family life for women and men**

In 1993, the Slovenian parliament passed a Resolution on Family Policy (Source: Resolucija o temeljih oblikovanja družinske politike, Uradni list RS, 1993) where policy support to reconciliation of private and family life with paid work for men and women is recognised as a tool for achieving several very important, but also potentially conflicting goals: better supply of workforce, higher GDP, higher income for families, higher fertility rate, gender equality and better possibilities for the development of the children. The main challenge of this policy is how to give proper balance to all of these goals.

On the one hand, this Resolution has been the basis of legislation which did not decrease women's employment rate or diminish women's opportunities for employment and which also helped employers who have workers with family obligations, especially on family leave. But at the same time this Resolution has also announced gradual prolongation of the parental leave, to two or to three years, which is somehow in opposition to the promoted goals of gender equality, as it is known that longer absence from the labour market makes a crucial impact on career development as well as on income of the employees with an interrupted working history.

On the other hand, the Slovenian system of paid parental absences for care for new born, sick or disabled children is one of the most generous in the whole of the European Union. Parental care is the right for all those who are employed on the territory of the Republic of Slovenia, and are paying contributory parental care insurance.

**All benefit indemnities based on this insurance - maternity, father's and parental leave - are paid 100 % from the State budget.**

The rights of all employees insured for parental care are as follows:

- The right to paid absence from work following the birth of a child.
- Types of parental benefit are:
  - **Maternity leave** - 105 days for the mother only, 28 of which have to be taken before the planned date of delivery (100% of salary);
  - **Non-transferrable paternity leave** - 90 days, of which 15 days are 100% paid and have to be taken at the same time as the mother is on leave; for the remainder of this leave the state pays only the father's social insurance taxes but no indemnity for his lost wages; and
  - **Childcare leave** - 260 days, 100% indemnity of the wage for the whole period, limited to 2.5 times the average monthly wage in the Republic of Slovenia. This parental leave can be shared upon a written agreement between both parents.

- All employed people insured for the parental leave also have the right to **adoption leave** which can be used by one or both adoptive parents of 150 days (for a child from 0 to 4 years) or 120 days (for a child from 4 to 10 years). Even better are the provisions for family leave for twins or children born with special health problems and disability. The right to maternity leave can be used, in agreement with the mother, also by one of the grand parents of the new born child, if the father is not using it, and the mother is younger than 18 years and she has the status of the pupil or the student.
- If the parents are not employed, they have no right to parental benefit indemnity, although the mother has the right to parental benefit - if she and her child are Slovenian citizens - to the extent of 55% of the minimum wage for the current month. This right can also apply to the father in a case where the mother gets a job, leaves the child or is not capable, according to medical opinion, of caring for the baby.
- The right to parental benefit indemnity for the duration of family leave.
- The right to short-time working due to parenthood.

Parents have the right to freely decide how they will use their family leave for a new born child. They can combine:

- Total absence from work of one or both parents
- Taking shifts in using their parental leave
- One or both parents work for shorter working hours
- Taking shifts in working shorter hours

100% benefit indemnity in the period of family leave enables the family to keep the same level of quality of life, and the principle of equality of both parents, leaving the couple to agree upon the use of parental leave, in theory, enables women to keep their competitiveness in the labour market. Non transferable fathers' leave also reinforces this gender equality approach.

But in practice, in Slovenia, the majority of women, when they become mothers, use 365 days of parental leave in one piece, and then return to full-time work. More and

more fathers use 15 days of paid fathers' leave (in 2004 72%, in 2005 -72%, in 2006 – 73% and in 2007 – 77% of the fathers did it), but in the same year, only 9% of the fathers took the non-paid part of the paternity leave, and only 2.4% of the fathers took their part of the parental leave (childcare leave). (Source: 4th Slovenian Periodic CEDAW Report, 2006).

In 2006-2007 the Slovenian Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities implemented, with the support of the EC, an international project called "Men at work - Achieving Gender Equality". As part of this project there was a media campaign of several months' duration called "Daddy, be active!", and a special film was made, promoting active fatherhood. It was broadcast on national TV in January 2007. (<http://www.uem.gov.si/index.php?id=968>)

In Slovenia, employees have also the right to paid leave for taking care of the sick, disabled and elderly dependant family member. Traditionally this right is much more used by the women than men. In 2004, employed women used this right six times more often than male workers (Source: 4<sup>th</sup> Slovenian periodic CEDAW Report, 2006).

The consequences of these legal regulations and traditions are as follows:

- Public childcare facilities do not provide care for very young babies. Women who in theory could and might want to shorten their maternity and childcare leave for career or any other reasons will not be able to find public childcare facilities for their infant.

Hidden gender discrimination at hiring and firing young women persists. Employers prefer to give jobs to male workers who are still practically from the care for their children and other dependant family members. Employers, especially in SME companies, also prefer to give jobs to women who already have children, in order to avoid the complications and costs connected with the replacement of female workers on year-long family leave. There is as yet no research to bear this out but there is circumstantial evidence: statistics on unemployment for women show the highest rate for women between 25 and 29, the most common age for Slovene women to give birth. The 2007 Report of the Advocate for Equal Opportunities for

Women and Men states: “On the free of charge phone line of the Office for Equal Opportunities, women who call often say that their employer had promised them a new short term employment contract, but when they informed their employer of their pregnancy, they were not offered the contract.” (Report on the work of Advocate for the year 2007, March 2008 )

- Couples think twice before they decide to have their first baby (in 2004, the average age of mothers when they had their first child was 27.5.)
- Couples think even harder before they have another baby. Though the fertility rate in Slovenia has grown in the last three years, it is still very low. In 2006 the fertility rate was 1.31. (Source: Statistični letopis 2007, Statistični Urad Slovenije and. PRB Fertility Rates for the Low Birth Rate Countries, 1995 to most Recent Year, <http://www.prb.org/pdf07/TFRTable.pdf>.) The total EU fertility rate was 1.47 children per female.

**Proposals for the potential improvements could be as follows:**

- The State budget should pay 100% benefit indemnity for all non-transferable paternity leave.
- Slovenia should change the legal framework of family leave in such a way as to enable men and women to share their parental leave equally, as is the Icelandic model. (In fact if men decide to take parental leave, they get the same indemnity – 100% wage - as women do. They do not take it because of their own and their employers’ traditional views on division of tasks in the family!)
- Slovenia should consider changing its legal framework on care for sick and other dependant family members so that partners have to carry an equal share of these responsibilities.

<b>5. Childcare workers</b>
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In Slovenia, according to the Law on Kindergartens, care and education work with children is carried out by the following main profiles of professionals:

- Educator – with higher or high education for preschool education of children

- Assistant to educator - with secondary pre-school education programme or grammar school and training course for professional work with preschool children
- Counselling workers – with high education
- Organiser of health and hygienic regime
- Organiser of nutrition

The law and collective agreements regulate full-time working hours; for the educator at 30 hours per week, for the assistant to educator at 35 hours per week, while standard working hours for other workers are 40 hours per week. .

In Slovenia, educators are ranked in the unified wage cluster, which requires a level of education at the level of a first degree of the Bologna studies. The wages are lower than for the primary school teachers the profession is highly feminised. The very few men working in this field are either janitors or headmasters.

**Table 4 : Employed staff in childcare by sex in Slovenia :**

Year	All	Women	Share of women
1998/99	7012	6935	98,9
1999/00	7329	7272	99,2
2000/01	7163	7022	98,0
2001/02	7099	6956	98,0

Source: :*Statistični letopis Republike Slovenije 2003*

#### **Childcare for school children, care for youth and students**

In addition to the pre-school publicly organised childcare, Slovenia also provides the following publicly organised and heavily state subsidised services for pupils and students:

- Free provision, based on voluntary inclusion, of care for the first grade children in primary school and provision before the start of the classes of breakfast and preparation for classes.
- Free provision, based on voluntary inclusion, of post class care and learning, art, languages, leisure and sport activities for the children from the first to the fourth grade, named daily extension.

- 50% subsidised , based on voluntary inclusion, of daily extension - post class care and learning, leisure and sport activities for the children from fifth to sixth grades, and for the children from first to ninth grades in the schools for the children with special needs.
- Organised breakfast and hot meals for primary school children are also subsidised. The Ministry of Education and Sport has adopted a regulation on subsidies for meal plans for elementary school pupils, which enables 15% to 50% of pupils to avail of free school meals. ( Source: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp>).
- Subsidy (2.43 EURO per food stamp paid according to the number of working days per month) for all students, who can choose between 80 places – restaurants, where they can get subsidised meals.
- Organised care for the children who are daily commuters.
- The government is planning to organise a similar solution which is now used for the meals of the students and also for the meals of all young people in secondary schools, who were not taken care of by public policy until now.

(Source: <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp> (19.6.2008))

**Table 5: Children in daily extension, last statistical data available only from 2000**

School year	Number of schools	Number of units	Teaching staff	% of children included
1985/1986	355	1184	1274	11.5
1990/1991	357	988	1137	9.5
1995/1996	463	1109	929	11.9
1996/1997	480	1165	925	12.7
1997/1998	509	1211	1169	13.7
1998/1999	521	1232	1183	14.4
1999/2000	551	1343	1302	16.0

Source: *Statistični letopis, 2002*

## 6. Impact on gender equality

The comparative data on unemployed by age and sex show that women in all age groups have more difficulties in finding jobs than men. Of interest is that the differences between men and women is the smallest in the age groups when women in Slovenia already have children. The childcare system appears to be good enough to enable practically all women with dependent children to find and retain full-time jobs, but the real problem lies in family policy and in the expectations of difficulties that the employers foresee in the family leave of women before they give birth.

*Table 6: Unemployed by age and sex in the second quarter of 2006*

Age groups	All – 5.9%	Men 5.1%	Women 6.8%
15-19	16.0	19	<i>No data available</i>
20-24	14.3	12.1	17.1
25-29	9.4	6.8	12.1
30-34	4.2	3.7	4.8
35-39	3.5	3.0	4.1
40-44	4.5	4.4	6.3

*Source: Labour Force Survey, 2006*

To be a woman is not a hurdle in regular education in Slovenia, at least not until women reach PhD level study. In 2004 only 40% women received PhD, although overall more women than men were students (59.5%), more women graduating from universities were women (63.2%) or had a master's degree (56.4). The strategy of delayed birth does not work for female PhD aspirants, and when they give birth, they are may find it difficult to advance their academic career.

The percentage of the population older than 15 years who follow additional training and learning has grown steadily, and there exists a gender balance in this, with a slight predominance of women. Of women not participating in training and learning older than 15 years stated that they do not participate because of family obligations (women: 79.5% ), or because of the cost (women : 57.6%). (Source: 4<sup>th</sup> periodical Slovenian Report to CEDAW, 2006).

The 2001 survey on daily use of time of employed people in Slovenia also shows, that women use two hours per day more of their time for domestic work than men do (2.24 hours versus 4.24 hours) and one hour less than men for work and learning: (men: 5,20 hours, women 4.23 hours). (Source: Fourth periodic Slovenian CEDAW report, 2006).

Childcare provisions and those that aim to alleviate the burden of domestic and care work (organised care for pre-school children, primary school children, organised and subsidised meals for university students), are very important for women with dependent children. These provisions help them to be fully active in the labour market, however, they are insufficient to reverse the traditional gender division of professions and the traditional gender division of work in the domestic sphere. Traditional gender division in the professions is the most visible in politics, where women in Slovenia are still heavily under-represented, and make up only 13.3 % of MPs, only 21.5 % of local councillors, only 3.3 % of Mayors, and only 18.7% of ministers. (Source: Statistical Office of Slovenia, Elections)

This democratic deficit in politics also strongly diminishes the chances of removing persistent remaining barriers concerning the unequal distribution of domestic and care work in the private sphere, and of hidden discrimination in hiring and promotion in the labour market. It is therefore important to ensure that good legislation aimed at ending open and hidden gender discrimination is implemented in full.

## **7. The impact of the transition from a socialist economy to a market economy on the supply of childcare services**

Slovenia is the only country in transition in which public childcare provision did not deteriorate, in fact since then public provisions of childcare but actually improved.

After the change of the system in 1990, Slovenia had a falling birth rate. In 1990 there were 22.368 live born children, in 1999 there were only 17 533 live born children, and only after 2005, Slovenia has started to have more than 18.000 live born children per year.

During the transition period, with heavy economic crises and high unemployment rates, it was very tempting to close down already existing units of the expensive public kindergartens, but instead of it the government decided to improve the quality and to raise the standards, illustrated by Table 7.

*Table 7: Areas where quality and standards have been raised*

	<b>1980/81</b>	<b>1985/86</b>	<b>1990/91</b>	<b>1995/96</b>	<b>1999/2000</b>
Kindergartens	737	793	785	793	808
Units	3 304	3 585	3 593	3 500	3 523
Included children	71 784	75 669	73 631	66 553	64 151
Professional staff	6 224	6 739	6 950	6 672	7 148

*Source: Vzgoja in izobraževanje v Republiki Sloveniji 2000*

*Izdalo: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport,*

The main reason for this was specific coming together of groups of cross political groups and a very active civil society issue coalition, made of feminist groups, parents' organisations, women activists in trade unions and women organisations in several political parties. This coalition was strong enough to prevent attempts to privatise childcare or to transform it into a two track system of expensive and high quality private and a cheap but low quality public system. High pressure was kept on the national governments to help poor local communities to keep and even develop new public childcare facilities. The main motive for this specific activism was not gender equality, but the best interest of the children. Gender equality came out of it mostly as a side effect.

The trend towards the inclusion of more children in kindergartens is steadily improving, for example, in the last three years, this has increased by an average of 2.1 percent points per year. Compulsory primary school has been gradually transformed from the school with eight grades into a school of nine grades, so that all children at the age of six are now included in compulsory primary school education. In socialist times, there were compulsory short preparation programmes

of a child for the primary school, but that did not cover 100% of all children at the age of six years.

Standards of quality of the childcare have also improved: there are now smaller groups, higher standards for the space, equipment, nutrition, a more diverse offer of the curriculum and programmes, and there are higher levels of qualification for professional staff working in kindergartens.

Set backs are mostly in relation to higher parental contributions for the parents with middle and higher wages, and the introduction of additional programmes for children that parents have to pay for (lessons of music, dance, foreign languages, sport activities). However, not all parents can afford them - consequently we do not have universal programmes for all children in the same kindergarten any more!

There have also been major changes in the working time of the parents - instead of the working time from 6.00 hrs to 14.00 hrs in factories, or 7.00 hrs to 15 hrs in most of other working spheres, which was prevailing in the eighties, Slovenian has moved towards EU working time from 9.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs for the majority of employed people. Many people now have to work longer working hours, there is more shift work for many women working in retail trade, tourism, catering, and there is more commuting to bigger urban centres for work. These changes in working hours have also led to requests for longer opening times for kindergartens, which have not yet been satisfied. Many parents are obliged to commute with their pre-school children in order to leave them in the kindergartens closer to their working places. This causes crowding of the kindergartens in the bigger cities, and creates problems for more remote local communities in fulfilling their financial obligations to offer childcare to residents in smaller and more remote local communities.

All these changes in the labour market have mostly not diminished women's opportunities to work full-time, but they have in many cases worsened the quality of the family life. Children have to stay in the kindergartens and schools much longer than before.

## **8. Elements of good practice and transferability of the measure**

The most important good practice of Slovenia is the fact that Slovenia succeeded in improving its universal public childcare provisions (curriculum, quality, affordability, availability) and policy of balancing private and professional life for men and women (improvement in the family leave provisions and set up of non transferable even short paid father's leave) in the most difficult period of transition.

In recent years the Slovenian government has developed special programmes for young Roma women in order to help them to finish at least primary school education, and started to include Roma children in public childcare. Roma children are included in some of the forty childcare facilities, some of which are in their own Roma settlements, with only Roma children, others are units of Roma children in Slovene kindergartens, and in some kindergartens, Roma children are also included in the units of ethnically mixed groups.

Some recommendations to other countries from the Slovenian experience:

- It is important to build a broad civil society and political consensus on the approach to public childcare
- Childcare should be a universal public service with publicly set and controlled standards of quality and accessibility
- The state should provide additional funding for all those communities unable to afford to establish additional necessary public childcare facilities, in order to ensure universal standards of quality and affordability. Parental contributions should be as low as possible, especially in the case of middle-class parents, who are in regular employment.
- It is important to include greater state support and to ensure solidarity for the local communities and parental contributions to childcare services for the first as well as second or further children.

## 9. Gaps and challenges

- In Slovenia there has been no mainstream political evaluation of the connection of the childcare policy and gender equality policy. The focus in childcare has been threefold: on the demographic challenge (very low birth rate), on the best interest of the child, on the quality and effectiveness of the public system. The focus with regard to gender equality policy has been on women human rights, especially in the field of political representation, economic independency, reproductive rights and health care, and domestic violence.
- The main gap is the absence of an integrated approach, which would seriously take into account the complex and sometimes colliding human rights of women, men and children. Women have the right to equal pay and equal opportunities in working life, but also the right to maternity. Both parents have the right to develop their careers but also to enjoy family life. Children have the right to be with their parents as long as possible, especially in the early stage of their life, but also the right to state support for an equal start in life, which can be greatly enhanced by high-quality public childcare. It is not easy to strike a realistic balance between these rights. Balancing the interests of good governance for healthy and happy citizens, including work/private life balance, with the interests of employers competing in the globalised labour market and trying to reduce their labour costs is also a challenge. Longer maternity, paternity and parental leave, as well as well- developed childcare systems, mean additional costs and administrative work for employers, especially in small to medium-sized companies, even when they do not need (as is the case in Slovenia) to pay directly for family leave costs and additional taxes, as high-quality, affordable childcare systems are expensive. The main concerns are that governments and local communities might seek to lower the standards of quality already achieved, by increasing the size of childcare groups and lowering the level of education and presence of educators in the kindergartens. This process has already started (as shown above) with the lowering of standards for education of self-employed childminders of children in the younger age group.
- There is also a danger with the registration (legalisation) of private self-employed childminders who would not be obliged to maintain the same standards of quality as public kindergartens, and might offer cheaper but inferior quality of service. Private childminders are not obliged to implement the curriculum of public

kindergartens. This could create unfair competition and start to undermine the system of public kindergartens.

- There is an issue of unequal level of services in the public kindergartens because of the differences in the level of budgetary income between local communities and insufficient support to disadvantaged parents from the national government. This problem was demonstrated by the number of parents who think that there is too much difference in the prices of the same basic programme between different public kindergartens.
- The connection between gender equality and childcare is for sure an issue for national consensus building in a broad social dialogue of all stakeholders. A cost-benefit analysis is needed to verify if there is macro - economic sense in making public childcare universal, equally accessible, and free of charge like the mandatory public primary school, and to invest in high quality standardised curriculum for all children, with special care for the children with specific needs (highly talented included). An effort is needed to put in place coordinated gender sensitive active employment and life long learning policies in accordance with the needs of life/work balance for women and men.

## **10. Issues for discussion**

In Slovenia, the main issues/challenges to discuss and find solutions for are the following:

- How to ensure equal standards of quality, affordability and accessibility for all parents and all children and strike a proper balance between the obligations of the national government and local communities?
- How to include private-public partnerships in the further development of childcare provision, in order to improve the diversity and availability of services, offering effective solutions for the specific requirements of children and parents, without sacrificing quality and the universal and public character of our childcare provisions? In fact, there is no open political debate on this issue any more. Some important conservative parties began the debate in 2005, but following the Court of Accountancy 2006 Report which showed high levels of parental satisfaction with the programmes and with the quality of public childcare, the

discussion somehow changed direction. The government offered easy registration for private child minders as well as the possibility that local communities could give concessions for privately organized “childcare families”, with lower standards than those required in the public system, so long as there were enough children for a childcare family in the community and not sufficient funding to establish a proper public childcare facility. The government also legalised a mid-term plan for a gradual lowering of parental contributions for children in kindergartens, starting in 2008, by excluding the second and each subsequent child from payment if these children were included in public childcare at the same time.

- What policies are needed in order to ensure more equal share of domestic and care work for children and other dependent family members between men and women?
- How to assist employers who have additional costs with the replacement of pregnant workers and workers on family leave, so that they will stop to use sex discrimination as a tool to avoid this problem?
- How to encourage the full and formal employment of Roma women and to include all Roma children in childcare facilities, without undermining their ethnic identity and without isolating them from the majority population?

*This report was prepared by Božena Devčič and Sonja Lokar*

*Ljubljana, June 20, 2008*

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*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Cyprus**

**by Susana Pavlou**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

Child care as a formal social welfare provision is a relatively new concept in Cyprus, and although it is a major concern for most employed as well as unemployed women, it has only recently been framed as a policy issue mainly due to the recent accession of Cyprus into the European Union and the EU emphasis on the reconciliation of work and family life for promoting gender equality and women's access to the labour market. Informal child care arrangements continue to prevail in Cyprus with the extended family (mostly grandmothers) usually playing the primary role in the provision of care. Care by domestic workers, although not formally recognized as child care by the state, has become increasingly popular in the last two decades.

#### **Ministry of Education and Culture**

Pre-primary education is offered in kindergartens for children aged below 5 and 2/3 and fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. As from 2004/05 enrolment to pre-primary education was made compulsory and free for children aged 4 years old to the age of 5 years.

There are three categories of kindergartens:

- Public kindergartens established by the government
- Community kindergartens working on a non-profit basis and supported by parent's associations and government subsidies;
- Private kindergartens working on a profit basis.

The government spends 6.3% of its GDP on education (2004). Pre-primary childcare falls under the education category although it is unclear how much of this expenditure is geared toward pre-school or after-school childcare services. The Ministry of Education is responsible for childcare for pre-school children (for children aged three years or older) and after-school activities through all-day schools. Private institutions are also answerable to the Ministry of Education through the obligatory application for operating licenses.

All-day schools are considered a form of child-care as attendance is voluntary, although they were not designed specifically to promote the integration of women in the labour market. All-day schools serve children aged nine to 11 years only and based on information currently available by the Ministry of Education only 37% of primary schools are all-day schools. The all-day school functions from October to May and no services are available during the summer months. Furthermore, all day schools run from 07:30 until 16:00.

*All-day schools for the academic year 2005–2006*

District	Number
Nicosia	61
Limassol	26
Larnaca	26
Famagusta	4
Paphos	12
Occupied area / Rizokarpasou	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>130</b>

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture 'Circular 380'

**Social Welfare Services – Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance**

Pre-primary day-care for children aged 6 weeks to 5 and 2/3 years is offered in day care nurseries and fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance. These fall into three categories:

- Public nurseries, financed and supervised by the Welfare Services
- Community nurseries, which are established and supported by local communities on a non-profit basis
- Private nurseries, usually on a profit basis.

During the school year 2004-2005, care was provided to 18% of children aged 0-3 years in 679 day care centre (253 public, 113 community, and 313 private).

Child care programmes and services offered by NGOs and voluntary organisations are subsidized by the State through the Grants-in-Aid Programme although it must be stressed that these organisations remain understaffed and underfunded and depend heavily on volunteer staff.

The NGO sector provides 55 day-care centres for pre-school children, 71 centres for school children (during after-school hours, including holidays), as well as a centre for children with disabilities aged five to 15 years.

The Social Welfare Services are also responsible for the implementation of the project "Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependents" under the Single Programming Document, Objective 3, "Human Resources" and co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Government of Cyprus. The main aim of the project is the provision of low cost social care services on the local level and supports the integration of women to the labour market and the reconciliation of professional and family life, implemented by local authorities and NGOs.

The project currently funds 18 day care centres in all districts which include centres for pre-school (children 0-3 years of age providing all-day care) as well as school children. All programmes are free of charge.

Finally, projects aimed at reconciling work and family life were funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) EQUAL Initiative to increase women's labour participation. Although the projects are now in their final stages of implementation, it is not yet clear to what extent they have had an impact on childcare as none of the three projects funded under the thematic field Equal Opportunities for Men and Women focused specifically on the provision of child care.

The role of employers in the provision of child care services in Cyprus is limited if not non-existent.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

**National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2006-2008**

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion makes specific reference to the integration of women in the labour market and emphasise child care and the care of other dependents as key to achieving this. To this end, the Social Welfare Services

have funded child-care services and programmes through the Grants-in-Aid Programme and the “Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependants” with this objective in mind.

### **National Action Plan for Employment 2004-2006**

The National Action Plan for Employment 2004-2006 makes specific reference to policies for the provision of childcare facilities and the reinforcement of the care infrastructure, although the focus is on women with no reference made to the importance of family responsibilities for men. It is important to note, however, that access to childcare is presented in the NAP as a cure-all for women’s access to employment and gender discrimination is largely ignored. The Naps Guideline 7 ‘To promote the integration of and combat discrimination against people at a disadvantage in the labour market’, although containing little or no reference to women, could have a positive impact on gender equality if they facilitate women’s access to the labour market. These policies include the expansion of the institution of all-day schools, the extension of compulsory pre-school education to the age of 4 years and 8 months, and the setting up of new community day care centres.

### **National Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming**

The National Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming prioritizes measures aimed at the reconciliation of work and family life in the promotion of women’s access to employment. It states that reconciliation is directly linked to the provision of care services for children as well as other family dependents. It proposes the assessment and improvement of existing child care services as well as the establishment of new centres in both urban and rural areas. It also recommends the adjustment of operating hours of care centres to coincide with those of working parents. The NAP assigns responsibility for the implementation of these recommendations to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, local authorities, NGOs, and women’s organisations.

Initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education such as all-day schools do not have gender equality as an objective but rather objectives related to the welfare of children such as holistic education and development.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

The Social Welfare Services are also responsible for the implementation of the project “Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependants” under the Single Programming Document, Objective 3, “Human Resources” and co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Government of Cyprus. The main aim of the project is provision of low cost social care services on the local level and supports the integration of women to the labour market and the reconciliation of professional and family life, implemented by local authorities and NGOs. The programme currently funds 18 childcare programmes for children of all age groups.

There is no data available as to initiatives involving staff working in childcare services.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

Formal childcare facilities for the youngest children (0-3 years), and in particular day care nurseries, are in very short supply and not easily accessible. For this reason, many parents opt out of formal child care for this age group. For example, there are only 12 public day care nurseries and most are in urban areas. Although community nurseries have a better geographical coverage, they are still few (46 in total) and far between. Private care options are more readily available but the high cost of this option renders it a non-option for low-income families. It is also important to note that all nurseries and kindergartens, be they community, public, or private will close for the summer months and at least two weeks in August, obliging parents to either take their annual holidays during this time or make other arrangements. A few NGOs do offer services in the summer however these are insufficient to meet the needs of working parents.

NGOs, although offering in many cases good quality and low cost child care, are not sufficient to cover the lack of publicly supported child care services. A substantial

increase of financial support to NGOs through the Grants-in-Aid Programme Scheme would assist in improving the quality of existing child care services offered by this sector as well as aid the establishment of new programmes.

In terms of quality, there is no research available assessing the quality of available child care programmes and services. However, the average child/teacher ratio for day nurseries is 10.9:1 and 15:1 for kindergartens, far surpassing the recommended children/staff ratio of 7:1.

The high prevalence of informal arrangements with family members (particularly grandmothers) in Cyprus must be stressed pointing towards the lack of accessibility to formal care as well as a lack of confidence in the quality of formal child care. There also seems to be a cultural preference for at-home care for younger babies. It is important to note that, contrary to other European countries, maternity leave in Cyprus is 18 weeks or approximately four months, so in order for women to return to work they must seek child care for very young babies. Thus, it may be possible that women may be more likely to return to work if there are possibilities for their child to be cared for at home, rather than in formal child care institutions. Given this, a case could be made for providing subsidies and support for home-based child care if parents opt for this alternative.

We must also emphasise another important source of child care in Cyprus, as elsewhere in Europe, that of female migrant domestic workers. Millions of mostly female domestic workers are providing indispensable caring services to a growing number of EU citizens, although such services are absent from national employment action plans, and are not formally recognized. The services of female migrant domestic workers have played an instrumental role in 'liberating' Cypriot women with children and other dependents to enter, re-enter, or remain in the workplace. Domestic workers largely live in the homes of their employers, are at hand on a 24 hour basis, and provide a multitude of services such as cleaning, cooking, and caring, all at extremely low cost. One could say that the thousands of domestic workers in Cyprus have diverted a possible policy crisis in terms of the provision of care and compensate to a great extent for the lack of adequate care services.

Finally, the provision of all-day schools are limited to a small number of primary schools and for only certain age groups and thus cannot be said to promote gender equality or women's access to the labour market. Furthermore, all day schools run until 16:00 which does not coincide with the working hours of most employed parents working in the private sector. Private schools operate all day for all ages of children, but these can be costly and thus not an option for low-income families.

In order to develop a strategy on childcare provision, research on the needs of families is essential in order to understand and meet the gaps in services.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

Unfortunately, there are no specific good practices in public child care that have demonstrated to be of good quality to promote gender equality. However, a number of NGOs and community child care centres offer low-cost quality care to low-income families and specifically to facilitate women's integration into the work place. These centres offer all-day care as well as offer services during the school holidays with the exception of the month of August. Although these NGOs benefit from a government subsidy under the Grants-in-Aid Programme, after speaking with the Directors of two such centres it is clear that the government subsidy is not nearly sufficient to allow the extension and improvement of such services, or for the establishment of new programmes. Although the project "Expansion and Improvement of Care Services for the Children, the Elderly, the Disabled and other Dependants", funded by the European Social Fund and the Government of Cyprus has enabled the establishment of new child care programmes to cater specifically to the needs of working women, such programmes cannot be sustainable unless childcare becomes a policy priority on a national level. So far, informal arrangements as described above, and the lack of a strong women's movement to lobby for change, have precluded the government from dealing with this issue in a comprehensive way.

**6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

N/A

**7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

**Strengths**

- The integrated model of childcare that cater for children aged 1-6 years is a commendable model
- Full day programmes that operate all week throughout the whole year, including the summer months
- Provision of government subsidies to families for child care based on family income

**Weaknesses**

- Families who use childminders due to inaccessibility of public child care are not eligible for subsidies from public funds.
- High cost of care for parents of middle-class incomes
- No equal level of accessibility to public child care to all parents and their children
- No provision for children of parents that work outside traditional hours

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

- Low child/staff ratio
- Wide availability and accessibility
- Educational, cultural, and recreational activities as per age group
- Availability of low-cost child care during holidays and summer months
- Specialized programmes for children with special needs
- Extended childcare after typical school hours
- All-day public schools for all school-age children

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Estonia**

**by Reet Laja**

## **Part 1: Country overview: Estonia**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

The main acts related to childcare in Estonia include: Parental Benefit Act, State Family Benefits Act, Working and Rest Time Act, Pre-school Child Care Institutions Act, etc. Today in Estonia the legal responsibility for providing childcare lies within the municipalities. In 2008 the parental benefit for a child varies between municipalities from 25 EEK up to 900 EEK a month (1 EUR=15,646 EEK). On average the parents pay 11% of development and operation costs of nursery schools, however, the rate is constantly decreasing. The rest is almost fully covered by municipalities.<sup>2</sup> This year the state has financed the programme “a day care place for every child” with 225 mln EEK all together (teachers’ salary, construction of kindergartens).

### **2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

In 2006, 80.5% of women without small children and only 54.5% of women with small children were employed, suggesting that mothers of children between 0-6 years old often give up participation in the labour market. At the same time, being a parent rather increases men’s participation in the labour market.<sup>3</sup> Although, The Parental Benefit Act has created opportunities for an increased participation in childcare of fathers. Due to the parental leave benefit in Estonia there has been a noteworthy development in recent 3-4 years. It has created more flexible work forms and has increased parents’ possibilities of different outputs. Although, only 400 fathers used the opportunity of parental leave in 2007, the number is continuously increasing.

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs. Mare Ainsaar, Kadri Soo. “The support of local governments to families with children in Estonia in 2007”

<sup>3</sup> See also Health, Labour and Social Sector in 2007, The Ministry of Social Affairs

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

In order to meet the demand for kindergartens, local governments have taken the following steps: created additional facilities (either building new kindergartens or laying plans for it, remodelling, forming new sections in old kindergartens, changing kindergarten-elementary schools into kindergartens, looking for suitable space for childcare, creating childcare facilities); sought alternative possibilities (using the services offered by other local governments, paid for childcare services, trained childcare providers, subsidized transportation costs to kindergartens in outlying areas, paid for private service); managed with available resources (increasing the numbers of children in a section, changing admission standards).

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

Although, the number of children in the waiting list has decreased in the most problematic towns, the lack of day care places is the biggest problem in Estonia. Another problem for parents is the possibility to use flexible work time arrangement. Shaping of a flexible child care system is the basis for parents with small children to use flexible work forms and time. An important issue is flexible opening hours of day care centres so that they would enable parents to combine raising a child and doing their salaried work. The distinctive feature of Estonian childcare is that rather than just taking care of children it is a preschool institution starting from a very young age.<sup>4</sup> Respective state and municipal institutions and nongovernmental organisations continue developing flexible child care opportunities.

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

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<sup>4</sup> Office of the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs. Mare Ainsaar, Kadri Soo. "The support of local governments to families with children in Estonia in 2007"

Parental benefit Act enables also fathers to stay home and mothers to go to work. In order to enhance the quality of childcare provision the Estonian Nursery School Teachers Union (NGO) stands for the teachers interests and works for their continuing education. In the initiative of the Office of the Minister of Population Affairs a qualifying system for baby-sitters (Baby-sitter Professional Standards) has been created. Initially Family Education Institute started to perform the role of a baby-sitter qualifying body. Since August 2006 Tallinn Pedagogical Seminar is responsible for qualifying baby-sitters. The first professional baby-sitters have formed an umbrella organization - Estonian Union of Professional Baby-sitters. The objective of the union is to unite, support, inform, represents and advise professional baby-sitters in Estonia.

#### **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

First of all, it is important to provide availability of information to other countries' politicians, state officials as well as to representatives of NGOs. Unfortunately, not all the information on respective studies is available in English on different web sites. However, it is recommended to visit the web sites of Statistics Estonia, Legal acts, and ministries. One of the important means of transferring good practices are study visits to the country of interest. Organizing joint projects between different countries would definitely also contribute to these aims.

#### **7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

The most important good practice of Slovenia lies in the fact that Slovenia succeeded in improving its universal public childcare provisions (curriculum, quality, affordability, availability) and policy of balancing private and professional life for men and women (improvement in the family leave provisions and set up of non transferable even short paid father's leave) in the most difficult period of transition.

On the other hand national legislation and the support of the state budget in Slovenia are not strong enough to ensure equal level of accessibility of public childcare services to all parents and their children who need it, especially in the

poorer local communities or in the communities where there has been rapid population growth due to new housing and an influx of young families, or in the capital with its huge influx of daily commuters. Also not all parents who are in need of childcare have easy access to the public or publicly subsidised private childcare facilities close to their home or their working place. If they do not get a place, they cannot profit from the state subsidies for their pre-school child. Private child-minders are not properly included in the public childcare system.

The main concerns are that governments and local communities might seek to lower the standards of quality already achieved, by increasing the size of childcare groups and lowering the level of education and presence of educators in the kindergartens. It has to be carefully monitored in Estonia such that the standards of child care are not lowered when implementing new and more flexible child care forms (e.g. child-minders). Based on the Slovenian experience we have found proof that it is important to build a broad civil society and political consensus on the approach to public childcare.

The trend in Slovenia is for the state to provide additional funding for all those communities unable to afford additional necessary public childcare facilities, in order to ensure universal standards of quality and affordability. Parental contributions should be as low as possible, especially in the case of middle-class parents, who are in regular employment. The same topics are also on the agenda in Estonia.

Compared to Estonia the opening hours of kindergartens are much more flexible in Slovenia. Discussion on more flexible opening hours of kindergartens should be initiated with the general public.

#### **8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

The main pre-condition for good quality childcare lies within an integrated approach, that would balance work and private life, taking also into account the interests of employers and trying to reduce their labour costs as longer parental leave, as well as improved childcare systems mean additional costs and administrative work for employers. Also analysis is necessary in order to find out to what point government-

based benefits are reasonable. Coordinated gender-sensitive employment and life-long learning policies should be aimed for, which take into account the needs of life and work balance for both women and men.

The most important pre-condition for good quality childcare would be creating a mixture of flexible childcare conditions and flexible working conditions. Each separate step is of course useful, however, actual positive shifts in childcare and gender equality provision are assured by the mixture of different steps.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Hungary**

**by Roza Vajda**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

#### **Childcare leaves and allowances:**

- *delivery benefit*: one-off payment, amounting to less than the minimal wage, subsidized by the state. Given to mothers after the birth of the child, provided that they have attended medical consultation at least 4 times during the pregnancy.

**Maternity leave**: 24 weeks, 4 of which should be given before the expected time of birth.

- *pregnancy and young mother's benefit*: 70% of mother's last wage, payable during maternity leave, covered by social security

**Paternity leave** (non-transferable): 5 working days paid leave, available from 2 weeks prior to, or during the first month following, the birth of the child.

**Parental leave**: Unpaid leave to take care for a child up to the age of 3 (or 11 if the child is chronically ill), or to nurse a sick child at home no less than twelve years old. Either parent can take the leave and request the related childcare allowances.

- *childcare grant* 70% of last wage (but having an upper limit), available until the child is 2, and covered from the employer's insurance. Conditions: parent must be insured for at least 180 days in the course of the 2 years preceding the birth of the child; restrictions apply regarding work activities.

- *childcare benefit*: Available to all citizens (not tied to insured status) during parental leave (can be extended if the child is sick). Amounts to less than 50% of the minimal wage. Recently constraints were removed from work: beneficiary can now be employed part-time, and even full-time as long as he/she is able to choose the place of work activities. Protection: person receiving childcare benefits can not be fired. (The prohibition of dismissal used to be tied to the period of unpaid leave.)

**"Main job motherhood"**: available for mothers with at least 3 children. Salaries amounting to the minimal wage are provided by the state. (Note: no "main job fatherhood")

- *childcare support*: for families with 3 or more children from state budget, payable as long as the youngest child is under 6.

**Sick leave**: constitutes a part of employee's rights; also usable when the child is sick

- *sick pay*: insured workers on sick leave receive a part of their salaries. Also received by women who cannot perform their job due to pregnancy or childbirth, breast-feeding mothers with a child under the age of one, single mothers/parents and those who are not entitled to any other type of benefits.

- *child bounty*: a form of family allowance available to all citizens with minors, covered by social security

#### Day-care institutions:

It is the duty of local self-governments to provide for the day-care of children during work hours – and the imposition of any restrictive measures regarding enrolment also pertain to their authority. The establishment and maintenance of nurseries is compulsory only in settlements of a population over 10,000. In small villages, the development of alternative forms of childcare is encouraged.

- **Public nurseries**: Supposed to serve children under 3 or 3.5 whose both parents are at work. In reality, accessibility is around 8% (1 in 12 children can attend as compared with 1 in 7 in the 1970s). Many have closed down; scarcity is very severe in the countryside, especially in Roma-populated areas. There are altogether 561 nurseries with 128% exploitation rate (25,000 places and 32,000 children). Currently, enrolment is suspended all over Hungary. The waiting time is extremely long: parents should apply several months in advance.

- **Public Kindergarten**: also scarcity in places but the situation is a little better. Last year (pre-school): attendance is compulsory.

- **Daily extension**: post-class care (including learning, art, and sports activities) are available in all public primary schools.

*Alternative day-care facilities* (especially in small settlements with a population less than 10,000):

- **Family day-care centres**: started by private individuals or organizations, but *publicly funded* (as opposed to the Slovenian case). 78 facilities, accommodating altogether 1,300 children.

- **Integrated institutions** (nursery + Kindergarten): 92 facilities. (This system is currently under transformation, supervised by an inter-ministerial group of experts, within the framework of “New Knowledge Programme”.)

- nurseries and Kindergartens operated by **companies** closed down after 1989 – no public policies to revive this system

+ private day-care institutions; child-minding in supermarkets, “play houses” in shopping malls and community centres, etc.

*Funding:*

The cost of the maintenance of a place in a public facility is 1.2 million Forints in one year. This includes a 547,000 Forints “normative support” subsidised by the state, while the rest is covered from the budget of the self-government maintaining the institution. Parents “contributions to meals”, amounting to 72,000 Forints in a year, are rather insignificant – yet hardly affordable for many families. Where income is under the minimal wage, as well as for families with 3 or more children (receiving childcare aid), public day-care facilities are free of charge.

The 2008 state budget assigns altogether almost **900 billion Forints** for expenditures related to children and young people.

In 2008, More than 10 billion Forints from the state budget is allocated for the maintenance of family day-care centres and integrated institutions; action plans of Regional Operative Programmes indicate 4.5 billion Forints investment to improve these systems in 2007 and 2008.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

“The system of social provisions – including childcare – is outstandingly complex and more generous than in most EU member states.” (*Bulletin of Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 04.22.2008*) This statement should be viewed with some reservation:: seemingly positive measures do not necessarily serve social justice in general, and gender equality in particular.

Background:

“Generous” provisions on childcare were introduced during state socialism with the intention to *keep women at home*. The underlying objectives were: enhancing population growth and conceal unemployment (caused by the scarcity of jobs) –

women on parental leave were registered as employed. The lifting of the taboo on unemployment did not help: the relative value attached to women's labour has significantly decreased, while the gendered division of labour has become more powerful.

As revealed by research (e.g. comparative survey by OECD), conservatism in matters of gender relations in general, and the share of domestic duties in particular, is especially strong in Hungary. The dominant theories of child psychology and pedagogy are instrumental in reinforcing the belief that children should stay at home with their primary caretaker for at least 3 or more years. As a consequence, parents are often reluctant to send their children to day-care institutions, or, if they have to, mothers feel guilty for doing so.

#### Legal harmonization:

Legislative developments related to EU accession (Hungary has adopted the EC directives related to gender equality) laid down the bases for change. The most important improvements include:

- the *reform of labour law* (particularly regarding provisions on anti-discrimination and safety at work),
- the *transformation of the social security system* (e.g. the introduction of uniform retirement age),
- and the 2004 introduction of the *Act on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities* (a compound legislation that has become the main tool of against discrimination efforts).

As a result, all protective measures regarding pregnancy, maternity and parental leave are in conformity with EU standards (92/85/EEC and 96/34/EC). Importantly, the Hungarian Labour Code prohibits the termination of employment contracts during pregnancy and maternity and parental leave.

These rights often remain stated on paper: there is a relatively big gap between *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality in Hungary.

#### Problems with implementation:

- *Ambiguities and contradictions of approach:* The early introduction of extensive childcare provisions, theoretically available for both parents, apparently suggests

progressive thinking. However, the incentives and constraints determined by these provisions, still in place, have only intensified traditional gender differences. This is because gender equality as such has never really been a guiding principle or priority of policy-making.

- *Lack of appropriate means/mechanisms of implementation.* As provided by the Act on Equal Treatment, an *independent authority* has been established to supervise compliance with the law and start investigations in cases involving discrimination. Its work is assisted by a publicly managed *network of agencies* that are supposed to reveal, collect and forward information on incidents to the authority. However, this network has not proved to be successful. The act also provides for the establishment of an *Equal Opportunities Government Office*, responsible to develop programmes to enhance equality, as well as for the preparation, by public employers, of *plans promoting the equal opportunities* of employees. As a consequence, gender inequalities and discrimination (esp. regarding wage gap, hiring practices, reintegration into the labour market) persist, constituting major barriers on women's employment opportunities. E.g. there is a lack of effective guarantees to prevent employers from discontinuing the employment of mothers with small children. (They are already reluctant to hire young women, in the first place.)

- *Discontinuity and inconsistencies.* The agendas of alternating governments have formed cycles in national politics since 1990, with 2 different kinds of approach and rhetoric. The conservative perspective, which has the family as its basic unit, upholds nationalist and middle class values. It is primarily concerned with population growth, and promotes the single-earner family model so that "women will not be forced to work" (states a government resolution from 1994). The social liberal agenda, on the other hand, focuses on the rights of individuals and disadvantaged social groups, and stresses the primacy of civil rights, equal opportunities and the assistance of the deprived.

Recent provisions related to gender equality:

Positive examples:

- the *removal of work-related terminology* in determining the eligibility for childcare benefit

- Start Plus Programme: young unemployed parents (mothers) are entitled to a reduction on social contributions for 2 years after parental leave – this incentive applies to the employer who hires them.

Ambiguous examples:

- person on parental leave is entitled to enrol in *free higher education courses*. This measure may help women to retain their competitive capacities and promote their reintegration to the labour market. At the same time, it potentially extends the period away from the workplace. (In addition, the measure favours middle and upper classes who are more able to make use of this opportunity.)

- The enhancement of *part-time employment* is also a case in point. However, while this goal is in conformity with EU requirements (97/81/EC), its approach is ambiguous. The question of *organization of working time* (along with part-time work, flexible work hours, work from home) has become regarded as crucial in *reconciling work and family duties*. The promotion of atypical forms of employment is, however, problematic and risky because of the general belief that this – as well as the management of work/life balance – concerns only women. (For instance, the previous National Action Plan sought to stimulate part-time employment specifically with respect to women employees.)

Evaluation of childcare provisions and policies:

*Parental leave and related allowances* are, in theory, available for both parents. Nevertheless, they are utilized virtually only by women because of the prevailing conservative attitudes regarding gender roles and norms, and the better career opportunities of men.

National policy provisions on childcare allow for an **exceptionally long period** to stay at home with the child: 3 years (extended if a second, third, etc. child is born). This possibility, in itself, represents a disincentive for the participation of women in the labour market as well as it reinforces the gender divide: men are more reluctant to take off so much time from work, and their (generally higher) income is more indispensable for the family.

The system is also unfair, since the amount of most types of allowances (pregnancy and maternity benefit, childcare benefit) depends on the income level, and eligibility is conditioned upon insured status. As a result, large sums go to higher wage groups while the members of lower classes truly in need receive comparatively less support.

Another negative consequence of the present approach is that childcare allowances **drain resources** that could otherwise be used to support alternative means of managing childcare, namely, from infrastructural developments. The scarcity of places at *day-care institutions* effectively prevents the (early) reintegration of women into the labour market. Having mothers take care of their children at home is considered a cheaper solution. Overall, family politics is defined by this idea, reinforcing conservatism at the political level. This approach is manifested in institutions like *main job motherhood* (i.e. women with 3 children, receiving childcare aid) introduced by the previous conservative government.

While leaving the fundamental provisions in place, it is promising though that the current government has improved the chances of reintegration into the labour market and considers the “comprehensive improvement of the social system” and the “gradual increasing of the accessibility of child-care facilities” an urgency. A *campaign against extended parental leave* was recently launched, arguing it is a “dead end”. Instead, the development of nurseries has been promoted, so that women can be reintegrated in the labour market in a timely manner.

#### Conclusion:

The present structure of childcare provisions is **ambivalent** towards the idea of gender equality. This is partly because of the general orientation of politics (demographic concerns are prioritized, and the connection between women’s employment opportunities and their willingness to have children is misinterpreted as related in a negative way); and partly because even the progressive political forces do not have the courage to criticise a system that is generally considered a major achievement in terms of social rights.

Despite its merits, a major effect of the system of childcare allowances is that women (but not men) are motivated to stay at home for 3-6 or more years, or they undertake employment of reduced value (illegal, uninsured, part-time, working from home, etc.), offering them lower wages and weaker career opportunities. (This situation is aggravated and reinforced by widespread discriminative practices, the wage gap between men and women, and the prevailing traditional gender norms.)

A general problem with provisions influencing women's employment opportunities and access to the labour market (e.g. those related to parental leave or part-time employment) is the **lack of any positive action** to support the implementation of the principle of gender equality. Equality remains a mere possibility as long as fathers are not actively encouraged to use the childcare-related opportunities provided by the law.

At the same time, there have been some significant improvements. Firstly, the accessibility of day-care services is getting slightly better, which is partly owing to the introduction of more flexible institutions. Secondly, a kind of public discourse appeared that criticizes the present system from the point of view of women's interests and gender equality.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

Background:

Most parents regard nurseries and Kindergartens as facilities serving the purpose of custody, to be utilized only in case of absolute necessity, and dismiss their role in the development of the child. It is often thought that only lazy and career-oriented parents send their children to such institutions. (While 40 % of mothers find it hard to return to work because they do not have anybody to mind their child, only every 4<sup>th</sup> of these seek the solution in nurseries.)

Therefore, facilities providing quality childcare have a potential role in changing negative attitudes towards the early institutionalization of children, and thereby in encouraging women's timely reintegration in the labour market.

The overall deterioration of the childcare infrastructure is manifested not only in its reduced capacity (as compared with the 1970s or 1980s) but also in the low standard of professional training and requirements of caretakers. This profession is not tied to university degree; training requirements consist of a degree from a vocational secondary school specialized on health-care and a diploma obtained at the end of a specialized course in baby- and infant-care. As a result, the quality of services is uneven.

A crucial problem is that child-care belongs to the heavily feminised sector: caretakers are almost exclusively women. As a consequence, the social prestige of this profession is pretty low, which is reflected in pay levels as well.

Initiatives:

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs regards the doubling of the capacity of nurseries as possible and important mid-term objective. After decades of decay, the number of institutions is currently rising (while there were 515 nurseries in 2003, by 2007 their number was 561).
- The introduction of a system of *family day-care centres* operated from public funds represents a particularly positive development.
- The public support of nurseries has also increased (it was 361,000 Forints per individuals in 2003, as compared to 547,000 Forints in 2007). Further resources are available for institutions operated in the framework of small regional associations.
- Since 2004, EU tenders (Human Resources Improvement Operative Programme 4.2) have also allowed for the improvement of services and infrastructure (more than 4.1 billion Forints were distributed among the 32 winners).
- The Democratic Trade Union of Employees of Nurseries and the Association of Nurseries plan to conduct a comprehensive survey of the system in order to increase the number of places as well as of professional care-takers.
- Raising of pay level of caretakers: not a specific measure; applies to civil servants in general.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

■ **lack of accessibility:** Nurseries are especially scarce, and one-year compulsory pre-school is not ensured in many places. Children are often taken care of by grandparents, etc., or have to commute with their parents to a distant facility. At worst, women cannot go back to work.

→ Therefore, there is a need to develop infrastructure, especially in small villages. Alternative solutions are welcome.

■ **uneven quality:** due to excessive exploitation of facilities (oversize groups); insufficient preparation of caretakers

→ accessibility should be improved, and the level of requirements and standards of training should be raised

■ **feminisation and low social prestige** of care-taking

→ positive action should be taken to enable men to choose this profession

■ **dismissal of the pedagogic function** of facilities by the parents

→ public information campaigns should emphasize the advantages of institutional care both for the child and for the mother

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

- **family day-care centres** (see above) may provide a viable solution for the problem of accessibility of child-care facilities, especially in small villages, thus enhancing female employment.

Its *form*: small facility (in a private home or a public place), with one or more caretaker looking after max. 7 children. The services are publicly funded, and caretakers are assigned the status of public servants.

*Requirements* from caretakers: secondary degree and training in management of family-day care centres.

- allowing public facilities to **operate groups on a privately funded basis** (parents' contributions) so as to increase accessibility, while saving public funds. (Those who can afford should be paying the costs.)

- **removal of constraints regarding employment** from conditions of eligibility for childcare benefit

## 6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?

*Family day-care centres:* may be effectively utilized only in a limited number of cases, and do not provide a good solution in big cities.

Caution! Even besides full utilization, funds are barely enough to cover the salaries of the personnel – not to mention meals and additional costs. If there are more than 5 children, 2 caretakers are needed, which drastically increases costs, making maintenance virtually impossible

- Re: privately funded groups: especially in neighbourhoods with a middle-class population.

- Re: unconstrained eligibility for childcare benefit – this is applicable as a transitional measure where parental leave is traditionally very long.

## 7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?

Strengths:

*Of facilities:*

- **integrated universal model** of – predominantly public – childcare forming part of the education system

- **flexible time frames:** half-day programmes are also available

- **private childcare facilities**, where public subsidies are tied to specific conditions – Once the system of family day-care centres really gets started in Hungary, more severe requirements should be introduced to ensure quality.

- **state budget pays more** in units of bilingual education

- **improvement of quality and standards** is a priority of the government

- **active civil society and coalitions** pressing for the assistance of poor communities

*Of leaves and allowances:*

- **help for employers** who have workers with family obligations
- generous system of **paid parental absences**
- **90 days paternity leave** – in Hungary, it should also be extended.
- **combination and share** of types of leaves is made possible

Weaknesses:

*Of facilities:*

- **low accessibility**
- **inappropriate facilities**
- extra **services not included** in the basic programme for additional payment  
→ consequence: reduced choices
- **98% female staff**
- + **integration of Roma children** is not promoted at this level

*Of leaves and allowances:*

- **gradual prolongation of the period of parental leave**
- **no wage indemnity for the unemployed**
- **eligibility of parental benefit** is defined as if normally the mother should be taking care of the child (even if, in practice, fathers can apply, too)

Doubts and disagreements:

- **260 days parental leave with 100% public coverage of wage indemnities:**

This might enhance men's willingness to go on leave, however, it is unfair to the poor (funds mostly go to middle and upper classes). Evidence: most women go back to work full time after 1 year.

- **higher parental contributions** for the rich – I think this is fair, and not a “setback”!
- **adoption of facilities to women's full-time employment** – I don't think that this, in itself, worsens the quality of family life.
- **the support of middle classes** should not be a priority – instead, poor people should be supported by the state, especially those having many children – i.e., the Roma

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

*Facilities:*

- **promote the institutionalization** of children under 3
- **have male caretakers** – this would increase the prestige of the profession (leading to the improvement of salaries on the longer run) and convey the message that men are competent in taking care of children
- **appropriate training of the staff** – this would also serve the purpose of increasing the prestige of care-taking
- **investment in infrastructure** – in order to enhance accessibility and quality (by reducing the size of groups, having well-equipped facilities, and providing special services for free of charge)

These latter 2 points are instrumental in improving the public acceptance of the early institutionalization of children, which, in turn, would encourage women's earlier reintegration into the labour market.

- **provide a variety of services** – with regard to time frames; allowing parents to chose facilities according to preferences in terms of same-age or mixed-age groups; and extra service offers (sports, arts, day-trips, summer camps, etc.)

+ promote **ethnically integrated facilities** – Roma children suffer serious disadvantages in education partly because of their lack of pre-school education,. Schooling is traumatic for many of them (as well as for their parents, their classmates, and the fellow children) precisely because they do not have a chance to attend integrated nurseries and Kindergartens. The training and employment of Roma care-takers should be also considered a priority.

(Integration goals are applicable also to the disabled.)

*Parental leave and allowances:*

- **create disincentives** for utilizing extended parental leave – e.g. by promoting flexibility of employment. Note: important to ensure that it applies to both men and women.
- **improve the protection** of person on leave – currently, a significant “incentive” of going back to work is provided by the fear of dismissal or transference.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Italy**

**by Claudio Storti**

## **Section 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

As in many EU member states, the Italian childcare system is divided into care and pre-school institutions, the first open to children from 0 to 3 years old, the second-called “scuola dell’infanzia”- from 3 till 6 years old.

The care services for children from 0 to 3 comprise: public day nurseries, integrative services (such as play spaces, centres for children and parents, domiciliary services) and companies and private day cares. Private care centres are very important since they represent about 40%<sup>5</sup> of the centres.

Statistics<sup>6</sup> published in 2006 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy show that between 2000 and 2006 the number of care centres has increased by 62.4%. Despite this increase, the Italian system in the year 2006 was able to offer care services only to 11% of children from 0 to 3 years old, a target far below the 33% fixed by the EU for children of that age.

The Italian pre-school system, designed for children from 3 until pre-school age, are both state and privately funded. State-sponsored day-care is free of charge and offers full-time hours up until 4 pm and after-school programmes for families who can’t pick up their children at that time. In contrast, care centres, even when public, are not free of charge and the parents have to pay in accordance with their income.

The legislation on childcare services is essentially regionally and locally directed; the central state plays only a general facilitative role. The Regions are responsible for organising services at the operational level, comprising the construction, management and control of childcare services. The Regions allocate public funds to the Municipalities, which directly manage the care centres. However, public centres are often contracted out to private cooperatives.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/quad\\_36.pdf](http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/quad_36.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/QuaderniCentroNazionale\\_43.pdf](http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/QuaderniCentroNazionale_43.pdf)

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market. How have they been implemented in practice?**

Article 1 of the Law 1044/1971 which creates public care centres in Italy affirms that “assistance in the care centres to children aged up to three constitutes a social service of public interest aimed at adequately sustaining the family and facilitating female access to the job market.”<sup>7</sup> The Law 53/20008 on parental leave recognizes this right as applying to working parents of both gender. The national Law 151/20019 clearly prohibits every kind of discrimination based on sex regarding access to the job market. Nevertheless, despite legislation that recognizes gender equality and the promotion of female employment, the Italian female employment rate continues to be one of the lowest in Europe. In 2007, the percentage of female workers was 46.7%,<sup>10</sup> still far below the Lisbon objective of 60% by 2010.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services.**

In order to increase the number of care centres, Law 285/1997 introduced the so-called “integrative services” that comprise play spaces, centres for children and parents and domiciliary services. However, for the moment, these alternative solutions have not produced significant results in addressing the lack of care centres in Italy. In fact, they offer a service with a shorter calendar and with a shorter timetable, not exceeding 4 hours per day.

The Law 53/2000 introduced special funds for companies that facilitate organizational changes and contractual innovation, in order to enhance parents’ work-life balance.

Moreover, Article 70 of the Budget Law of 2002<sup>11</sup> created a national fund for the construction and management of care centres as well as “micro-nidi” in places of

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/l1044\\_71.html](http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/leggi/l1044_71.html)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.parlamento.it/leggi/000531.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.parlamento.it/deleghe/01151dl.htm>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.portalecnel.it/portale/documenti.nsf/0/C1256BB30040CDD7C125748600551A2B/\\$FILE/Mercato%20Lavoro%202007.pdf](http://www.portalecnel.it/portale/documenti.nsf/0/C1256BB30040CDD7C125748600551A2B/$FILE/Mercato%20Lavoro%202007.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://gazzette.comune.jesi.an.it/2001/301/448-01.htm> Pubblicata in G.U. 29 dicembre

2001, n. 301 – suppl. ord. n. 285

work. Micro-nidi are care centres to be used by children whose parents work either in the company or in public administration.

Article 91 of the Budget Law of 2003<sup>12</sup> strengthened this provision by creating a special fund to provide finance for employers who created care centres in the work place.

Among the 2008<sup>13</sup> priorities for the Education Ministry are an increase in educational services through the extension of timetables and greater services for both families as well as regional and local authorities. As regards to the staff working in childcare services, the main aims are: the conversion of temporary contracts into indeterminate ones, the permanent training of all the staff and, ultimately, the revision of the current recruitment system.

#### **4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

While pre-school institutions offer good service both in quantitative and qualitative terms throughout the country, there are several exceptions to this in nursery schools.

The main exceptions are:

- Insufficient number of care centres. Many children and parents are put on waiting lists and it could take more than a year to find a place.
- Regional disparity. South Italy and the Island Regions (Sardinia and Sicily) often have a smaller number of care centres, and often the organization and services offered are of poorer quality than those of the Centre-North Italy.

The main causes for this could be the absence of a concrete development plan at national level as well as the financing, which is mainly organized at the regional and local level.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/02289103.htm#legge> Pubblicata in G.U. 31 dicembre 2002, n. 305 – suppl. ord. n. 240

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/prot9914\\_07.shtml](http://www.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2007/prot9914_07.shtml)

In contrast, preschool institutions are distributed equally throughout the country and the number of children attending is almost the same as for primary education.

This is a very important point, especially considering that attendance at preschool is not compulsory.

The insufficient number of day care centres contributes strongly to the very low Italian birth rate and to the still inadequate presence of women on the labour market, putting Italy at a disadvantage in comparison with other EU Members. Too often families have to have recourse to grandparents or to private babysitting services in order to obtain childcare. In some cases, the lack of adequate services forces women to stop working after having given birth.

In conclusion, it is advisable that public financing of nursery schools should be increased, and the coordination between national level and regional and local levels should be strengthened.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

- 5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

On a general level, Italy, together with Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, is one of the countries with the highest number of children attending pre-school institutions at European level.

As regarding specific good practices on publically funded childcare and the promotion of gender equality, the example of the municipality of Giugliano, situated in the Campania region, could be a very interesting one to study. In this small municipality, a project called “Nidi di mamma<sup>14</sup>” (Mothers’ nurseries) has been launched. The main aim of this project is the professional training of 8 unemployed mothers, by helping them to acquire professional experience in the childcare

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/QuaderniCentroNazionale\\_45.pdf](http://www.minori.it/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/QuaderniCentroNazionale_45.pdf)

system. This experience produces two beneficial effects: the creation of a new care centre - and consequently the opportunity for a greater number of women to use the service - and work placement for some unemployed mothers. In this way, an innovative solution is solving two of the main gaps in Italian childcare and gender equality promotion: the lack of nursery centres and the lack of jobs for female workers.

## **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

The Italian pre-school institution system of the “scuola dell’infanzia” could be applied to other European countries, thanks to its coherent structure, despite the many differences existing between different Italian regions.

The high level of participation, even if the service is a not compulsory one, makes the pre-school institution a good example that can be studied and applied to other EU countries.

As for the specific good practice of the Giugliano municipality, this could be applied in all countries that experience a shortage of care centres and want to improve the chances of work placements for mothers.

## **7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

In my opinion, one of the strengths of the Slovenian childcare system is the essentially public nature of the service which, by making the service available to all families, enables a high female employment rate. This creates a sort of “contrary discrimination”, by producing a higher rate of employment for mother workers than for non-mothers. This is particularly true in the case of academic researchers, who - if mothers - experience great difficulties in their professional careers. Moreover, the continuing unequal division of tasks in the domestic sphere and the low numbers of women in public life and politics demonstrates the persistence of stereotypes and barriers against complete gender equality.

One of the elements of the Slovenian experience that could be transferred to the Italian system is that of the integrated kindergarten model, open to children from age 0 to 6. Since nursery centres are lacking in Italy, the integration of these centres into kindergarten - "scuola dell'infanzia", which are common throughout the country - could help solve the problem.

In conclusion, the Slovenian case is a valid and positive example of childcare assistance and proper analysis of it could be extremely useful for all countries which experience problems in the organization of public care service.

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

In my opinion, the main pre-conditions for a good quality childcare service lie in the overcoming of stereotypes and social conventions. Governments should promote legislation that really supports a greater involvement of fathers in the education and care of their children. Private companies should be encouraged to promote gender equality - for example, by receiving financial advantages if they support paternal leave or if they don't obstruct the professional careers of female employees who have children.

Childcare and gender equality should be listed as a priority for all European governments. This is necessary not only in order to realize a more equal society and to abolish disparities between the sexes, but also in order to help solve the dramatic population decline in many European countries.

If Europe wants to continue to be the biggest market in the world and one of the strongest economies, it should not oblige its female population to choose between their maternal desire and their professional careers.

From a practical point of view, in order to realize this objective, a greater number of public childcare centres need to be created, with more flexible opening hours and offering different programmes. More public funding should be invested in the childcare sector. However, at the same time, the private sector should be encouraged to help create a greater number of centres, and both public and private centres should abide by the same quality standard.

In conclusion, in a modern Europe, the example of women who are both successful business people and mothers should become an everyday reality and not an isolated exception. The still inadequate number of fathers who stay at home after the birth of their children clearly shows how far Europe still has to go in its quest for real gender equality.

*Sources:*

- Rapporto sul mercato del lavoro 2007, Consiglio Nazionale dell'economia e del lavoro, 15 luglio 2008.
- I numeri italiani. Infanzia ed adolescenza in cifre-Edizione 2007. Quaderni del Centro Nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza, 2007
- I nidi e gli altri servizi integrativi per la prima infanzia. Quaderni del Centro Nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza, 2006
- Buone pratiche oltre la legge 285/1997. Dalla ricognizione alla segnalazione. . Quaderni del Centro Nazionale di documentazione e analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza, 2000

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Liechtenstein**

**by Maja Marxer-Schlader**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

#### **Possibilities of outside-home childcare in Liechtenstein**

Due to the constant increase of employment of mothers, outside-home childcare has become a more and more important issue in Liechtenstein during the last years. Since 1989 the Liechtenstein Association on Childcare Facilities (*Verein Kindertagesstätten Liechtenstein*) and the Parents-Child-Forum (*Eltern Kind Forum*) have been offering professional childcare.

#### **Day Care Facilities for Children**

There are day care facilities which accept groups of children of various age as well as such which are directed to special groups of babies respectively infants. The task of day care facilities is to provide subsidiary support to families in the field of care, advancement and education of the entrusted children.

As a general rule, children between the age of 4 months and 16 years are allowed into day care facilities but most children attend them only until the age of 12 years. Day care facilities are offered to all children irrespective of the cultural background, religion, marital status or income-level of their legal guardians. The total number of groups within one day care facility is dependent on the size of the single group. Normally a group consists of 10 to 13 places. For 5 children one group leader is responsible.

Each group is under the responsibility of a specialist in early childhood education or a person specially trained in the field of pedagogy. These professionals are supported by a trainee.

The opening hours vary between the different providers. Normally children can be taken care of from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM. All day care facilities offer lunch. The prices differ according to the parents income.

Since 2002, running day care facilities for children is subject to prior authorisation by the Office of Social Affairs (Act of 17 April 2002 amending the Youth Act and the

Care Authorisation Ordinance). Before a day care facility is allowed to operate, the Office of Social Affairs has to assess whether the requirements for an authorisation are fulfilled. The aim of this legislation is to secure the quality of the care provided. (cf. *Liechtensteinische Landesverwaltung o.J.*)

### **Day mothers**

Day mothers have, in most cases, children themselves and take – additionally to their own children - care of one to three other children. This can be done on a hourly or daily basis as well as on a half- or all-day basis. There are day mothers who are self-employed or such who are employed by the Parents-Child-Forum. Since 2002, the care of day mothers is subject to prior authorisation when it lasts longer than 3 months or the weekly amount of hours of care exceeds 40 hours. The authorisation is granted by the Office of Social Affairs. Day mothers who are employed by the Parents-Child-Forum are exempted from authorisation. In this case, it is the responsibility of the Parents-Child-Forum to guarantee that their employees comply with the relevant provisions of the Youth legislation.

Day mothers employed by the Parents-Child-Forum are paid monthly on an hourly basis. They are provided with social and health insurance.

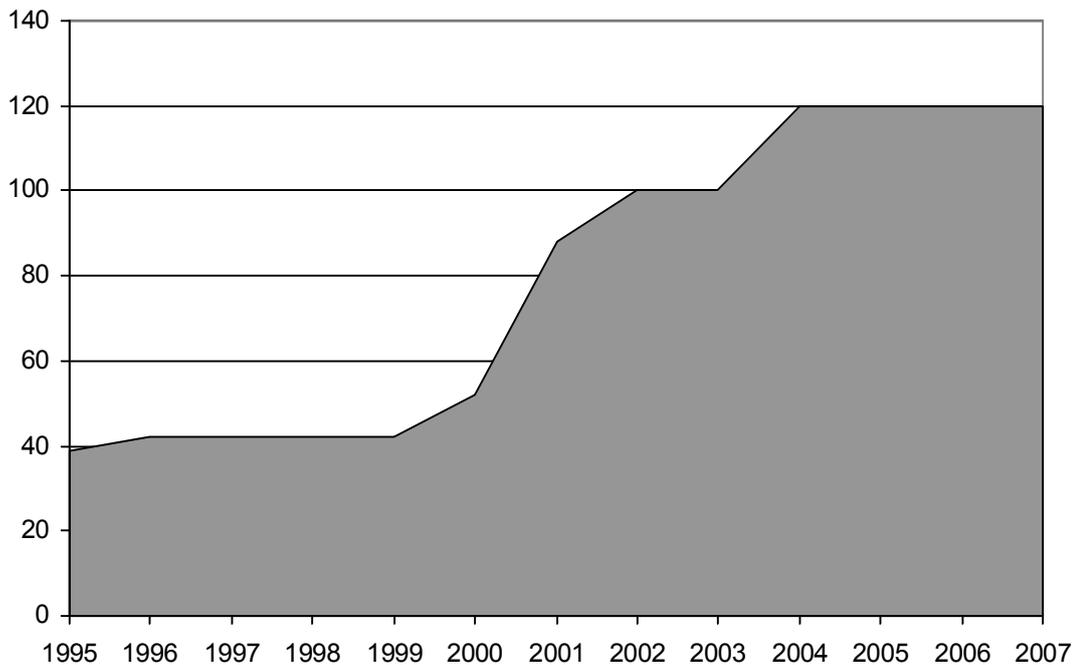
It is expected that a day mother meets the following requirements: Frankness and general positive attitude towards life, experience in dealing with children and pedagogic capacities, interest in the positive development of the child, stable family environment and readiness to talk to parents and the Parents-Child-Forum. (cf. cited above)

### **Development in figures**

#### **Day Care Facilities for Children**

The total number of childcare places provided by the Liechtenstein Association on Childcare Facilities - the main provider of day care facilities in Liechtenstein - is limited to 122. This figure has not been varied since the end of 2004.

*Table 1: Childcare places provided by the Liechtenstein Association on Childcare Facilities 1995-2007*



*Source: Office on Equal Opportunities (2006: 27) until 2004. As of 2004 the table was updated by the author.*

From 1999 to 2004 a significant expansion of day care facilities for children has taken place. Facilities have been opened gradually in nearly each of the eleven Communities of Liechtenstein.

Apart from the facilities offered by the Liechtenstein Association on Childcare Facilities, there are five other private facilities. The number of children, who have effectively been taken care of in day care facilities during the last years, varies between 230 to 400.

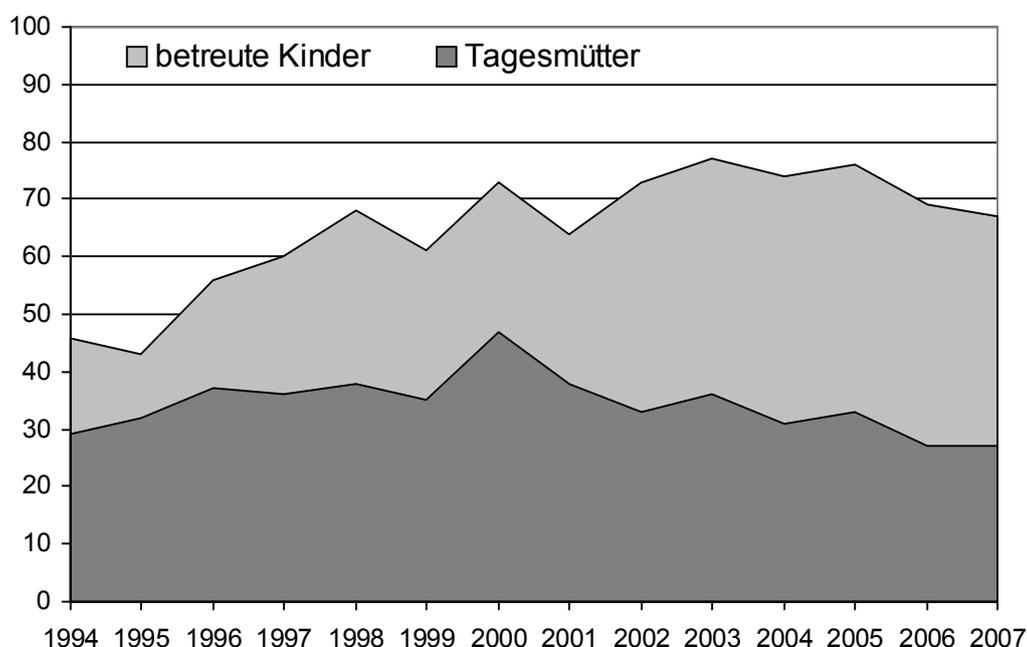
At the moment, there is a political discussion on education in Liechtenstein, which – under the heading of equal treatment – also includes a proposal for mandatory start

at kindergarten from the age of three years combined with an expansion of the system of all-day school. The implementation of such a proposal would automatically result in a massive reduction of the number of children in day care facilities.

### Day mothers

The figures concerning day mothers and children under their care have developed as follows:

*Table 2: Number of day mothers and children under their care 1994-2007*



*Source: Annual reports Parents-Child-Forum 1994-2007*

In the years 2000 to 2005 the maximum numbers of children under the care of day mothers were between 73 and 76 per year. The table above shows that gradually fewer day mothers are taking care of more and more children. In 2000, 47 day mothers cared for 73 children, whereas in 2005 only 33 day mothers cared for 76 children. Since 2001, the number of children taken care of has been relatively stable, between 73 and 76 children per year. The number of day mothers has been continuously decreasing over the last years to a low level of just 27 day mothers.

The stock of designated day mothers allows the Parents-Child-Forum to place several children requiring different small care units with the same day mother. The system of childcare is characterised especially by its flexibility concerning care times and care units. (cf. Annual reports Parents-Child Forum 1994-2007)

(Quotation: Marxer-Schädler M., *Einstellungen zu ausserhäuslicher Kinderbetreuung in Liechtenstein*, 2008: 7 et seq.)

### **Tax allowances (family tax-deduction, tax-deductions for educational costs)**

Tax allowances do in general relieve the family budget and can insofar be considered as family friendly. It would make sense, also in view of contributing to a better compatibility between family/work life, to allow for a tax deduction of child care costs. It has to be examined whether such tax-benefits are effective and feasible.

### **Financial aid for outside-home childcare**

In order to promote a better compatibility between family/work life, low-income families are, with regard to financing childcare, supported by the Child and Youth Aid (pursuant to the Youth Act). Parents, who due to their job situation are dependent on childcare, are entitled to receive financial aid based on their income-level. Up to a yearly income of CHF 24.000.- (€ 14'725.--) the own contribution per child is CHF 150.- (€ 92.--) per month, for each additional CHF 2000.- (€1'227.--) income per year the own contribution per child increases by CHF 30.- (€ 18.50). For families with more than one child the amount of the own contribution will be reduced.

The amount of the own contribution will also be reduced when the family lives at the minimum subsistence level. In case a family lives below the minimum subsistence level, the costs for childcare are fully covered.

In order to make childcare facilities affordable for families, the State allocates a considerable amount of subsidies. In 2006, the subsidies alone for 143 childcare places amounted to CHF 1,75 million (€ 1,07 million). Additionally, the State's contribution for the Parents-Child-Forum was about CHF 288'000 (€ 176'690). In the same year, the costs for one childcare place of the Liechtenstein Association of Childcare Facilities amounted to CHF 106,35 (€ 62.25) per child. Accordingly, the same amount (CHF 106,35) had to be gained. This sum was raised by parents'

contributions of CHF 42,53 (€ 26.09), by State's subsidies of CHF 61.07 (€ 37.46) and by other sources of CHF 2,76 (€ 1.69). Thus, in 2006 parents paid 40% and the State 57,4% of the costs. Today, the cost sharing formula is based on a governmental decision.

### **Provisions on Leave (Maternity Protection, Parental Leave, Job Guarantee)**

In most of the European countries parental leave is a matter of course. In Liechtenstein the duration of parental leave is 3 months and unpaid.

It should be assessed whether the prolongation of parental leave in combination with the introduction of a "Family Money" approach could be reasonable and effective.

### **Childcare: Extension of all-day childcare and all-day facilities in schools (all-day schools)**

The integration of mothers into professional life requires sufficient quality childcare possibilities for children of all age-groups.

In the field of schools, a survey and commission's report on the requirements of all-day care and support facilities (supervised lunch tables, homework and learning support etc.) had already been ordered on 21.09.2004 and was taken account of by the Government on 24.08.2005. The results and recommendations have been assessed and implementing measures are already in place: for example, due to Government decision of 16.05.2006 all-day schools had to be established with regard to the school period 2007/08 in each of the two districts of the country (the *Lower Land* and the *Upper Land*). Additionally, projects shall be launched and supported on Community level.

From today's perspective, the supply of childcare facilities is to be regarded as good. In Liechtenstein, out-home childcare is of high quality and is broadly accepted. For the moment, there are no major waiting periods in day-care centres. However, it should be assessed whether within the given framework improvements are possible, for example with regard to opening hours, care during holidays and care on a hourly basis. Is it possible to optimize the harmonisation of the beginning

and ending hours of primary school and kindergarten (within the same Community)? Is it possible to introduce longer (as from 7:00 AM in primary school and in the kindergarten) access hours (when qualified teachers and kindergarten workers are not necessarily available) and to organize longer timeframes for fetching the children during lunchtime, in order to prevent parents from a complicated and energy consuming dislocating of their children to other facilities ("KITA", day mothers)? Would it be helpful to reduce the entering age in the kindergarten for one year? (Government response to the "postulate" of the Liechtenstein Parliament concerning family support, No. 85/2007, 53 et seq.)

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

Unfortunately, there are no figures available on the implications of measures with regard to equal treatment of men and women on the Liechtenstein labour market.

The following figures can be taken from the Statistical Yearbook 2005:

*Table 9 Working population with residence in Liechtenstein 1930-2000*

	1930	1941	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
<b>In total</b>	4436	4874	6018	7575	10243	12988	15537	18189
<b>Women</b>	1166	1178	1698	2347	3471	4610	5892	8015
<b>Women in %</b>	26.3	24.2	28.2	31.0	33.9	35.5	37.9	44.1
<b>Men in %</b>	73.7	75.8	71.8	69.0	66.1	64.5	62.1	55.9

*Source: Office of Economic Affairs, Statistical Yearbook 2005*

While the total number of the working population has increased four times within 70 years, the number of working women has even increased seven times. In the 1930's, only 25% of the working population with residence in Liechtenstein were women, whereas in 2000 this number increased to 44%. To a large extent, this development took place regardless of the legal equality of men and women and started long before women got the right to vote, in parallel to the economic

development and the increasing number of working places. (Statistical Yearbook 2005)

Concerning the Liechtenstein public administration, the question can be analysed on the basis of the Government response to an interpellation of the Liechtenstein Parliament in 2006 (No. 113/2006):

How many employees of the public administration have reduced their working hours after their first or second child? How many employees of the public administration, who have reduced their work due to the birth of a child, have again increased their working hours to the original amount and after how many years? How many of those who have interrupted their work have entered again the public administration?

In general, it has to be stated that the public administration, compared to other employers, offers many part-time jobs which are occupied mainly by women. As of 30.09.2006 the Liechtenstein public administration employed 758 persons of which 181 work part-time. Out of these 181 part-time posts, 151 are occupied by women. Normally, women have the possibility to reduce their working time after the birth of a child provided that this is compatible with the concerned function. During the last years, fewer women stop working at all and only few women continue working full-time. The majority of women reduce their working time after the birth of their first child to 50%-80%. This trend is definitely also a result of the childcare facility within the Liechtenstein public administration ("KITA LLV").

Is it possible to offer a work returner an equal position?

Former employees of the public administration, who gave up their job in order to care for their family, do not enjoy special treatment when they reapply for a job in the public administration. They apply for published job offers and have to pass through the normal selection process. With regard to a new appointment – and due to data protection requirements - only the personal data are collected which are necessary for the appointment. At the moment, the persons' information system is not capable to collect these additional data. Besides non-recurring costs for the

necessary programme adaptations, this would also require regular expenses for the evaluation and collection of data.

The following table illustrates the total amount of public costs spent for services in the field of child care:

	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001
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**Youth Care (540.365.00)**

Association on Childcare Facilities	403'200.00	378'000.00	336'000.00	320'000.00	216'200.00
Day Nursery Vaduz				-	53'440.00
Day Nursery Triesen				-	
Association Childcare Pimolino	36'960.00	36'960.00	37'000.00	15'000.00	
Association Childcare Planken	23'520.00	23'000.00	20'160.00		
Total Amount	463'680.00	437'960.00	393'160.00	335'000.00	269'640.00

**Youth Aid (540.366.00)**

Day Nursery Vaduz		-			107'880.00
Association Childcare Planken	78'000.00	74'000.00	61'824.00		
Advice Center for Adults and Adolescents	120'000.00	90'000.00	90'000.00	90'000.00	90'000.00
Parents-Child-Forum	286'807.65	275'871.24	280'000.00	273'603.70	263'549.05
Social-Pedagogic Youth Residential Group Vaduz	490'000.00	473'000.00	465'000.00	453'000.00	422'000.00
Social-Pedagogic Family Advice	67'000.00	65'000.00	60'000.00	57'000.00	50'000.00

Association on Childcare Facilities	1'075'000.00	981'000.00	927'000.00	790'000.00	568'000.00
Day Nursery Triesen				-	
Association Childcare Pimolino	123'000.00	115'800.00	80'000.00	13'000.00	-
Day Nursery Balzers		-			-
Day Nursery Lower Land		-			-
Total Amount	2'239'807.65	2'074'671.24	1'963'824.00	1676603.70	1'501'429.05

*(Interpellation of the Government to the Liechtenstein Parliament; No. 113/2006, 10 et seq.)*

This means a raise about 33 % in the time from 2001 to 2005.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

As mentioned above, since 2002 operating a childcare facility is subject to prior authorisation (Act of 17.04.2002 amending the Youth Act). The Office of Social Affairs gives approval after having assessed whether all requirements are fulfilled. The aim of the legislation is to secure the quality of childcare in Liechtenstein. Childcare facilities employ highly trained and qualified caretakers as for example child nurseries, infant educators and kindergarten workers. The facilities themselves also offer further vocational training in the concerned professions.

Childcare provided by day mothers also requires prior authorisation. The quality of the services of day mothers is guaranteed by the Parents-Child-Forum through regular inspections, pedagogic-psychologist training with preventive orientation as well as through specific vocational training for day mothers. In order to motivate for training measures, day mothers who have participated in special training courses do get better payments.

Liechtenstein is a very small country (160km<sup>2</sup>). In every Community, childcare facilities are easily accessible.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

The childcare system in Liechtenstein is very good and also controlled by the State. Only those facilities are entitled to receive subsidies which have fulfilled the quality standards. However, it will still remain a challenge to define good quality in an absolute way and to support it accordingly, in particular when demand for childcare facilities is very high.

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

The political framework concerning outside-home childcare is, in general, strongly influenced by the attitudes towards the role of women / mothers in society, the distribution of work between the genders as well as by the conception of the child's well-being and the respective responsibility of the State in the field of child education. Accordingly, the attitude of the Government towards public childcare is very decisive with regard to quantity and quality of childcare facilities.

After two negative votes in the 1970s, Liechtenstein has introduced the voting right for women only in 1984, as one of the last countries in Europe. Hence, with a view to gender equality Liechtenstein has not a long tradition like, for example, the Scandinavian countries which are oriented towards the principle of gender equality and aim to an equal participation in the labour market and to an improvement of family/work life balance. Nonetheless, in the last 20 years Liechtenstein has compensated in various fields of policy and society. (cf. *Marxer* 2004)

Liechtenstein, like Switzerland, can be described for the purposes of this lay history as a conservative-concordant welfare-state. A dominant factor in Liechtenstein's approach is that of dual compensation, whereby a shortfall in family expenses is compensated by additional benefits.

The public funding of childcare facilities only started in 1980's and is not as developed as in other European countries. The general orientation of Liechtenstein's family policy is clearly focused on the family as the main provider for care and education. Providing care within the family is still regarded primarily as the responsibility of women. Hence, the existing gender relation can be described by a strong economic dependence of women on their men. The classical role model of fulltime working men and fulltime housewives is still relevant. The labour force participation rate of women has not exceeded 50% and is still 15% under the male one. The percentage of women in the economically active population even shows a difference of 20%. This gap is especially large among married couples. (cf. *Simon 2007: 31*)

However, especially young women in Liechtenstein consider occupation as an important factor in terms of good life quality. Thus, 77% of young women agree to the assertion that women are able to realize their full potential better if working than being a housewife or mother (cf. Austrian Institute for Youth Research 2007 in *Simon 2007: 66*).

(Quotation: Marxer-Schädler M., *Einstellungen zu ausserhäuslicher Kinderbetreuung in Liechtenstein*, 2008: 5 et seq.)

Not least due to the economic conditions in Liechtenstein, which are characterized by a manpower shortage, politics is interested in enforcing the expansion of childcare facilities. In this regard, it is important to mention - and could be regarded as best practise - that the initiative by private associations to install childcare facilities after having fulfilled the quality standards has been sponsored by public funds. Thereby, it was made possible that today in nearly every Community a childcare facility exists and that a professional day mothers agency has been established statewide.

## **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

Public funding of private initiatives concerning childcare facilities appears to be essential. Such is, however, dependent on the financial resources of the State. In return, the State must define quality standards and enforce them. Taking the example of all-day school structures, which are currently established in Liechtenstein in a pilot phase, it clearly shows that - before it comes to a definitive implementation of these new structures - it is necessary to gain experiences which have to be assessed and further developed.

## **7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

The strength of the Slovenian system is that Kindergartens are an intrinsic part of the educational system. This contributes to the possibility of ensuring equal opportunities not only for men and women but also for different levels of society as well as the integration of foreign and handicapped children. Furthermore, the long opening hours guarantee high flexibility of the parents' working times.

The weaknesses, as illustrated in the Slovenian report, are that childcare facilities are not equally accessible which is an obstacle to ensure equal opportunities. In addition, private day mothers are not properly included into the public childcare system.

The important achievements with regard to parental leave, which Slovenia has attained and still intends to improve or adapt, could be assessed and transferred to Liechtenstein. This could be another important step towards equal opportunities for men and women.

## **8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

As already mentioned, the political framework for childcare facilities is strongly influenced by the attitudes towards the role of women respectively mothers in the society, the distribution of work between the genders as well as by the conception of

the child's well-being and the respective responsibility of the State in the field of child education. Accordingly, the attitude of the Government towards public childcare is decisive with regard to the quantity and quality of childcare facilities, both in terms of their general acceptance in society as well as the funds which are made available for them.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Lithuania**

**by Jurgita Peciuriene**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

After the regaining of national Independence in 1990, voices were heard calling for 'the return of women to families' and demanding the 'closing of the kindergartens'. The number of child-care institutions has been in consistent decline since 1990, when there were 1808 pre-school institutions in Lithuania, 1003 in urban areas and 805 in rural areas<sup>15</sup>. In 2007, only 649 pre-school institutions remained, 486 in urban areas and 163 in rural areas<sup>16</sup>.

In 1993 the numbers of children attending these institutions had dropped sharply to 21.3% of the child population<sup>17</sup>. Numbers, and the demand, then started to increase and currently there is lack of places in pre-school institutions as compared with the demand. By 2007, some 54.8 % of children aged 1-6 attended pre-school education institutions<sup>18</sup> as changes in society and general living conditions contributed to a variation in trends and it had become once again popular to send children between 3-6 years of age to kindergartens. There are now big disparities in attendance at these places according to age and location. The highest current attendances - 95.8% - are in urban areas, at pre-school establishments for children of 3-6 years of age, while the lowest attendances (6.7 %) are among children in the rural areas aged between 1-3 years.

The state is responsible for the development at national level of general goals and principles for childcare and preschool education, while funding and financing is mostly left to the municipalities. The standard institutional child-care services in Lithuania are the nurseries and kindergartens run by the local governments. There are very few private agencies represented, and this is also true for facilities run by NGOs or charity organizations. Nurseries and kindergartens are 'long-day care' services, i.e. they are open throughout the working hours of the majority of the local community. Their hours of opening average between 10.5 and 12 hours each day a

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<sup>15</sup> Lithuanian Department of Statistics (1995). Lithuanian Women and Family. Vilnius.

<sup>16</sup> Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2008).

[http://www.stat.gov.lt/uploads/docs/Vaikai\\_tem\\_Svietimas\\_0421.doc](http://www.stat.gov.lt/uploads/docs/Vaikai_tem_Svietimas_0421.doc)

<sup>17</sup> Statistics Lithuania (2004). Women and Men in Lithuania. Vilnius.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.stat.gov.lt/uploads/docs/Vaikai\\_tem\\_Svietimas\\_0421.doc](http://www.stat.gov.lt/uploads/docs/Vaikai_tem_Svietimas_0421.doc)

standard pattern being from 6.30 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. for five days of the week. Parents bring, or take a child whenever it is convenient to these facilities, though they have to pay for the full day. Children from 1 to 3 years may obtain a place in a nursery. Children from 3 to 7 years old have the right to enter the kindergarten. (Nurseries provide full-day child care services; kindergartens provide both educational and full-day child-care services).

While the level of the fees charged for attendance is a responsibility of the individual local authority (average 44 euro per month), there are general principles common to all areas. Families deemed to be socially disadvantaged, or with children having physical or mental disorders are required to pay only a charge of 0,04 euro per day as an educational supplement. The fee is reduced by 50 % in the case of single-parent families; families with 3 and more children below 18 years of age; and when the family wage earner is a full-time student or the father is a serving soldier.

The fee is not levied during the period when a child is unable to attend kindergarten because of illness, or during the week next following. A similar exemption is allowed when parents take holidays, or have a day free from work (this includes the case when a parent follows a work timetable with a free day which occurs during the normal working week); when parents who are registered as employment-seekers at a Labour exchange do not bring their child to the kindergarten; when children do not attend during the summer; or when the ambient temperature falls below 20 degrees Celsius. If mothers return to the workplace before their child is one year nannies are normally employed, or the child is placed with a grandmother or another relative up to the age of three years when mothers return to employment.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

The national programme on Development of Pre-school Education 2007-2012 aims to increase pre-school education accessibility (especially in rural areas), diversity and quality, to increase the image of pre-school educator.

It targets of enhancing the provision of childcare by 2012 to at least 25 per cent of children under three years of age and 60 per cent of children between three years

old and six years old and 90 per cent of six to seven years of old. At least 50 private childcare service institutions will receive some financial support from the State. At least 5500 educators and/or educator's assistants will attend not less than 10 days trainings. New pre-school education models will be prepared and tested.

Objectives of the National programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for 2005-2009 are to address gender inequality problems in all areas in an integrated and systematic way, to implement gender mainstreaming, to establish conditions for reconciliation of work, professional military service and family obligations, to improve women's reintegration into the labour market after a long break, increase the number of women in decision-making and top managerial positions, include trainings on gender equality into programmes of formal and informal education, sensitize teachers, social teachers and educators on gender equality, to encourage employers to pay equal pay for work of the same value to men and women.

Maternity leave is paid for 126 calendar days. The amount of the maternity benefit is equal to 100% of the reimbursed salary of the beneficiary. Paternity leave (non-transferable) is paid maximum 1 month from the date of childbirth. The amount of the paternity benefit is equal to 100% of the reimbursed salary of the beneficiary. Parental leave: One of the parents or a foster parent can take the leave until the child reaches 3 years but not sooner than from the end of the maternity leave. The amount of the parental benefit is equal to 100% of the reimbursed salary of the beneficiary until child reaches 1 year of age, 85% of salary until child reaches 2 years old, and 28 euro is paid until child reaches 3 years old.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

96 multifunction centres should be opened, 60 childcare service facilities should be renovated, 500 new staff engaged, childcare facilities for children from birth till 1 year (now it is only from 1 year old) will be opened according the National Programme on Development of Pre-school Education 2007-2012. The Programme is being successfully implemented for a second year.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

\* The kindergarten system is currently failing to keep up with growing demand for day-care services and pre-school education. Many of the existing services in the bigger cities are seriously overcrowded.

\* The physical conditions for the care of toddlers in child-care institutions often fall short of what is appropriate. Frequently one finds that staff members and learning resources are too few, the equipment dated, and the education programmes are unsuited for this age group.

\* The current legislation does not favour the foundation of private child-care institutions.

\* Lack of flexibility of the working hours of pre-school institutions and flexible payment for the exact time the child has spent at the institution.

\* No facilities for babies until 1 year old.

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

Kindergartens "Mazyliis" and "Kurpaite" are founded by Vilnius municipality. Trying to help parents to reconcile family and work responsibilities in these 2 kindergartens were introduced through prolonged working hours since autumn 2005. Each kindergarten has one group which is open from 6.30 a.m. until 9.30 p.m. The need for those prolonged working hours was revealed by questioning parents, as some of them were working night shifts, in supermarkets with long working hours, some of them were working far from kindergartens and have no other possibilities for the childcare.

Kindergartens participated in the project "Forward! Seima ir darbas-suderinami", which was implemented under the Equal programme. Staff of both kindergartens was sensitized on gender issues, learned how to organize daily activities and organize the space of rooms in a non-discriminatory manner.

Additionally kindergartens are providing psychological help and social work services. Parents can get personal psychological consultations, and psychologist runs self help groups, where parents are discussing different issues such as relationships within the family, management of children's problematic behaviour and others. A social worker is working as a case manager, she evaluates needs and problems within the family, together with parents (or one of them) makes intervention plan, meets with parents and discusses with them steps which has to be or had been taken to improve situation, evaluates changes. Psychologist, social worker and educators are cooperating by sharing some information and looking for the solutions of some family issues. Unemployed parents (mainly mothers) had an opportunity to take the courses for the advancement of vocational skills.

#### **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

The above-mentioned good practices were introduced to different organizations and institutions in Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Portugal, Germany, Italy. Information about the good practice is placed on the Internet: [www.seimairdarbas.lt](http://www.seimairdarbas.lt) Products of this transnational cooperation are available on the CD in English. Trainings for staff and manuals could be translated and disseminated to other countries.

#### **7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

##### **Strengths:**

Prolonged opening hours of some institutions: some are open 16 hours per day, some are open on Saturdays.

##### **Weaknesses:**

Poor accessibility of pre-school institutions.

Lack of flexibility of the working hours of pre-school institutions.

No facilities for babies until 1 year old.

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

- \* Training for the staff on gender equality.
- \* Encouraging men to enrol on educational courses and to work in pre-school institutions.
- \* Involvement of fathers into activities and events of pre-school institutions.
- \* Provision of flexible and integrated services.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Luxembourg**

**by Anik Raskin**

## **Introduction**

In Luxembourg, (re)conciliation of work, private and family life is still perceived as a women's issue and the aspect of social life is not often on the agenda. Even if this no longer corresponds to reality, the dominant family model remains the 'housewife-man breadwinner' one. The classic working scheme is still supposed to be an uninterrupted career of a full-time job. In general, (re)conciliation of work, private, social and family life is meant to enable women to combine work and family life with regard to their care obligations. Enabling men to do so is not really discussed.

As a result, the lack and the cost of care facilities for children are first mentioned as a main difficulty regarding conciliation. This difficulty increases when children are entering school because of the incoherence of school and work time schedules.

Gender pay gap and segregation (vertical and horizontal) on the labour market may be considered as reinforcing the fact that women continue to be the ones who are perceived and perceive themselves as being responsible for care activities.

Due to the demographic evolution, the need of care for elderly people reinforces the problem in the short to medium term.

In Luxembourg, the rate of female employment stood at 54, 6% in 2006<sup>19</sup>. Considered in full time equivalent this rate drops however to 46, 1% in 2006<sup>20</sup>.

## **Section 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

In its work programme of 2004, the Luxembourg government announced its intention to extend the offer on childcare facilities and to reflect on more flexible schemes of childcare. Furthermore, the government declared to support the offer in place and to grant financial supports for the creation of private cribs even of

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<sup>19</sup> Enquête sur les forces de travail, STATEC (Central Statistics and Economic Studies Service), 2006

<sup>20</sup> Indicators for monitoring the Employment Guidelines including indicators for additional employment analysis, 2008 compendium, European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and equal opportunities

company cribs. These measures were announced in order to facilitate (re)conciliation of work, private and family life.

The national plan of action for gender equality (Plan d'action national d'égalité des femmes et des hommes) adopted in 2005 reaffirms the governmental programme.

Different levels of financing, depending on parents' income, are available. This however concerns only public or public financed structures. The government supports the communes in their efforts to provide after-school facilities by covering 50% of any operating deficit.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

The national plan of action for gender equality aims for an increase of 66% in the number of available places until 2008. In a general way, the policies allow women to combine work and private life as they aim to increase their participation in the labour market. This is also the primary reason for the intention to increase childcare facilities structures.

The national Plan for Innovation and Full Employment 2003 (Plan d'action national pour l'innovation et le plein emploi), set as objectives a 33% coverage for children under three years old and a 90% coverage for children between three years old and the compulsory school starting age, by 2010. These targets meet the Barcelona targets.

In 2005, Luxembourg had places for 8.000 children in out-of-school structures. The government identified that a total of 30.000 places would be needed by 2013. (30% of them in rural areas).

The national Plan for Innovation and Full Employment 2005 projected to create 5.321 new places in 44 facilities between 2005 and 2008.

Parental leave was introduced by law in 1999 in order to implement Directive 97/75 EC.

The government supports municipalities to create structures for preschool and primary schoolchildren. From 2009, the municipalities will have an obligation to provide preschool education.

In 2005, a project consisting of a continuous school day in post-primary education was implemented on pilot basis. The same year, a new type of childcare structures, the 'maisons relais' were created. Regarding booked places, an additional capacity of 33,3% per year between 2005 and 2007 was also projected by this plan.

In 2007, 'parental assistance' was regulated by law.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

The major challenge which Luxembourg tries to answer currently is of a quantitative nature. Even if the intention to improve the quality of childcare facilities is posited, it seems difficult to identify real progress on this aspect.

The concept of 'maisons relais' created in 2005 aims to increase the number of places for childcare as well as their geographical distribution. They are meant to constitute a flexible network of childcare facilities in order to combine school, work and local activities. On August 2007, Luxembourg had 92 'maisons relais' which represented a total of 10.449 places.

Parental assistance as regulated by law concerns private childcare of daytime and/or night-time for groups of more than three and less than eight minor children. Minimum requirements have to be fulfilled by persons who apply for a permit to work as a parental assistant.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

Luxembourg's efforts in order to increase the quantity of childcare facilities are commendable. The concern regarding geographic coverage is the most urgent.

However, it remains important to pay attention to the effects that certain measures or policies are likely to produce regarding childcare quality as well as with regard to gender equality.

Thus, the concern for increasing the quantity of childcare facilities while making them accessible caused that the standards of staff training are on a relatively low level. This of course may influence the quality of childcare but has even an effect regarding gender equality. Concretely, the increase in the women employment rate

is certainly partly due to the increase of childcare facilities. But, in this sector Luxembourg shows a great amount of little remunerated part-time employment which does certainly not improve gender gaps.

In the same way, it is regrettable that Luxembourg seems to consider the affordability of childcare facilities as being part of social policy. This disadvantages parents with middle and high income and thus slows down the gender equality policies.

Currently, many parents have recourse to relatives, friends or even to informal workers for their requirement in childcare.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

### **5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

The Ministry of Equal Opportunities (Ministère de l'égalité des chances) runs an 'affirmative actions' programme by providing logistical and financial support to firms that act on promoting gender equality. This programme has just been reorganized in 2008 in order to assure a more effective evaluation as regards the impact on the field of gender equality of actions supported. Such actions may include measures aiming at greater access to flexible and accessible good quality childcare.

Since the school year 2006-2007, the town of Esch-sur-Alzette offers the first elementary school of the county with a prolonged day option. Children are accommodated from 7h00 until 18h00 and offers alternating extra-curricular studies and activities. This pilot scheme is meant to be used as a basis for a reflexion at national level in order to possibly generalize this type of teaching.

### **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

Similar practices already exist in other countries. In fact, Luxembourg does not seem to present completely innovative good practices. Nevertheless, it is quite probable that similar projects do differ in certain aspects depending on the concerned country. The Luxembourg expertise could bring assistance to countries

which show characteristics close to that of Luxembourg. (small, multilingual, immigration...)

**7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

At first sight, the Slovenian system appears favourable to encourage female employment in general and full-time female employment in particular. This constitutes an important component in the promotion of gender equality.

On institutional level, the fact that the Ministry of Education and Sports is in charge of childcare and preschool education seems coherent in so far as this should make it possible to organize childcare and education in a structured and effective way. Furthermore, the responsibility for the State is clearly fixed by the integrated system of kindergartens and educational system.

Concerning quality and diversity, Slovenia appears to be a positive example in its avoidance of a two track system.

On the other hand, measures in the field of family leave do not seem likely to contribute to gender equality. As an example, the fact that parental leave does not constitute a personal right involves the risk that mainly women do take this leave and are thus absent from the labour market for a long period. It also reinforces the stereotyped roles as women remain in charge of childcare.

Finally, it may be that, just like in Luxembourg, families with middle or high income do not use public childcare services because of the high costs. In that case, it may get difficult to maintain a one track system.

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

It is very important that the State takes a clear and strong commitment by recognizing its responsibility in the field of gender equality. Good quality childcare is an element which should be a part of any gender equality policy and should be qualified as this.

Quantitative and qualitative needs have to be identified before proceeding concretely. Concerning quality, gender equality has to be a major criterion. It seems

obvious that minima must be fixed by the State as regards the traditional quality standards of staff, training, ratio, infrastructures, opening hours, socialization programmes...). However this is not sufficient in a gender equality approach.

In parallel, the State has to analyze and refit its whole policies and in particular the education and reconciliation policies with the aim of avoiding stereotyped behaviours. A harmonization of maternity and paternity leaves could be a possible track to follow.

#### Sources:

- Plan d'action national d'égalité des femmes et des hommes, Ministère de l'Égalité des chances, 2006
- Responses to the list of issues and questions with regard to the considerations of the fifth periodic report (Luxembourg), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, 2007
- Plan national pour l'Innovation et le Plein emploi, 2005

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Malta**

**by Frances Camilleri-Cassar**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

Malta has little experience of publicly supported childcare. There are disparate practices of varying quality across state funded and private childcare centres, which are free to develop and follow their own programmes. There is a minimum regulatory framework binding child day care centres with a provisional registration certificate. Other than that, Malta's response to a long-standing demand for childcare provision in the category age 0 – 3 years was to publish a consultation document on standards in childcare in 2004. This was followed in 2006 by National Standards of child day care services in the public, private and voluntary sectors. These include centre based services for children younger than 3 years such as kindergartens, play schools, nurseries and other facilities and other home-based facilities.

### **2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

There have been several statements by governments over the years about what they see as the crucial importance of national childcare for the well being of children and gender equality especially. However, to date, there has not been an attempt to discuss or design a national policy for early childhood education and care, and the state has done little, actively, to facilitate women's participation in the labour market. At 34.9 per cent, the employment rate of women remains the lowest among the EU-27, and the employment rate gap between women and men is more than 39 percentage points in Malta. Indeed, there is a serious lack of childcare facilities, and Maltese women are expected to make their own arrangements for childcare and domestic responsibilities. The school schedule of state funded childcare for 3-year olds until compulsory schooling are poorly matched to the new realities of Maltese families in which both parents may be employed, and childcare for the 0 – 2 year-olds remains in the pipeline.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

The national standards which are meant to guide parents on what to expect from a childcare facility, and for child day care providers to become compliant with national regulations, outline the areas through which quality childcare can be assessed, namely, staff qualification and training; the physical environment, including safety issues and hygiene; suitability of activities for a holistic development; regular consultation with parents on the progress of the child; clear policies and procedures which are adhered to as required and are easily accessible; the promotion of a healthy environment, including nutrition; and encouraging diversity and tolerance through integration.

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

The motherhood and family ideology are strongly rooted in Malta's historical, cultural and political contexts, and until today, ideological pressure from the church in Malta emphasises the critical role of the mother in the rearing of children. Although state policies may be seen as enabling gender equality, in practice they are trapped in the traditional way.

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

In a move to support childcare centres and promote gender equality, the Employment and Training Corporation secured funding under the ESF scheme to support employers who offer childcare services to their employees. These include: a start-up grant of €900 to adapt premises; €1500 for the purchase of equipment and furnish the place adequately; half the salaries of trained childcarers (proposed salary of €10,000 per annum plus statutory benefits); fees chargeable to parents must not

exceed €100 per month for each child in full-time care which constitutes 20% of the minimum wage and 10% of the median wage.

## 6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?

Male breadwinner regimes tend to hold back from public provision of childcare, and tend to maintain a strong division between public and private responsibility for care work, thereby strengthening women's traditional role and family duty. There are few good practices in Malta that are transferable to other countries, as policy debates are still dominated by the idea that reconciling work and family means improving conditions for women to do both.

## 7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?

**Strengths:** (1) the Slovenian system of paid parental leave is one of the most generous in the EU as wage indemnities based on maternity, father's and parental leave are paid 100% from the State budget. (2) the system provides full-time childcare and enables almost all women with dependent children to find and retain full-time jobs

**Weaknesses:** (1) lack of equal level of accessibility of public childcare services especially in poorer local communities, young families living in new housing communities or in the capital. (2) facilities do not meet the needs of parents working outside standard working hours.

**Transferable to Malta:** (1) media campaign for Daddy leave. (2) pressure from cross political groups and civil society to promote gender equality through a quick development of childcare provision.

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

What appears to be happening in Malta is that although the State aims to establish a monitoring system in the provision of childcare, it still keeps its distance from financing and organizing the service. For 20 years, a national childcare strategy has remained at discourse level, school schedules are incompatible with adult employment hours, and there is no indication that the situation is likely to change. Childcare in Malta is usually organised and managed solely by mothers, while father's involvement in care is minimal. Although EU policy and the European employment strategy filter through Malta's gender policy, they do not eradicate differences of cultural, social and economic practice in the way that work and care are managed. Care related policies have ramifications which reach deep into the Maltese social fabric, and most women in Malta seem to accept a situation of unequal share in familial responsibilities and home life where childcare impinges on their freedom to earn.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: The Netherlands**

**by Inge Bleijenbergh**

## **Part 1: overview - the Netherlands**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

In the Netherlands, since 1 January 2007 the Dutch government supports the public provision of childcare support. This means that all parents in employment, studying or in a trajectory preparing for employment can apply for a tax allowance to support (part of) the costs of childcare. This allowance is income dependent and supports childcare facilities of parents own choice, being day-care services, pre-school or after-school services or a recognised host parent (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2008).

The introduction of this legislation marked a shift in the Dutch childcare discourse, that had started with the introduction of the Law on Childcare in 2004 (Wet Kinderopvang). Formerly also childcare support was available, but only for one third of the actual costs. Another third of the costs had to be paid voluntary by the employer and one third by the parents. Since 2007 the employer's contribution is included in the tax allowance and the state is responsible for collecting it. Moreover, since the tax allowance is income dependent, the contribution of parents may be less than one third of the costs.

With the new legislation, the political responsibility for childcare provision moved from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In contrast to Slovenia, in the Netherlands two different systems of childcare exist. Child care institutions provide full-time day care for children from the ages of 0 to 4, while pre-school institutions provide part-time day care for children from 2.5 to 4. These institutions used to fall under different legislation and have a different policy logic (Bleijenbergh, Bussemaker and de Bruijn, 2006). Full time day care was supported by the ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and supported gender equality. In contrast, pre-school institutions fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and supported the preparation of children for education. In practice, the first institution is mainly used by double earner families, while the second is mainly used by families with a more traditional breadwinner housewife model (Ministerie van Onderwijs,

Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2007). The recent move of responsibility for full-time day care to the Ministry of Education, aims to bring the two systems towards each other and to connect the logics of education and gender equality.

The childcare legislation is already under threat because of its own success. The Balkenende IV government, which is a combination of Christian democrats and Socialists, recently announced plans to decrease the level of childcare allowances. Dutch Left wing parties and Non Governmental Organisations are organizing protest actions against these proposals (Groen Links, 2008).

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

The public childcare policies are part of the Dutch Equality policies that originate from the 1980s, while the pre-school institutions show traces of the elder, more traditionally oriented Dutch welfare system, where married women stay at home and bring their young children to a preschool institution for some hours a week (Bussemaker, 1998).

After the Second World War the Dutch welfare system was based on the ideal of a (male) breadwinner that earned a wage high enough to support wife and eventual children. From the 1980s, married women entered the labour market, but mainly on a part-time basis. In the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch government began to stimulate employers childcare provision, but on an individual and voluntary base. Employers which provided their employees with childcare services were given a tax incentive. As a result, the provision of childcare facilities was steady but slowly increasing (Bleijenbergh, Bussemaker & de Bruijn, 2004). At present, the Netherlands has a relatively high labour participation of women. In 2005 66% of the women are in paid employment, but 61% of them were working part-time (Portegijs et al. 2006). As a result, the majority of the women are still economically dependent on their husband. In 2004, only 42% of the women between 15 and 65 was financially independent (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2007). The majority of part-time working women are able to take care of their children or elderly relatives for some days of the week, something which is highly valued in the Netherlands.

Also a relatively big amount of men is working part-time, namely 15% of men in 2005 (Portegijs et al, 2005).

The cultural emphasis on the value of care for relatives is reflected in Dutch equality policies. During the nineties Dutch Equality Policies were directed towards shifting care giving responsibilities from women to men, to give both sexes equal chances on the labour market and in politics (Bleijenbergh, 2004: 65). Under influence of a neo-liberal turn in the beginning of the new millennium and of the Barcelona target figures, at present the emphasis is narrowed. Redivision of care responsibilities between men and women has disappeared from the political agenda, while the goal of increasing the working hours of women dominates right now (Ministerraad 2007).

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

The accessibility of childcare provision has improved considerably since the Dutch government introduced a tax scheme that supports the costs of childcare on the basis of the household income. Since employers pay a fixed amount of the costs to the state, the provision of childcare support is no longer dependent on individual arrangements between parents and employers or parents and the municipal. Especially the coverage of childcare costs of lower income is improved, but also huge investments have been made to support middle and higher income groups. To make this concrete, under the new scheme the lowest income groups may only need to pay 4% of the actual costs. On average parents only have to pay 20% of the actual costs (Groen Links, 2008). The maximum price of childcare is 6.10 euro per hour. As a result, in 2008 24 % of children in the age group of 0-4 years make use of public childcare facilities, against 8% in 1995. Moreover, 8% of the children between 6 -12 make use of after school services. (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2008).

**4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

The main gap is to keep the childcare affordable, now the quest for childcare is growing so quickly. Under the government of Balkenende IV, the budget for

childcare rose from 680 million euros in 2005 to 1580 million euros in 2007 and the government had not foreseen such a big increase in demand (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2008). The government of Balkenende IV has been announcing a budget cutback to childcare to keep the government finances balanced. Concrete plans will be announced in September 2008.

The second challenge is to keep the quality of the childcare services intact, since the growth of the sector has been so quick. Childcare centres run out of staff, room and organisational capacity to meet the growing demand of parents, especially regarding preschool and after school care. Providers that want to set up new services, need to involve many different parties in their initiative, namely schools, municipals, parents, welfare institutions and personnel. Childcare staff needs a secondary school certificate, but because of the high demand qualified personnel is difficult to find.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

### **5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

A good practice is the fact that the Dutch government has been able to involve a fixed employers contribution in the national tax schedule of childcare. Since all employers are obliged to transfer a certain percentage of their profit margin to the national budget, they cannot claim to be on a competitive disadvantage towards each other. In fact this new schedule supports childcare provision for groups that traditionally had a less strong bargaining position towards employers, like low skilled and temporary workers. Moreover, also self-employed people now have a better entrance to this provision.

### **6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

The practice of involving employers in the national childcare pay scheme appeared in the context of the Dutch corporatist system where employers are partners in the

social policy making structure, together with trade unions and the government. Actually such a model has also come to dominate the context of European social policy making in the field of work life policies (Bleijenbergh, 2004). For more than a decade, Dutch employers have stated to be willing to make voluntary agreements on childcare support with trade unions, but after they hadn't been able to meet a certain level of support via collective agreement, the Dutch Minister of Social Affairs obliged them to a collective tax charge. It is difficult to foresee how easily such a system can be transferred to other countries. It may depend on the strength of trade unions in comparison to employers and to the interdependence between the government structure and these social partners.

**7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

One strength of the Slovenia system is that it provides an uniform childcare system. This integrates the goals of gender equality and pre-school education of children, which relieves the pressure of women to stay at home. It would be good to transfer this uniformity to the Netherlands, to integrate the educational and equality goals of the two different systems that are only growing together very slowly.

Another strong point of the Slovenian childcare system is the length and extensiveness of paid parental leave, also for men. Actually the Dutch government is planning to extend the Dutch parental leave (which can be taken up by both fathers and mothers and is not transferable to the other partner) from 13 till 26 weeks. When both parents of a child take up parental leave, they can take care of the child in its first life year before bringing it to childcare facilities. The Dutch system has a wage saving system for the leave to be paid.

A weakness of the Slovenian system is that local municipalities decide on the level of contribution towards parents. According to the Slovenian report, this results in legal inequality between parents living in different communities. Probably the Slovenian system could improve by introducing a national system of childcare support that equalizes the support for all parents.

## 8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?

The education level of the staff is important for the quality. The Netherlands has a tradition of a strong motherhood ideology and the idea that children are taken care of at home the best (Bussemaker, 1998, Knijn, 1998). Traditionally even a high level of highly educated women remained at home after childbirth to take care of their children. To alter this cultural tradition, it should be evident that childcare offers added pedagogical value to the upbringing of children rather than a facility for 'keeping the children entertained'. Staff with a higher educational level is better suited to make this educational contribution. Raising the educational level from middle to higher education, would bring childcare staff on the same level as Dutch primary school teachers.

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**RESPONSE REPORT: Slovakia**

**by Zuzana Jezerska**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

In Slovakia, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has the mandate to cover childcare and related issues in Slovakia; within the structure of the Department for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities and Section for Social and Family Policy. In particular policies, the Ministry is cooperating with the other ministries (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health) as well as with different governmental agencies. The most significant legislation where the childcare is mentioned and handled are the Ministry's policies for reconciliation of work and family life within the employment policy, provisions for paternal subsidies, maternal leave, tax bonus within the family policy, etc. Otherwise, the childcare is treated in general legislative norms, as for example Civil Code, Labour Code, Criminal Code, and specific legislative acts, such as Family and Material Shortage, Collective Bargaining, Minimum Salary, and so on. Additionally, National Plan for Children for the years 2008 – 2012 is currently under serious and critical discussion and is going to be discussed and approved by the national parliament in September. This plan, however, is more focused on children rights within the frame of the Universal Rights of a Child.

Via state subsidies childcare is supported in Slovakia. The strategies cover various situations and levels of family income and status. The most important are children allowances and tax bonus (it represents 540 Sk per month for each dependant child plus the same amount as tax bonus that is provided by an employer). Paternal subsidies could be updated annually, each September. Currently, the contribution paid by state until the age of three years for each child represents 4560 Sk per month (overage nominal salary in Slovakia, according to Statistical office of SR, is at present 17 274 Sk). Additionally, lump sum subsidy paid to a newborn child is also 4560 Sk for each child; following the demographic strategies the contribution towards the **first** newborn child since February 1, 2008 is 20 440 Sk. The policies also take into account specific situations – child with specific needs, minder, foster child, low income families, etc. They are supported specifically and additionally.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

The basic strategies covering the issue are measures for reconciliation of family and work life. The main aim is the following: "Aim (of proposal) is to support increasing options for employment of persons with family duties and lowering the risk that these persons would face the dilemma - work versus family, or would become a subject of discrimination on the labour market and in employment as the result of their family care obligations and to widen supporting and disburden services for the family in a way that drafted measures will represent a tool for enabling space to balance unfavourable demographic changes in Slovakia"<sup>21</sup>

In Slovakia, the proportion of men and women on the labour market is relatively balanced (in 2007 women represented 44% of all employees and 52 % of all unemployed); however, gender disparities in the labour market such as pay gap<sup>22</sup>, low participation of women in decision making work positions, gender stereotypes in family, double burden, persist. Women in middle age are the lowest paid salary group. In Slovakia, women with university education earn only 65% of the salaries of the same male group. One of the attempts to solve this situation was revision of the Labour Code and reinforcement of monitoring and controlling situation by the National Labour Inspectorate.

In Slovakia, the direct link between gender equality on the labour market on one side and childcare on the other is replaced by two links: persons (male and female) should not be discriminated in searching for jobs as well as in employment process when they take care of children; women and men (together with all other "marginalized" groups) have to have equal access to the labour market. The latter is protected by Antidiscrimination Act, the first one by Labour Code. The reality is, despite the provisions that has been already mentioned, that gender stereotypes in family are persisting and women and men have specific roles and obligations when taking care of a child.

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<sup>21</sup> Draft of measures on reconciliation of family and work like for the year 2006 with perspective to the year 2010, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

<sup>22</sup> There are some exceptions in particular professions as e.g. design, journalism, hairdressers.

In praxis the person caring for a child could be discriminated in the labour market. The National Labour Inspectorate discovered the breach of law (Labour Code § 41) mostly in cases when applicants, before signing the employment contract have to submit the questionnaires with inclusion of the questions on family status and relations. Employers often hide discrimination under the fact that the applicant does not fulfil the company's criteria for selection.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

In Slovakia, as in most of the new member states, social benefits and childcare system suffered – has declined or stagnated – in confrontation with the priority of economic transformation. This was in fact quite logical and Slovenia is a rare positive exception. Currently, development strategies of the current social democratic government in Slovakia – at least in its Programme Declaration – are more socially friendly oriented.

A specific positive initiative worth mentioning is a rapidly increasing interest in the philosophy and praxis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). More and more companies, but also municipalities and public sector organizations, are interested in participating in CSR initiatives. At the beginning of the decade the concept of CSR was more intuitively based and was reflected in individual gestures of a company/organization at a local level; today it is more nation-wide and part of a more structured policy.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family is supporting the idea of CSR, especially in the field of family friendly measures, including childcare, via the annual competition "Zamestnavateľ ustretový k rodine"(Employer friendly towards the family). This competition started in 2000 and is getting more and more recognition. The precise rules and criteria have been developed and have been improved during the years with the aim to copy the new trends, recognitions and best practises in Europe. The participants and winners are from different society groups. This year, in three categories announced (Family Policy, Equal Opportunities, and Most Original

Measure for Family and Equal Opportunities in SME), the winners represented private companies, municipalities, SME, even one Ministry and a high school.

Similar activity - International Conference on Corporate Responsibility and Marketplace of Corporate Solutions, organized by NGO – Nadacia Pontis (Pontis Foundation) gained significance and public interest as well. This year's conference was organized for the fifth time already. Competition was/is focused on local/national subjects, conference is international; best practises could be found at both places.

It would be an interesting initiative to underline the aspect of childcare services related to labour market and gender equality in the future events' themes.

#### **4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

The gaps still lie in coordination and cooperation of the good quality childcare, which is part and parcel of family friendly policy, with all stakeholders – state institutions, local and regional governments, municipalities, relevant civil society actors, and companies. Good quality childcare is not a priority either at governmental level or in society as a whole. Clear linkages between gender equality and childcare systems are not popular these days.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

#### **5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

Taking into account existing good practices, there are several interesting initiatives. CSR with its wide opportunities I have already mentioned. Another example not unique but new in Slovakia and at the same time quite successful is related to the protection of children, “Nest of Rescue” - public incubators for deprived newborn children supported by Ministry of Health. These activities are not typical childcare services but very important and lacking in the country until recently.

**6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

All activities mentioned at section 5 are transferable. With governmental policies it is more complicated as they are embedded in the overall social and economic context of Slovakia.

**7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

The childcare system in Slovenia is quite impressive and well developed. Nevertheless, the national study is focused mostly on childcare centres, less on the other aspects of this issue. The strength of its childcare structure lies definitely in high support of the government and public as well as in general awareness on the importance of good and functioning childcare system for the society. A less successful part of the story is in public-private partnerships. In comparison to Slovenia, in Slovakia for example more responsibilities are tending to be transferred to local authorities, companies, employers, and other actors. All have positives and negatives. Governmental bodies are preparing mostly legislative and policy framework, monitoring and analytical measures. Transferring social policy to ground level, the region, as a part of building local social infrastructures, seems to be the next task for Slovenia.

**8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

The first step is to be clear in articulating the relation and synergies between good quality childcare and gender equality. The next one is to be heard, understood and accepted.

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: Spain**

**by Dr Myrtha Casanova**

## **Part 1: Country overview**

Spain thirty years ago was the country with the highest birth growth in the world. Today it is the country with the lowest birth rate in the world. Why? Because women have joined the workforce at an exponential rate; more women than men have university degrees since 1995. Yet the social, political and corporate infrastructure has not developed at the same speed to allow this amazing behavioural change.

The main Spanish childcare policies (for children under six, when mandatory education starts) are centrally state-funded care policies. Most policies are educational pre-school programmes for children aged three or over. The scope of these programmes is quite high in comparative terms. In contrast, the percentage of Spanish children aged two or under cared for in public centers is one of the lowest in the European Union. The characteristics of Spanish childcare policy can be understood by examining the political agenda, and the role played by the main social and political actors of the agenda setting stage. Those who might have emerged as determined advocates of more public childcare programmes after 1975, namely, the feminist movement, state feminists, and the women's departments of trade unions, have in practice not consistently advanced such demands. The relevant explanatory factors include: the influence of the authoritarian political past; the characteristics of the labour market and the welfare state; and societal views on child rearing. Policy-makers have extended the programmes which already existed before 1975, that is, educational services. They have been defined by policy-makers as measures that chiefly benefit the child. Therefore, the policies are targeted at children aged three or over, because in Spain most policy-makers are of the opinion that children should be enrolled in educational programmes around the age of three.

### **1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

The Spanish Law of Equality (2006) is very advanced in protecting gender equality, the right to access to work, to promote and to have the same salaries. But it has not regulated the 40/60% ration of women in decision making proposed by the Commission in its Directives of the year 2000.

The State and the Law ensure the protection to maternity and paternity rights. The main guarantee provisions are:

- \* Mothers have 16 weeks of paid leave after giving birth
  - \* Up to 3 years unpaid leave, guaranteeing returners to same level of job which they had
  - \* Fathers have 2 weeks of paid leave
  - \* Mothers receive 100€ per child from 0 months to 3 years for childcare support
- Parents receive 2.500€. per every born child since January 2008

Generally the Spanish childcare system doesn't provide too many options to the parents. The distinguishing features are:

**Public childcare centers.** Regarding public childcare centers, we must divide children in two groups:

(a) Up to 3 years old: the number of places for children up to 3 years is very low and decreasing. Generally, the State does not provide educational programmes and does not envisage enough facilities and special programmes for this group of children. It simply let the initiative to the other participants in the market, such as local administrations, corporations, non-profit organizations, etc. Recently, the Ministry of Labor and Immigration tried to introduce more educational programmes and provide more places in the public centers for children up to 3 years, but it is still a problem in Spain.

There is a strong relationship between the availability of childcare centres and crèches and women returning to work. Only 5% of children under 3 years old have a place in the public centres (even though the law establishes the commitment of the administration for full childcare support). On the other hand the average cost of private childcare centres and crèches is of 300/400€ a month depending on the region and city.

(b) Older than 3 years: The number of places for children between 4 and 5 years, provided by the state, is constantly increasing, but it is not enough yet. Parents do not have many opportunities to enroll their children in public centers and they must look for additional opportunities.

**Private childcare centres**: There are two main types of private childcare centers. Some of them work with subsidies by the states and others are 100% private. The state intends to support some of them in order to assure more opportunities for the parents, but they still have to encounter many difficulties to enroll children as the number of places is very reduced.

**Specialized day care centres**: Different non-profit organizations, private companies and corporations offer these possibilities for the parents, but they are mainly private and independent initiatives.

Nowadays, public childcare centers and facilities in Spain are considered of good quality and well-accepted among the population. One of the main problems which still remains is that of quantity, as the state doesn't provide a sufficient number of places. This means additional complications for mothers, as if they don't have the possibility of using private childcare centers, they are obliged to leave work.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

In Spain whether women return to work or not is highly influenced by their level of education and therefore their salary and work conditions. 60% of women take up to 50 months to return to work, generally those who have low and medium education levels. Only mothers with higher education levels return after the 3 months established by the law and up to 40% return before the legal 16 weeks. 17% of women cancel their contract during their pregnancy.

Concerning the public administration, the Law on Equality (2006) guarantees women's rights and offers them possibilities to combine their work with the obligations to care about their children. The state aims at facilitating women and

allowing them to return to work after their maternity leave. Generally, we have to underline that public administration jobs, compared to the private sector, offer different options such as part-time jobs for women.

Former employees of the public administration, who voluntarily gave up their jobs in order to care for their family, do not enjoy special treatment when they reapply for a job in the public administration.

**3. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions, including the role of staff working in childcare services?**

The National Commission for the Rationalisation of Time in Spain, presided over by the King and promoted by Ignacio Buqueras, proposes restructuring the time of all stakeholders: business communities, schools, transport systems, commerce and banks, etc – which at present are rather chaotic and create enormous costs at all levels of business and social activity. The objective is to have a more rational and efficient use of time to create quality of life for all people in work / family and leisure times.

In-company subsidised childcare centre are being challenged by the local administrations. In Catalunya the model of subsidised corporate childcare centres is considered negative for the family workers and for work life balance after having invested 1M€ in promoting childcare centres in the Free Zone, the local ministry of social affairs. “Child care centres should be managed directly by the municipalities, preferably within industrial areas”. Furthermore, local government is asking companies to comply with the legislation that establishes the norms for “Family Support” and give childcare support to its workers. “Companies have to be aware of the critical importance of women as family carers but all the weight of childcare cannot fall on them.”

**Role of Business community**

Companies in Spain are now assuming the social responsibility as well as the business opportunity of giving support to their employees to allow them to balance

work and family life... because it is the socially correct thing to do, because it is efficient for business and in order to comply with growing legislation.

#### Profile of companies regarding work/life policies

1.4%	In-company child and elderly care
5.3%	Tele-working plans
2.8%	Economic support for dependents
8.0%	Maternity leave beyond the legal 16 weeks
26.0%	Part time jobs with possibility to return after child birth to a full time position
31.6%	Free choice of shift times
24.6%	Flexible time during the day
36.0%	Flexitime at beginning or end of day

Companies like Alares and Mas Vida offer child and elderly care services to all employees of an organisation which contracts their service. Ricardo Bacchini, S.A. has contracted these services for its 1.800 employees, % of the workforce use the childcare service which has a very important impact in reducing absenteeism and turnover particularly of women employees. Alares, the other vendor, has never lost a client, they state "When companies start giving this service to their workforce the benefits for the employees and for the company are so evident that nobody cancels the contract." Alares services over 500.000 employees with childcare support.

These organisations charge their client companies a global fee that can go from 0.80 cents to 3€ per employee, depending on the number of people that make up their workforce and the geographical extension of their facilities. This global per employee monthly fee covers:

- \* 24 hours a day service availability
- \* Information service related with childcare
- \* Baby sitter service in home
- \* Nursing service in home in case of illness of the child
- \* Transfer of the child to a health centre in case of serious illness

It does not cover long term childcare in home support. In these cases the company and the employee generally find a way of financing the extra cost of the service. These service providers also give concierge services (shopping, laundry, catering, event organising....). Services which help mothers dedicate valuable time to the issues that are priorities for them and the family.

#### **4. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

One out of every 3 women work only part-time to take care of their children, which relates to women of middle and low education levels.

The Cateman Report indicates that:

- \* 75% of Spanish workers would work for less salary in order to have more time free
- \* 3 out of 4 think that to have a brilliant career they must renounce to family life
- \* 75% consider that flexible time and distance work is core to childcare and prefer to have in-company childcare centres

The National Centre for Working Conditions of Sweden in its EU research identifies the following behaviour for Spanish workers:

- \* Work is more important than having children
- \* 64% are satisfied with family life
- \* 7% of men admit taking care of children
- \* Women are stressed because of a lack of time to dedicate to their children
- \* Need for "quality time"

#### **Support social networks**

New paternity role has increased in fathers between 30 and 44 years old in Spain according to a research of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Equal behaviour is seen in young men from 16 to 29 years old, mainly because younger teenagers take to baby sitting and childcare while they study.

Women dedicate more time to childcare than men in all age brackets.

The high dedication of women over 45 and over 66 is due to grandchildren care.

The selection of baby-sitters is a critical issue for working women without a family support network and low income. General women from South America are the preferred profile given a similar cultural background.

Family networks were the traditional support of women who had to take care of children while working. Today those women of the family generally also work or simply have changed behaviour in their retirement age looking to dedicate time to leisure and other activities rather than taking care of children of the family.

The main challenge is the fact that the social traditional network women counted on for childcare is simply not there anymore; and the state and corporate support is scarce.

### **Conclusion**

This paradigm will not stop women developing in the professional and business world. And there is a starting trend towards a growth in child birth. Women are finding new mechanisms to balance professional and family life, and the legislation is setting the pace to promote improved public and private childcare systems.

At the same time, the business world is realising more and more of the critical need to include women not only in blue collar and middle management positions in the company, but also in decision making positions, given the value that women can bring to the company with diverse visions. And it pays to develop work/life programmes to help women and men balance professional and family life. In Spain this situation translates mainly into childcare programmes as they are more frequently demanded by the workforce.

## **Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe specific good practices in your country in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these should be initiatives that have been demonstrated to be of a good quality to promote gender equality).**

Each autonomous public administration in Spain intends to launch and implement specific programmes, but one of the best examples is the City Council of Madrid and its programmes.

The City Council of Madrid has launched the “Concilia” programme as a result of an EQUAL project which is applied to all workers in the administration. The programme:

- Allows men and women to balance family and domestic responsibilities and return to the labour market after a period of absence, mainly maternity/paternity
- Offer support services that allow balancing the care of dependants ( children and elderly ) with their labour responsibilities
- Promote the social co-responsibility of public and private institutions in the area of conciliation and childcare
- Integrate entrepreneurs, companies and human resource managers as well as trade union in the accomplishment of this plan.

**6. How are these good practices transferable to other countries?**

Through development of strong networks that collect local cases of best practice to share the info with local networks from other countries. The mission of the organizations would be to create communication strategies so that this info reaches the specialised business press as well as associations of human resource managers.

A website dedicated to feature best practices of policies from each country. Develop a mechanism to invite companies as well as representatives in local administrations to visit respective best country practices as well as interact on this virtual platform.

**7. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Slovenian childcare system, as it contributes to gender equality? What elements of this experience do you think could be transferred to your own country?**

As the report clearly states, there is no direct relation between childcare and gender equality in Slovenia. Notwithstanding this there are strengths and weaknesses regarding the system:

**Strengths**

- a) there are minimum curricula and childminder requisites, such that the quality is assured in public centres. Though in more opulent areas the quality is higher because the care has more funding' the quality is not controlled
- b) adoption leave rights pass to grandparents in the event both mother and father do not exercise them (great idea for all other childcare rights!)
- c) flexibility of how to combine parental leave is a good policy
- d) Men at work - achieving gender equality film campaign "Daddy Activate",
- e) incorporate younger babies into the childcare system so that women can move into the labour market sooner and thereby not prejudice the corporate community against hiring them.
- f) coalition of feminist groups, parent organisations, women activists in trade unions and women's organisations in political parties, need to keep the ball moving.

**Main weaknesses**

- a) avoiding renewal of short term contracts when women become pregnant,
- b) unbalanced funding leads to a non-universal system which creates "discrimination" between women and families with more or less incomes.
- c) less childcare support in small rural as well as large urban areas

d) parental leave for fathers is not promoted sufficiently for fathers to access to this right.

e) women exercise their rights 6 times more often than male workers – mechanisms should be put in place to motivate men to play a larger role in family and childcare

### **Transferability**

A mayor practice that could be transferred to other countries is that of leave rights transferring to grandparents in the event that neither mother nor father exercise them. This programme could expand beyond adoption circumstances into other countries.

## **8. What do you consider to be the main pre-conditions for good quality childcare, in particular so that it contributes to gender equality?**

Awareness of the local and state administrations of the critical impact of childcare as core to the sustainability of the socio-economy of the country.

\* The inclusion of women in the professional arena is a major value added for development in all fields of activity. Their contribution based on a new or diverse mindset, historical background experience of family management, pragmatic style of decision making, emotional intelligence... is essential to creativity, innovation and development

\* The support for women to carry out their care activities is essential to the sustainability of the social and system. Women will always “care” because it is intrinsic to their holistic personality. The issue is to give the necessary support so that this “care” continue without affecting professional, social and personal areas of activities and interest of women.. and men

\* Take the further step of legislating and promoting childcare services as centres in accordance with the real needs of women, in order to build up a healthy and strong socio-economic system

Awareness of the part of companies and institutions that employ women and men, of the need to respect the new values of the times and of its people. Need to reward persons by their contribution and not by time spent in the company site. Need to value the contribution that women make to today's professional environment which men cannot. Women's proximity to the use of products and services make their suggestions and contribution very valuable for the results of companies. For this contribution to be made with quality, commitment and loyalty companies must create a supportive environment:

- \* Create work/life programmes
- \* Flexible time
- \* Childcare information services, care centres, childcare home support, childcare health aid

*Organisation of exchange of good practices on gender equality (VT/200/054)*

**RESPONSE REPORT: United Kingdom**

**by Dr Jane Pillinger**

**1. What are the main national policy provisions on childcare, including how childcare is funded?**

During the 1990s a significant shift took place in policy and practice on childcare in the UK. The provision of childcare changed from a small and targeted measure, primarily intended to help lone parents move into work, into one that aimed to make formal childcare more affordable for working families. A range of policy measures have been introduced including the establishment of new department for childcare at the ministry of education, protective child laws and a range of education and childcare policies. They include SureStart, Birth to Three Matters, National Childcare Strategy, Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, Early Years Foundation Stage, the Green Paper *Every Child Matters*, Children and Young People's Workforce Development Council, Early Years Education and Care, and Children First. Many of these initiatives such as extended schools, raising the number of childcare places, nursery voucher system and childcare tax credit programs, were initiated in an effort to improve the well-being of children and parents.

Up to the 1990s the UK lagged behind other countries in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The National Childcare Strategy (2004) contains a number of measures to improve the quality and quantity of childcare, nursery education and wraparound care for children aged 14 years and under, as well as an increase in subsidies to help parents with the costs of childcare. There are a range of ways in which childcare policy has been developed and implemented in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While the National Childcare Strategy (2004) in particular represented a rapid and substantial growth in ECEC, it has been implemented differently in the four regions that make up the UK. For example, the 2006 Childcare Act was the first ever legislation to be passed that is exclusively concerned with early years and childcare in England. The Act aims to transform childcare and early years services in England and to take forward some of the commitments from the Childcare Strategy. Measures in the Act formalise the important strategic role local authorities play through a set of new duties. These duties will require authorities to improve the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes for all pre-school children and reduce inequalities in these outcomes; secure sufficient childcare for working parents; and provide a better parental information service. The Act also reforms and simplifies early years regulation and

inspection arrangements providing for a new integrated education and care quality framework (for pre-school children) and a new Childcare Register. The provisions in the Act come into force in 2008.

Since 1997 there has been an eightfold increase in the number of childcare beneficiaries and a sixteenfold increase in the costs of childcare. Much of this has been in the area of the expansion in the private childcare market, rather than through direct provision of public childcare services. One of the main mechanisms has been a childcare tax credit scheme, the introduction of which was part of the government's objective to subsidise a larger share of childcare costs for working parents, up to 80 per cent of costs. This has facilitated the growth of the private market in childcare.

In addition to the funding of childcare the government introduced legislation in 2003 giving working parents and carers rights to request flexible working hours. Parents of children aged 6 and under (or 18 and under if the child is disabled) have a right to be able to request to work flexible hours, and in 2007 this was extended to carers of dependent adults.

**2. Please describe how these national policy provisions contain objectives and/or targets related to gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market?**

In the UK providing affordable childcare has been a key to increasing economic productivity by opening up career opportunities for women. Men's participation in childcare has not kept pace with women's employment, leaving an increasing burden on women in the home. The government's Women and Work Commission 2007 report, *Towards a Fairer Future*, has highlighted the importance of child care to extending employment opportunities and career development for women. Increased female employment is recognised as being important, not only to support the future welfare state's finances as the population ages, but also as an aid to reducing the gender pay gap and allowing more women to provide for their own old age (so contributing to the solution to current concerns about a possible future pensions crisis).

Overall there has been an increase in employment for women in the last decade, particularly of women working long part-time hours (16-29 hours per week). This has largely been attributed to expanding childcare and a buoyant economy. In addition, the government has proposed that lone parents living on social welfare benefits will be required to seek work once their child reaches the age of 12 years, and eventually 7 years. This is likely to increase the demand for out-of-school hours childcare provision.

The government's ten year National Childcare Strategy (2004-2014) has two main objectives: i) to expand labour supply choices and improve work-life balance for parents; and ii) to advance the long-term social and educational outcomes of children, particularly those that are the most disadvantaged. Gender equality runs through many of the government's statements on childcare and as the Minister for Women recently stated good quality, affordable childcare is good for children and helps parents balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Evidence from the Day Care Trust (2008) finds that there is scope for extending maternal employment through improved childcare provision. A 2003 study on the implications of universal childcare provision on women's employment rates, carried out for the local government 'think tank', the Policy Network, found that and estimated 1.3 million mothers would be potentially 'released' from childcare responsibilities by the shift to universal provision. The employment rate for women in the 25-49 age band in the UK would rise over a 10 year period to around 7 percentage points lower than the UK male rate. Female employment rate would rise to 81 per cent 35-49 year olds, compared to around 74 per cent in 2004, with a net increase of around 740,000 jobs over the 10 years.

The key element of the strategy was the introduction of the childcare tax credit, which provides working parents with a subsidy to help pay for childcare. While the scheme has led to an increase in childcare provision in the UK there are some concerns that the tax credit is unnecessarily complex, that it does not properly target poor families, and that there is a lack of incentives to improve the quality of childcare. Some organisations have argued that the government might be better

placed to influence the quality of childcare if it diverted the money from tax credit to subsidies for childcare providers.

The government has also stressed in its taxes and benefits reforms since 1997 that it is necessary to 'make work pay', particularly for low-income parents. The childcare tax credit is described as contributing to that goal; however, there is so far little reliable evidence from the UK on whether childcare subsidies are effective in encouraging mothers to work.

A number of studies have shown that women in the UK work in lower paid and lower status jobs than their male counterparts principally because they still shoulder the responsibility for housework and childcare. Part-time work is now more accessible for women in the UK, by virtue of the right for parents and carers to request to work flexibly. However, evidence does show that women pay a high price for working part-time, many of whom work below their potential and are locked into low-paid jobs. The Equal Opportunities Commission has also found that an 'equal pay penalty' exists for women working part-time, the outcome of which is that the gender wage gap widens substantially when part-time and full-time hourly pay is compared.

**3. What have been the outcomes of these national policy provisions in facilitating women's access to the labour market? How have they been implemented in practice?**

There has been a substantial increase in the provision of childcare care, particularly day care and out of school services, while care at atypical hours and care during school holidays tends to be limited. There has been a substantial increase in the numbers of registered childcare places (which stood at 1.29 million places in 2008, double that of 1997). This has been the result of an investment of over £21 billion in early years and childcare services. All 3 and 4 year olds are now guaranteed a free, part time (12½ hours per week, 38 weeks a year), early education place for up to two years before reaching compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). The government's goals are that by 2010 there will be a Children's Centre in every community (3,500 in all); every school will offer access to a range of extended services between 8am and 6pm; and all three and four year olds will be able to access 15 hours of free early education per week.

In practice the expansion of childcare has been important to facilitating women's entrance into the labour market as UK research does show that the incidence of children directly affects labour market participation, working hours and pay.

**4. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives that have been introduced to enhance the quality and accessibility of childcare provisions?**

There have been a range of initiatives that have aimed to improve the quality and accessibility of childcare – these have been implemented as a result of the policy developments outlined in the response to Question 1. In particular, the Childcare Strategy places a high priority on improving the quality of childcare, with emphasis on the physical environment, lower staff:child ratios and a consistent and highly qualified workforce. In particular, it is worth highlighting the importance of the 2006 Childcare Act in placing certain responsibilities and standards on Local Authorities in England, and the expansion of nursery school places for three and four year olds, as particular examples. The national provision of childcare for disadvantaged households and in particular the expansion of the SureStart scheme have also been important to opening up childcare to disadvantaged families, while also providing opportunities for women dependent on welfare benefits to enter the labour market.

**Section II: Transferability of good practice**

**5. Please briefly describe any specific initiatives for staff working in childcare in their roles in providing quality childcare (for example, in relation to training or their pay levels).**

One specific initiative benefitting local authority child care workers has been the Single Status Agreement in local government which has introduced a mechanism for local authorities to evaluate all local authority jobs with a view to improving the value given to female dominated care work. While still not completed in all local authorities, the agreement provides a model of good practice for the social partners in implementing a major overhaul of pay, to the benefit of lower paid care workers.

In addition, the National Childcare Strategy has also placed emphasis on the importance of quality childcare provision, including the investment in the skills of

staff. There is also evidence to show that there is an impact of having a highly qualified workforce on the quality of the services provided. As a result investment is needed in the area of continued professional development, improved ratios of childcare staff to children, some of which is being implemented under the Strategy. However, pay levels and the status of staff working in childcare continue to be low.

## **6. What are the main gaps and challenges at the national level in promoting good quality childcare?**

The main gaps exist in the provision of childcare for those between the ages of 0 years and 3 years, while for 3 and 4 year old children there is a commitment to free nursery care for up to 38 weeks a year. While there has been an increase in after-school childcare, through homework clubs or after school clubs, many working parents find it difficult to juggle work with school hours. This explains in part why there is such a high rate of part-time working amongst women with children. The gaps in the provision of out-of-school childcare, care during atypical hours and care during the school holidays need also to be looked at, particularly with regard to how existing provision can be used more flexibly.

In particular maternal employment rates are also affected by the limits on early years education of up to 20 hours per week. Extending these hours is crucial if women's labour market participation rates are to improve and if women are to have access to longer hours and better quality work.

Childcare does not exist in isolation and for this reason there have been some attempts in the UK to link extended maternity leave and parental leave with childcare, within an overall framework of gender equality. However, men still work long hours in the UK and they on the whole have not availed of the right to request flexible working hours, which in turn prevents them from participating in the sharing of family responsibilities.

The provision of childcare continues to be highly gendered. Childcare is the second most female-dominated occupation, exceeded only by secretaries and personal assistants (99.1 per cent female). 97.5 per cent of the childcare workforce is female.

There appears to be no evidence that men in the UK are participating in any enhanced way in childcare. Employment rates amongst men are highest when their children are under five; men increasingly want to be a part of their children's lives: 87 per cent of men think it is best for a father to be "very involved in bringing the child up from an early age" (Day Care Trust.

**7. Please briefly describe specific good practices in the provision of publicly funded childcare (these can be specific national, regional or local initiatives or projects that have been developed on childcare to promote gender equality).**

Examples of good practices include:

- SureStart which is a pioneering scheme to provide support for families from disadvantaged communities. A strong emphasis of SureStart has been on building capacity through childcare, while also empowering mothers and providing them with opportunities to take up training and paid work.
- Funding for the provision of childcare facilities in training and educational establishments to encourage mothers to take up training; and funding for the provision of workplace nurseries provided by SMEs.
- Childcare tax credit as a mechanism for extending childcare to working parents (up to 80% of costs).
- Initiatives introduced through the Scottish Executive, including the provision of holiday childcare and the National Sitter Services.
- Specific workplace initiatives, for example, childcare coordinators that are employed to advise and help women workers in sourcing local childcare. This has been particularly developed for employees in several large companies in the private sector, and in local government and the National Health Service.

**8. Do you consider that good practices at the national level can be transferable to other countries? If so what do you think are the main elements of good practice at the national level that could be transferable?**

There are a number of elements of the above initiatives that could be transferrable. The focus by the government on a strategy and additional allocation of resources

has been driven by a political commitment, which is crucial if publicly funded childcare is to be expanded.

## **Summary of key points in the Government's Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, 'Choice for parents, the best start for children', 2004.**

### **Parental leave**

- Maternity leave to increase from six to nine months by 2007, with the goal of 12 months' paid maternity leave by the end of the next Parliament.
- Introducing Additional Paternity Leave, giving families the right to transfer up to 26 weeks of maternity leave and pay to the father/partner, by the end of the next Parliament.

### **Childcare and early education services**

- 3,500 children's centres by 2010, providing access for all families. Most children's centres will provide early education and childcare, although some will just provide signposting to childcare services.
- Free part-time early education places for three and four year olds extended from 12.5 hours a week 33 weeks a year to 38 weeks a year by 2006 and to 15 hours a week by 2010, with the goal of 20 hours a week, 38 weeks a year.
- By 2010 all 5-11 year olds to access affordable school-based childcare all year round. All secondary schools will be open from 8am to 6pm during the week by 2010.
- A new duty on local authorities to ensure that quality affordable childcare is available where families live.
- A Transformation Fund of £125m a year from April 2006 to support investment by local authorities in quality affordable and sustainable childcare.
- A new legal framework for the regulation and inspection of early education and childcare by 2008, creating a single system for all services.
- A single quality framework for children from birth to five, taking an integrated approach to care and education.

### **Childcare workforce**

- A long-term vision that all full day care settings are led by graduate qualified early years professionals.
- A single qualifications framework and the raising of the qualifications of the workforce and the development of training opportunities for childminders and other home-based carers to achieve level 3 qualifications.

**Affordability**

- An increase in the maximum eligible costs in the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit from £135 to £175 a week for one child, and from £200 to £300 a week for two or more children from April 2005.
- From April 2006 an increase in the proportion of childcare costs covered by the tax credit from 70% to 80%.
- Consultation on extending entitlement to the childcare element to those working less than 16 hours a week.
- A series of pilots aimed at improving accessibility and affordability of childcare for parents on lower incomes living in London.