

# 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

EMPLOYMENT  
EQUALITY AND CARING  
FOR CHILDREN

**European Commission Network on Childcare**  
and other Measures to reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities



93 ANNUAL REPORT



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# FOREWORD

## FROM THE COMMISSION



Agnès Hubert

**I am pleased once again to introduce this valuable collection of information and commentary on the care and upbringing of children in the European Union. For too many women in the Union, childcare remains the greatest single barrier to equal opportunities in employment. Even if a woman can make the practical arrangements, the sense that she is responsible for organising these practicalities, for sorting things out if arrangements break down, of checking that they are still appropriate to her children's needs - all this adds enormously to the stress that is evident in the lives of many working women.**

In spite of which, women continue to play their part in the labour market. Although women are currently more likely than men to be unemployed, and although their status in the workforce is often precarious, the European Union recognises that both social justice and economic good sense demand that the push for equal opportunities for women at work must continue even at a time of recession and uncertainty. At the end of 1993, two important documents were launched by the European Commission.

The first was a Green Paper, a consultative document on the future of social policy in the Union (**European Social Policy: options for the Union**, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Community). In it, the Commission challenges outdated assumptions about the roles of men and women in both the labour market and the family:

*“social and labour market structures continue to operate on the assumption that women are primarily responsible for home and child care while men are responsible for the family's economic and financial well-being. This conflicts with reality”.*

The Green Paper calls for *“a combined labour market and social policy to develop the rights and opportunities of women, one which reflects their role in society and their needs throughout their lives”.*

The second major document, a White Paper, dealt with an issue that preoccupies us all – employment and unemployment (**Growth, Competitiveness, Employment: the challenge and ways forward into the 21st century**, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities). The White Paper recognises the realities of women's employment

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and the higher rates of unemployment which they face. However, it also refers to the possibilities of increasing employment in the caring sector, including of course childcare services. These are jobs of such immense social importance that it is almost incomprehensible that they have been historically among the lowest paid and least secure: no surprise, then, that they have also been undertaken mostly by women. So here we have both an opportunity and a risk: the possibility of new employment for women in areas where there is a real need for services, but the risk that they will continue to be undervalued, underpaid and exploitative.

And if men want to enter these caring fields too? The Childcare Network has focussed on the role of men as carers since it started its work in 1986. While it is important to ensure there is no conflict with the principle of equal opportunities for women, we can all agree that men have much to contribute to the care of children, and look for ways of encouraging them to become more involved as fathers and as childcare workers. That is one reason why the Equal Opportunities Unit has chosen this subject of men as carers as its contribution to the International Year of the Family in 1994.

This is the second 'new-style' Annual Report from the Childcare Network. Last year's report was widely distributed. I hope that this 1993 Report will reach as many as possible of those in each Member State, and further afield, with an interest in and commitment to the provision of childcare for Europe's children.

*Agnès Hubert*

Head of Equal Opportunities Unit  
Directorate-General V  
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European Commission

# REPORT ON WORK UNDERTAKEN IN 1993



Peter Moss

**The Network is one of nine European Commission Networks supporting the Commission's work to promote equal opportunities between women and men. First established in 1986 by the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit, the Network began a new programme of work in 1991 as part of the Third Medium-Term Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. Peter Moss, Coordinator of the Network, reviews its work during the second year of its new programme from November 1992 to November 1993.**

## INTRODUCING THE NETWORK

**R**econciliation of employment and family life is necessary if women and men are to have equal opportunities in the labour market - an important and long-standing objective of the European Community. 'Reconciliation' - harmonising employment and family responsibilities so that they co-exist with the minimum of friction, stress and disadvantage - is a broad concept. It covers:

- men as well as women, since both have family responsibilities.
- the life course, since men and women have family responsibilities - caring for others, sustaining relationships, looking after the home - throughout their adult lives.

- a wide range of measures: although the Recommendation on Child Care<sup>1</sup> deals with only one aspect of reconciliation, the up-bringing of children, it still proposes an approach covering services for children, leave arrangements for parents, making the workplace more responsive to the needs of employed parents and promoting increased participation by men in the care of children.

The Network's change of name in 1991, from the 'Childcare Network' to its present title, emphasised the need for a broad approach to reconciling employment and caring for children, including but going well beyond the provision of 'childcare services'. The Network's programme, outlined below, covers a number of areas - services for children, leave arrangements, men as carers. However, a small expert group (13 national members plus a Coordinator) cannot do everything; we have to recognise our limits and target our work. So far we have done little directly on the workplace. This gap will be partially filled by a new 'equality' Network on Positive Action, which began work in 1993 and has prioritised reconciliation in the workplace; we look forward to working in partnership. We have also concentrated on younger children (under 10s); much work remains to be done on the reconciliation of employment and caring for older children and more dependant adults.

Gender equality is of central importance to the Network. But work on reconciliation has a wider significance. A major preoccupation of the Community is unemployment, forecast to average 12% in 1994. Reconciliation can contribute to reducing unemployment in two ways. First, it can create new jobs; the Commission's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment proposes that 3 million jobs could be created through the development of a 'social economy' which includes services for children and the old. Second, a more equal allocation of care and employment - the

1) For the text and discussion of the Recommendation, see the Network's 1992 Annual Report.

'social work-load' - could produce the double benefit of reducing stress on employed parents (and other carers) and increasing employment.

Reconciliation requires the re-allocation of work between men and women. As more mothers are employed, fathers need to assume a greater share of family responsibilities and reduce their long hours in employment (in 1991, fathers averaged a 40-49 hours working week and only 2% worked part time<sup>2</sup>). Re-allocation across age groups is another dimension. An important structural change occurring within the labour market is a concentration of paid work within the 25-49 age group: "between 1960 and 1990 the proportion (of the Community's labour force) in the prime age group of 25-49 rose from 51% to 62%"<sup>3</sup>. This age group is also heavily engaged in unpaid caring work; the average age at which women have first children is at least 25, and 27 or over in France, Netherlands and UK. At the same time, employment is falling among under 25s and over 50s, due to the growth in education, early retirement and high unemployment among young people; in 1990, 82% of 25-49 year olds were economically active compared to 52% of under 25s and 50-65 year olds.

The challenge is to re-allocate the 'social work-load' between women and men and between different age groups - and in the process to reduce unemployment. This means spreading the social work-load more evenly by: providing opportunities to reduce working hours (not necessarily on a permanent basis but at times of their lives when men and women choose to do so); encouraging more equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men; and creating more jobs to compensate for the reduction in working hours and by the development of 'care' services'.

This sounds fine on paper, but it is much harder to put into practice. Three parts of the Network's programme address re-allocation of the social work-load. The development of good quality services for children will provide more good quality jobs. Our work on the theme of men as carers involves exploring ways of encouraging increased participation by men in the care and upbringing of children; it questions the entrenched male model of employment and assumes that gender equality and reconciliation require new models of male involvement in employment and family responsibilities. Finally, our review of leave

arrangements for workers with children has highlighted important developments in some countries. A key element of these innovative schemes is flexibility, both in how leave can be taken and when. Flexible, paid leave schemes, available throughout working life, provide one means of re-allocating work by giving men and women the opportunity to reduce hours of paid work at times of their choice with compensation for lost earnings and without losing their jobs. In such schemes, reductions in working hours might vary from full time leave to cutting back by 10 or 20%, and leave might be taken in response to family responsibilities, but also to undertake further education, training or other personal projects. The underlying concept is that each worker has a 'time account' to draw on as and when he or she feels the need (for further details, see page 20).

In addition to gender equality and unemployment, the Network's programme is relevant to two other important areas. First, reconciliation is important to the well-being of families; it affects their functioning, relationships and economic position. Second, it is important for the well-being of children. At present, only the individual Member States of the Union have legal competence to take major initiatives to promote the well-being of children. The Union's concerns are focused primarily on members of the labour force. Yet reconciliation must take account of children and their needs. It affects their lives as much as their parents'. Policies that ignore children will not satisfy parents: concern for gender equality and children's well-being are complementary not conflicting.

Reconciliation measures become better value for money when it is recognised that they can promote not only gender equality, but also the well-being of children and non-employed carers. For example, Europe needs more services providing safe and secure care for children while their parents are at work. But these services will be better and more productive if they are conceptualised and developed as multi-functional services meeting a range of needs for children and carers (whether employed or not) - care, but also social relationships, education, support, and so on. We need to move away from the narrow concept of 'childcare services' to the wider concept of 'early childhood social and educational services'.

Taking account of children can be justified in terms of investment in Europe's human resources and future. Children are the work-force of tomorrow and an increasing body of evidence shows that early childhood services provide a good foundation

2) For more information on fathers and mothers employment, including hours of work, see the Network's report *Mothers, Fathers and Employment 1985-1991*.

3) Directorate-General V (1992) *Employment in Europe 1992*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; page 10.

for later schooling. But it can also be justified on the grounds that children are citizens, have rights and are entitled to a fair share of resources and a decent quality of childhood. They are also a diminishing group. Between 1960 and 1991, the number of births in the Community fell from 5.5 million to just under 4 million. The Community's total fertility rate was an all-time low of 1.48 in 1992 (it needs to be 2.1 simply to replace the population). In Italy, Germany and Spain, the rate was 1.3 or lower. This reduction in numbers provides an important opportunity to improve services for children and their carers.

Reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities contributes to a range of social and economic objectives. It can improve the conditions of women, men, families and children. It enables best use to be made of the experience, skills and abilities of the labour force. It is essential to the economic and social health of the Community.

## THE NETWORK'S ACTIVITIES IN 1993

The work of the Network is presented below under three headings: services for children, leave arrangements and men as carers. One important task for the Network has encompassed all three areas. The Network has supported the Commission in the preparation of its Guide to Good Practice. This Guide supplements the Council Recommendation on Childcare, providing detailed advice, with examples, about how to reconcile employment and caring for children in ways that promote gender equality. It is hoped that the Guide will be published by the Commission during 1994.

## SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

- Quality: The Network has a long-standing interest in the issue of quality in services for young children. The Third Equal Opportunities

Action Programme gives the Network the specific task of "establishing criteria for the definition of quality in childcare services". Following a European seminar on quality, held in Barcelona in 1990, a discussion paper - Quality in Services for Young Children - was prepared for the Network by three experts including the Spanish member of the Network (Irene Balaguer). In 1992, Network members disseminated the paper very widely and organisations were invited to comment. During 1993, responses to this consultation process have been analyzed, and an internal report prepared (see page 14 for a summary of the main results).

In 1993, work also began to prepare a report for the Commission which will put forward, in discussion paper format, proposals for quality targets in services for young children. These targets will be closely related to the objectives proposed in the Council Recommendation and Commission Guide to Good Practice. The final report will be ready during 1994, and will also include information on standards currently required in services by each Member State.

A conclusion of the 1990 Barcelona seminar on Quality was that "discussion of childcare services, and quality in these services, can best occur in the context of a discussion about quality of childhood". Developing this theme, a seminar on Space and Quality of Life for Children, jointly organised by the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Network, was held in December 1992 in Madrid. The seminar examined quality of environment for children at three inter-related levels: the city; housing; and services for young children. A seminar report, with the full set of papers and available in Spanish and English, was produced during 1993 (for a summary of the seminar's main conclusions, see page 16).

Finally, pursuing the theme of quality in services for young children, a video is being prepared about centre-based services in Denmark and Northern Italy. These high quality services exemplify many of the principles and objectives promoted in the Recommendation and the Guide. The video will present innovative developments as well as the work of more established services. It will be available early in 1994 in Danish, Italian and English versions; we hope to produce versions in other languages during the course of the year.

- Focusing on specific services and specific groups: Since 1986, the Network has under-

taken two general reviews of services providing care and education for young children. A third review will be undertaken in 1995. In the meantime, the Network is looking in more detail at particular types of service and the needs of particular groups of families.

Family day care provides a service for many children in the European Union, and is a source of employment for many women. During 1993, work began on preparing a report on family day care in Europe. This work is being undertaken by a Danish expert, who is actively involved in the International Family Day Care Organisation (for more information about IFDCO see page 17). The report should be available in the second half of 1994. Looking ahead, work will start in 1994 on a report on school-age childcare services in Europe. This report is being prepared for the Network by the European Network on School-Age Childcare, and will be available in 1995 (see page 18 for more information about ENSAC).

Work began in 1993 on a report on childcare services in Rural Areas which is being prepared by the UK member of the Network (Bronwen Cohen). As well as analyzing trends, problems and issues in rural areas, the report will consider current services in rural areas and examples of good practice. The report is expected to be finished in the second half of 1994.

- **Structural Funds and services:** Another long-standing Network interest has been the contribution that the Structural Funds can make to the development of services. A Network report prepared by Anne McKenna (Irish member of the Network), Structural Funds and Childcare with special reference to Rural Regions, was published by the Commission in 1993. The Network hopes to undertake further work on this issue in 1994.

Finally, the Third Equal Opportunities Programme refers to the need for "guidelines on the information that Member States should collect regularly in relation to childcare services". A report on this subject of information needs has been prepared by the Belgium (French Community) member of the Network (Perrine Humblet). The report was completed and translated in 1993, and should be available during the first half of 1994 (for a summary of the report's main conclusions, see page 19).

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## LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN

During 1993, the Network has prepared a report on leave arrangements for workers with children in Member States, as well as Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden. It covers Maternity Leave, Paternity Leave, Parental Leave and Leave for Family Reasons. The report reviews current statutory leave arrangements, their relationship to collective and company agreements concerning leave, and evidence on the costs of leave arrangements and use of leave by mothers and fathers. It is hoped that the report will be available during the first half of 1994.

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## MEN AS CARERS

The Network has a long-standing interest in the subject of men as carers for children, both as fathers and workers in services. This interest has been taken forward by a Working Group established by the Network and including members from Denmark (Jytte Jensen), Italy (Patrizia Ghedini) and Belgium (Flemish Community) (Freddy Deven), as well as a representative from the UK.

The Working Group, in partnership with the Regional Government of Emilia-Romagna, organised an international seminar, held in Ravenna in May 1993. The seminar - **Men as Carers: towards a Culture of Responsibility, Sharing and Reciprocity between Women and Men in the Care and Upbringing of Children** - focused on measures that could be taken to implement Article 6 of the Council Recommendation on Childcare: "*Member States should promote and encourage, with due respect for freedom of the individual, increased participation by men (in the care and upbringing of children)*". Participants from eight countries - including Australia, Sweden and the United States - considered a range of measures, covering leave arrangements, services for children, the workplace and the media and public education. A seminar report has been

prepared by the Network, which will be available in all official Community languages in the first half of 1994. Also during 1994, the full proceedings will be published in English and Italian (for a summary of the main points from the seminar report, see page 23).

Another important piece of work has been the preparation by the Danish member of the Network of a discussion paper about men as workers in services for young children. A draft was presented at the Ravenna seminar. A final version will be ready for publication during 1994.

During 1994, the Network looks forward to collaborating with the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit on this important subject, since the Unit has decided that its contribution to the International Year of the Family will be on the subject of 'men as carers'.



### **OTHER WORK DURING 1993**

- An updated Network report on parental employment in the European Community - Mothers, Fathers and Employment 1985-1991 - was published by the Commission in English and French. The report is based on a special analysis of the Labour Force Survey conducted for the Network by Eurostat.
- The Network submitted three sets of comments to the Commission: on the NOW Programme; on the future of Community Social Policy; and on the Green Paper The Future of Community Initiatives under the Structural Funds.
- During 1993, a report was prepared on a project entitled Challenging Racism in European Childcare Provision; the report will be published during 1994. Begun in 1991 and involving four Member States (Belgium, France, Italy and the UK), the project included exchange visits and a European seminar. The project has been a collaborative venture involving partnership with a number of UK organisations and a steering group with representatives from the four participating countries (see page 12 for more information about this project).

- Over the last two years, the activities of the Network have increasingly included the four countries currently applying for membership of the Union - Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden. This is important, not only because of the possible future enlargement of the Union, but because these countries have important experience in many relevant areas. In September 1992, the Network was involved in a Conference organised by the Danish Government and the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit - Parental Employment and Caring For Children: Policies in EC and Nordic Countries. The report of the Conference was published in 1993 by the Danish Ministry for Social Affairs. Network reports written or in preparation on leave arrangements, family day care and school-age childcare include all four applicant countries. The report being prepared on men working in services for young children draws on Nordic experience (the author is a member of a group established by the Nordic Council on this subject). Swedish experts attended the Ravenna seminar on Men as Carers.



### **DISSEMINATION**

Since its first report Childcare and Equality of Opportunity was published in 1988, the Network has been producing a steady flow of reports. Over the years, we have become increasingly concerned to ensure this work is disseminated - which means material being both distributed and read. We are trying to improve dissemination in a number of ways:

- More languages: six of our last eight publications have been available in five or more languages. We shall endeavour to get future publications translated as widely as possible.
- Design: the Annual Report and the report of the Ravenna seminar are being professionally designed to make them more attractive.
- Distribution: Network members have databases of international, national and regional organisations to whom copies of the Annual Report are sent. We hope to make two distributions to these data-base organisations in

1994. The Equal Opportunities Unit and the Network also hope to arrange, in collaboration with national offices of the Commission, a press launch for the Guide to Good Practice.

This is far from perfect. However, as far as possible, we are working to improve dissemination. Comments and offers of help would be welcome.

## 1994: WORK PLANNED FOR THE CURRENT YEAR

### Publications during 1994:

- Leave Arrangements for Workers with Children
- Men as Carers; report on Ravenna seminar
- Men as Carers: full proceedings of the Ravenna seminar (English version to be published by the Commission, Italian by the Regional Government of Emilia-Romagna)
- Information on Childcare Services
- Challenging Racism in European Childcare Provision
- 1993 Annual Report

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- Video about services in Denmark and Italy: 'Can you feel a colour?'

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In addition, the Commission's Guide to Good Practice in the reconciliation of employment and caring for children is due to be published

### Reports to be completed in 1994<sup>4</sup>

- Childcare Services for Rural Families
- Family Day Care in Europe
- Quality Targets in Services for Young Children - a discussion paper
- Men as workers in services for young children - a discussion paper

### Work starting in 1994

- Preparation of a report on School-age Childcare in Europe
- Preparation of a report on the Costs and Funding of Services for Young Children (postponed from 1993 due to other demands)
- Further work on Men as Carers

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<sup>4</sup> Because of the time taken to get reports checked, translated and printed, it is not always possible to be exact about publication dates.

# TAKING ACCOUNT OF RACE AND ETHNICITY IN CHILDCARE



Bronwen Cohen

**'Challenging Racism in European Childcare Provision' was a project examining issues of race and ethnicity in childcare services. The project involved transnational exchange visits and a European seminar. A report on the project, prepared for the Network by Babette**

**Brown of the Early Years Trainers Anti-Racism Network, will be published in 1994; see page 64 for how to get a copy. Bronwen Cohen, UK member of the Network, writes about the project.**



**F**ollowing publication of the Network's first report in 1988, a number of UK organisations met to discuss the issue of anti-racist practice in childcare services in the European Union. The group met against a background of growing concern over the rise of organised racism in Europe, highlighting the damage which racism can inflict on all children as well as the impact of racism on access to services by ethnic minority groups. The group agreed on the need to examine the different ways Member States were tackling racism in their childcare services and staff training and to discuss policies which could be proposed at a local, national and European level.

It was realised at an early stage that discussion at European level would be more effective if informed by wider understanding of the different historical and cultural perspectives as well as practice in this area of work. The steering group

was expanded to include representation from Belgium, France and Italy, as well as other relevant organisations, and it was decided to have a two stage programme. The first stage involved an exchange programme for practitioners in Belgium, UK, France and Italy, to look at examples of practice in each country. The practitioners' reports and experiences fed back into a seminar organised in October 1992 in Leeds. The seminar involved 40 participants from all Member States except Spain and Greece, representing a wide range of professions and organisations. Some were members of ethnic minority groups within the countries they represented.

Financial support for the programme came from Leeds City Council, Save the Children Fund UK and the European Commission which noted in its statement to the seminar that:

*'funding from the Commission is a sign of the fundamental importance it attaches to challenging racism in European childcare, ensuring that ethnic minority women are enabled to participate fully in the labour market as well as significantly affecting the lives of minority ethnic parents, children and society as a whole'.*

Both the exchange visits and the seminar revealed important differences in the concepts, language and cultural perspectives of Member States. For example, some European services focus on integration - ensuring that children from ethnic minority groups acquire the language and customs of the majority culture. Others base their approach on the assumption that all cultures are of equal value. For UK delegates an anti-racist approach to services is important to counter the acquisition of racist attitudes from an early age. In some cases, inter-culturalism and multi-culturalism were preferred concepts, but with some differences between countries in the understanding of these terms.

Areas for action identified at the seminar included:

### Access to services

- Access for all children needs to be a right rather than depending on whether they or their parents are citizens or whether they or their parents are deemed to be deficient or failing in some respect. Services need to integrate an educational and social functions and not segregate out particular functions or groups of children (eg. childcare for working parents).
- Access depends on availability of services. It was suggested that when the European Commission reviews the Council Recommendation (in 1995), it could set targets towards which all Member States need to work.
- Children need access to high quality services; poor quality is not acceptable to parents. Access depends on cost; public funding is essential if there is to be equal access for all groups to good services.

### Access to training for workers in childcare services

- Access to initial training for all is crucial but particularly for people from minority ethnic groups. It is unacceptable for children from black and ethnic minority families to be in services in which black and minority ethnic groups are under-represented. Children from majority ethnic families also benefit from being in services staffed at all levels by people from black and minority ethnic groups, but this is seldom acknowledged.
- Access to continuous training for staff working in childcare services is emphasised in the Council Recommendation on Childcare (and any other references to Recommendation). It is important that the training curriculum, at every level, includes issues of racism and diversity, whether the training is being run in homogeneous or ethnically mixed areas.
- Providing initial and in-service training costs a great deal of money. The Commission can play a role through the Structural Funds, with

perhaps a special initiative like the NOW programme, to focus on minority ethnic children and women.

### Information about rights, services and resources

- The Commission can set a good example in this area, for example by publicising a guide to the Structural Funds and their use for childcare services, backed up by other initiatives to make the Funds easier for people to understand and use.

### Monitoring

- Monitoring is important at local, national and European level. The European Community has an important role as well as local and national bodies.
- Access to services needs monitoring to check, for example, who is benefiting from them and who is working in them. The way services are operated also needs to be monitored.
- The labour market needs to be monitored. A growing group of marginalised workers, often on short term contract or self employed, is leading to increasing poverty and inequality.
- Monitoring involves planning, evaluation and reviewing not only the position of minority ethnic families but also other groups who are devalued and oppressed.
- Monitoring must lead to action. By itself it is interesting but of limited use.

Summing up at the end of the seminar, Peter Moss (Co-ordinator of the Childcare Network) drew attention to the project's contribution towards putting the needs of minority ethnic families on the European Community agenda and welcomed the explicit recognition in the European Commission's statement of the need "to take race and ethnicity into account on a European level". The seminar and the visits had "shown how individual organisations and individual local authorities or municipalities can work together in partnership to develop work at a European level - I hope that this initiative will set an example to other organisations and authorities in other countries as well as in the United Kingdom".

# QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

**In 1992 the Network undertook a major consultation exercise, distributing its discussion paper Quality in Services for Young Children to more than 3,000 international, European and national organisations. These organisations were invited to comment on the discussion paper, with the help of a questionnaire. The Network received over 800 replies, which are summarised below. Full results (in English) are available from the Network Coordinator**

## MAIN POINTS IN THE DISCUSSION PAPER

**T**he Network's Discussion Paper Quality in Services for Young Children contains three sections. It starts with some important assumptions about the concept of quality: quality is a relative concept, based on values and beliefs; defining quality is a process and this process is important in its own right, providing opportunities to share, discuss and understand values, ideas, knowledge and experience; the process should be participatory and democratic, involving different groups including children, parents and families and professionals working in services; the needs, perspectives and values of these groups may sometimes differ; and, finally, defining quality should be seen as a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular review and never reaching a final, 'objective' statement.

The second part of the paper proposes criteria for defining quality, based on a set of value-based aims. The criteria are organised into 10 areas or blocks: accessibility and usage; environment; learning activities; relationships; parents' views; the community; valuing diversity; assessment of

children; cost benefits and ethos. Each block is further divided into detailed indicators expressed as questions.

The third part of the paper proposes conditions for quality assurance - in other words, what needs to be done at a national and local level to enable services to meet quality criteria. These conditions are organised into 10 areas or blocks: policy; legislation and setting standards; financing and resources; planning and monitoring; advice and support; staffing; training; physical resources; research and development; integration and coordination of services.

## THE RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER

### Assumptions

The questionnaire sent to organisations asked if they 'agreed', 'agreed with reservations' or 'disagreed' with five assumptions from the first part of the discussion paper: (a) there are three major perspectives when looking at quality - children, parents and families, and professionals; (b) definitions of quality are based on values and beliefs as much as on facts and knowledge and must be relative; (c) understanding and defining quality involves a dynamic process of discussion and review in which ideas will change and develop; (d) quality of services includes equality of access; and (e) quality requires government at appropriate levels to assume major responsibility for funding, regulating and supporting the development of services. Overall there was a high level of agree-

ment with the assumptions, with (c) receiving the highest level of unqualified support, and (d) and (e) receiving rather more substantive reservations although most replies agreed with these two assumptions without reservations.

## Aims for Children

The discussion paper outlines 11 aims for children which “high quality services for young children should aim to ensure that children have the opportunity to experience”; respondents were asked if they would change or add to any of these aims. A substantial proportion did propose modifications (for example, more precise definitions) or additions. The responses emphasise that discussions about quality cannot occur in a vacuum, but need to be part of a wider debate about children and childhood, including the rights of children and quality of life for children.

## Criteria for Quality

Respondents were asked to prioritise the three most important areas or blocks. Three areas consistently emerged as particularly important: ‘accessibility and usage’; ‘relationships’; and ‘ethos’. Many replies commented that prioritising areas was very difficult as all areas were inter-related.

## Conditions for assuring quality

Respondents were again asked to prioritise the three most important areas or blocks. ‘Finance and resources’ was the top priority. ‘Policy’, ‘legislation/ standards’, ‘staffing’ and ‘training’ also received substantial support. Again, many replies emphasised the inter-relatedness of conditions, and by implication the need to develop a broad approach to quality assurance rather than relying on one or two measures.

## Minimum standards

Respondents were asked whether “it is necessary and useful to define minimum standards” in

addition to quality. ‘Minimum standards’ were defined as a level “below which no service should be allowed to operate”, compared to ‘quality’ which was defined as “high or optimal standards in services”. In general, there was a high level of support for the need for minimum standards to be defined as well as quality. Those opposed often referred to the danger that minimum standards would have a negative effect on working towards quality since minimum standards “tend to become the maximum standards” rather than serving simply as a baseline.

The consultation process was neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. Many groups were not reached and many voices not heard - not least those of children and parents. The exercise however does reinforce the Network’s view that the process of defining quality is vital and valuable, involving different perspectives and views, argument and debate, sharing and negotiation. It cannot be either a prescriptive exercise or simply a technical project. It should be a continuous process, able to accommodate changing ideas, values and circumstances, and closely linked to wider discussions about childhood, parenthood and gender equality.

# SPACE AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CHILDREN

**● A seminar on Space and Quality of Life for Children was held in Madrid in November 1992, with participants from six Member States. The seminar was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs, and organised jointly by the Ministry and the Network. The seminar focused on children below primary school age and was organised around three themes: the urban context; housing and the micro-context; and services for young children. The seminar papers are available in the seminar report (see page 64 for how to get a copy). The main conclusions from the seminar are summarised below.**

**1.** The organisation and use of space is important for children for a number of reasons. It affects their safety and physical health; behaviour; development; relationships; and position in society.

**2.** Any discussion of quality in services for young children has to be concerned with the physical environment of these services. Space, indoors and outdoors, is a vital resource for enabling services to achieve their pedagogical and other objectives.

**3.** Cars pose a major challenge to the development of positive spaces for children. Excluding cars is not generally feasible; new methods of traffic management and new rules for drivers are needed for a socially acceptable organisation of traffic in urban areas.

**4.** Gender is an important issue when considering space. Cities and their culture have tradi-

tionally been masculine, with men responsible for planning and organisation. The needs of women and children are connected as women are the main carers for children; space for children must also address the needs of carers.

**5.** Discussion about space for children, especially in the urban context should be part of a wider discussion about exclusion and inclusion. Children are one of several groups who at present are under-privileged users of urban space; other groups include women and people with disabilities. The objective should be to develop urban areas that are fit for all people.

**6.** Children can and should participate in planning, creating and managing spaces; there are various ways of doing this. Children should be seen as partners in the context of a children's culture. Participation should also include carers.

**7.** Participation of children and carers is one of a range of measures to produce good quality spaces. Others include: increasing the awareness of decision-makers and the public; the involvement of a wider range of people with particular expertise; establishing inter-disciplinary groups; developing a range of instruments, indicators and other tools to identify problem areas, evaluate options etc.; research.

**8.** A broad strategy for change is needed including: political commitment; a culture of children based on children's rights; visions of what 'good spaces' for children would look like; and a global (rather than a sectoral) approach to space combined with small-scale applications within small districts.

# FAMILY DAY CARE IN EUROPE

**A report is being prepared for the Network on Family Day Care in Europe. The report's author, Malene Karlsson, was born in Denmark, but now lives in Sweden. As one of the coordinators of the European region of the International Family Day Care Organisation (IFDCO), she plays an active role in IFDCO and was one of the organisers of the 1993 IFDCO World Conference in Uppsala. She introduces IFDCO and the Uppsala Conference.**

IFDCO was founded in 1986, to provide an international network for people involved in family day care. IFDCO's objectives are:

- to facilitate an international exchange of information, ideas and methods;
- to promote the provision of family day care services for the care, education and recreation of children;
- to promote good standards in family day care;
- to advance the education and training of family day carers and others involved with family day care;
- to conduct research and to publish the results.

IFDCO has a world-wide membership. The organisation is divided into three regions: the Americas; Asia/Pacific; and Europe. Each region has two coordinators and a board with a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and newsletter editor who are elected.

IFDCO operates through a newsletter, produced

four times a year, and international conferences. The first international conference was held in Wales (1987), followed by San Francisco (1989) and Sydney (1991). A European Conference was held in Belgium in 1990.

The most recent international conference took place in Sweden in May 1993, when delegates from 22 countries met in Uppsala. The theme of the Conference was 'Quality and Competence', with particular attention paid to training, support and other aspects of quality. Strong feelings were aroused during a panel discussion titled 'Freedom or Security' when the question of employment was discussed. Some members feel that family day carers should be employed (for example, by local authorities), getting the same benefits as other employees. But other members would not consider giving up their independence as self-employed family day carers.

For information about membership and activities contact: Malene Karlsson, Nergardsstigen 2, 16353 Spanga, Sweden; or Anke Schulz-Henke, Othmarscher Kirchenweg 5, 22763 Hamburg, Germany.

# SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE IN EUROPE

**In 1994, work will start on a report for the Network about School-Age Child Care in Europe. The report will be prepared for the Network by the European Network on School Age Childcare (ENSAC). Pat Petrie, one of the founders, introduces ENSAC.**



ENSAC began in 1986. It focuses on care and play for children after school and in the holidays and is a network for social scientists, educationalists, practitioners and administrators (currently from 20 countries) with an interest in this subject. ENSAC's aims are:

- to develop and evaluate different models of provision;
- to exchange experience and information;
- to raise consciousness about school-age daycare within Europe;
- to promote equality and improve the quality of life for children.

ENSAC has organised four European Conferences: 1989 in Florence (School-age Child Care: the social context); 1990 in Gothenburg (Organisation, content and staff training); 1992 in London (The children's experience); and 1993 in Arhus (Time for leisure). Two of these Conferences have received financial support from the Commission's Equal Opportunities Unit.

ENSAC has also established interest groups for training, information technology, equal opportunities and research. The research group held a two day seminar on evaluation in the Netherlands in May 1993, and the training group is planning an event in the UK in May 1994. ENSAC edited a special issue of the *Women's Studies International*

*Forum* (Volume 14, Number 5, 1991), exclusively devoted to school-age childcare, and Conference proceedings are also available.

Looking forward, as well as producing a report on School-age Child Care in Europe for the Network, ENSAC has received funding to produce examples of good practice in play and care services within Europe. The fifth ENSAC Conference will be held at the University of Ghent at the end of September; the main theme is 'Empowering Parents'. In October 1994, ENSAC will jointly sponsor an international conference with Wellesley College (Massachusetts, USA).

ENSAC has three coordinators: Ria Meijvogel (Netherlands), Bjorn Flising (Sweden) and Pat Petrie (UK). For information about membership and activities, contact: Ria Meijvogel, Hereweg 289, 9651 AH Meeden, Netherlands.

# SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN: INFORMATION NEEDS

 **The Third Equal Opportunities Programme refers to the need for “guidelines on the information that Member States should collect regularly in relation to childcare services”. A new discussion paper prepared by the Network analyzes existing information and proposes a framework to provide improved information. Some of the main points from the report are summarised below; see page 64 for how to obtain a copy of the report.**



**1.** Information is required on ‘needs’, ‘demand’ and ‘provision’, and the report examines and defines these concepts. ‘Needs’ cover children, parents and workers in services. It is necessary to distinguish between ‘explicit demand’, reflecting a request that has been made for a service; and ‘latent demand’, which, for a number of reasons, has not been expressed.

**2.** Information on needs, demand and provision should take account of a number of parameters emphasised in the Council Recommendation on Child Care, including the needs of parents who are employed, training or looking for work; children with special needs (for example, disabilities) and living in lone parent households; the availability of services in urban and rural areas; diversity and affordability of services; and the needs of workers employed in services, including their training. The needs of children cover not only safe and secure physical care, but also the full range of social, educational, health and psychological needs.

**3.** A review of existing information in Member States on needs, demand and provision reveals widespread inadequacies. It is impossible to get a full and regular picture of needs, demand and

provision in Member States or to make comparisons between Member States.

**4.** Recommendations include:

- Needs: there should be national statistics with children as the unit of observation, and there should be data on the economically active population, female and male, taking into account their hours of work and their family responsibilities.
- Demand: a sample survey, based on a national sample of children, should be organised every 4 years, taking account of the distinction between ‘explicit’ and ‘latent’ demand, preferences and the satisfaction of parents using services.
- Provision of services: there should be a uniform scheme involving annual activity reports from services, to be completed for a common date or period. These reports would give information, for each individual service, about the service itself, the children attending, workers employed in the service and parental payments.
- There should be a national publication, produced annually and relating to the same date in all Member States. This will also enable comparisons to be made between Member States.

# LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR WORKERS WITH CHILDREN

**The European Union has a long-standing interest in leave arrangements for workers with children. In a report to be published in 1994, the Network has reviewed Maternity Leave, Paternity Leave, Parental Leave, and Leave to care for sick children, covering the 12 Member States, plus Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The report focuses on statutory rights, but also gives examples of collective agreements which enhance these rights. Main points from the report are summarised below; see page 64 for how to obtain a copy of the report.**



**1.** The case for leave arrangements is that they contribute towards the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities, as well as other social and economic objectives, including equal opportunities, the health and well-being of children and parents, the well-being of families, improved economic performance and reducing unemployment.

**2.** Leave can be provided as a legal entitlement or through collective or company agreements. The two approaches are not mutually exclusive; collective or company agreements can supplement legal rights. There is no comprehensive source of data on the extent or nature of such agreements.

**3.** Within the EC, Maternity Leave is available as a general right in all but one Member State and is normally paid at a high proportion of earnings. Only one Member State offers a substantial period of paid Paternity Leave. Parental Leave is available in 8 Member States, with a ninth operating a 'career break' system; payment to parents varies considerably between countries, with most paying nothing or a low level of benefit. Belgium and

Denmark have developed schemes in which child care is just one of many reasons why workers can take leave. Five Member States offer workers the right to leave to care for sick children; the length of leave varies and leave is unpaid, except in Germany. Overall, statutory leave arrangements are most developed in Denmark, Germany and Italy, and least well developed in Ireland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

**4.** All 4 non-EC countries have paid Parental Leave; Norway and Sweden are developing very flexible schemes. Sweden and Finland provide paid Paternity Leave; Sweden and Norway offer paid leave for parents to care for sick children. Taking account of the range of leave and conditions such as length, payment and flexibility, Sweden has the most advanced statutory leave provision among the 16 countries covered in this report.

**5.** Parental Leave and other forms of leave are, in general, widely used when they are paid. Fathers make extensive use of paid Paternity Leave, but rarely take Parental Leave with the significant exception of Sweden (see page 22). Parental Leave is used more by fathers in the public sector, in certain types of job, with higher levels of education and whose partners have higher incomes and levels of education. There are wide variations in the extent and quality of statistics and research concerning the use of leave arrangements.

**6.** Parental Leave and other predictable types of leave including Maternity Leave do not appear to cause major problems or costs to employers, although there may be specific exceptions to this general experience; they may also benefit employers. The cost to public funds depends on features of particular schemes, as well as the extent of savings in other areas of public expenditure. There may be costs to parents, depending to some extent on the structure of the leave arrangements and whether leave is taken disproportionately by women. Leave to care for sick children and entitlements to work reduced hours cause most

problems for employers and parents. There are no comprehensive studies assessing the costs and benefits of leave arrangements.

**7.** The report draws a number of conclusions, including:

- Leave arrangements can contribute to a range of social and economic objectives, but only if a comprehensive, detailed, critical and dynamic approach is adopted. The development of better and more effective leave arrangements requires regular monitoring and research.
- At present, few men take leave where it is available and most countries appear to accept this situation. The main exceptions are Nordic countries. Their experience suggests a number of conditions that need to be considered if leave arrangements are to be used by a significant number of men (for example, concerning payment, length, non-transferability and flexibility). Many of these conditions will benefit women as well as men.
- To be fully effective and encourage their use by men and women, leave arrangements need to be flexible: this means responding to diversity in family and employment circumstances; and offering choice about how leave can be taken. The report provides examples of how a flexible approach can be implemented in practice.
- Because leave arrangements are of such basic importance to reconciling employment and family responsibilities, a basic entitlement to the four types of leave needs to be guaranteed to all workers by law. This entitlement should be paid and flexible and include at least 16 weeks post-natal Maternity Leave; 2 weeks Paternity Leave; 12 months Parental Leave; and 10 days Leave for Family Reasons per child per year.
- Employers and trades unions can supplement this basic entitlement, as well as making other important contributions to the operation of leave arrangements.
- Introduction of a comprehensive, flexible and paid system of leave arrangements can be phased in over time. Where there are particular problems, for example in some small companies, extra support may be provided.
- At present, leave arrangements are mostly tied specifically to the birth and care of young

children. An alternative approach would be to integrate Parental Leave into a strategy concerned with the working hours of men and women over their whole adult lives. This life course approach means adopting a 'career break' or 'time account' system, offering opportunities to take periods of leave throughout working life for a variety of reasons, including but not only caring responsibilities.

*The report describes a number of innovatory leave schemes developing in Europe which show how this measure could be developed to play an important role in reconciliation programmes and strategies to re-allocate work.*

*Since 1984, Belgium has developed a system of 'career breaks' which now covers all workers. 'Career breaks' between 6-12 months can be taken to care for children - or for any other reason. They are paid at a low flat rate, with a higher rate paid to workers caring for two or more children, and are subject to an employer's agreement and willingness to accept a previously unemployed worker as a replacement. The number of workers taking a career break has increased from 2,000 in 1985 to nearly 58,000 in 1992. Most women appear to take a 'career break' because of family responsibilities; many men appear to take a 'career break' in anticipation of retirement.*

*A major reform of leave in Denmark, introduced in January 1994, is discussed in the article by Jytte Jensen on page 32. Like Belgium, Denmark has developed leave arrangements that apply not only to caring for children, but which can be taken for any reason and throughout working life.*

*Norway is reforming its Parental Leave to make it more flexible. Parents can already choose to take 42 weeks at 100% of earnings or 52 weeks at 80%. The new 'time account scheme', starting in July 1994, enables parents to take part of their leave in the form of reduced working hours. For this period they can choose between working 50%, 60%, 75%, 80% or 90% of full time hours, with the length of the leave being increased correspondingly. For example, parents who opt to take 52 weeks leave at 80% of earnings might take the first 26 weeks full time, then take the remaining 26 weeks leave in the form of reducing their hours by 25% for 2 years or by 40% for 65 weeks or by 50% for 52 weeks. The Norwegian Government have calculated that the new scheme will give families up to 100 options.*

*Sweden offers 15 months of Parental Leave, 12 months paid at 90% of earnings, 3 months at a low flat rate. The system is very flexible. Parents can take part or all of their paid leave on a full time, half time or quarter time basis, and at any time until a child reaches 8. They can take leave in one block of time or several; transfer leave between parents; and switch from full time to part time leave and vice versa. They can also extend the period of leave by taking, for example, 5 days benefit for every 7 days leave. Although mothers take most of the leave, almost 50% of fathers now take a period of leave, on average about 6 weeks.*

# MEN AS CARERS FOR CHILDREN

 **An international seminar, organised by the Regional Government of Emilia-Romagna and the Network, was held in Ravenna in May 1993. The aim was to examine how to support increased participation by men in the care and upbringing of children, an objective to which Member States have committed themselves in Article 6 of the Council Recommendation on Child Care. Participants presented examples of initiatives already taken by governments, services, employers and trade unions, including: leave arrangements; education and media programmes; projects in nurseries and other services for young children to increase involvement by fathers and the employment of male workers; and action in the workplace. Main points from the Network's report of the seminar are summarised below; see page 64 for how to get a copy of the report.**

  
**“As regards responsibilities arising from the care and upbringing of children, it is recommended that Member States should promote and encourage, with due respect for freedom of the individual, increased participation by men in order to achieve a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities between men and women and to enable women to have a more effective role in the labour market”**

[Article 6, Council of Ministers Recommendation on Child Care]

**1.** There is an urgent need for change, to increase men's participation in the care and upbringing of children. Change has potential benefits for children and women, as well as men -

but also potential risks and disadvantages which must be recognised and taken into account.

**2.** Change - of expectations, attitudes, behaviour - is already occurring, although it is not uniform, either between or within countries. There are many forces working for further change. It is not a case of whether or not change should happen, but rather what type of change will occur, how far and fast it will go and to what extent it can be mediated by policy and other interventions.

**3.** Increased participation by men in the care of children means new roles, new identities and new relationships for men and women. Some women may not want change; many feel ambivalent. Strategies must recognise that change is a sensitive issue, for men and women, capable of generating negative feelings. Men and women need safe opportunities to explore new roles, identities and relationships as well as their feelings about change. Individual men and women will vary in how far and how fast they want to change, and change cannot be forced on men or women who do not want it. Men must accept and share responsibility for the process of change; they must share all family responsibilities, not just the more positive and rewarding aspects of caring for children.

**4.** Change takes place at many levels and in different settings (the family, services, the workplace, the wider community); support for change must also take place at different levels and settings. Change is promoted by informal practices, negotiations and relationships and by formal interventions, such as law, policies and programmes. The seminar conclusions discuss the contribution and the limitations of formal interventions; these can support, but not initiate change, being most effective as a response to changes already underway.

**5.** Points to be considered when developing a strategy to encourage and support change include:

analysis of the context within which change is sought; recognition of difference (for example, class and ethnicity); supporting existing informal processes and networks; targeting 'golden opportunities in life' when men and women are more responsive; providing role models; finding appropriate and effective incentives; and recognition that change will take a long time and will require sustained support.

**6.** The seminar demonstrates that there is no excuse for government, employers, trade unions and other agencies to argue that intervention to promote increased participation by men in the care of children is impossible, undesirable or unwelcome. A range of interventions have already been tried and welcomed by men and women (although there are few examples of workplace measures). However, there cannot be a standard package of measures applied uniformly in all contexts; the choice of measures should follow from an analysis of the current situation, current assets and current obstacles in a particular country, region, community or workplace.

**7.** The seminar focused on 'men as carers' for children, but men have caring responsibilities throughout adult life. If men are to increase their participation in all forms of caring, a life-course perspective must be adopted. This requires redistribution of paid and unpaid work not only between men and women and the employed and unemployed but also over the individual's adult life.

**8.** The recommendations include:

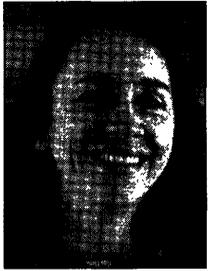
- Government at different levels, social partners and private organisations should make a clear commitment to the objective of increased participation by men in the care of children; and draw up proposals for action, including targets and timetables, based on an analysis of their particular context. Within this broad approach, priority should be given to: pilot projects; exchange and discussion of experience; support for networks; establishing systems to monitor and evaluate; and developing research.
- The European Commission can play an important role. It can support the exchange of experience between Member States and pilot projects especially in less advantaged regions. It can mainstream support for increased participation by men in the care of children in

its many programmes and initiatives as part of a wider approach to mainstreaming equal opportunities. As an employer, it can take a lead in developing workplace initiatives.

- The European Union should adopt a strong Directive on leave arrangements.

In June 1993, a Conference Fathers in the Families of Tomorrow was held in Copenhagen, organised by the Danish Government and the Commission's Family Policy Unit. See page 64 for details of how to obtain the Conference proceedings.

# AROUND EUROPE WITH THE NETWORK



Perrine Humblet

**Many European countries have extensive services for children between the ages of 3 and 6. For example, in Belgium, as in France, nearly 100% of this age group attend nursery school ('école maternelle'). In both countries, the nursery school replaced charitable day**

**care services ('garderies') for under-privileged children at the end of the 19th century and has, from that time onwards, been incorporated into the educational system.**

## WORKERS IN CHILDCARE SERVICES : WHAT'S AT STAKE

In Belgium the way has been open since the end of the last century for professionalization of nursery education ('*enseignement préscolaire*') for children between the ages of 3 and 6. The first programme in 1880 attempted to give nursery schools other functions than just looking after the children of the many women who then worked in factories; it was influenced by the work of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852). The second programme, introduced in 1927, was inspired by Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and required teachers to follow a three year upper level teacher training course. Within a short time, there was a great demand for nursery school, so much so that certain directives attempted to put a check on schooling from too early an age: already by 1935, nearly half the children aged 3 to 6 were provided with schooling.

Other childcare services were also set up, but without similar developments taking place: centres for children under 3 years old as well as services providing out-of-school care ('*garderie scolaire*') which nowadays exist in nearly all nursery and primary schools. Attempts to professionalize childcare services for children under 3 are more recent and have hardly started for out-of-school childcare. These attempts have not had the same support as nursery education.

At the close of the 19th century, at the time when the nursery school was being incorporated into the education system, working mothers were condemned by infant welfare services. Since its establishment in 1919, responsibility for supervising the people and services which take care of very young children has fallen to the O.N.E. (then known as the '*Oeuvre Nationale de l'Enfance*'). In an effort to fulfil its mission, O.N.E. took up the fight against the private use of 'hidden' (or unsupervised) childminders or centres - whilst at the same time promoting the role of the mother/housewife. In line with this opposition to working mothers, nurseries ('*crèches*') were deemed a necessary evil destined to vanish without trace. Group childcare was viewed even more askance given the greater risk of sickness at a time when antibiotics did not exist and vaccinations were restricted. Nurseries alone were grant-aided, registered carers and other centres merely being supervised. Comprehensive regulations for nurseries published in 1938 specified that all staff must be female and that the person in charge would be a medical nurse. Hygiene was the main criterion for quality; for example, masks had to be worn in nurseries. Services were few in number and little used.

Although teachers in nursery education have had legally to be qualified since 1927, the first law organising specific training for the staff of childcare centres was in 1957. Training for core staff, known as 'carers' ('*éleveuses*' or '*soigneuses*'), was introduced on an experimental basis from the 1930s. From 1947 in Brussels, and subsequently in

Liege, it led to a certificate in technical paramedical education at upper secondary level.

Ten years later, nursery nursing studies were legally organized as a lower level of vocational training. This training lasts two or three years and is open to pupils upon completion of lower secondary education, i.e. at 16 years old. It covers fields such as hygiene, nursing, infant care, nutrition and dietetics and applied psychology - but not in great depth. The nursing commission responsible for devising the training programme seemed to believe that no detailed knowledge was needed to work with healthy children. The vocational training certificate (*'certificat de qualification'*) was considered to be an end in itself since it did not give access to higher education. It was rapidly dismissed as inadequate given the overall poor level of training involved and the lack of preparation for the educational and inter-relational dimensions of work in childcare centres.

The term 'early childhood care professionals' (*'professionnels de l'accueil de la petite enfance'*) is often employed nowadays to describe workers responsible for the under 3 age group. The term "professionalization" implies the development of theoretical and applied knowledge in a specific field, restricting admission to jobs to workers with professional qualifications and the social recognition of professional status, thus enabling 'professionals' to determine how their profession is to be practised and who is to practise it. Is this sector of childcare for young children really undergoing professionalization?

The certificate in nursery nursing (*'puériculture'*) became mandatory in 1970, but only within one category of services for young children registered by the O.N.E. - the grant-aided childcare centres. In nurseries, pre-school nurseries (*'prégardiennats'*) and commune childcare centres (*'maisons communales d'accueil de l'enfance'* - MCAE), which at present provide 41% of all childcare places supervised by O.N.E., salaried employment is restricted to qualified workers: nursery nurses (*'puéricultrices'*) (1 for every 7 places), medical nurses (1 for every 48 places) and social workers (1 for every 96 places). Organized family day care schemes (*'services de gardiennes encadrées'*) were set up in 1975, offering a grant-aided but home-based service, and now account for 36% of all places; qualifications are not necessary for carers, but they are required to attend training sessions. There is no regulation governing basic training in childcare services that are not grant-aided, whether provided by centres or family day carers (*'gardiennes*

*indépendantes'*) which together account for 23% of the places supervised by the O.N.E.

Overall, therefore, only 41% of the childcare services sector has qualified staff, mostly nursery nurses. Nursery nurses, however, are finding it difficult to gain social recognition as professionals within their field of work. They are disqualified from obtaining management positions in services and from teaching their vocational skills in nursery nursing schools due to the hierarchy of qualifications and the organization of positions of responsibility. Generally speaking, medical nurses, who complete at least three years of upper level training, manage centres and teach nursery nurses.

Furthermore, nursery nurses are facing difficulties in the labour market which further weaken their status. Posts open to nursery nurses have recently been extended to encompass care services for the elderly; while employment possibilities are at present growing within this sector, this development renders their training less specialized. Another development having a negative influence on professional status is that the new commune childcare centres (MCAE, discussed in more detail in the 1992 Annual Report) have to recruit nursery nurses from programmes intended to reduce unemployment (A.C.S.); these newly created posts have inferior conditions and lower status. Lastly, nursery nurses are sometimes asked to train women who are long-term unemployed and unqualified, within the framework of social integration programmes (often subsidized by the NOW Programme<sup>5</sup>); these women will then be in competition with nursery nurses for jobs despite having a lower level of training. Such requests therefore create conflicts which have led to the refusal by nursery nurses to become involved in what can only go against the professionalization of their occupation.

For more than twenty years now, there has been a major trend of encouraging improved qualification for nursery nurses. The Bernard Van Leer Foundation has provided backing for such training. Nowadays, demands for improved qualifications are made via associations for workers in this area: the association of nursery nurses (APROPUER); the association of professionals working with young children (*Nouvelle Orientation Enfance*); and the Belgian section of OMEP (*Organisation Mondiale de l'Education Préscolaire*). A reform of

5) The NOW Programme (New Opportunities for Women) is a Community Initiative, under the Structural Funds, to promote the vocational training and employment of women. Within this Programme, funding is available to support the development of childcare services including training of childcare workers.

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training for nursery nurses, both initial and continuous, has been supported by many other organisations for women and parents who emphasise the need for improvements in the quality of services.

A reform of training is considered a matter of priority by all of these organisations. The associations of staff working with young children have defined the new roles of workers in childcare centres, outlining the duties of qualified nursery nurses and the skills and knowledge they require, with the aim of opening up discussion on reforming training. They recommend an advanced level of training, comparable to nursery school teachers, and continuous training which furthers an in-depth knowledge of and analytical outlook to practice. Educational, relational, social and health aspects need to be developed in keeping with the importance of early childhood, the need to work closely with families and numerous other demands on the newly-created profession.

Generally speaking, the various reform programmes which have been drawn up have met major obstacles due to budgetary, political and social factors. Raising the educational standards of workers in childcare centres requires salary increases. The O.N.E. budget could not provide this without a substantial increase in funding from the French Community of Belgium or reducing expenditure elsewhere for example by reducing the number of grant-assisted places in services: in political terms, the choice is very difficult. The proposed amendments could also have repercussions on employment, since closing nursery nursing sections in vocational training schools would result in the loss of teaching jobs. They may also require radical changes in practice in some centres by favouring team work. Finally, reforms in training risk excluding students and workers from lower social backgrounds and who have failed their upper secondary education. It is for this reason that in-service training which leads to qualifications can play such a crucial role, enabling nursery nurses to gradually attain more advanced qualifications whilst at work.

A project to reform the training of nursery nurses is now going ahead, and could be associated with in-service training. The Minister for Social Affairs obtained a budget for 1994 of 12 million BF to be earmarked for continuous training in all childcare services. This budget is in keeping with the new O.N.E. regulation issued in 1993 (see news item, page 31) requiring grant-aided childcare services to arrange continuous training for their staff and to

allow them to attend the training sessions O.N.E. will be running. In my view, this training should be incorporated into a comprehensive long-term framework and meet specific objectives that are complementary to an improved basic training curriculum.

If this reform programme is placed in the context of professionalization of the sector of childcare for young children, it is essential that improved training should be open to workers from centre-based services but also that there should be specific programmes designed for family day carers. Otherwise, there is a possibility that this new training will widen the rift between the so-called professionals and family day carers, and between families using centres and family day care. Claims made by family day carers to have a recognised employment status may be seen as a desire for social recognition similar to the trends already noted among workers in childcare centres.

A process of professionalization is gradually developing in the sector of early childhood, initiated not only by the workforce but also by other groups including users of the services. A fundamental issue is whether or not this process will involve the full range of services for young children. The work of collating and exchanging information which has already been carried out by the EC Childcare Network is judged, by those involved in this process, to be of great significance. The process must be supported by political decisions which clearly support this movement.

# THE JOYS AND SORROWS OF CHILDCARE QUALITY IN FLANDERS



Fred Deven

**This article considers recent developments within the Flemish Community of Belgium related to quality issues. During 1992-93 a number of indicators point to an increasing interest as well as concern about the 'quality' of childcare provision in Flanders.**

For example:

- 'Kind en Gezin', the office which publicly regulates and supervises childcare services, took the initiative to develop measurement tools for evaluating dimensions of quality in nurseries.
- The Resource and Training Centre for Childcare (VBJK/VCOK), a major centre providing materials and training programmes for childcare workers, has increasingly voiced its concern about the poor quality of some services (eg Peeters, 1993).
- The Family League (BGJG), continuing its involvement in the public debate on childcare services, recently dedicated a special issue of its Journal to 'Quality in Childcare' (Struyf et al, 1993).
- Following public hearings, the Working Group on Women in the Flemish Parliament (Vlaamse Raad) issued its Advice on Childcare in December 1993. 'Quality' is one of the five issues dealt with by the Working Group, who voice their concern and recommend that

there should be minimum standards for each type of childcare service, covering amongst other items basic training.

At the same time, these discussions have been fuelled by a continuing impasse at government level in Flanders which has prevented agreement on general policy rules for school-age childcare services, where a considerable number of initiatives are developing, although differing widely in range and scope.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN ISSUES AT STAKE?

Until recently, 'Kind en Gezin' has mainly regarded the regulation of services as an administrative-technical issue. However, its new project, involving collaboration with the Institute of Education in Louvain University, was initiated to develop tools that will also enable an evaluation to be made of the educational dimensions in child/caregiver interactions. From a quantitative point of view, this initiative has a modest impact since it is limited at present to nurseries, which represent only a minority of overall services for children below six years. So called 'informal' childcare - provided by grandparents, relatives or neighbours - continues to be the dominant type of provision and remains beyond any type of public supervision. To a large extent, family day care is still dealt with in the same way. Nevertheless, this initiative is important; its psychological impact cannot be overestimated. Since it was implemented by 'Kind en Gezin' at an experimental level, the initiative has stimulated wide interest and many requests for information and training.

Against this background, several issues need proper

consideration in order to further improve the quality of childcare provision in Flanders.



**A COMPREHENSIVE PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPT AND STRATEGY**

In general, substantial progress has already been made. A child-oriented approach, an appropriate environment and equipment, regular contact with parents, a focus on stimulating experiences and self-reliance - all these areas have improved in an increasing number of services. Unfortunately, though, still only a few centres work on the basis of an explicit pedagogical concept.

Strategies are also needed to deal appropriately with specific situations such as a multicultural group setting or children from deprived households. Moreover, some centres continue the practice of assigning workers every other week to a different age group - not the best way to develop close bonds between children and workers.



**PEDAGOGICALLY TRAINED PERSONNEL**

Some of the workforce are still better equipped for a sociomedical rather than an educational approach to the work. The historical roots of 'Kind en Gezin' go back to a period when doctors and nurses ruled the services, focusing on health and hygiene of infants. The background of many workers in childcare services is paramedical (eg nursing) or vocational training, rather than psycho-pedagogical. It is still unusual for the head of a nursery to have an initial training in educational or psychological sciences. Experts therefore call for the development of training for senior staff in nurseries at the level of higher education outside the university.

Family day care ('opvanggezinnen') merits consideration on its own. A distinction needs to be

made between the services provided on a strictly private basis and those affiliated to a family day care service and receiving support and supervision. The former are at present almost beyond any kind of public guidance or control. To put it bluntly, anyone can still become 'registered' for this kind of service, operating as a private enterprise. These independent family day care providers are currently even allowed to take care of more children (5) than those affiliated to a family day care service (recently increased to 4 from 3). In this respect, training projects such as the one developed by VBJK in cooperation with 'Kind en Gezin', as part of the NOW Programme, are to be welcomed: this project is more intensive and extensive than average 'basic courses' offered elsewhere; some initial screening allows selection of the most motivated candidates; and the trainers are highly qualified and experienced. The demand however clearly exceeds the places available, especially from long-term unemployed women with low formal qualifications.

A major handicap arises from the modest qualifications required of several types of childcare workers, especially family day carers ('onthaalmoeders'). They need no formal level of training or specific qualifications. Moreover, the amount of supervision from 'Kind en Gezin' remains low (at most, two visits a year) and still focuses more on infrastructure rather than on educational and interactive skills.



**THE STATUS OF CHILDCARE WORKERS**

The lack of status and low earnings is most keenly felt among family day carers, and probably has a negative impact on workers and supervisors alike. These poor conditions militate against raising the qualifications required of workers and increasing their willingness to undertake continuous training. Lack of subsidies and inadequate pay, especially among 'private childcare institutions', a label which refers to individuals taking care of more than 5 children, runs the risk of these childcare workers being more preoccupied with financial survival than increasing the quality of their work.

## THE EXTENT OF REGULATION AND SUPERVISION

Many professionals working in childcare services in Flanders call for an extension of the services that are regulated and monitored by public agencies such as *'Kind en Gezin'*. They see this as an important requirement for the improvement of quality in services. This view has been expressed in particular in relation to the 'private childcare institutions' mentioned above and to school-age childcare, especially as both types of services have expanded rapidly in recent years. Proposals include the need for specified minimum qualifications for all workers involved in these services, making attendance on a training course compulsory, and issuing an 'establishment certificate'. This would reduce the existing diversity, especially in rapidly expanding 'new' areas, such as school-age childcare.

## CONCLUSION

The picture presented in this article may sound bleak or even overtly pessimistic. If the reader perceives this article that way the blame should be put on the writer, not on the practice. Evaluating the current quality of services in Flanders depends on the perspective taken. As a drunk may perceive his glass disappointingly half empty, a sober man may perceive it as comfortably half full.

It remains beyond doubt that substantial improvements can and needs to be made to reach appropriate levels of quality in childcare provision. But this is true of many Member States. I am inclined to take the positive view. From that perspective, I can but welcome the increasing awareness and ongoing concern to improve standards and practices. The issue of quality is becoming as prominent as the issue of quantity (i.e. number of places). Moreover, this concern is shared by the different actors involved. Parents, professionals and policy-makers alike perceive what is at stake. The importance of good quality is also voiced on behalf of (or

exceptionally by) the children involved. Many agree that further initiatives need to be taken urgently, with the issue of training clearly central to a strategy for achieving services that deserve a 'high quality' label.

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# ANNUAL REPORT

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BELGIUM  
FLEMISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

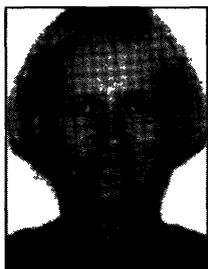
## NEWS FROM BELGIUM

\*At Federal level, an agreement was made between employers and trade unions at the end of 1992 to spend 0.05% of the private sector wage bill on childcare services; the Government legally recognised this agreement in a Royal Decree issued in September 1993. This new money, amounting to about 600 million BF per year, will be provided via the Employment Fund, and will be exclusively used to pay staff costs in childcare services rather than capital costs. Initial grants have mainly gone to school-age childcare services.

\*In the French Community a regulation for childcare centres was adopted in March. It contains principles taken from the Council Recommendation on Child Care and the Early Childhood Charter, which was drawn up following extensive consultations in 1990-1991, under the aegis of the Minister for Social Affairs, with professionals and users of childcare services. The principles include: the right of the child to have access to a quality childcare centre, with a pedagogical programme and in surroundings which are age appropriate and which enable physical, psychological and social development; centres must respect the cultural identities of children and pay attention to the special needs of children with disabilities; and centres should promote closer relationships with parents. The regulation is so important because it defines in legal terms the organizing principles for all centres subsidized by the O.N.E.. As such it may be an important starting point for a policy to promote quality. Now, O.N.E. must set specific goals and define a detailed programme for implementation and allocating resources, in particular for training, evaluation and supervision.

\*In the Flemish Community, the Government has been unable to resolve the political deadlock over school-age childcare services, arising from the conflicting interests and perspectives of the different Ministries involved (see 1992 Annual Report for more background). As a result, no comprehensive and integrated policy has yet been developed. The issue however continues to have a high priority, with new initiatives emerging at grass-roots levels and an important development at Federal level concerning funding (see above).

# A NEW CHILDCARE LEAVE SCHEME : TOWARDS A BETTER FAMILY LIFE AND LESS UNEMPLOYMENT



Jytte Juul Jensen

**In 1994, an improved Child-care Leave scheme comes into force, as part of a bigger leave scheme which offers paid leave not only to care for children but also to undertake training or as a sabbatical break from employment. The new scheme will contribute to several policy**

**areas: labour market, education and family needs. One objective is to reduce unemployment, by taking on unemployed people as substitutes for workers on leave. Another objective is to better the qualifications of the workforce. A third objective, expressed in an official statement accompanying the new Act, is to "give more time and quality of life in the daily life of families with children so that, considering their own wishes and needs, they can organize their life, (and) so parents and children can spend more time together". The new leave will "give each individual...the possibility to realize a better life through leave for training, childcare or sabbatical".**



**F**or some time in Denmark, there has been 14 weeks Maternity Leave after the birth, followed by 10 weeks Parental Leave which is a family right to be divided between father and mother as they choose.

Almost all mothers take both types of leave, whereas only 3% fathers take Parental Leave. On the other hand, half of all fathers use their right to two weeks of Paternity Leave. Payment for leave is

on a flat rate basis (at the same level as unemployment benefit), but many collective agreements supplement the legal entitlement; all public sector workers get full pay while on leave, as do some private sector workers.

In 1992, there was a radical improvement of leave for parents: the new scheme introduced in 1994 provides a further improvement. Each parent can take leave to care for their children of between 13 and 56 weeks (in addition to the established 10 week Parental Leave period). Each worker has an unconditional right to take the first 26 weeks of leave; the next 26 weeks depend on the employer's agreement. The right to leave extends to people who are unemployed and on welfare benefits as well as self-employed and family workers.

A flat rate payment is made to parents on leave, set at 80% of the level for Maternity and Parental Leave (2035 DKK per week). From a Danish point of view, unpaid leave is no use and gives no real choice for parents as they cannot afford to take leave. The relatively low payment for the new leave will be one of the barriers to taking it.

For equal opportunity reasons, as it is stated explicitly in the proposal for the Act, both mothers and fathers have an individual non-transferable right to take leave. The parents can take leave at the same time or consecutively. This means that leave can be taken for two twelve months periods for each child if both the mother and the father take this opportunity. Leave can be taken at any time until a child reaches the age of 9, and can be divided into blocks of leave, with a minimum length of 13 weeks. The scheme is therefore very flexible in some respects, although it also lacks flexibility in others: leave must be taken on a full time basis and cannot be taken in blocks shorter than 13 weeks.

The leave scheme introduced in 1992 (which was less flexible and conditional on employers' agreement) was used primarily by mothers (95%) and many took it immediately after Maternity and Parental Leave when their child was only 6 months

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old. The new leave scheme can be seen as responding to the wishes of some mothers: in surveys which have asked mothers how ideally they would like their children to be looked after, 37% respond that children aged between 1 and 2 years old should be looked after by their mother. Now they get this possibility. While there is a risk that this extended leave will increase labour market inequality, the solution must not be that mothers are not allowed to take leave - but that fathers also use their entitlement. Trade unions and employers have a big role to play here, recognising that workers also are parents.

In a national study, fathers and mothers agreed on four reasons why fathers did not take any part of the 10 week Parental Leave period: finance (as fathers earn more, it costs families more if fathers take leave); the length of the leave (the leave period is too short as mothers are still breast-feeding); the workplace (fathers jobs do not permit leave); and the possibility of the father taking leave was never discussed (see Carlsen and Larsen 1993). The new scheme improves the length, but not the payment which is even lower. The minimum leave period is 13 weeks, which is important as Swedish research suggests that men need to take a long enough period of leave to develop their competence and confidence in caring for children and housework, otherwise taking leave does not have longer term impact on how these tasks are shared between mothers and fathers. On the other hand it seems, also from Swedish experience, that part time leave options are important for fathers, but these are not possible in the new childcare scheme. Overall, however, the scheme is clearly innovative because fathers have their own, non-transferable leave period; if they take leave, it is not taken from the mother's leave entitlement. Spreading knowledge of the scheme is very important, and it will be crucial to follow closely men's use of it.

Childcare Leave also has the objective of reducing waiting lists for public services for young children. This has been a major political concern in recent years. Parents who are at home on leave are not allowed to use public services for children under 3, and only half time places are available for children over 3. Furthermore, local authorities, which are responsible for services, have the option of giving an additional payment (maximum 35,000 DKK per year) to parents taking leave. About two-thirds of all local authorities will use this option, paying on average 30,000 DKK a year to parents who take leave, because they want to encourage more parents to take leave and not use publicly funded services;

many local authorities have decided to give this subsidy only to parents with children under 3 years.

In October 1993, the Government stated that all children from 12 months of age will be guaranteed a place in a publicly funded service in 1996. This commitment clearly indicates an expectation that many parents will take Childcare Leave of at least 6 months after Maternity and Parental Leave. However, it is essential that local authorities also offer places for children from 6 months old, so parents really have a choice between work and leave; otherwise, if no services are available, they may be forced to take leave.

Childcare Leave does not restrict access to the other types of leave introduced in the new law. Leave for training is for one year, paid at 100% of unemployment benefit (in other words, at a higher rate than childcare leave); sabbatical leave is for one year, but with the same payment as leave for childcare. Unlike the first part of the Childcare Leave, both leaves are conditional on employer's agreement and, for sabbatical leave, on the employment of an unemployed person as a replacement.

Is it not costly for public expenditure to introduce such leave schemes? Not in the existing situation with high unemployment. It is expected that many workers on leave (an estimated 75%) will be replaced by unemployed workers, making the new Act neutral in terms of public spending.

Some employers are concerned about not getting a qualified substitute and other problems created by leave. Such concerns can be a strong barrier to employees taking leave. But "what is striking about Sweden, which has a long established and extensive system of Parental leave, is how little difficulty it seems to cause most employers" (EC Network, 1994; 20). At the present stage of industrialization it seems very difficult to create many new jobs, so the approach must be to divide the existing jobs between the unemployed and employed, and distribute the work-load over the life-time of the individual. This policy may avoid a large group of long-term unemployed people being expelled from the labour market, with the danger of creating a society divided into two parts with consequent social problems. To help to avoid this is a crucial objective of the new leave schemes.

With this new Childcare Leave scheme, Denmark has moved well up the league table of leave arrangements compared with other Nordic countries and now has a high standard for length, payment, flexibility and fathers' rights compared to

other countries in the European Union. The new scheme has the potential to be a big success. Even at this early stage there are already signs that it will prove popular. To guarantee this success, it has to be monitored closely, with information and research on how the scheme works out in practice both for family life and the workplace. The gender dimension must be included in this monitoring, so an evaluation can be made of the consequences for both mothers and fathers. It is important that the new scheme has been introduced initially on a 3 year basis, after which it will be reviewed.

The new leave scheme, taken overall, is a radical approach to labour market policy aimed at reducing unemployment. It can also improve quality of life for children, fathers and mothers by giving rights and possibilities to individuals to take a break from their jobs.

## NEWS FROM DENMARK

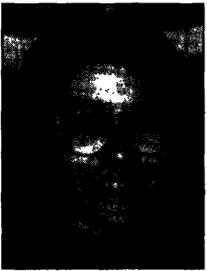
\*In October, the Government stated that all children from 1-5 years of age will be guaranteed a place in a publicly funded service by 1996. Even before this commitment, new places were being created as never before. In 1993, there were 36,000 new places in services for children below compulsory school and providing out-of-school care; for 1994 27,000 new places are expected. If this growth is achieved, places will have increased by 44% in the six years from 1988 to 1994 - 130,000 extra places in a country with a population of just over five millions.

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# NURSERY SCHOOLS : A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT FOR TWO TO SIX YEAR OLDS



Martine Felix

**In France, schooling is compulsory from the age of six when children start primary school (école élémentaire). However, virtually all children go to school well before this age. In 1992, 99% of three-year-olds were in nursery schools, commonly known as "école maternelle"; many two year olds (36%) also attended. Altogether, there is provision for 2,6 million children between 2 and 5 years of age. Nursery schools are open from 8.30 to 16.30 and they care for children from all economic and cultural backgrounds.**

**T**he Ministry of Education is responsible for providing the teaching staff. As well as school meals and supervision during lunch breaks between 11.30 and 13.30, the communes are responsible for providing facilities and additional staff for certain school activities and any activities provided before and after school or in holiday periods. This mainly involves providing assistants (*agents de service des écoles maternelles*) whose task is to help teachers in caring for the children (for example, with hygiene, dressing, meals etc.) and to help in the upkeep of the premises. Each school has at least one of these attendants. Out-of-school activities are organised by supervisors recruited by communes or registered associations.

The great social achievement of the nursery school is that it has managed to combine specific educational aims with the principle of a free service (excepting out-of-school care and meals, which

require a contribution from parents based on their income). This system is deservedly appreciated by the French population and particularly so, it would seem, by the children themselves. However, the number of children per class (in 1992, the national average was 27.5) is often considered excessive, especially for the under-threes. It should nevertheless be stressed that this average figure has gone down over the years; for example, in 1980-1981 the national average was 30 children per class.

## A CENTURY OF HISTORY

The constitutional decree of 18 January 1887 on primary education, designed to organise schooling for children over the age of two, specified in its first Article that "écoles maternelles are early education establishments where children of both sexes together receive the care required for their physical, moral and intellectual development". At first, the main aim was to care for children of working-class parents in urban and industrial areas while their mothers were at work. Then gradually, under the pressures of heavy social demand, these schools spread throughout the country and came to accept the entire child population.

Unlike primary education, nursery schooling has not undergone many reforms because the population has been satisfied with its methods and results, even if a few controversies (discussed further below) crop up regularly. Nursery schools have always had triple aims: to educate children, to introduce them to school and learning and to socialise them. Each generation has seen emphasis placed on one aim or another; the idea is to make learning to read the absolute priority for 1993-1994. Laws, memorandums and decrees have all helped

to reinforce the specific objectives of the nursery school, and to highlight the very special place it has come to occupy within the school system. The Act of 11 July 1975 endeavoured to harmonise theory and practice by recognising the progress made by the nursery school in adapting its methods, in response both to the characteristics of the population catered for and scientific knowledge about child development. The aims of the nursery school are summarized as follows: "The teaching supports the awakening of the child's personality". The memorandum of 2 August 1977 proposed activities "to form children's minds so that they will gradually acquire control over certain objects in the world around them". The memorandum of 30 January 1986 on "lines of development for the nursery school" marked a fundamental break with previous legislation. It declared that nursery schooling and daycare services have different functions: nursery schools are not daycare centres.

The framework law on education (No. 89-486) of 10 July 1989 reflected the political will to make education the top national priority, contributing to equality of opportunity. Education was established as a right and Article 2 of this law stipulated that "the possibility shall be given to each and every child from the age of three of being accepted in a nursery school or class (...) where requested by the family". Admission of two-year-olds was given priority in schools located in a socially disadvantaged environment.

## A POLICY OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

The overriding objective of the nursery school is to develop each child's potentiality to the full and give him or her the best chance to do well at school and integrate into social life. The aim is first and foremost to arouse the young child's "desire to learn", stimulate awareness and curiosity and prepare for the transition to primary schooling.

In the context of establishing an educational process that would really promote equality of opportunity, the major innovation of the 1989 framework law was putting in place three cycles intended to produce greater coherence to the learning of young children within the overall system of education.

Article 4 states that "schooling is organised into cycles for which are defined objectives and national curriculums requiring an annual progression and criteria for assessment". The aim is to create closer links between nursery and primary schools. Three basic tools were introduced in 1989 to ensure education worked along new lines and more responsively to each child's development: pedagogical reforms embodied in the cycles; Priority Education Zones; and new teacher training methods.

**1.** Definition of the Cycles: the decree (No. 90-788) of 6 September 1990 laid down new organisational and operational procedures in nursery and primary schools. The introduction of cycles aims to enable each pupil to progress at his or her own rhythm, avoiding the need to repeat years, and is consequently more consistent with an individualised approach to children. Schooling from the nursery school through to the end of primary school is divided into three pedagogical cycles:

- The early learning cycle which takes place at the nursery school;
- The core learning cycle, which begins in the last year of the nursery school and continues over the first two years at primary school. This cycle not only provides a link between nursery school and primary school, but also takes into account the achievements of each pupil to ensure better continuity in learning.
- The in-depth learning cycle, which corresponds to the last three years at the primary school and leads to the first cycle in secondary education.

The objectives of each cycle are laid down by instructions from the Minister for Education.

**2.** Priority Education Zones: these Zones (*Zones d'Education Prioritaires*) have been established to combat high levels of school failure observed in certain geographical areas and to make an equal opportunity policy more workable. "Contractual policies" concluded between the State and local authorities have been implemented in areas selected by a national commission of the Délégation Interministérielle à la Ville. These three or five year contracts apply to a particular geographic zone and enable contractual partnerships to be formed around a joint project with increased financial resources. Project, partnership, communication between school and neighbourhood, consideration of the

child and its family - these are the fundamental concepts embodied in the contracts.

The very existence of these schemes, both more comprehensive and more "targeted", demonstrates the variety of solutions that will be needed to establish equality of opportunity. The Ministry of Education has not standardised the system, recognising that all children do not have the same capacities, development, rates of learning. It has left room for innovation and for teachers to adapt their teaching within the context of specific programmes.

**3. Teacher Training:** In order to put these principles into practice, and bridge the gap between primary education and secondary education, teachers now receive two years of training (after a university degree or equivalent qualification), in Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Mâitres. Whatever the type of teaching they subsequently choose, they all follow a common-core syllabus.

One of the questions of the moment is whether, in view of the political changes that occurred in March 1993, these three tools will prove permanent enough to enable proper assessment of their relevance and efficiency.



**SCHOOL FOR UNDER-THREES: A LONG-STANDING DEBATE THAT IS STILL WITH US.**

For or against schooling for the under-threes: it is not a new issue. As far back as 1881, government documents had already set nursery schools the task of admitting very young children. What has completely changed the scene today is the greater number of under-threes accepted into school over the past fifteen years. Note, however, that the proportion of under-threes attending school has been on a slight downturn since 1988. The aim here is not to try to give a cut-and-dried answer, but rather to provide some facts that will throw light on the issue. First, a few observations:

- A child under three does not have the same needs or rhythms, does not fit in the same way

into a group, does not have the same types of interest as a three year old. More generally, there is a substantial difference between the maturity of a child under-three and of a three-year-old. Most of today's nursery schools are intended for the over-threes, whether in terms of pedagogy, design or architecture.

- Attendance of two year olds at school is not greatly affected by female employment and social disparities. The attendance rate for two year olds with mothers who are not employed (35%) is similar to that for all two year olds (37%). The nursery school does not play the predominant role providing care for children which has sometimes been attributed to it.
- However, the shortage of daycare services has an impact on the nursery school: 48% of parents applying for a school place for a child under-three need their child to be looked after on an all-day basis.

Against the background of a shortage of available or accessible facilities providing care for children and a limitation on the number of places for the under-threes at nursery school, the question that has to be addressed is that of the child's interest. The refusal of an application from a family is liable to have detrimental consequences for the child if it results in unstable or unsuitable solutions being found.

Nursery schooling for three year olds has met with such success because it has demonstrated its benefits for children in this age group. It remains to assess the extent to which schooling has beneficial or detrimental effects on younger children, given that the school, as it is today, imposes rhythms of daily life which may impede or even arrest the formation of some young children's individuality. This debate goes hand in hand with that about quality of provision for children under-sixes in general. The goal set for the coming years is to offer the best possible provision for young or very young children with very different needs.

## A SCHOOL OPEN TO PARENTS

At the nursery school, the aim is to involve families in their children's school life as closely as possible. The school is open to parents and, at the start of each year, they are invited to a meeting with the teacher and are shown round the school. This opening towards the families creates dynamic links between teachers, parents and children and encourages the families to cross the threshold and take an active part in guiding the nursery education of their children. The fact that parents are able to accompany their child to and from the classroom reflects the school's wish to communicate with the family. In the same spirit, parents are asked to take part in school trips or to help improve the school environment (for example, helping with DIY jobs, donating materials, etc.). Furthermore, the teachers, who are well aware of the impact on children's academic future of their first years at nursery school, are eager to innovate and set up a real dialogue with all the partners involved with young children in order to ensure optimum integration of the very young child into the world outside.

If early socialisation, amongst other factors, plays a role in achieving equal opportunities, every country must acquire the appropriate means to attain this goal. It will be up to the public authorities to supply each school with the means of offering high-quality provision that will place young children right at the centre of the concerns of both family and school.

## NEWS FROM FRANCE

\*Five years after they were launched in 1988, 'childhood contracts' (*contrats enfance*) - for more details see the 1992 Annual Report) are yielding encouraging results. By the end of 1993, 1,500 contracts had been signed covering 2,200 communes accounting for a third of the population of under-sixes. A recent report shows that: the contracts have led to a substantial increase in services (an extra 22,000 full time places and 103,000 places in part time and other types of service); communes with few or no facilities mainly use contracts to develop more 'traditional' services (eg. *crèche*, *halte-garderie*, out-of-school care) and, more recently, support for family day care; bigger communes are also using contracts to develop drop-in centres (*maisons ouverts*), training schemes and posts for 'coordinators'. Larger communes (with over 20,000 inhabitants) are more likely to sign contracts than small communes and in general rural areas have not been much involved. However, contracts continue to be promoted, in particular showing the advantages of small communes grouping together to develop an early childhood policy.

# COMPANY SPONSORED CHILDCARE IN WEST GERMANY



Monika Jaeckel

**The situation of childcare remains different for both parts of unified Germany. In the East, company childcare, which was common in the former GDR including on-site nurseries (for children under 3) and kindergartens (for children from 3 to 6) as well as extensive vacation programmes for children, has been completely taken away due to the introduction of the market economy. However, in the West companies are gaining interest in supporting childcare programmes.**

**T**his is due to the low level of public provision of services in the West; by contrast, public provision still roughly covers the demand in the East. According to the latest study of the women's magazine "Brigitte" (Brigitte Untersuchung '92': Kinderbetreuung in Deutschland, Hamburg 1992), only 7% of the mothers in West Germany are fully satisfied with childcare provision. This is especially the case for children under three. But there is also a shortage of kindergarten provision for three and four year olds of about 30%, increasing to 40-45% depending on the region. Of the 1.4 million kindergarten places provided in West Germany, only 200,000 offer full day provision. Out-of-school provision for children over 6 amounts to only 4%, not even enough to cover the urgent needs of the population of single mothers in West Germany.

For women working full time, therefore, it is extremely difficult to find adequate publicly funded

childcare provision. This is especially true for qualified women, as the scarce places usually go to low income families. The problem is however, not only a quantitative one, but also a question of the way services are organised. Mostly the places that are available do not match the needs of working women; opening hours do not correspond to working hours and there are no hot midday meals provided. This is also true for German schools, as the German school system is organised on a half-day basis.

Companies on the other hand are gaining interest in retaining their qualified female staff after Parental Leave. The lack of adequate childcare services proves to be one of the most severe bottlenecks to be overcome in recruiting qualified female labour. Often company involvement in childcare is reduced to the option of making 'on-site' provision. But this is not the road most West German companies are currently taking. Many companies hesitate to bring childcare services into their premises and to become directly involved in and responsible for running them, as it may bring foreign dynamics into the corporate culture. Conclusions from cost-benefit analysis are mainly unfavourable; 'on-site' childcare services involve high investment costs and are only able to serve a small group of employees (usually an 'on-site' centre provides places for 40-50 children).

Therefore companies in West Germany are currently involved in a variety of different approaches:

- Company sponsorship of community-based services with places reserved for company employees.
- Consortium projects, where several companies in an area (for instance Frankfurt based companies) jointly fund a kindergarten, organised and run by a private welfare organisation.
- Employee childcare initiatives that obtain funds and rooms from the company, but organise the childcare programme themselves.

- The "Kinderbüro" in Munich and Frankfurt/Main is a childcare resource and referral service for company employees. Employees of those companies which have a contract with the "Kinderbüro" can obtain referrals appropriate to their specific childcare needs and preferences; in their own homes, near their homes or near their jobs; a place in a creche or a kindergarten, a home-based arrangement (childminder, au-pair or nanny), out-of-school care; or for special occasions like the illness of a child, a parent or a other regular carer, or a training course away from home.

An interesting aspect of these new company childcare programmes is that they have opened up new channels for public-private partnership in the field of childcare provision, creating a synergy effect which is increasing the provision of places in West Germany. For example:

- In Frankfurt/Main, and soon in Stuttgart, locally based companies and the local authority are jointly sponsoring childcare resource and referral centres.
- In Munich, the city council and some of the largest Munich based companies are cooperating in the funding of employee childcare initiatives as well as in recruitment and training programs for childminders (*Tagesmutter*).

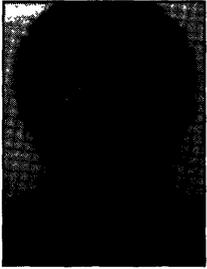
New resources for services are urgently needed in West Germany as recent legislation has guaranteed by 1996 a publicly funded place in kindergarten for children aged 3 and over, at the same time as city and state (*lander*) budgets are facing severe cuts due to the costs of reunification. Consequently the developments described are widely welcomed.

## NEWS FROM GERMANY

\*Unification led to controversial debates because of very different policies in the two parts of Germany on childcare services and abortion. A law passed in 1992 by the Constitutional Court (*'Schwangerenhilfegesetz'*: law on support measures for pregnant women) was relatively restrictive on abortion, but established the legal right of children to a publicly funded kindergarten place by 1996. It has also opened up a new debate on the duty of the welfare state to provide sufficient childcare services: if abortion is to be effectively discouraged, it is argued that conditions in society must be child and parent friendly.

The legal commitment to provide kindergarten places puts great pressure on the lander and local governments, since additional funds have not been allocated by the federal government. This has produced several trends: in some areas, the lowering of standards, especially increasing group size; the creation of mixed teams of workers in kindergartens, including staff with no training; increasing popularity of mixed age groups, including in the new lander in the East where kindergartens are dealing with reduced funds and demand by taking older and younger children; and more generally, a movement towards greater flexibility, for example providing services on an hourly basis to meet local demands. There has also been a trend in many lander to pay more attention to services for children under 3, mainly involving playgroups, parent-run initiatives and other less traditional types of provision which are being included, for the first time, within lander guidelines for funding.

# TO KNOW CHILDREN BETTER



*Vivie Papadimitriou*

**Greece has two systems of centre-based services for young children. One system consists of nurseries for children under 2.5 years, and kindergartens (paedikos stathnos) for children aged 2.5 to 5.5 years. These services are the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, and are open for 9 hours a day, from 07.00 to 16.00. Their main purpose is to provide care for children with working parents, but they are also regarded as having a pedagogical role. The second system consists of nursery schools (nipia-gogion) for children between 3.5 and 5.5 years. This service is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and the schools are open for just 3-4 hours a day, in the morning. Their main role is pedagogical and preparation for primary schooling.**

two types of institution is similar, except for their length and some relatively small differences in the courses. However, whereas nursery school teachers can work in kindergartens, kindergarten workers cannot work in nursery schools.

This dual system of services, providing for the same age group of children produces, several problems which are difficult to solve because the State does not define the scope of the work of the two types of service; for example, cooperation between workers with different training is not always easy and the different services can create difficult choices for parents. Cooperation between the services, based on their respective experience, could contribute positively to improving education for young children, within the framework of a broader social policy. The latter should aim both at appropriate training for those who will work with young children and at cooperation with the whole family. Particular attention should be paid to this latter point; for when a child starts at kindergarten or nursery school, difficulties and problems which may have been latent upto then, may become apparent when the child finds itself among other children.

Training is important for other groups of workers. Until now, family day care has been uncommon in Greece. To provide more services, especially for the children of working parents, and to ensure they meet the needs of children, the Family and Child Care Centre in Athens has developed a new training programme for family day carers, as part of the NOW Initiative; this is the first programme of its kind in Greece. The approach taken has been to train a group of mothers, who will form a core of trained workers who can in turn work with prospective family day carers, training them to provide a service for pre-school and school-age children. The programme was initially implemented in two municipalities in the larger Athens area. The municipalities not only helped with the implementation of the programme in their areas but disseminated information about the programme so that it was widely known about. The programme will be

**A**lthough the two systems provide for children in the same age group, the staff have different training. Teachers in nursery schools train in University Pedagogy Departments, while kindergarten workers train in Infant Care Departments in Technical Educational Institutes; these Institutes are part of the tertiary education sector. Before 1984, Pedagogy Departments were 'Child Care Schools', offering a two year course; now the Pedagogy Departments offer a four year course. By contrast, Infant Care Departments offer a shorter course, lasting 3.5 years. In practice, the training in these

extended soon to large provincial cities, with the prospect of being introduced into rural areas.

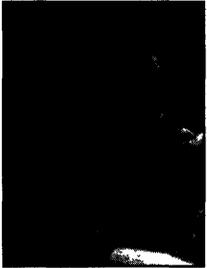
Participants in the programme had to be between 25 and 45, with at least 12 years of formal education; there were a few requirements concerning their homes, where they would be working, for example that they should be safe and that there was enough space. The programme includes 240 hours of theoretical training, organised on a modular basis; modules include child development, early childhood issues, health care, music and rhythm, and are supplemented by practical training when participants spent 6 hours a day in a kindergarten or nursery, working with children, practising skills, observing and recording, etc. A centre was established for the children of the participants, for the times when they were training

We believe that this programme of training will help the creation in Greece of another type of service for young children with working parents. Close cooperation is needed with officials in the relevant Ministries, for them to appreciate the conditions needed to implement this type of programme and to take account of this new type of provision. Cooperation is also needed with local government, in order for the officials in charge of services to assume their responsibilities. Local government is a dynamic institution in Greece, and the aim of the programme is to develop cooperation between social organizations, to deal more effectively with problems arising in the daily life of families.

A recent Presidential Decree of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Social Security announced a new Programme (MIDA), whose objective is the training of mothers as family day carers. However there are some differences between the two programmes of training -NOW and MIDA. For example, trainees in the programme supported by NOW receive 550 hours of training, compared to 40 hours for MIDA, and the NOW programme requires trainees to have a higher level of formal education.

Within the framework of the NOW Initiative, we have been able to prepare a programme for developing a service for the children of working parents, to supplement existing kindergartens and other centres. I hope that the programme will provide a basis for the development of similar initiatives in both urban and rural areas.

# THE REPORT OF THE SECOND COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



Anne McKenna

**The Second Commission on the Status of Women submitted its report to the government in January 1993. The Commission was chaired by Ms Mella Carroll, a Judge of the High Court and comprised 19 members, representative of the social partners, women's organisations, and women in farming. It was set up by the government in 1990 to make recommendations to achieve the full participation of women on equal terms with men in economic, social, political and cultural life. It was also asked to consider the feasibility of possible measures, to pay special attention to the needs of women in the home and finally to estimate the cost of all its recommendations. The Commission's Report contains twelve chapters: this article focuses on two of them - Women and Work and Women and Childcare.**

## WOMEN, WORK AND CHILDCARE

**T**he Report is realistic in its assessment of the current childcare situation for working parents:

*"At present in Ireland childcare as a community or economic service is characterised by a virtually total absence of standards and protective legislation and by minimal financial support. The Commission seeks to make recommendations which will change this situation for the better by responding to the actual needs emerging in our society."*

The Commission notes that the rapid increase in the participation rate for women in the workforce (from 8% in 1971 to 27% in 1991) has signalled the development of childcare in Ireland as elsewhere. At present 49% of the female labour force is made up of married women and 35% of women with children under seven years work outside the home. The Report considers that women should no longer be regarded as a reserve labour supply to meet shortages of male labour.

There is a need to take account of women, who make up half of our human resources; this need is highlighted by the current inefficient use of the considerable investment in women in Irish education and training. But there is also a human rights argument, which applies to women, to children and to men. For women it is stated in terms of access to childcare services in order to enter the labour market: for children, in terms of an optimum developmental start in early education: for men, it is the right to share child rearing responsibilities "for those men who wish to develop the nurturing aspect of their relationship with children".

The case for childcare services is treated under a number of headings: social equity; economic efficiency; labour market trends; support for home makers (i.e. women who work full-time as home makers and carers and yet need some access to services to support their parenting); and finally, optimum development of children. As a consequence, the report concludes that childcare provision is a public policy function, which needs to be integrated into unemployment, health and education policies, as well as being an individual responsibility.

The Report considers that government initiatives to date do not add up to a coherent childcare policy, with the policy of the Department of Health at the moment operating on a reactive rather than proactive basis. The Council Recommendation on Child Care is referred to throughout the Chapter on Childcare. For example, it notes that the fact that

childcare programmes will cost money does not justify a policy vacuum; rather what is to be recommended is the approach of the Recommendation which advocates a staged programme. The report outlines the importance of the Recommendation as follows:

*“An important stimulus has been given to the development of a childcare policy in Ireland by the agreement of an EC Recommendation on Childcare...At paragraph 4.3.2. of this report we make a number of recommendations on the kinds of initiatives the government might take so that it would be in a position to report progress to the EC Commission in three years time.” (4.2.4)*

The objective proposed is to move, over time, to the average level of provision in the European Union. The report notes that local authority structures are insufficiently developed to play a significant role in the running and financing of childcare services. Since the Health Services are operated on a regional basis and since they currently have the lead role in the provision of nurseries (although only for children “at risk”), the Report recommends siting the proposed Childcare Policy Unit within the Department of Health, and appointing a ‘childcare co-ordinator’ in each of the eight Health Board regions. It also proposes a tax regime for providers of the services as well as for the operating costs; standards for childcare services and a method of implementing these standards; provision of recognised training for workers in childcare services; and the expansion of out-of-school services.

The Report proposes a budget to underwrite these aims. Four methods of funding services are considered:

- state-run community based childcare services, provided on the lines of the national school system with pro-rata charges to parents;
- increasing the value of children’s allowances paid to parents;
- tax relief for parents’ childcare costs;
- allocation of money to be used in a targeted way through the proposed national Childcare Policy Unit.

The Report supports the last option; the others are rejected on grounds of cost or, in the case of tax relief, because it would not increase provision and because most benefit would go to higher income parents who pay higher tax.

The Report also makes a case for the use of European Union Structural Funding for childcare facilities on the basis of promoting balanced social and economic development; promoting training and employment opportunities for women; job creation; and assisting diversification of the rural economy. The Report states however that “what is at question is the political will at national not EC level”.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REPORT**

The Commission recommended the establishment of a Women’s Affairs Department, headed by a Minister of Cabinet rank. Instead, following a change of government in January 1993, a new Department of Equality and Law Reform was created, headed by a Minister of Cabinet rank, and with responsibility for all equality measures, including women, persons with disabilities and travelling people. The new Minister has circulated each Government Department with the recommendations of the Commission’s Report, requesting its plans for the implementation of those recommendations relevant to that department.

The Department of Enterprise and Employment has stated its wish to be represented on the Childcare Policy Unit. It supports the recommendation of the Report that “the development of workplace childcare facilities, in feasible locations, should be pursued on the social partner agenda”, and proposes to consider the Commission’s recommendation that childcare facilities should be made available for all trainees in a national training programme. With regard to its training programmes for childcare workers, the Department propose to investigate the provision of evening courses for existing “childminders”. The Department of the Environment has also signalled its willingness to participate fully in the Childcare Policy Unit. Being the Department responsible for local government, it proposes to bring the recommendation regarding local childcare partnerships to the attention of managers at local level.

The Department of Health however does not see the role prescribed for it by the Commission as totally appropriate to their stated policy. It considers that the Childcare Policy Unit, recently established

within that Department, relates only to services for children at risk. Furthermore, the Department does not consider the regulation of general services, available to all pre-school children, to be a priority compared with measures for children at risk.

The Department of Equality and Law Reform has itself set the pace for implementation of the Report. The publication of its own report on "Childcare for Working Parents" is imminent. The Department's programme regarding women and work is substantial and includes:

- a review of Employment Equality legislation, currently in progress;
- the Employment Equality Agency has been asked to draw up a national Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment;
- legislation on maternity leave is being reformed in line with the recent European Directive;
- a Bill has been introduced to provide entitlement to adoptive leave to female employees who adopt a child and to sole male adopters.

The Commission made two interim statements to the government with recommendations and then monitored how these recommendations had been handled. One recommendation for example was for the appointment of a minimum of 40% women or men to state boards. This has been accepted by the government and by all government departments and progress is being closely monitored. In one instance, County Enterprise Boards set up to initiate enterprise and reduce unemployment, representation of women has doubled from 10% to 20% through direct government intervention.

Finally the Minister of Equality and Law Reform has set up a monitoring committee as recommended in the Commission Report. This committee will comprise representatives of the Departments of Health, Social Welfare and Education, the Taoiseach's Office and the Tanaiste's Office; continuity of work will be maintained by an inter-departmental group. The aims of the committee will be to agree the proposals which can be effected in the short term; to monitor the implementation of the recommendations already accepted; and to provide a forum for consultation on the other recommendations of the Report.

## NEWS FROM IRELAND

\*The new Government published its programme early in 1993. This includes a number of aims affecting services for young children: a system of pre-school education for children between 2 and 4 in disadvantaged areas; full implementation of the 1991 Child Care Act; and a major expansion of childcare services.

\*The National Development Plan 1994-1999, published in 1993, is both a means of implementing the new Government's programme and the first step in preparing the EU Community Support Framework. In a Chapter on Human Resources, the Plan includes discussion of childcare under the heading of Support Structures and envisages financial support for childcare services from Ireland's Structural Fund allocation: "*appropriate proposals on childcare will be put forward for support (from the Structural Funds) under both CSF programmes and Community Initiatives*".

# EXPERIENCES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW PROJECTS



Patrizia Ghedini

**At present in Italy, 92% of children between 3 and 6 years of age attend a nursery school ('scuola infanzia'), either public or private. Though attendance is not compulsory, this service has been fully accepted by families, public opinion and at institutional**

**level, not only as an educational service but as the first stage of the school system.**



**T**hese schools were originally created, as in many other European countries, for welfare or charity reasons by private agencies, mostly religious; or as the result of initiatives taken by some Municipalities, especially in the North and Centre of the country, in view of the growing number of women in the labour force and in order to respond to the need to provide childcare for small children from working class families. The main development of these services throughout the country occurred when the State, that is the central government, took direct responsibility for them in 1968, by adopting a national act establishing State-run nursery schools and defining criteria for their objectives and general

management. The 1968 Act was followed in 1969 by the so-called "Didactic and Educational Guidelines" whose implementation was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

By the mid 1980's, more than 80% of children aged 3-6 were enrolled in nursery schools. The Table shows the situation in more detail, in particular how several management bodies or agencies are involved in providing this service: the State, Municipalities, other public agencies, religious bodies and private lay organizations. State-run nursery schools had developed most in the South, where previously there was a marked lack of services.

By 1991-1992, helped by the falling birth rate, the percentage of children attending the service had reached 92% (ISTAT data). The contribution of State-run schools had become more even between the North, Centre and South. Unfortunately, recent official data do not differentiate within the group of schools not run by the State between the ones run by Municipalities or other agencies, public or private, lay or religious.

Explaining to a foreign reader our system for nursery schools and the intricate and fragmented overlapping of competencies - State, Regional, Municipal - has always been rather difficult. It is similarly hard to explain the system of basic training for workers in nurseries (*asilo nido*) in relation to the basic training of teachers in nursery schools. In sum, we can say that the development of nursery schools in Italy has taken place through several parallel systems, which up to a few months

CHILDREN ATTENDING NURSERY SCHOOLS : SCHOOL YEAR 1983-1984						
Percentage of the total number of children enrolled in schools provided by different agencies						
Area		Agency managing school:				
		State	Municipality	Other public agency	Religious agency	Private lay agency
North	%	31	21	7	26	16
Centre	%	49	21	1	26	3
South	%	57	10	3	19	12
Total	%	46	16	4	23	12

Source: ISTAT

back were not even minimally linked, and which included:

- State schools: the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, including the personnel and all the management functions;
- Municipal schools: autonomously established and managed by Municipalities, but still considered as private schools by the Ministry of Education;
- Schools run by other public agencies: these are bodies with their own boards and regulations defining their objectives, which are mostly charitable;
- Schools run by private agencies or individuals: very few of them are lay organisations, the majority are Catholic. They are non-profit services with autonomy in management and receive very modest financial support from the central Government and Municipalities.

The relations between these differing management bodies have always been an issue and problem in Italy, hotly debated and difficult to resolve due to several factors:

- the conflict between central government and local authorities, which involves not only the nursery school system, but more generally the decentralisation of power from the State to Regions and Municipalities;
- the fact that Italy's Constitution defines the possibility of establishing private schools without State support (many documents and opinions have been put forward in order to offer an interpretation of this specific article of the Constitution);
- the presence of two opposing blocks within the Parliament, one based on lay principles, stressing the universal and civic value of public education and schools which must be promoted and developed by the State; the other based on Catholic principles, stressing freedom of choice for families which prefer an education more guided by religious principles;
- Differing positions regarding the management of public nursery schools. Some would prefer to see them run mostly by the State; others would prefer them run by Municipalities as they are closer to the local social fabric and better equipped to respond to the needs of families and the community - even though there is an awareness that the commitment of

Municipalities to nursery schooling varies, with differences especially between the North and the South.

The lack of co-ordination at national level, the lack of a commonly-shared approach, and in particular the lack of a law capable of regulating the relations between public and private bodies and agencies by establishing common educational guidelines which still respect different approaches and viewpoints - together, they have given rise to a system of diverse services that is very varied in what it offers families both quantitatively (e.g. opening hours, meals, transportation) and qualitatively (e.g. staff training, technical support, educational pilot-projects, parents' participation, support for handicapped children, evaluation systems).

In the last few years, however, several positive developments have established conditions for the solution of the above-mentioned problems:

- the weakening of the most extreme approaches and therefore the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between the parties involved;
- the awareness that the crisis of public expenditure requires the development of a comprehensive framework of actions and initiatives to overcome wasteful divisions between public and private agencies;
- the need to integrate policies, strategies and competencies by placing them within a framework stressing children's rights;
- the adoption in 1991 by the Ministry of Education of new "Guidelines for educational activity in State-run nursery schools", prepared by a National Commission composed of about 50 experts who represent different disciplines and cultural approaches.

It is impossible to sum up in just a few lines the contents of these "Guidelines". But in taking into account new social and cultural elements and the new needs of families, they stress in particular the importance for young boys and girls of having their individual, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity recognised. They underline how the development of an individual identity and skills and the acquisition of autonomy represent fundamental elements which must permeate the educational activity in nursery schools. They examine, in a complex analysis based on a multi-disciplinary approach, the issue of children's development - cognitive, physical, communicative, logical, relational and emotional.

The most important point I would like to stress is the level of analytical and consultative work which has accompanied the adoption of these "Guidelines", and the unanimously positive response. Although these guidelines have been defined for State-run nursery schools, many Municipal nursery schools identify with them, as they see innovative features found in several municipal systems of nursery schooling recognised in the Guidelines. Moreover, the Guidelines also provide a point of reference for private schools.

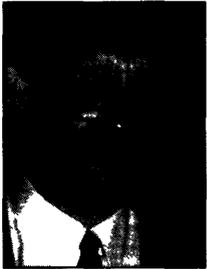
Having moved together within a framework of common educational guidelines represents a basic condition for eventually reaching the drafting of a law on standards and regulations for the entire system of nursery schools, either public or private. Such a law would also define quality indicators, organisational standards, relations between the different agencies running services, the competencies and responsibilities of the Ministry, the Regions and the Municipalities, together with funding systems.

Various bills, put forward by some political parties, are already under discussion by the competent Parliamentary Commission. There are still some points on which an agreement has not yet been reached, in particular with regard to determining competencies at national and local level. However, it seems that converging points of view have emerged on several other items, including:

- the right of access for all children to a system of nursery schools for which educational goals, continuity with other educational services (such as nurseries and primary schools), curriculum guidelines and staff qualifications are clearly stated and defined;
- the need to define national quality indicators (e.g. for building, staffing, continuous training for staff, number of children per class, hours of opening, support for handicapped children, additional support services);
- the creation of a national system of nursery schools comprising public schools, either State or Municipal (so that at last the latter are recognised as public services) and private schools which must agree to follow the quality indicators in order to receive public funds;
- the signing of planning agreements between public and private institutions at regional and local levels in order to respond to the needs of local communities in a more adequate, flexible, informed and co-ordinated way.

It seems certain, however, that the recent political events in Italy and the national elections in Spring 1994 will not permit the adoption of this bill by the current Parliament. Nonetheless, the analysis and work already accomplished provide the right conditions and a good foundation for discussion of this issue by the new Parliament.

# THE DYNAMICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD CARE SERVICES



Jean Altmann

**Not more than 5% of children under three years of age have access to nurseries in Luxembourg. For children over three years of age but under compulsory school age, there are more places in nurseries or nursery school: Luxembourg is one of several Member States**

**that provide such services for 50-80% of children in this age group. However, the opening hours of nursery and primary schools necessitate the provision of other services for children outside school hours. In Luxembourg, as in most other Member States, public provision of such services is inadequate to meet demand, so many women must look for a solution in the private sector.**

**P**ursuing the aims set in a national action programme, the Ministry for Family Affairs has, since 1992, intensified its efforts to develop a network of nurseries (*foyer de jour*), privately run but publicly funded via an agreement with the Ministry. The objective has been to provide a more even regional distribution of services and to adapt the provision to the real needs of families. However, these efforts would not have been possible without the active help of the municipalities; following discussions, the municipalities offered premises that they owned to be transformed into nurseries.

One of the more recent innovations was the creation of the nursery "En Haerz fir eis Kanner" at

Esch-sur-Alzette, a metallurgical centre in the south of the country. This nursery, which opened in November 1992, has been regarded as a pilot project. It offers room to 4 children aged from two months to two years and to 8 children aged from two to four years.

The nursery is the result of a partnership. The local municipality provided the building, the nursery is managed by a private, non-profit organisation and receives funding from the Ministry of Family Affairs following an agreement made between the Ministry and the managing organisation. It provides for the children of staff working in the city hospital and in the local geriatric hospital, and priority will be given to the children of staff who have irregular working hours.

The nursery is open twenty-four hours a day from Monday to Sunday, holidays included. In order to guarantee the best possible use of the nursery, the parents who work irregular hours must hand in their work timetable for each month, no later than the 20th of the preceding month. Generally the child will be in the nursery only during the working hours of the parents, and parents must collect their children as soon as they have finished work, but parents do have the possibility of their children attending for two days a month when they are not working, and during Maternity Leave a mother can arrange for her child to attend for two days a week. Parents' financial contribution for using the nursery is based on conditions laid down by the Ministry for Family Affairs in the agreements it makes with nurseries. It is related to family income and number of children.

A very important principle of the pedagogic work in the nursery is to create a coherence, a wholeness and a simplicity in the daily life of the child. In this pilot project, it has been particularly important in organising the pedagogical work:

- to establish close and mutual cooperation between the parents and the staff;

- to encourage the parents to take part in the activities of the institution;
- to establish stable relationships with the adults;
- to develop a feeling of tolerance in the children and their understanding of human diversity;
- to create an atmosphere which will enable the child to make friends with other children;
- to stimulate the curiosity and creativity of the child and allow the child to concentrate on its activities;
- to establish contact with the local community.

Following the good example of the city of Esch-sur-Alzette, the Ministry of Family Affairs has made further agreements for nurseries. According to the Ministry of Family Affairs it is their job to stimulate and to encourage private initiatives, but the municipalities also have an important part to play. Municipal initiative and help will guarantee a real regional spread of services. Some examples will help to illustrate the progress made in this field.

The municipality of Sanem is building a day nursery for 12 children aged from two months to two years, 24 children aged from two to four years and 12 children over four years of age (who will attend outside school hours). This multi-functional nursery will aim particularly to stimulate the creative development of the child through its facilities, which will include a film projection room and a little theatre. The municipality of Bascharage has decided to transform an old farm into a nursery. It will be able to take 6 children aged from two months to two years, 12 children aged from two to four years, and 8 children over four years of age. This regional nursery will provide for children from several villages. Last but not least the APEMH association has created a nursery in the town of Differdange, intended for both so called normal children and slightly handicapped children. Open since January 1993 this nursery is run by staff who have received appropriate training from specialized courses.

However promising joint ventures involving companies may seem, there are obstacles in the way of their realization. Despite the modest size of companies in Luxembourg, certain employers are becoming more and more conscious of the problems involved in trying to reconcile employment and family responsibilities and the

importance of this issue in the recruitment of women workers. However, managers and heads of companies are unwilling and unable to cope with providing nurseries; as economic organisations, the well-being of children and families cannot be the priority of companies. Another obstacle is the lack of flexibility in working hours and other rigidities in the organization of work.

To achieve genuine equality of opportunity between women and men will require greater flexibility in the world of work, including working hours. A substantial increase in nursery services must continue in the years to come, ensuring that services are located in all regions in the country. The state should actively help and stimulate initiatives of companies and other employers who wish to set up nurseries for the children of their employees. In order to encourage more rapid expansion of a network of nurseries, the state should help private persons as well as associations that establish such services; such help could for example consist of subsidizing part of the investment necessary for the creation of the premises. To help employers support parents can also be done via fiscal laws, again reducing investment costs.

Childminding also has to be developed. Last but not least, in order to support employed parents, it is absolutely necessary to harmonize school hours and work hours through measures such as services providing care outside school hours, school canteens and the organization of extra mural activities at school.

# WHAT IS IN A NAME?



Liesbeth Pot

**Evaluating meanings from an historical perspective sometimes leads to quite exciting perspectives. Therefore, I will briefly review the changing terminologies used to describe the various types of provision for 'care' and 'education' in my country. New names not only reflect changing attitudes but also changing functions. This article can be regarded as an exercise in the semantics of the broad concept of 'childcare' in a specific historical context, limited to centre-based or institutional childcare; in writing it, I have drawn heavily on the historical-sociological work of L.E. van Rijswijk-Clerkx and the more psychologically oriented work of E. Singer on the development of organised childcare in the Netherlands.**

## A GLOBAL HISTORICAL REVIEW

Until the last decades of the 19th century, the distinction between 'care' and 'education' for young children was not very clear. Two institutions provided both functions, mainly for children of poor families: infant schools (*bewaarscholen*) and dame schools (*matressenscholen*). Under the influence of the ideas of Friedrich Froebel and later of Montessori the kindergarten movement slowly replaced the infants

schools. The 'caring' function, favoured by parents, became less prominent and the admission age of three was gradually raised to three and a half years and later to four years. Kindergartens were strongly supported and promoted by parents in the higher social classes.

After World War II, nursery schools were set up for four and five years old children, offering education and preparation for primary school, which started at six. The 'caring' function was explicitly removed and replaced by 'child-centred' pedagogical functions, reflected in admission policy and opening hours. Parents, in practice mothers, were expected to offer care and education at home. Until the late sixties however, private kindergartens and infant schools persisted, admitting younger children and offering services to parents like care facilities.

Earlier attempts to regulate pre-school services only succeeded in 1956, when the Preschool Act was adopted. The pedagogical functions of nursery schools were laid down, defining them as a 'child-centred' pre-school for all children. When nursery education became generally available and free of charge for parents, private nursery classes and kindergartens gradually disappeared.

In 1985, the Act on Basic Schooling integrated nursery schools into the primary school system and compulsory education was lowered from six to five years. The formal school system hardly recognises its 'caring' functions. The Lunchtime Act (1983), stating that school boards should provide accommodation in the school for children to have lunch, might be seen as a rather limited exception to this rule.

The former dame schools provided care (and some education) for even younger children. They were however slowly expelled by more rigorous regulation of hygiene and licensing. Since 1870, private institutions to provide care for children slowly replaced the dame schools. They were called 'kinderbewaarplaatsen' (literally, guarding places for children) and were set up by charitable

ladies for young children of poor working mothers. A broader pedagogical function was only introduced after 1956, when their name changed to daycare centres (*kinderdagverblijven*). There were very few of these centres, only about 30 in 1965.

## NEW TYPES OF CHILDCARE IN THE LATE SIXTIES

The playgroup (*peuterspeelzaal*) movement in the Netherlands shows rather strong similarities to the movement in the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom. There is however an important distinction, certainly compared to the situation in the UK: playgroups in the Netherlands were meant for children of 2 and 3 years of age and they did not compete with nursery education. They were initiated in 1965 by rather well-educated mothers, and were intended to offer all children general developmental opportunities, play and social contacts. As at the time there was little provision for care and education of children under 4, they might be regarded as modern 'kindergartens' for infants and toddlers.

Over the years, however, preparation for school became a highly valued function of playgroups, especially for parents. Leaders of playgroups were called 'teachers' - as in schools. In the 1970s, influenced by early learning programs like Head Start in the United States, Parliament discussed the idea of lowering school admission to 3 years. Playgroups, among others, strongly opposed this idea which in the end was not realised. During the 1980s, schools started to set up playgroups as part of their service to parents, hoping to attract more children. Playgroups were also integrated into community centres, some of which already did work with deprived mothers and their children.

Shortly afterwards, welfare services were influenced by the concept of 'early prevention'. During the 1980s, 'early prevention of problems' became one of the priorities in official youth policy. Playgroups became more aware of their 'stimulative' functions and sometimes co-operated with other 'preventive' services in the neighbourhood. Special home-based intervention projects were set up for children and parents of other cultures, teaching mothers how to play and read with their children in order to prepare

them better for school. Especially in larger cities, where many immigrants lived, playgroups became involved in early learning programmes for deprived children.

Large and generally well resourced organisations for educational support (e.g. VSP-Welzijn, Stichting De Meeuw, Landelijke Pedagogische Centra/OVB, Averroes) tend to define playgroups as 'preschool provisions', assigning to them the function of promoting 'readiness' for school. In Rotterdam, these developments have led to an integrated policy for children under 4. A positive side effect is that the middle-class character of playgroups might disappear.

Playgroups are now widely available and used by more than 50% of all two and three year olds. The 'child-centred' functions of playgroups are slowly replaced by 'educational' functions, closely related to the prevention of school failure and other adverse effects of deprivation. In the future, this might lead to a merging of educational, developmental and social functions, so that playgroups might become a mixture of a kindergarten and nursery school.

## FROM 'CHILDREN'S CENTRES' TO CHILDCARE

In the 1970s and 1980s, the various types of services for young children, except for schools, were called 'children's centres' (*kindercentra*); this term covered playgroups, nurseries, family day care projects and centres providing out-of school care. From its establishment in 1970, WKN (*Werkgemeenschap Kindercentra in Nederland*), a national umbrella organisation for 'children's centres', defined and emphasised the functions for children undertaken by these centres. But in the 1980s, as 'children's centres' were increasingly seen to have an important function in promoting equal opportunities of women, allowing them to prepare for or enter the labour market, the guarding and caring aspects were emphasised. The term 'childcare' (*kinderopvang*), used in official publications, pointed to the 'mother-centred' function of offering care while the main caretaker was occupied elsewhere. In the special government scheme, the Stimulative Measure on Childcare

(1990-1996) (discussed in more detail in the Network's 1992 Annual Report), this already popular term was adopted for all types of full time and part time services - except playgroups. The economic (or instrumental) function of providing care to enable parents to work was stressed over more child-centred educational functions. Arguments related to the labour market proved to be more influential than 'child-centred' arguments in promoting the development of centres for pre-school and school-age children.

However, the 'children's centres' themselves, and especially the older ones, argued that 'care' and 'education' should be seen as an integral part of their services, fearing that the pedagogical aspects of their work would be marginalised. Their prime target group was the children attending the centres; they should have opportunities for broad development and education while their parents were at work. They strongly stressed the importance of quality, referring to the broad developmental, educational and social aspects of the work.

In essence, the Stimulative Measure on Childcare is based on broader functions than simply providing 'care' for children with working parents. The original idea, to set up joint ventures in childcare, was meant to share the funding of services between various interest groups (public authorities, employers, parents) and to integrate various functions, including care, education and child development. In principle, this approach should offer children, mothers and fathers equal opportunities for individual growth and development, and provide a measure for the reconciliation of employment and the care of children. It presupposes however, that public authorities, parents and staff together define the content and the aims of the centres and find ways to guarantee these functions. If this does not happen, 'children's centres' might develop into plain 'guarding' and 'caring' facilities for employed women, like they have been in the past.

### INTEGRATING 'CARE' AND 'EDUCATION'

It took the kindergarten movement more than 60 years to regulate and define its functions for young

children. But in the end, the well-being of all children was clearly accepted by law as a general principle. In my opinion, the well-being of children and parents should be the guiding principle in legislation to guarantee that the functions of 'children's centres' are both 'child' and 'parent centred'. At the same time, the education system should develop a more 'parent centred' approach and also recognise its 'care' functions.

### NEWS FROM THE NETHERLANDS

\*In June 1993, the Government announced an extension of the Stimulative Measure on Childcare (see 1992 Annual Report for more details) for two more years, to the end of 1995. From a purely quantitative view, the Stimulative Measure, which began in 1990, has been very successful. By the end of 1992, there were 48.000 full time equivalent places in centres providing for children under 4 and out-of-school care for older children as well as in family day care; this was more than double the 21.000 places available in 1989 and represented a coverage rate of just over 5% of children aged 0-3, and 0.5% of children aged 4-13. Because many children attend on a part time basis, these places were used by 80.000 children.

New places have been funded from the budget of the Stimulative Measure (260 million NFL in 1993), parental contributions and by money from public authorities (for example, for children with special needs) and employers (who sponsor places for employees). The original intention was that public authorities would take up more places than employers; this has now been reversed so that employers will buy two-thirds of new places. At the end of 1992, 30% of all places were subsidised by employers; however employers actually fund more than half of the 27.000 new places arising from the Stimulative Measure. As a result of this and other developments resulting from the Stimulative Measure, there are more places receiving public funding but the proportion of costs covered by these funds is falling; the proportion covered by contributions from employers and parents is increasing and this

trend will continue as childcare provision increasingly becomes a market commodity.

Growing emphasis on the need for employers to sponsor places increases pressure on employees who are expected to persuade their employers to buy a place. In 1992, more than half of all collective agreements included some type of childcare measure and about 40% of these measures involved employers buying places in services. But about 30% of workers in the private sector are not covered by collective agreements, and self-employed workers are also excluded.

# NURSERIES AND PARENTS



Teresa Penha

**Portugal has about 10 million inhabitants. Between 1981 and 1991, major demographic changes in the age structure of the population resulted in a significant increase in the elderly population. At the same time, the number of children fell by 2.3% per year**

**especially as a consequence of the decrease in fertility. The majority of parents with dependent children aged under 12 are employed; over 60% of mothers work for more than 40 hours per week. Unlike the situation in other countries of the European Union, part time work plays an insignificant role in Portugal's labour market. At the level of infrastructure providing social support for working parents, the Maternity Leave period is still 90 days, fully paid, while Parental Leave can be taken for up to 24 months, but is unpaid. Young couples thus have to face difficult living conditions, especially in the big urban centres where neighbourhood and mutual help networks are weak and the distance between home and workplace is increasing. Parents face growing difficulties in finding sufficient space - physical, social and emotional - to enable them to interact actively with their growing children.**

**T**he majority of children under six years of age receive non-parental care. Children between three and six attend pre-school services (both nursery schools and kindergartens). These services cover about 50% of this age group, with higher coverage rates for inland regions where there is a higher proportion of elderly people. Many children under three years are cared for in informal settings, most commonly by grandmothers. For this young age group of children, formal services are provided in nurseries and by childminders, including some in organised and publicly supported schemes. However these services (both publicly and privately funded) cover only about 11% of this age group, and coverage rates are not uniform, ranging between 7% and 24% in different regions; in Lisbon the percentage is about 9,5%. The objectives of services for this age group are centred on children and their families; therefore they pursue a broad range of care, education and health objectives.

A study conducted by IAC (*Instituto de Apoio à Criança*) of nurseries in the metropolitan area of Lisbon provides a number of insights into their organization and functioning and their ability to accomplish this complex set of objectives. The study covered 55 nurseries - public, financed by the public sector and private. It was based on an interview carried out in each institution, on the observation of one of the groups in each nursery and a questionnaire answered by 64 parents. The data from the questionnaire to the parents cannot be generalised; they should be considered to provide only an indicator of parental opinion, more so because it was not possible to achieve a representative sample of parents. However, even with this qualification, we feel it is interesting to provide some of the information gathered on parents' opinions since very few studies have been carried out in Portugal in this field.

The majority of the parents who answered the questionnaire were professional workers (doctors, teachers, engineers etc.) or were employed in the

commercial and service sectors, which implies that these groups are potentially the most significant users of these services. The fact that “being employed” is the reason most frequently indicated for placing the child in a nursery shows the social importance of this service for working parents. However, other reasons are also important in parental decisions: a significant number mentioned ‘child-related’ reasons such as “to be occupied/to play” and “to have friends/to socialize” which shows a recognition, on the part of parents, of the socialization needs of children even under three. Another factor, referred to by 16% of parents, is related to the idea that children need “to learn new things”. Regarding accessibility, 87% considered that the admission process was easy though a significant percentage mentioned that they were not offered immediate admission for the child.

Most parents had a positive view of the service attended by their children. More than 70% considered it to be good or very good. This is similar to the proportion of parents who said that they would not choose to change their child to another service even if they had an opportunity to do so. The main reason given by those parents who would have liked their children to attend another service was the existence of improved pedagogic conditions.

A majority of parents referred positively to the attention given to their children in the nurseries. Many parents also considered that attending a nursery had produced positive changes in their child’s behaviour; 58% mentioned no negative results. Positive changes, in order of preference, included: better communication skills/being more talkative; acquisition of new knowledge; and increased autonomy. The most commonly mentioned negative change was “lack of attention paid to parents”. Other negative aspects pointed out included children becoming more restless. It is important to note that health problems traditionally associated with centre based care were not significantly mentioned by parents.

Most parents considered themselves well informed about the activities of their children. The educator working in the nursery was the key element in the relationship between the service and the parents. Regarding parental participation, the great majority of parents replied positively. The forms of participation most frequently mentioned were meetings and parties. Participation in more significant activities such as management, exchange of skills, helping with repairs was mentioned by a limited number of parents. However, in our opinion, there are other indicators that suggest lack

of significant parental participation; for example, a substantial number of parents from among those who referred to their participation in meetings did not know how often these meetings took place and there was also a high number who did not know whether the service attended by their child received funding from other sources or whether the fees paid by them were sufficient to cover total costs.

Though this study was carried out in a limited geographic area, we can draw a few conclusions. The organization and functioning of the nurseries seem to reflect a high degree of awareness of the importance of catering for the care needs of children with working parents without losing sight of the pedagogical function. Obviously, there is a lot of room for improvement and increased quality, in particular concerning the number of children per group, staff training and even space and safety conditions. However, we consider that there has been a positive evolution, in quantitative as well as qualitative terms.

The results on parental opinion, even if looked at as merely indicative, provide some support for this positive view, since parents consider the influence of the nursery on their child’s behaviour to be positive; this contradicts some critical views about the effects of centre based care on child development. At first glance, it may seem that the opinions of parents reflect low demands concerning technical conditions even compared to those recommended by the public authorities. However, a more detailed analysis shows that the majority of parents are attentive to pedagogical aspects and hope that nurseries, alongside providing care, will also pursue educational objectives and stimulate child development. In fact, parents were satisfied with the functioning of the nurseries as far as their own needs were concerned (e.g.hours of opening, etc.), but had a more critical attitude towards the pedagogical approach.

## NEWS FROM PORTUGAL

\*The 1984 law for maternity, paternity and adoption (which includes rights to Maternity and Parental Leave and leave to care for sick children) is being reviewed by a working group with representatives from different governments departments, following the Directive on Pregnant Women. The objectives are better information, clearer regulations and possible changes to overcome the direct relationship between rights and vulnerability, which makes it difficult at present for many workers to take advantage of statutory leave arrangements.

\*In 1989, the Government approved a plan to extend nursery education. To carry forward this objective, a Commission was set up, including representatives of the Education, Employment and Social Security Ministries and non-government organisations. This Commission has recently presented a report to the Government proposing principles for the development of services, including: an increase in the network of services, with places for 75% of 3 and 4 year olds and all 5 year olds; progressively reducing regional variations in provision levels; recognition that, while pursuing a fundamentally educational function, services must also be concerned with the provision of care for children during parents' working hours, especially in urban areas; improvement of quality in the system through diversifying provision, adequate regulations and increased involvement of the Education Ministry in quality promotion and control.

# ANNUAL REPORT

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# THE PARADOX OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN 0-3 YEARS OLD



Irene Balaguer

**The reality of services for children under the age of three in Spain is rather complex. Not so long ago these services came under the auspices of various Ministries - Labour, Interior, Health or Culture - depending on the purpose of the service. Conceptually, the services were aimed at assisting working women or underprivileged children. In some cases, this history is still influential. But starting in 1990, with the passing of the Law for the General Regulation of the Educational System (LOGSE), a substantial change has occurred in how services for children under 3 are conceptualised (for a fuller discussion of LOGSE, see the 1992 Annual Report). The education of very young children and their right to enjoy high quality service are new basic concepts. However, despite these common principles, different policies are developing in each of the seventeen autonomous communities in Spain.**

**S**ome statistical data will help an understanding of the current situation, including an estimate of the level of provision for children under three. First, some evidence from two autonomous communities: the Early Childhood Education Plan for the Autonomous Community of Madrid estimates that nearly 11% of children under 3 were attending centres, with just over half (5.6%) in public services (as a result of the LOGSE, all centres are

now referred to as infant schools, *escuela infantil*); by contrast, the Autonomous Community of Murcia estimates that 21% of children under three were in infant schools, with a third (7.5%) in public services, mostly provided by local authorities, and the remainder (13.5%) in private services most without any public subsidy. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs gives us some very interesting data at the national level. According to the study, the rate of attendance at infant schools for children under the age of three throughout the country is 21.5%, with 6.7% in the public sector and 14.7% in the private sector. The rate of attendance is 7.6% for children in their first year (2.1% public, 5.5% private); 14.6% for children in the second year (4.3% public, 10.3% private); and 42% for children in their third year (13.8% public, 28.2% private).

These data show differences between the Autonomous Communities of Madrid and Murcia, with very similar results for Murcia and from the study conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Hopefully, not too far in the future, we may have national data showing the situation in each community, and which will show area differences resulting from different traditions and needs.

During recent years, the policy of the central government regarding services for children under the age of three has been based on four principles:

## **A policy of transferring competence for services**

Responsibility for services for children under 3, formerly distributed among various national ministries (Labour, Health etc), has been transferred to the autonomous communities. In almost all cases, this policy has meant an important transformation and a qualitative improvement in the existing services; in some communities it has also led to an expansion of public provision of infant schools. This generally positive situation, in which each autonomous community develops its own policy, still lacks coordination or mutually agreed plans of action, and as a result both qualitative and quantitative differences exist.

## **A quality education policy**

LOGSE provides a legal framework to regulate the

new educational system. Children under the age of three are considered to be the first level of that system and services for these children are considered to be educational services; one implication is that the concept of 'infant education services' replaces the concept of 'childcare services', even though many 'infant schools' also provide physical care for children with working parents. The LOGSE lays down the basic criteria for the policy to be followed in educational services for young children: early childhood education (from 0-6) will be voluntary in nature, but public authorities will guarantee the number of places requested by the population; the infant schools will cooperate closely with the families; education authorities (nationally and in autonomous communities) will coordinate services and lay down conditions for making agreements with local authorities, other Government Ministries (e.g.the Ministry for Social Affairs) and non-profit organizations.

With these basic guidelines, we might expect a consistent policy, both quantitatively and qualitatively. But policy needs to be translated into action which requires financing - and that is the great defect in government policy on children under three. The recession continues, and priority is given to the other levels of the education system for children aged over three. The almost complete absence of action and funding on the part of the central government and many autonomous communities is in marked contrast with the response of many town councils which, without direct competence in this area, are developing policies to set up and maintain educational services for children under the age of three.

These contradictory approaches, which affect support for services for the youngest children as well as other services provided by town councils, have been the source of important discussions and have led to a negotiation process between central, autonomous community and local levels of government in which the town councils demand more funding.

■ **A social policy**

Measures have been developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs aimed at meeting certain priority social needs. For example, several have focused fundamentally on women working outside the home, subsidizing services to care for their children; this assistance is channelled via the autonomous communities. Another measure is

compensatory in nature and involves subsidising infant schools or services in socially deprived areas. This initiative is developed through two kinds of institutions, town councils and non-government organizations. However, these social policies are more symbolic than real, as the funds to finance them are minimal.

■ **A fiscal policy**

The Ministry of Finance has established a policy of tax deduction to cover part of parents' costs in using services for their children. The measure applies to children under the age of three with working parents whose annual income is below a specified limit. The deduction is 15% of the total cost upto a maximum of 25,000 pesetas per year. As this policy was only introduced in 1993, it is not yet possible to assess its impact.

In contrast with other countries, Spain does not have a range of different types of services for children under three. In general, there is only one type of service, provided in centres. Different types of provision have only existed in exceptional services which meet very specific needs, for example care for children whose families do seasonal farm work in the countryside. The one basic type of centre-based service is however differentiated by quality; important qualitative differences still exist among services on offer for children under 3. The following is a descriptive outline of three types of service, differentiated in this way:

- The first block has very poor material and staff conditions. These services go no further than providing physical supervision of children by untrained and exploited female workers. Families leave their children in these centres because there are no other services available or else they are unaware of them, or because of their low cost. These services reflect Spain's past.
- The second block responds, to a greater or lesser extent, to present day expectations, offering a service based on an overall understanding of children's needs, interests and potential for development. The personnel have a medium level training, with poor working conditions and low pay. Families have access to them either because they have sufficient income or because the service is minimally subsidized by public funds.

- The third block consists of the infant education services which have played and still play a fundamental role in the political and cultural definition of services in Spain. In these services, the physical environment is not always the most appropriate, but the personnel have given these centres a high standing. The personnel have had a proper basic training and have undergone continuous education throughout their careers - although this high level of training is still not always reflected in working conditions and pay. A defining feature of this block of services is the on-going, systematic relationship with families. Almost all the services in this block are provided by public authorities. Financially, they are accessible to all families irrespective of income, but the demand for places far outstrips the supply. In the infant schools of this third block of services a deep understanding of children aged under three has been evolving for more than twenty years. Constant educational and social innovation has resulted in a flexible model that can be adapted to different environments.

Recently, and still at an early stage, new types of services for children under three are being created in addition to the infant school, at the initiative of some local and autonomous community governments. These new types of service are based on analysis of new social needs and the needs of local areas. These include: '*Casas de los niños*', education centres located mainly in rural areas of the Community of Madrid, where provision for children is linked to a training plan for the parents; '*Aulas infantiles*', education centres in the Community of Madrid located inside centres providing training for adults, which provide education programmes for children while their parents, mainly mothers, receive vocational training (and funded via the NOW Programme); '*Ludoteques*', recreation areas specially designed for children under the age of three; and '*Espais familiars*', education services for up to 15 children under three and those who take care of them (whether mother, father or grandparent), available for six hours a week. It is hoped that these new types of services will not only diversify the provision on offer but will also improve the quality of the standard model of infant school.

From this brief summary of the reality in Spain regarding educational services for children under three, it is clear that a paradoxical situation exists which makes imperative a policy initiative

covering: the need for better information about services, so that we will know their real coverage rates; coordination between the various levels of government to implement a plan of action at various levels of administration; and funding.

## NEWS FROM SPAIN

\*The Second Women's Equal Opportunities Plan 1993-95, produced by the Instituto de la Mujer proposes to promote an equal sharing of household responsibilities: "raising boys and girls, caring for the elderly, ill or handicapped family members and responsibility for household chores are the main causes of women's inequality...because women have accepted a major and disproportionate share of these tasks...and because society does not acknowledge the true value of family responsibilities, it does not encourage a sharing of these tasks or any alternatives that support making family life compatible with employment, social and political responsibilities and leisure activities". The Plan proposes eight actions, including: more services for children aged 0-3; a better fit between working hours and the hours of schools and childcare centres; advertising and media campaigns on the sharing of responsibilities to raise public awareness on equal opportunities and the positive effects on children of parenting by fathers and mothers; publicising and promoting Parental Leave to encourage its use by both parents; various measures related to the care of elderly and other adults; and research on the cultural roles of mothers and fathers and how these roles are transmitted and learnt.

# LONE MOTHERS AND EMPLOYMENT: THE CHILDCARE DILEMMA



Bronwen Cohen

**The past year has seen considerable discussion of the social and economic situation of lone parents. The United Kingdom now has the highest proportion of lone parent families in the European Union. In 1991, 19% of all families with a dependent child were headed by a lone parent, in most cases (18%) a lone mother. Over the last decade, the proportion of families headed by a lone parent has increased by nearly 50% (from 13% in 1981 to 19% in 1991). This growth has largely been accounted for by increasing numbers of divorced mothers, now a third of lone parent families, and single (or never married) mothers, who make up another third of the total.**

**T**he Government has made clear its concern over the increase, with particular attention focused on the number of teenage mothers - again the highest rate in the European Union although only accounting for a small proportion of lone mothers. A view that teenage pregnancies were being encouraged by the too ready availability of housing led to an announcement in October 1993 that local authorities should no longer give lone parents priority in access to housing, although a government funded study published at the same time found no evidence that young women become pregnant in order to jump the queue for public housing. Concern has also been expressed over the growth in social security expenditure on benefits

for lone parent families, due not only to the increasing numbers of lone parents but also to a high, and increasing, rate of dependence among lone mothers in the UK on social security benefits. One response to this has been the establishment of a new Government body, the Child Support Agency, which is intended to improve the payment of maintenance for children by identifying and tracing liable parents (usually fathers) and assessing and enforcing maintenance. The Government noted that "it is not right that taxpayers who include other families should shoulder that responsibility instead of parents who are able to do it themselves".

Despite rising levels of social security expenditure, many organisations involved with the welfare of children and families are concerned over the worsening economic situation of many lone parent families, and their particular vulnerability to poverty. Between 1979 and 1991 the number of children in lone parent families living on social security benefits increased nearly threefold, from 538,000 to 1,490,000. In 1979, 28% of children of lone parents were living in households with below 50% of average income; by 1990/91 this had increased to 74% (Kumar, 1993).

The financial plight of many families results from the low level of social security benefits available to lone parents, the majority of whom are not in paid employment and consequently have high levels of dependency on such benefits. The United Kingdom is now one of only three Member States where employment rates for lone mothers are lower than those for mothers in two parent families. During the 1980s, employment rates increased rapidly for all mothers, but actually fell for lone mothers.

This decline in employment rates amongst lone mothers is principally accounted for by changes in the composition of lone parent families as a group. These structural changes include an increase in the number of younger single mothers, and a greater proportion of lone mothers who now have a child under five or have three or more children, all

factors associated with lower employment rates. Whilst structural changes account for much of the decline in employment rates, the major issue remains that of the low employment rates in general amongst UK lone mothers.

One important explanation of the low employment and high dependency rates of UK lone mothers lies in the levels and structure of childcare services and the inadequate recognition of these factors within the social security system. The problem begins with leave arrangements for parents. Women in the UK will only obtain a general right to Maternity Leave for the first time in 1994 and even then will still only receive a very low rate of maternity pay. There is no statutory Parental Leave. Inadequate leave provision makes it more difficult for lone parents to retain employment.

At the heart of the problem is the dearth of affordable childcare services. The UK has amongst the lowest rates of publicly funded services in the European Union, for example providing places for only 2% of children under the age of 3. Government policy emphasises that childcare arrangements for parents in paid employment are in general their own responsibility. Increases in provision have been very largely within private services paid for almost entirely by parents themselves.

Lone mothers are particularly affected by this. They are more likely than lone fathers to have low paid part-time or temporary employment and less able than couple parents to pay for childcare services. Lone parents in general are unable to make use of the childcare arrangements most often used by two parent families in the UK - care by the spouse or partner. Unsatisfactory as this form of arrangement may often be, affecting the working hours and employment choices of the couples involved, it nevertheless represents one option unavailable to lone parents. As a result, lone parents are more likely to pay for childcare than couple parents; a recent survey shows that when they do so, they pay on average 22% of their earnings (Marsh and McKay, 1993).

The social security benefits system to which UK lone parents have access has made only inadequate recognition of the high cost of provision within a childcare system which has a low level of public subsidy and which, consequently, directly affects the ability of lone parents to keep or enter paid employment and in many cases to enhance their employment prospects through education and training. Access to education and training is in

itself an issue of particular significance; single mothers, the fastest growing group of lone mothers, have on average poorer education, training and work experience than other women. In November 1993, the Government announced a new childcare allowance (of upto £28 per week); this is intended to assist parents (in particular lone parents) receiving social security benefits to return to work by subsidising part of the cost of childcare services. This additional allowance has been welcomed by many agencies but has also been seen as insufficient in itself in solving the availability and affordability of quality childcare services sought by parents.

The childcare problems of lone parents are not restricted to the difficulty of securing access to employment or enhancing employment prospects. A number of highly publicised 'home alone' cases (where young children have been left at home to look after themselves) have highlighted the need for support outside as well as within working hours. Lone parents are frequently in greater need of a 'break' but often have less opportunity than other parents. 'Sitter' services developed by lone parent and other agencies, providing babysitting services, are still only available to a minority of families.

Lone parents in the United Kingdom are supported by a welfare system which recognises public responsibilities in alleviating hardship. The increase in the number of lone parent families combined with the very high degree of dependence on this system has meant significant increases in government expenditure on benefits which nevertheless are inadequate to meet the needs of the families involved. Moreover, lone parents do not have access to leave arrangements and childcare services which many groups now believe would significantly diminish their dependence on social security payments. Flexible and paid leave provision plus an adequate structure of publicly supported early childhood care and education services which met the needs of parents and children would go a long way to improving the economic situation of many UK lone parents and improve their quality of life in other ways.

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1. **Childcare and Equality of Opportunity (1988)**. Review of policies and services in the European Community.
2. **Structural Funding and Childcare: Funding Applications and Policy (1989)**.
3. **Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990 (1990)**. A second review of policies and services, with national profiles.
4. **Childcare Needs of Rural Families (1990)**. Seminar Report.
5. **Childcare Workers with Children Under 4 (1990)**. Seminar Report
6. **Quality in Childcare Services (1990)**. Seminar Report
7. **Men as Carers for Children (1990)**. Seminar Report
8. **Mothers, Fathers and Employment (1990)**. An analysis of parental employment in the EC at national and regional level.
9. **Quality in Services for Young Children: a discussion paper (1991)**.
10. **Structural Funds and Childcare with special reference to Rural Regions (1993)**
11. **Network Annual Report 1992 (1993)**.
12. **Mothers, Fathers and Employment 1985-91 (1993)**. An updated and extended analysis of parental employment in the EC.
13. **Monitoring Childcare Services and their use: information needs (1994)**.
14. **Men as Carers: towards a Culture of Responsibility, Sharing and Reciprocity between Women and Men in the Care and Upbringing of Children (1994)**. Seminar report.
15. **Leave Arrangement for Workers with Children (1994)**.
16. **Challenging Racism in European Child Care Provision (1994)**.
17. **Video 'Can you feel a colour?' (1994)**

All available (except 3 & 17) from European Commission (DG V/A/3), 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium. For (3) contact European Commission DG X, Women's Information Service, 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels Belgium. For (17) contact the Network member for your country. All, except 17, are free of charge.

**OTHER PUBLICATIONS REFERRED TO IN THE ANNUAL REPORT**

18. **Parental Employment and Caring for Children: Policies and Services in EC and Nordic Countries (1993)**. Conference proceedings. Available from Danish Ministry of Social Affairs (Signe Hemmingsen), Slotshomsgade 6, DK-1216 Copenhagen K.

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20. **Fathers in the Families of Tomorrow (1993)**. Conference proceedings. Available from Danish Ministry of Social Affairs (Pia Lippert), Slotshomsgade 6, DK-1216 Copenhagen K.

**LANGUAGE AVAILABILITY**

1, 2, 10, 12, 13, 15, 18 & 20 - English, French

3-9, 14 - all Community languages

11 - English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, part Danish

16 - English, German, Italian

17 - Danish, English, Italian

19 - English, Spanish

# EUROPEAN COMMISSION NETWORK ON CHILDCARE AND OTHER MEASURES TO RECONCILE EMPLOYMENT AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

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### ABBREVIATIONS FOR MEMBER STATES

BEL = Belgium  
DE = Germany  
DA = Denmark  
EL = Greece  
ES = Spain  
FR = France  
IRL = Ireland  
IT = Italy  
LUX = Luxembourg  
NL = Netherlands  
PT = Portugal  
UK = United Kingdom