

# CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR RURAL FAMILIES

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

# CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR RURAL FAMILIES

**IMPROVING PROVISION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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to Reconcile Work and Family Responsibilities*

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The contents of the report reflect the opinions of the author. It does not necessarily represent the European Commission's official position.

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# CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR RURAL FAMILIES

**1. The report examines rural childcare services in the twelve Member States of the European Union. It explores issues affecting the delivery of services and trends in their development. It includes a review of the situation in each Member State and Recommendations addressed to Member States and the European Commission.**

## ■ Rural Change

2. Rural areas in the European Union vary considerably in their physical, demographic and social features. However, many are now facing a common problem: how to cope with "rural change", encompassing significant demographic, economic and social changes which are affecting the employment and caring roles of rural families and have significant implications for childcare services and policies in all Member States.

## ■ Economic restructuring

3. **Changes in markets, productive processes, and support mechanisms** have affected many rural families through, for example, reducing agricultural and fishing employment and increasing alternative types of economic activity.

4. **Women's rates of employment are rising** and their role within the rural economy is of increasing significance in many areas, with a feminisation of agriculture and greater visibility of women in the labour market associated with a shift from informal work to obtaining jobs within the formal labour market.

5. There is evidence that rural women continue to be **over-represented in low skilled and unskilled areas** to a greater extent than their urban counterparts.





### Demographic and family trends

6. Economic restructuring has contributed to a considerable decline in population in many rural areas and a **redistribution of population** away from the open country into small villages and towns. In many areas, the problem of population decline has been compounded by a **significant decline in fertility rates**. However, some areas are experiencing population growth from an influx of urban families.

7. **Family structures are changing significantly**, including smaller households and an increasing number of single parent households.

### Environmental changes

8. Environmental changes mean that there are **diminishing opportunities for rural children for safe play** and activities without supervision.

### Social and educational expectations

9. There are **changing expectations** amongst many rural families over what their children should be offered and increasing recognition of the role of quality childcare services in providing opportunities for children. In some areas, childcare services are now seen as essential in protecting the linguistic and cultural identity of indigenous minority communities.

## Rural change, rural policy and childcare

10. Rural change has brought to the fore the issue of services which enable women to effectively participate in the economic, social and political life of their communities, contributing to economic diversification strategies and promoting rural development. It has focused attention on the need for rural children to be given the same opportunities as their urban counterparts for early learning and safe play. It has underlined the importance of social infrastructure in supporting quality of life for families and promoting community self-confidence. Through contributing to all these areas, childcare services have an important role to play within European and national strategies for combating rural decline and promoting rural development.

11. Childcare services have a valuable role to play in relation to the rural strategies proposed within the European Commission's Green Paper on Social Policy and the employment strategy outlined in the European Union's White Paper on Employment.

## Childcare in European Union policies and funding

12. The European Commission's interest in rural childcare derived initially from its importance in achieving equality of opportunity between women and men. A Recommendation adopted in 1992 by the Council of Ministers specifically refers to the need for childcare services to "be available in all areas and regions of Member States, both in urban areas and in rural areas". The Third Equal Opportunities Action Programme refers to the need to "finance innovative action projects, notably in rural areas". Although the European Union's Structural Funding Programme recognises the contribution which childcare services can make to the economic as well as the social objectives of the funds, take-up of these funding possibilities has been only limited in rural areas. There is no funding programme directed specifically to rural childcare.

## Childcare services in rural areas

13. Rural change has contributed to **increased levels of demand** for childcare services, yet the level of services in rural areas is not only not meeting demand in those areas but is generally substantially lower than the level of services in urban areas.

14. Marked rural/urban variations in the structure of

services are greatest in relation to centre-based care - totally absent in many areas and in short supply in most others. Levels of pre-primary schooling are significantly lower; in some countries levels of informal services are higher.

15. There is evidence that rural services providing care and education on a more formal basis can experience difficulties in finding appropriately qualified staff. Training problems relate not only to initial qualifications but also to in-service training.

16. Low level of services and less choice also means that rural services in general are less able to meet the needs of particular groups, for example, **children with disabilities/special needs** and families requiring extensive support for reasons of social or other disadvantage.

17. In some countries, only informal services are available for families wanting support for their **indigenous language or dialect**.

## Obstacles to Development of Services

18. **Low density and scattered populations** increase the cost of providing services in many rural areas.

19. **Distance and transport problems** contribute to the difficulties in providing services, restrict access and diminish the effectiveness of the service.

20. The development of services is made more difficult by the **existing structure of services** which is usually unnecessarily fragmented, frequently involving the separate provision of services for education and care and play. The functional separation creates difficulties for the development of services in all areas but, in many rural areas, it frequently compounds the effect of low population density on the viability and cost of providing services.

21. The small size of some rural services can mean **higher staff costs**. There can also be problems in finding **appropriately qualified staff** required for more formal services because of the shortage of training programmes adapted to the needs of rural communities.

22. Smaller size and problems posed by distance can make it more difficult to effectively support and monitor the quality of services. **Standards** are in some cases inappropriately set for rural areas which may require different, although not lower, standards.

23. **Low levels of awareness of the increasing need for services** and, in some cases, low expectations and little knowledge of what can and should be provided,

have impeded development in many areas. Whilst EU funding in childcare has been limited, national reports suggest that it has been significant in raising awareness of the issues involved.

24. **National childcare policies** are often developed in an urban environment and frequently take insufficient account of rural issues. This is of particular significance in countries where policies expect parents to find and pay for provision, or envisage a significant role for employers. Rural women often receive lower wages than their urban counterparts and frequently have to meet additional transport costs. There are fewer employers willing to assist with childcare in most rural areas.

25. **Funding is the major problem** in the development of services in rural areas. Adequate public funding is needed to develop and maintain services and successful programmes.

## TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT IN PROVISION

### Flexible and Multi-functional Models

26. Flexibility is a common feature in many successful examples of the development of rural childcare services. This may involve flexibility over hours and/or flexibility in combining the purposes and functions of services (for example, education and play, services for older and younger children and full-time, part-time or occasional care). Other examples of flexibility and/or multi-functionalism involve **making use of existing resources such as school premises; functional sharing of premises; adaptation of informal services such as playgroups to offer daycare.**

### Family and Community Associations

27. In a number of countries, family associations and parent and community groups have played a significant role in the development of services.

### Peripatetic Services

28. In a number of countries, access to some form of provision has been facilitated through the development of peripatetic services. Peripatetic

services sometimes constitute a valid service in their own right but in some cases they represent a second best, low cost alternative.

### Association with Rural Development

29. Rural childcare is increasingly seen within the context of population retention and rural development, improving the quality of life and facilitating diversification within the rural economy through developing and upgrading labour market skills and improving the learning and development opportunities of children and creating jobs.

### Locally Relevant Curricula

30. In many countries there is increasing interest in ensuring that the childcare curriculum reflects the needs of the local community and the wider role of childcare services in promoting social development.

### Role in Supporting Local Language

31. In some rural areas, childcare services are seen as playing an important role in supporting the local language or dialect and, in so doing, protecting the identity and self-confidence of rural communities.

### Promoting Development of Services

32. Key factors in the development of services are high levels of **public support** for services in general, combined with **funding strategies** which stimulate **local community initiatives**. The two countries with the best developed provision - Denmark and France - have high levels of investment in publicly-funded childcare services and also have funding strategies which provide opportunities to parent and community groups to assist in the development of provision.

### Role of European Funding in Rural Childcare

33. European funding has been limited in quantitative terms with take-up in the mainstream funds disappointing. However, the Commission's own programmes have been significant in raising awareness of the role of childcare in the context of

equal opportunities and rural development and transnational exchanges have been successful in actively sharing ideas and experiences. The evidence suggests that, whatever funding applications exist, uptake will only be limited without a major promotion of the possibilities they provide. European funding **could** play a major role in promoting the development of services on a basis which takes account of innovative models being developed in a number of countries. This would be most effectively achieved through a **rural childcare funding programme**, accompanied by a **programme of dissemination and exchange of information**.

### **Rural Childcare Policies Within Member States**

34. Strong national childcare policies in some Member States (notably Denmark) have benefited rural as well as urban areas. In all countries, however, childcare policies have tended to be urban-led. Rural areas require national childcare policies which recognise the diverse range of functions which childcare serves and are able to locate childcare within a context of overall community development. Such policies will be valuable for disadvantaged urban communities as well as rural areas.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

1. Member States should develop a comprehensive and coherent policy to ensure access of rural children to good quality services.
2. Member States should facilitate the piloting of appropriate models and funding strategies for the delivery of services.
3. Member States should examine legislative requirements and funding mechanisms and training in relation to rural requirements. Member States should collect and analyse information on comparative levels of services in urban and rural areas, as well as other relevant information.
4. Member States should encourage a collaborative approach between relevant government departments, encompassing not only those involved with welfare and education, leisure and recreation, but also agricultural and rural development. Member States need to ensure that childcare policies take full account of the full range of functions of services and are not either solely led by, or totally detached from, the labour market.
5. Member States should collaborate with the European Commission in disseminating information and facilitating exchange of ideas and information on ways of delivering services in rural areas, and encouraging effective use of the structural funds in developing childcare infrastructure.

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

1. Member States are required to report to the European Commission in 1995 on the implementation of the Recommendation on Child Care. The Commission should disseminate guidelines for the collection of data on a basis which compares urban and rural areas and permits the Commission to assess implementation of Article 3(1) relating to the availability of services in urban and rural areas.
2. Following this Report on the implementation of the Recommendation, the Commission should make arrangements to continue to monitor and review on a regular basis rural childcare provisions in Member States.
3. The Commission should promote rural childcare policies which take account of the variety of rural areas and diversity of need by:
  - a. using Article 10 of the ERDF and technical assistance provisions of ESF and EAGGF to facilitate the exchange of information, innovative models and good practice between Member States in the European Union.
  - b. exploring the potential for a Rural Childcare Programme of up to 250 innovative projects to:
    - increase awareness and recognition of possible childcare applications for the use of the structural funds.
    - support the development of services.
    - assist Member States in developing appropriate models of childcare for different rural areas, focusing in particular on flexible models with a multi-functional approach and possible ways of adapting some existing services.
  - c. working with Member States to ensure that rural childcare services receive adequate support and attention within the European Union's Structural Funding Programme and other relevant programmes.
  - d. ensuring that rural areas receive explicit recognition in any subsequent measure or initiative concerning childcare policies and services or, more broadly, policies for the reconciliation of employment and family policies, and childcare is explicitly recognised in rural development policies.

# INTRODUCTION

**Rural areas in the European Union vary considerably in their physical, demographic and social features. Their populations, differing considerably in their settlement patterns, range from small island fishing communities to those living in sparsely populated remote mountain areas or at an increasing rate in some countries in “peri-urban” areas, partially or fully integrated into the neighbouring urban economies. They possess, often within national boundaries, a variety of cultural traditions and languages. However, they may confront common issues and few rural areas within the Union are unaffected by the economic and social changes taking place on a significant scale across most of Europe’s rural areas.**

This report is concerned with one aspect of ‘rural change’ - the changes affecting the employment and caring roles of rural families and the implications this has for childcare services and policies throughout the European Union. It reports on the level of childcare services, developments and trends in the delivery of rural childcare services in all Member States.

## CHILDCARE SERVICES

Childcare serves a number of purposes. Its multiple functions mean that services are relevant in a variety of different ways: in addressing rural decline and contributing to the economic and social development of rural areas, promoting equal opportunities and the effective use of women in the workforce, providing important educational and other opportunities for rural children and enhancing the quality of life for rural families - a significant factor within rural depopulation.

“Childcare” is used here to refer to the full range of services providing care, education, recreation and play. These services may be provided separately, or two or more of these functions combined within the same service - for example, pre-primary schooling with extended hours to meet the needs of working parents; centres providing care combined with educational opportunities for children. Services described in this report, using terms developed by the European Commission’s Childcare Network, include:

**Nursery or Centre:** Providing group care for children under the age of 2 years (and usually under 12 months) until the age of 3 or four.

**Mixed age centre:** Group care for children under 3 and from 3 to compulsory school age; or provides for children under school age as well as outside school hours care for children at pre-primary or primary school.

**Family Daycare:** Care provided for a single child or a small group of children in the carer's own home. The carer may be part of an organised scheme or operate independently.

**Organised Family Daycare:** Service where family day care is provided by carers who are recruited, paid and supported by a publicly-funded organisation.

**Own Home Care:** Care provided in a child's own home by a paid carer who may live in the child's home or come daily.

**Playgroup:** Group care for children from 2 to compulsory school age, where children generally attend for less than ten hours a week.

**Kindergarten:** Group care for children between 2 and compulsory school age outside the education system. Children usually attend for more than twenty hours a week and parents usually contribute to the cost.

**Pre-Primary Schooling:** Schooling specifically organised for children from 3 to compulsory school age, although in some cases 2 year olds are admitted. Part of the education system and free to parents.

**School age childcare or Outside School Hours Care:** Care provided before or after school or in the school holidays for children attending pre-primary or primary schooling. The service can be based in schools or centres separate from schools.

This report is only concerned with childcare services. It does not cover the full range of work and family provisions relating to the care of children, including pregnancy, maternity, parental and family leave provision, "family-friendly" working arrangements and practices, and programmes which encourage a more equitable sharing of the responsibilities of the care for children between women and men. Many of these measures are of particular importance in rural areas. Reports suggest for example that rural men are significantly less involved than those in urban areas in the care of children. The absence or inadequacy of replacement services for the self-employed who are assisting spouses may mean that women in agriculture continue to work until confinement and have to return to work quickly after childbirth to avoid loss of earnings or the cost of paying for a replacement - a problem addressed but not resolved by the Directive on Equal Treatment for Self Employed Men and Women in Agriculture (86/13/EC).

## **PREPARATION AND STRUCTURE OF REPORT**

The report has been prepared on the basis of study visits to Denmark, Greece, France and Portugal, undertaken by a small group of Childcare Network members concerned with structural funding in rural areas, and through questionnaires completed by my Network colleagues, and in some cases government departments and relevant agencies. It draws on material from previous Network reports and initiatives, including the following:

- CEC (1988) **Childcare and Equality of Opportunity**
- CEC (1990) **Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990**
- CEC (1993) **Employment, Equality and Caring for Children**
- Seminar on **Childcare Needs of Rural Families** (Athens 1990)
- Seminar report: CEC (1990) **Childcare Needs of Rural Families**
- CEC (1990) **The Structural Funds of the European Community in Childcare with Special Reference to Rural Regions.**

It has also drawn on data (in draft form) from a report on Women in the Rural Economy, prepared by Dr Mary Braithwaite and colleagues from the Equal Opportunities Unit of the European Commission.

### **The report comprises:**

- An examination of the impact of "Rural Change" on families and the Commissions's existing interests and initiatives in relation to rural childcare. (Chapter 1).
- Examination of rural childcare within individual Member States, including rural context, levels of services, developments and examples of provision (Chapter 2).
- Issues, obstacles, trends and developments in provision, Conclusion and Recommendations (Chapter 3).
- A Summary of the report and recommendations are at the front of the report.

Finally, it should be noted that there is no single or standard definition of "rural areas in the European Union"; the data used in this report relates to the national and institutional definitions.

# RURAL CHANGE, RURAL POLICY AND CHILDCARE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

**Europe's rural areas are confronting major economic upheaval and significant demographic and social changes, changes which have affected the employment and caring roles of many rural families and have had significant implications for the provision of childcare services.**

**What are the major changes which have been affecting rural areas?**

## **ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING**

The lives of many people in rural areas have been affected by changing markets, productive processes and support mechanisms. In agriculture, the principal user of land, accounting for 57% of land area in the European Union, increased productivity, which has almost doubled the volume of output over the last three decades, has contributed to a substantial decline in agricultural employment from 21% of the economically active population in 1960 to 7% in 1992 (Lowe, 1992). Over recent years, market pressures and diminished levels of financial support have also contributed to changes within farm households and an increase in many areas in the non agricultural activities of farm households. A study carried out for

the European Commission by the Arkleton Trust on Farm Household Adjustment in Western Europe found that in some areas this has involved an increase in **farm-based** non-agricultural activities ranging from the transformation of crops and livestock products - for example wine and cheese processing; machine contracting and forestry - to tourism related activities such as bed and breakfast, recreational services and handicrafts. It has also involved an increase in **off-farm** employment. The Arkleton Trust





study found that the percentage of household labour involved in off-farm work rose between 1987 and 1991 from 20% to 26% (Bryden et al (1992)).

In the fishing industry, reduction in fish stocks and the development of protection measures to address this, combined with changes in technology and markets, have brought major changes and, in many cases increasing indebtedness affecting as in agricultural areas, the wider community.

Other significant changes include a continuing growth in many areas in service sector employment and an increase in some areas in rural manufacturing, contributing to the development of some peri-urban areas drawing population from the city and other rural areas.

## WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Economic restructuring has contributed to changes in women's participation in the labour market and enhanced the significance of the economic role of women within the rural economy. A study prepared for the European Commission on rural women, drawing on national and European data, reports that there is now a general trend of higher female activity rates in the Union's rural areas (Braithwaite et al 1994). These rates remain lower than those of rural men, are "generally but not exclusively lower than those of urban women", and the trend is not universal - the Arkleton Trust study found a fall in female employment rates in some areas (Bell et al 1990). However, the increase in many areas has been marked.

Eurostat data, prepared for the Braithwaite report on rural women show, for example, that in two out of three of the rural regions examined in Spain, female employment had risen dramatically in the period 1986-1991. Female employment rates in the regions of Aragon and Extremadura rose by 39% and 50% respectively. Similarly, in Portugal in two out of the three regions examined - in Centro and Acores - female employment rose by 49% and 25% respectively. In Germany and the UK the data show an increase in all the regions under examination. French data show that in France the proportion of women economically active in rural areas increased by over 56% between 1975 and 1990, an increase which was sharpest in the South and in tourist regions such as the Rhone Alpes and Mediterranean. (Braithwaite op cit) - The report notes that national differences are more pronounced than regional differences with both urban and rural regions of Greece, Spain and Italy showing lower figures for women's share of employment than rural and urban regions of the UK, France and Germany.

This increase reflects women's increasing share of the employment market in both urban and rural areas. This has been particularly associated with the increasing significance of the service sector. In rural areas the service sector now employs over 65% of the female workforce and in some rural regions, for example in the Netherlands and the UK, over 80% (Braithwaite op cit). High maternal employment rates found in one German survey - higher than the national average - were associated with high levels of urban commuting with over half of mothers commuting to work outside the village (Berger & Krug (1991)).

In some areas it has also been associated with a feminisation of agriculture. Whilst employment in agriculture has decreased, women's **share** of agricultural employment has increased in a number of areas - in Extremadura in Spain by 61% and in Centro and Alentejo in Portugal by 22% and 59%

respectively (Braithwaite p 63). In Italy the number of female heads of farms is increasing. Between 1988 and 1990 farms run by women in Italy increased by 10% from 22% to 26% of the total (Braithwaite op cit).

The increase reflects not only an increase in the number of women entering the labour market but also the greater visibility of women within the labour market associated with a shift from "informal" work in the form of assisting a spouse in family enterprises such as farming or fishing, to obtaining jobs within the formal labour market. The increase in off-farm work associated with economic restructuring in agriculture has included an increasing proportion of women in farm households. The Arkleton Trust study of farm household adjustment found that the percentage of women in farm households involved in off-farm work rose from 12% in 1987 to 17.5% in 1991 (Bryden et al op cit).

Whilst less information is available on the impact of restructuring on fishing households a French study on the situation of women in rural areas reports an increased tendency for younger spouses of owner fishermen in the port of Granville in Basse Normandie to seek employment outside the family fishing business (Toutain et al (1992)).

Economic restructuring has made the role of women in the rural economy more visible, but has not in most cases brought them greater rewards. Women are more likely to be salaried employees and the Braithwaite study found that in many areas rural women are over represented in low skilled or unskilled areas, to an even greater extent than their urban counterparts. In England for example 77% of women in rural areas, compared with 65% of all women, have low paid jobs. Reasons for this include the nature of the local labour market in many areas where the available employment is unskilled or low skilled; cultural attitudes towards women leading to sex discrimination; and, in some areas, the low qualifications amongst rural women.

With some exceptions, such as rural areas in the UK where girls are more likely than boys to have formal qualifications, rural women are educationally less well qualified than urban women and, in some cases, rural men. The situation of Greek rural women is identified as the worst in this respect, with illiteracy levels of nearly 29%. Women's participation in vocational training and continuing education was found to be low throughout the European Union, not because of demand, which is often very high, but because of difficulties of access to courses presented by factors such as distance and lack of childcare (Braithwaite, et. al ).

## DEMOGRAPHIC AND FAMILY TRENDS

Economic restructuring, with a consequent loss of employment in many areas, in particular in agriculture, has contributed to a considerable decline in population in many rural areas and a redistribution of population in rural areas away from the open countryside and into small towns and villages.

The impact of loss of employment and outward migration trends on some areas has been compounded by the significant decline in fertility rates, in varying degrees, in all European Union countries. Throughout the European Union women are having their families later and having fewer children. Fertility rates have dropped from an EU average of 1.82 children per woman in 1980 to an all time low of 1.48 in 1992 (Eurostat, 1993). While the evidence suggests that the rates have not dropped in some rural areas to the same extent as urban areas, the general trend is leading to smaller families. In 1985, except in Ireland and Italy, of households with a child under 10, more than half contained just one child; only 10% had three or more young children (CEC 1988). This trend has contributed to the isolation of families reinforcing population movement to larger centres.

However, this outward migration trend has been uneven. The more fragile areas have been the most affected; relative and even absolute increases in rural manufacturing employment in some areas in the 1970s and an increase in service sector employment have led to some increase in population in some areas, in particular, although not exclusively in peri-urban areas (Lowe, op. cit.). Migration from the city to the countryside where it follows manufacturing employment, cheaper housing or quality of life often involves a higher proportion of young families with resulting implications for service provision.

Demographic trends have contributed to other aspects of "family change". Households are smaller because they contain not only fewer children but also fewer adults. Grandparents, uncles and aunts are now less likely to be living within the same household and are less involved in providing childcare. A growing number of children spend part of their childhood outside nuclear family settings, and in all countries there has been a significant increase in the number of one parent families - now at least 10% of all families with children in the European Union (Roll (1989)). Births outside marriage have increased from an EU average of 9% of all live births in 1980 to 20% in 1992, accounting for nearly half all births in Denmark and almost a third in France and the United Kingdom (Eurostat 1993). Available information - from surveys in a number of European Union countries - show that rural areas have not been immune from these trends. A German rural kindergarten study found that

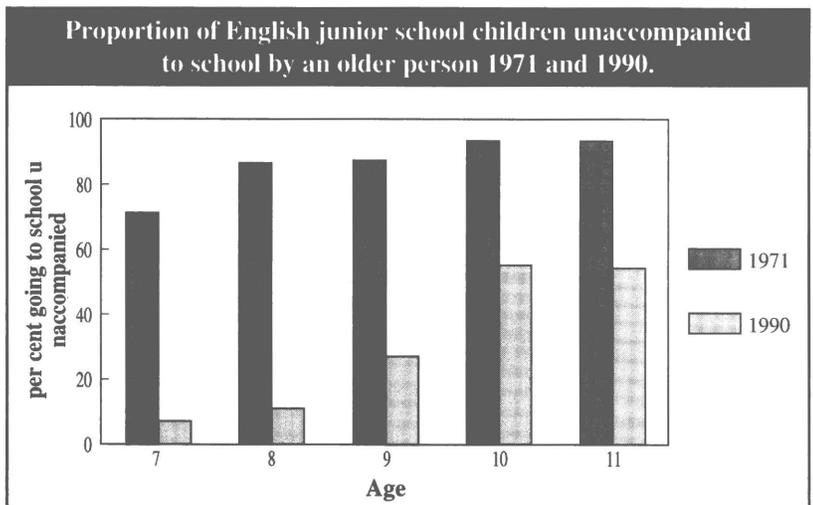
extended family forms were not as common as had been assumed. Only 15% of the children were growing up in households in which adults other than the mother or father lived. Five percent of the children were living in one parent families (Berger and Krug 1991). A 1990 Scottish survey of four rural communities found a significant increase in the number of one parent families - 7% of families overall rising to 14% in one of the communities (Palmer 1991). The Greek Thesprotia survey found 12% of the families were headed by one parent.

In some areas temporary or seasonal male migration means a further considerable number of families experiencing the "absent father" syndrome. The Thesprotia survey found, for example, that a large number of fathers spend a considerable part of the year away from home. "Absenteeism" was particularly high for fathers with large families. Over a third of fathers with four or more children and 22% of those with three were absent for periods longer than six months compared with 4% of those with one child (Papadimitriou, 1990).

## ENVIRONMENT

Rural family life has been affected by environmental factors. Roads and road improvements have transformed the lives of many communities, frequently offering an economic lifeline. However, increased traffic, together with developments such as mechanisation of agricultural work and increasing use of chemicals in agriculture, have diminished the opportunities of many rural children for safe unsupervised play. In some countries, rising crime rates have affected rural as well as urban areas. "Stranger danger" as well as increased traffic has led to a substantially increased likelihood in some

Table 1



Source: M. Hillman, *One False Move ... An overview of the findings in ed P. Hillman; Children, Transport and the Quality of Life, PSI, 1993.*

countries of children being accompanied to schools or other activities. A survey comparing the independent mobility of English junior school children in 1971 and 1990 found that there was a marked reduction of almost one half in the number of activities children undertake on their own and that this was not compensated for by an increase in the number of activities when they were accompanied. As shown in Table 1 there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of children accompanied to school. It is sometimes not appreciated that rural as well as urban children are affected by these trends.

## **SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS**

In many rural areas, modern communications have brought awareness of other ways of living and contributed not only to growing demand for better housing and consumer products but increased expectations of the social and educational opportunities for children. Local and national surveys throughout the European Union reveal the high level of demand not only for services to meet the care requirements of families but which also enhance the educational and life opportunities of their children. Expectations relate therefore not only to the availability of services but also their quality. For parents, quality includes the contribution services make to the learning and development of their children as well as the role they may play in meeting their own care requirements. The economic uncertainties facing many communities enhance the value attributed to education and underline the educational and cultural disadvantages experienced by many rural children. In the Thesprotia study, 77% of the parents thought that living in the villages was adversely affecting their children's future prospects (Papadimitriou op cit).

Parental perceptions of quality also encompass access to services which reflect the language, culture and values of the community. In some areas childcare services are now seen as essential in protecting the linguistic and cultural identity of indigenous minority communities.

## **RURAL CHANGE, RURAL POLICY AND CHILDCARE**

Over recent years, the European Commission's rural policy has become increasingly concerned with ways of helping rural communities to address 'rural change'. The Commission's **Communication on the Future of Community Initiatives under the**

**Structural Funds** notes:

"The institutional and other factors involved in rural development agree that rural society today is undergoing major changes and that new directions, new forms of rural development, new schemes bringing together the various partners concerned need to be found"

The Commission's Green Paper on Social Policy refers to "the crisis in agriculture, the risk of accelerating rural desertification and the weakening of the social structure of the rural communities" and stresses that the future of the rural economy will depend on diversification of both production and service activity, "this twin development being essential to the retention of rural populations". CEC (1993)(a), CEC (1993)(b).

The **Green Paper on Social Policy** also notes the importance of social policies in addressing these major changes and asks:

"As risks of exclusion and marginalisation in rural areas are increasing, what further actions other than what is undertaken at present would prevent rural social decline?" CEC (1993)(b) op cit.

Childcare services have an important role to play in addressing social **and** economic issues arising from these changes. This chapter has shown that families are caught up in rural change in ways which have substantial implications for the care and upbringing of children in rural areas and which need to be addressed within the Union's rural, social and economic policies. Rural change has brought to the fore the issue of services which enable women to effectively participate in the economic, social and political life of their communities: inadequacies in provision affect to a considerable extent the availability and quality of the labour force in rural areas, undermining diversification strategies which frequently need to maximise local employment development programmes. Rural change has focused attention on the need for rural children to be given the same opportunities as urban children for early learning and safe play; research now shows the extent to which this can enhance educational performance and later employment prospects. It has underlined the importance of social infrastructure in supporting quality of life for families and in promoting the self confidence essential for the survival of communities confronting demographic and economic upheaval.

Childcare services contribute to all of these areas and as such have an important role to play in combating rural decline and promoting rural development. The relationship between childcare services and rural development is now being explored within rural development programmes in a number of EU

countries. A major French action research programme funded by the French Ministry of Agriculture and carried out by the Association des Collectifs Enfants/Parents/Professionels (ACEPP) has explored the role of children's services in addressing rural decline and contributing to the economic 'revitalisation' of communities in six French departments, revealing the importance of the family dimension within rural development. A study of a similar kind is also being undertaken in Scotland by Children in Scotland in collaboration with Rural Forum. The Scottish initiative aims to assist rural communities in the development of childcare services meeting the requirements of rural development and diversification as well as the social needs of children and their families (see Chapter 2).

A number of recent cost benefit studies in the United Kingdom offer evidence of the considerable economic as well as social benefits which may be derived from the establishment of childcare services - enhancing the supply, and upgrading the quality, of labour whilst at the same time creating jobs. A report co-authored by this author argues that the development of childcare services has a 'galvanising' effect through both enhancing the supply and quality of labour whilst at the same time creating jobs. This is of particular significance in disadvantaged areas. The study suggests that this dual effect means that investment in childcare (and other care services) can avoid the bottleneck inflationary pressures which can be associated with other forms of infrastructural investment. (Cohen & Fraser (1991)).

This characteristic indicates that childcare services have a particularly valuable role to play in the employment strategy outlined in the European Union's White Paper on Employment which identifies childcare and care services as possible areas for employment growth (CEC 1993c).

Insufficient information is available on many aspects of gender and family issues within rural development. The Braithwaite report notes that "the issue of gender is not currently integrated into mainstream research and policy initiatives in the field of rural development in spite of marked differences in the rates and positions of women and men" (Braithwaite et al op cit p 264). There is however accumulating evidence, some of it from initiatives funded through the European Union Structural Funding Programme, that the issue of childcare services in rural areas is not only a matter for European **childcare** and equal opportunity policies, but also an important issue for Europe's

**rural development.** As such it can and should be seen as a key element in the European Union's rural strategy.

## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF EC INTEREST AND INITIATIVES IN RURAL CHILDCARE

The Commission's interest in childcare in general terms derived initially from recognition of its significance in achieving equality of opportunity between women and men. This led to the establishment of the Commission's Childcare Network under the Community's Second Equal Opportunities Action Programme. From 1988, the Childcare Network (now known as the European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities) presented a series of reports to the



Commission detailing evidence of the need to improve childcare services and other related work and family provisions (CEC (1988), CEC (1990), CEC (1993)(d). The Network's reports showed that changes affecting families and their need for social provision are taking place throughout the European Union, with all Member States experiencing substantial and continuing growth in demand for services. Inadequacies in provision were found to be affecting not only equality of opportunity for women,

but also the labour market, and economic development, and affecting the long term opportunities of many children.

Key issues identified by the Network include:

- the low level and quality of services for children under 3 and childcare services for school-age children
- variation in levels of services and support
- distinction between care and education services in many countries
- poor pay and conditions of childcare workers
- the need for employment provisions and other measures to assist in balancing work and family commitments
- the low level of services in many rural areas.

## COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION ON CHILDCARE

In 1992, the European Council of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on Childcare. The Recommendation addresses the need for a wide range of work and family provisions to support parents in paid employment, education and training, and calls for action in four areas:

- Services for children
- Leave arrangements for parents
- Making the environment, structure and organisation of work responsive to the need of workers with children
- Promoting the sharing of responsibilities for children between women and men.

In its first report to the European Commission on childcare provision and policies in Member States, the European Commission's Childcare Network concluded that the provision of childcare services in rural areas required particular attention.

"The evidence points to childcare services in rural areas being at lower levels than those in urban areas, and especially in cities. The issue of parental employment and what childcare services are needed and wanted in rural areas, the problems faced by families wishing to use them and how best to provide services, needs urgent attention." (CEC, 1988)

The Council Recommendation makes specific reference to the need for childcare services to be "available in all areas and regions of Member States, both in urban areas and in rural areas".

The Third Equal Opportunities Action Programme refers to the need "to finance innovative action projects, notably in rural areas".

## CHILDCARE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRUCTURAL FUNDING PROGRAMME

The Commission's interest in childcare widened significantly with the 1988 reform of the European's Union Structural Funding Programme which recognises the economic as well as the social significance of childcare services.

The reform of the European Union's structural funding programme in 1988 facilitated some funding for childcare in a number of programmes. Within the central funds, these included:

- the possibility in Objective 1 areas of funding for centres enhancing the economic potential, development or structural adjustment of areas.
- funding in Objectives 1 and 2 areas of centres and other childcare services included within industrial sites or business centres servicing small and medium sized enterprises.
- In Objective 5b areas, childcare provision facilitating diversification of the rural economy.
- In all areas, services facilitating access to training in areas where women are substantially under-represented, training and occupational re-integration of women returners, maximising local employment development potential and measures for young people, innovatory projects and actions accompanying measures to support these providing access for training.

Subsequent regulations covering the period 1994-1999 extend the possibilities for childcare most noticeably under Objective 3. Here the regulations refer to support for "the provision of care services for dependents" (that is, children and other dependents of long-term unemployed people).

## COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

In addition, a number of the European Commission's own programmes provided for some childcare funding. The principal ones were the NOW programme - concerned with the promotion of employment and training measures for women which provided for childcare as a complementary measure to training and business creation and a LEADER programme which provided for childcare in the context of reintegration of women into the rural economy (see EC Network for Childcare - the Structural Funds of the European Community in Childcare - V/2311/92-EN). Under the new Community Initiatives, the NOW and LEADER programmes will continue (called Employment-NOW and LEADER II respectively). Under Employment-

NOW, there are opportunities for the development of childcare services and training, both as a source of training and employment per se, and as a support for women who are looking for training or employment in other fields and who need help with their caring responsibility for children or adults.

Specific examples of rural childcare services developed under infrastructural opportunities in Objective 1 and 2 areas are rare although funding may be supporting national education and the social programmes. The funding which has been most visible has been in the Commission's own NOW programme. Commission data indicates that 18% of the NOW projects involve some element of childcare including the establishment of childcare structures, operating costs of centres and vocational training for childcare workers. Within this overall figure, only 6% involved the establishment of centres, 12% involved the payment of allowances and 4% involved the training of childcare workers. (Information provided to the EC Childcare Network, January 1993). Countries with the largest number of projects involving the establishment of centres were Northern Ireland, Greece, Belgium and Portugal. No information is available on whether the projects were in rural areas, but examples from a number of countries included in Chapter 2 show that some were. There appear to have been very few examples of childcare applications under the LEADER programme.

At the time of writing, childcare funding applications under the revised Structural Funding Programme for 1994-99 have not yet been finalised and it is therefore not clear whether all childcare funding applications included in the previous programme will continue and be extended to some of the new Commission initiatives such as the Fisheries programme. There is currently no funding programme directed specifically to rural childcare.

## RURAL CHILDCARE: SUMMARY OF PROVISION AND TRENDS IN MEMBER STATES

**This chapter examines employment trends, provision, developments and examples of childcare within the rural areas of each Member State. There are considerable difficulties in all Member States (in varying degrees) in obtaining data allowing comparisons between rural and urban areas. One reason for this is that the information available on childcare services is often inadequate for comparative purposes. The major problems relate to difficulties over definitions of rural/urban and the absence in many cases of data which enable rural areas to be compared with urban or other rural areas in other countries. Definitions of the services described in this chapter can be found in the Introduction to the report.**



### BELGIUM

#### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

It is estimated that around 25% of the Belgian population live in areas defined as rural which cover over half of Belgian territory but are predominantly and increasingly peri-urban in nature. Belgium has a federal structure encompassing French, Flemish and



German language communities.

Employment in agriculture declined by just over 50% in the period 1975-1991; female agricultural employment decreased less sharply and increased as a proportion of the total agricultural workforce from 16% to 28%, with women classified in 1991 as 12% of permanent heads of farms and with over two thirds of "farming women" playing some role on the farm. However, only a small percentage are categorised as '*conjointe salariee*', conferring rights and social protection but which involves additional costs to the employing spouse. (Braithwaite, et al).

Nationally, 69% of Belgian women with a child aged 0-9 were economically active in 1991 (CEC (1993)(e). Eurostat and other data prepared for the Braithwaite report suggest a significant increase in women's employment rates within Belgian rural areas. In the predominantly rural province of Luxembourg, female manual wage employment increased in the period 1980-1990 by 32% and female non manual employment by 44%. Employment in those areas was predominantly in the service sector (Braithwaite et al op cit).

Table 2

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
20%	95%+	6	7 hours	No information

(Source: CEC, (1990) *Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-90*, CEC Brussels)

## CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Children start primary school at six. Provision for under 3s (available for 20% of under 3s) in publicly funded services is in nurseries (5%), organised family daycare schemes (4%) and for children from 2½ in pre-primary schooling (attended in 1988 by about 70% of the 2.5-3 year age group). About 95% of children aged 3-5 attend pre-primary schools with most of the provision within primary schools.

Most school age childcare during term time is school based. There are holiday playschemes subsidised by the French, Flemish and German welfare agencies. In 1988 the French community welfare agency, *Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance (ONE)* provided schemes for 55,000 children and a study showed that 70,000 of children aged 3-14 (11% of this age group) spent part of the school holidays at this service. The main form of privately funded provision is in private family daycare. A survey by the Flemish welfare agency, *Kind en Gezin* in 1989 reported that 11% of children under 3 were in private services, mainly family daycare. (CEC (1990)).

## RURAL CHILDCARE

There are no comparative urban/rural statistics available for services as a whole but reports have found the level to be substantially lower. Findings of an action research project undertaken between 1989 and 1991 in the French speaking community by the Femmes Prevoyantes Socialistes and funded by ONE include:

- lack of adequate structure of services particularly for children under 3 and school age childcare
- lack of choice
- constraints on women's employment
- high, sometimes exorbitant cost of private provision despite staff not necessarily being qualified

- grandparents used for care do not necessarily have appropriate skills or desire to take care of the children.

Rural areas are reported to have far fewer day nurseries and offer less choice than urban areas. An area of provision more common in rural areas is that of organised family daycare but this is still inaccessible to some families. Statistics for 1990 on childcare in six predominantly rural districts within the French speaking Community show that publicly funded places were available for only 7% of children aged 0-3 in organised family daycare, day nurseries (which take children from 0 or 18 months up to 3) and a new form of centre, *maison communale d'accueil de l'enfance (MCAE)* which takes children from 0-6 years. This excludes children within pre-primary schooling which is however also reported to have lower levels of coverage in rural areas. The minimum threshold for providing separate pre-primary and primary schools (*écoles fondamentales*) in French speaking areas varies according to the density of population: twenty four in communes with population of up to 75 inhabitants per square kilometre; sixty for communes of 75 to 500 inhabitants and 140 for communes with more than 500 inhabitants per square kilometre. The thresholds for running a separate pre-primary school are fourteen, twenty and fifty children respectively, and fourteen, fifty and 120 children must be enrolled for running a separate primary school. An assessment of primary schools in the French speaking community for 1990/91 shows 1,200 with only one to three classrooms and 293 of these with only one. The provision of public nurseries in rural areas is affected by a general occupancy threshold of 75% for receiving subsidies.

The standards required of services in rural areas are in general the same. There are no special services for children with disabilities/special needs but these children are given priority in the new MCAE centres and in organised and subsidised family daycare, where a 150% subsidy is allocated for each child.

## DEVELOPMENTS

Within the French speaking community the ONE funded 1989-91 action research project led to a number of initiatives exploring appropriate models. This included the establishment of a centre for children from 0-12, 'midday' school care services and homework schools. The emphasis has been on a collaborative approach and involving the community in what is seen as a return to traditional childcare patterns. The size and flexibility of the new communal childcare centres (MCAE's) developed by ONE have also proved particularly appropriate for rural areas. The centres are small - twelve to twenty four places and can enrol children from 0-6 on a flexible basis - full time, part time or occasionally although the centres are open for at least ten hours daily five days a week.

A similar approach is also evident in Flemish speaking rural areas in small centres such as 'Kakelbont' which offers twenty children aged 0-4 full time, part time and occasional daycare, support for family daycarers and school age childcare. A recent school age childcare initiative in Flanders is also expected to stimulate the development and improve the quality of school age childcare centres in rural areas.

European funded projects in Belgium include two NOW projects in rural areas within the French and German communities. In Bouillon in the province of Luxembourg, a project entitled *La Source, Une Cascade de Ressources*, involves training for tourism with childcare provided for trainees. A project developed for 9 communes in the German speaking community by the *Association Regionalzentrum Fur Kleinkindbetreuung Tagesmutterdienst (RSKB)* involves the parallel development of childcare centres and integrated training structures for unqualified or longterm unemployed women wishing to re-enter employment in a childcare setting.

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### ■ Les P'tits Boux d'Choux

MCAE publicly funded rural communal centre providing range of care services for children.

#### Description

The centre was opened in 1992 in a commune in the arrondissement of Neufchateau. Previously family daycarers were the only form of childcare available. The centre is in an old school building fitted out for

the new service and is open from 6.30 to 18.15 every day except public holidays. It currently has a total of twenty two children. Eight of the children are aged 0-18 months, ten aged 18-36 months and four (after school) aged 2.5-4 years. There are three full-time and two part-time staff (*puericultrices*) co-ordinated by a part-time social worker. Staff were selected from amongst the unemployed on a special contract (*Agent Contractuel Subventionne ACS*).

The centre is funded by ONF, the commune and a regional programme for the unemployed and the funding is long-term. 150% funding is received for every child with disabilities or heavy social problems.

#### Contact

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### ■ Kakelbont

Publicly funded communal centre providing range of pre-school and school age care services for children and support for family daycarers.

#### Description

Small centre in peri-urban area providing full-time, part-time and occasional daycare for children aged 0-6, predominantly up to the age of four. The centre provides school age childcare for children aged 4-6 attending kindergarten and occasionally for older children, facilitating a gradual transition between the centre and pre-primary schooling. The centre also provides support for family daycarers. The centre provides ten to twelve places, used flexibly providing for up to approximately twenty children.

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## DENMARK

## RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Around 15-20% of the Danish population (varying according to the definition used) were living in rural areas in 1990 compared with half of the total population seventy years earlier. The rural population has now generally stabilised with, from the 1980s, a significant migration from urban back into rural areas and a substantial increase in peri-urban areas. However, Denmark retains a number of rural areas facing problems of remoteness and depopulation, particularly evident in some of the islands (Braithwaite et al).

Only 8% of the total population is now employed in agriculture; few women are agricultural workers or own a farm in their own right - most take the role of 'assisting spouses'. Employment rates for women with children are high in Denmark. In 1991, 87% of women with a child under 10 were economically active. (CEC (1993)(d). It is reported that there is almost no difference in economic activity rates of women and men in general and between rural and urban areas. However, women's unemployment rates tend to be higher in rural areas, and women are significantly more likely to be self-employed (Braithwaite et al).

## CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Children start primary school at the age of seven. Denmark has the highest levels of childcare services in the European Union providing in 1988 for 48% of under 3s, 85% of 3-6 year olds and 29% of primary school children in publicly funded childcare services. Publicly funded provision for children under 3 is in organised family daycare (60%), nurseries (28%), mixed age centres (8%) which mostly take children

from 0-6 but sometimes also provide care outside school hours and kindergartens which take some 2 year olds. In the 3-6 years age group all 6 year olds and some 5 year olds attend pre-primary schooling and 70% attend some other form of service - kindergartens (61%) mixed age centres, (17%) organised family daycare and some form of outside school hours care. Private (for profit) services play a secondary and diminishing role, providing for 15% of under 3s in 1989 (compared with 47% in publicly funded services). Family day care is the most common form of privately funded service providing for 8% of children aged 0-6 followed by own home care (2%). There are virtually no private (for profit) nurseries. A new Government commitment, to extend daycare to every child from the age of one to school age whose parents want it, will further improve on these levels.

## RURAL CHILDCARE

High levels of national coverage in Denmark mean that there are higher levels of services in Danish rural areas than in many urban areas within other member states. However, the evidence suggests that rural families in Denmark may have less choice and access to fewer places than their urban counterparts.

Danish studies show that in general small municipalities have lower rates of coverage by services than bigger municipalities and also have longer waiting lists. The most significant differences lie in the form of childcare services available.

Tables 4 and 5 from a study by Ole Bertelsen show, for example, that for under 3s, while approximately 40% of children in the greater Copenhagen area were in childcare centres, less than 5% of children in rural areas were in centres, with over half of rural care arrangements involving parents and private care. Approximately 85% of children aged 3-6 were within public childcare services in the greater Copenhagen area but only 60% in rural areas. (Bertelsen (1991)). Demand for 3-6 year olds in rural areas approached demand in the greater Copenhagen area for public

Table 3

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
48%	85%	7	3-5.5 hours	29%
Source: CEC (1990), <i>Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-90</i>				

daycare. Demand for 0-3 year olds is more complex with growing unemployment outside the greater Copenhagen area constraining demand. There is some evidence that parents in rural areas are less likely to prefer childcare centres and more likely to prefer public and private childminding in particular for under threes.

There are no minimum threshold requirements required by the Act for the development of services but in practice the number of children can affect the development and form of service. There are no separate standards for services in rural areas.

A limited examination of communes of varying sizes ranging from around 7,000 inhabitants to 50,000 inhabitants with two communes in each category show that rural provision where it existed generally had longer opening hours. There was somewhat inconclusive evidence over differences in staff/child ratios and running costs. Priority in access to services is given to children with disabilities/special needs, single and employed parents and siblings. There is some special provision for German minority communities.

## DEVELOPMENTS

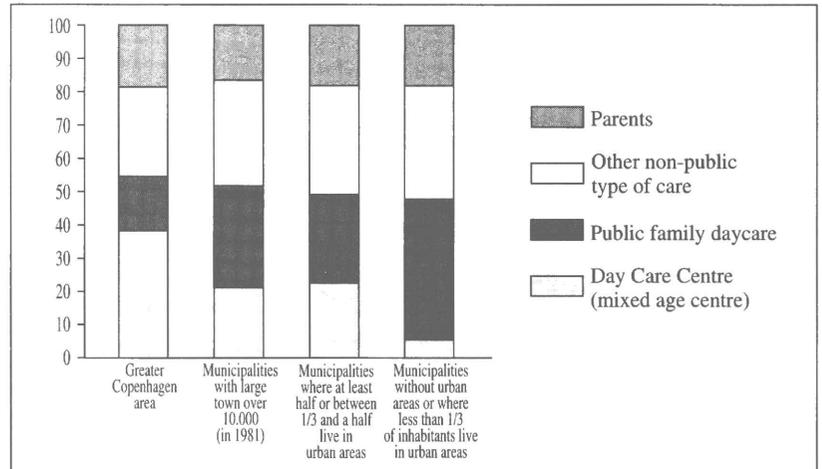
Levels of childcare services in Denmark are already higher than in other countries in the European Union and will continue to rise with the new Government commitment announced in Autumn 1993.

The development of services in rural areas has been assisted by some legislative changes and the use of flexible models. One legislative change involved allowing public funding for extending family daycare (*stordagpleje*) to allow two family daycarers to care for up to ten children in one household - a form of 'hybrid' nursery. Age integrated centres based upon a philosophy of the benefits children derive from mixed age provision and providing for 20% of children from 0-7 or sometimes older also offer a flexible model for rural areas. Other models of relevance to rural areas include the conversion of houses in residential areas - reducing capital costs, particularly significant in setting up small nurseries, and 'wood kindergartens' based upon a philosophy of children learning and playing outside. In some areas threatened school closures have assisted the development of provision through enabling childcare services to share or take over school premises.

One funding model which is seen as having assisted development in rural areas has been the 'bag of money' or 'pooling' arrangement facilitated through legislation in 1990 involving funding from municipalities to enable parents, groups and

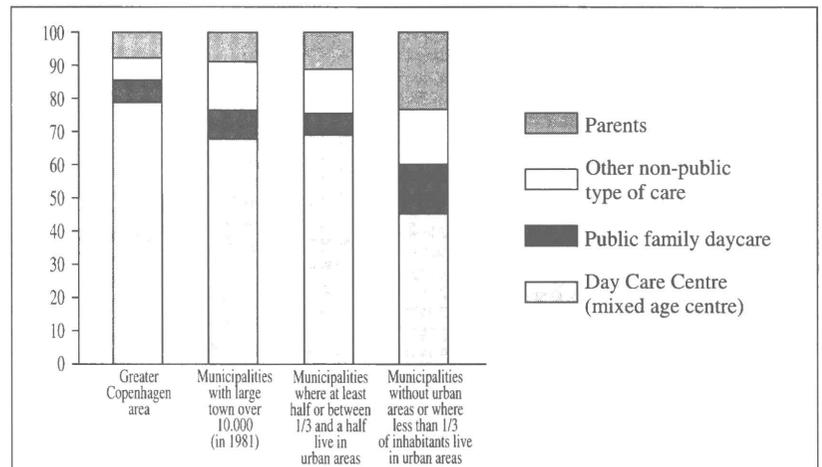
organisations to establish and operate their own nursery, subject to meeting the criteria specified by the municipality.

**Table 4**



**Proportion of children aged 0-2 in publicly funded childcare services by urban/rural characteristics**

**Table 5**



**Proportion of children aged 3-6 in publicly funded childcare services by urban/rural characteristics**

Most of the centres, of which in September 1993 there were 170, have been started by parents. The first centre established on this basis was one in Hover Bornehus in the municipality of Ringkøbing. The centre was established by parents for whom the only available centre-based provision was 20 kilometres away and as a way of supporting the school and strengthening the life of the community in an area with a lot of commuting. The centre is based at the school, which has to the dismay of parents now closed down, but has helped to keep the school premises for community use - it also accommodates a library providing school age childcare for the schools of the area, and involves grandparents as well as parents within the centre.

National training initiatives for unemployed people and a measure passed in 1992 enabling the municipalities to receive a refund of 60% of unemployment benefit of unemployed trained and untrained childcare workers are also seen as having assisted the development of provision in rural areas.

A significant factor in the development of services in all of Denmark's municipalities has been growing awareness that availability of childcare services can influence inward investment in areas. A survey examining the importance attached by the mayors of municipalities to facilities which assist in providing sound commercial development found that childcare services were the single most important item - seen as more significant than transport, housing, schools, recreational and cultural activities of the environment (Rogvi 1991). The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs has recently indicated that it will be producing an annual map of municipalities showing, amongst other information, services for the care of children and elderly people as a way of encouraging municipalities to further improve their services. Municipalities with low rates of childcare coverage (in general rural municipalities) are to be allowed additional reimbursement from the government towards the running costs of centres and family based care under the two year programme of expansion.

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### **Svanninge Miljorbornhave og Fritidshjem (Environment Kindergarten and Youth Centre of Svanninge)**

Parent developed and run kindergarten and school age childcare centre for children aged 3-9 years of age.

#### **Description**

Svanninge is a village of approximately 500 inhabitants in the municipality of Faaborg (approximately 17,000 inhabitants) in the south of Fyn, the main island of which is linked by a bridge to the mainland. Although, as in Denmark generally, the birthrate is now increasing, the population of school age children has been decreasing with, as a consequence, a number of schools closed or threatened with closure. Unemployment is high in the municipality, particularly for women, and there are low levels of childcare services.

The centre was initiated by parents, opening in 1991.

In 1992 it provided for thirty eight children aged 3-6 and twenty five aged 6-9. It is open from 6.30 to 17.00, 52 weeks of the year. The centre has taken over (and is continuing to expand into) school accommodation (built for 400 children but when visited in 1992 only had 180 children) as well as taking over houses. There is a strong emphasis in the curriculum on understanding the environment with children encouraged to play, dig and explore in the extensive outside play area.

The centre works closely with the school in which the school age childcare services are based, making use of the school gymnasium and woodwork rooms as well as the outside facilities. It also provides support for public family daycarers - the principal form of care for children under 3 although there is demand for centre care now.

The centre is run by a parent/staff committee. The parents converted the building, working at weekends and in the evenings. It also makes use of trainees from a nearby employment project. The centre not only provides care for children, but also runs social functions for the parents and works with the local old people's association. Six times a year, the old people's association joins the centre for gymnastics and a Christmas party and there are special grandparent's days twice a year when they join the children for singing and a meal.

#### **Contact**

Gunhild Hansen

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### **Kirkeby Borne og Fritidscenter**

(Children and Recreation Centre of Kirkeby)

Centre with farm providing care for children aged 3-10 years of age

#### **Description**

Kirkeby is a village of around 800 inhabitants in Munkebjerg, a rural municipality of approximately 8,000 inhabitants in the south of Fyn.

The centre started as a small kindergarten in 1980 and developed as a result of staff initiative. Staff proposed that the kindergarten land could be used for a farm on which children could help with the animals, with the

age range of the children extended to include those of school age.

After discussion with parents and the trade union, the centres and farm were established in 1985.

The centre is in an old cottage with a new extension and is now open from 6.30 to 17.00 providing for thirty one children aged 3-6 and thirty four aged 6-10. It has seven trained staff and one untrained member of staff and makes some use of trainee childcare workers and unemployed workers. The children help with feeding and cleaning up the animals and with work in the fields. The centre works closely with the adjacent school acquiring expensive equipment together and making use of its facilities. Parents are extensively involved in the centre with a parents committee meeting six times a year and helping with activities. The parents built an amphitheatre in the grounds and help in an autumn market in the village in which the centre and school cooperate with the local citizens association. They also help with some of the agricultural work - for example, planting the potatoes. The centre has a music room and a woodwork shop and has received funding from a trade union fund for encouraging innovation.

#### Contact

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*Children preparing entertainment in the parent built amphitheatre at Kirkeby children's centre.*

The wood kindergarten, which developed from the adventure playground, now provides for twenty children from 7.00 to 13.00 who assemble in a Scout hut and set out from there to play in the countryside. Although they have access to an adventure playground in an old shed, if the weather is unfavourable, there are only a very number of occasions when they do not play outside. Activities are not planned in advance except when there is a special outing. Instead children are asked what they want to do; most undertake activities as a group.

The centre as a whole works closely with parents and every year organises a week end summer camp for children, parents and grandparents.

#### Contact

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## Troldebakken, Bredballe

Centre providing care for children aged 0-14 with farm, adventure playground and a satellite 'wood kindergarten'.

#### Description

Bredballe is a commuter village of around 5000 inhabitants in the municipality of Vejle which has a high level of childcare provision. The centre was established in 1978 and in 1992 had nineteen children aged 0-3, thirty aged 3-6, thirty aged 6-9 and forty five children aged 9-14 and twenty two staff. For children aged 0-9, hours are 7.00 to 17.00 throughout the year. For children aged 9-14 the centre is open 11.30 to 17.30 for eleven months of the year. The centre has extensive land and keeps animals and grows crops and vegetables. It provides support for both public and private daycarers through a 'drop-in facility'.

**FRANCE**

**RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

32,000 of the 36,000 French communes are categorised as rural. Two thirds of the French land area has an average population density of only fifteen inhabitants per square kilometre (described as 'deep rural'). Peri-urban areas account for 20% of rural areas but 80% of the rural population with an average density totalling around 90 inhabitants per square kilometre. In 1990 one in every four women was living in a rural area. (*Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques*).

Whilst agriculture remains an important economic activity in rural France, farm households have fallen as a percentage of the rural population from 47% in 1962 to 27% in 1982 with an associated decline in the female farming population - by 26% between 1980 and 1988. However, an increasing proportion of farm heads are now women - 15% in 1988 compared with 9% in 1980 and women have become increasingly involved in developments such as agri-tourism and other diversification projects such as gites, walking tours, and riding farms. The number of women working outside the farm in non-agricultural employment has increased by 9% between 1980 and 1988 (Braithwaite et al).

Although only limited information is available on fishing families, a recent French study suggest that they have been considerably affected by changes affecting the fishing industry. The study reports on an increased tendency for younger spouses of owner fishermen in the port of Granville in Basse Normandie to seek employment outside the family fishing business but suggests that wives of seamen, possibly through lack of training and qualifications have been less likely to follow this route as a means of addressing the considerable problems of increasing indebtedness, isolation and status confronting many

wives of offshore fishermen (Toutain et al 1992 op cit).

Economic activity rates of rural women have increased significantly overall - by 56% between 1975 and 1990. In 1990, 43% of all rural women of working age were economically active, only slightly lower than the rate for urban areas (48%). The increase was sharpest in the South of France - where rates had previously been low and in some of the tourist areas such as the Rhone Alpes and the Mediterranean. (Braithwaite et al op cit). Levels of female unemployment were slightly lower in rural than urban areas except for women under the age of thirty (*Societe d'Etudes Geographiques, Economiques et Sociologiques Appliquees* 1992). Rural women in this age group have slightly higher rates of unemployment than urban women. Nationally, 67% of women with a child aged 0-9 were economically active in 1991 (CEC (1993)(e)).

**CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS**

Children start primary school at the age of six. In 1988 publicly funded services were available for around 20% of children under 3 in day nurseries (creche collectifs) and kindergartens (5%), organised family day care (2%) and part time centres or haltes garderies (1.5%) with around 40% of 2 year olds (13% of under 3s) in pre-primary schools. About 95% of children aged 3-5 are in pre-primary schools open from 8.30 to 16.30 with most providing meals and supervision during the two hour lunch break. Outside these hours, on Wednesdays and holidays, outside school hours care is provided for around 10-15% of 3-5 year olds and services are available on a similar basis to primary school children.

The main form of privately funded provision is in family day care and accounts for 40-45% of care provided for children under 3 with employed parents.

**Table 6**

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
20%	95%+	6	8 hours	No information
Source: CEC (1990) <i>Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-1990</i>				

## RURAL CHILDCARE

No national statistics are available on levels of provision in rural areas but they are reported to be substantially lower, reflecting the problems of providing services in those areas associated with scattered populations and transport difficulties. Funding mechanisms are also seen as making insufficient allowance for these factors, not allowing for example for the heavy staffing costs that can be incurred in some rural provision. For children under three, childcare options in rural areas include family day care and mixed age centres. Age integrated and multi-functional models combining different types of services such as mixed age centres, occasional daycare and school age childcare, have provided one means of offering collective facilities in areas of low density population. Some occasional care and play and educational services are provided through mobile services. Pre-primary schooling is available in most areas (with some exceptions) but may be on a different basis to urban nursery education - involving for example the grouping of several communes or single class grouping from nursery age to the end of primary school. Legislation provides for schooling to become possible from the age of two - this is not always available in rural areas.

There is no official minimum threshold for providing services and in some areas there are pre-primary school classes for only five pupils. The viability threshold for collective facilities is seen by one study as between 200 and 600 inhabitants according to the average age of the population. Requirements are the same for urban and rural provision in relation to qualifications and training requirements but exemptions are possible for certain types of care and these are more likely to be granted in rural areas.

## DEVELOPMENTS

High levels of pre-primary school services for French children have ensured that even in rural areas this is generally available with some exceptions and/or from the later age of 4 years in the more remote areas. Services for under 3s and school age childcare are in shorter supply. An important development has been an extension in the use of Family Allowance Funds (*Caisses des Allocations Familiales (CAF's's)*) which are regional funds financed by employer contributions used to subsidise childcare services, to provide access to parent and family agencies in developing services. As in the Danish 'bag of money' or 'pooling' system, this has facilitated local action in developing provision. Rural Communes have worked with local community organisations such as *Association des Collectifs Enfants/Parents Professionnels (ACEPP)* and the long established French rural family

association, *Familles Rurales* in developing a range of flexible services on a partnership basis involving the use of flexible and multi-functional models which have been significant in the development of services in some other member states.

A recent report by *Familles Rurales* reveals the extent to which its local family associations are involved in the development and running of leisure, cultural, recreational and educational activities which increasingly recognise the need for a care component. A programme of "assistance with homework" developed by the local *Familles Rurales* association in Montreal in the Languedoc-Roussilles Region was originally intended for children from disadvantaged families who through language difficulties or other reasons were unable to help their children. It has now widened its initiative to include children whose mothers are in paid employment (*Familles Rurales* (1993)).

As in Denmark a number of projects have been prompted by the threat of school closure. In the departement of Aude in the Champagne-Ardennes region of France parents, municipalities and a number of associations (*Faux/Villecerf-Prunay/Belleville-St. Lupien*) have joined together to open a canteen and provide out of school care and a creche. In the same departement the village of Courteranges and several other villages are planning to provide out of school care and meals for children in the homes of approved childminders as a way of preventing children having to go to school in the nearby town because of the absence of these services in the villages. In Prissac, in the Department of Indre, a music school has been established on Wednesdays in the school which is usually closed that day giving children an opportunity to learn a variety of instruments, establishing an orchestra. The programme has now been extended to include courses in the school holidays. (*Familles Rurales* (1993) op cit).

Over the last two decades, the association has developed a particular emphasis on services for young children in a number of regions. In the region of Gard in the period 1985-1991, the regional association assisted in the development of 25 parent managed centres providing full and part-time care facilities financed through the CAF and municipalities and parents. (CEC (1992)).

A further development associated with this has been the recognition of the significance of childcare in the wider context of rural development. In one remote mountain village in Gard, a centre combining full, part-time and occasional care has been established and is run by parents to meet both their own needs and those of tourists. The centre encourages tourism through offering care and leisure facilities and also recognises the role of services in population retention

in rural areas. A major action research project funded by the French Ministry of Agriculture and run by ACEPP entitled *Une Dynamique Participative pour le developpement d'Actions Petite Enfance a l'Animation de Dynamiques Locales de Developpement en Zones Rurales Fragiles* also explores the role of childcare services in population retention and community development. The programme, run by ACEPP (which in 1992 had 188 rural childcare centres) involved a four year programme to improve and develop services for children and families through 'animating' community development. The project encompassed seven pilot projects in six departments - Vienne, Tarn, Yonne, Alpes Haute-Provence, Vaucluse and two projects in hautes Alpes.

European Union funding has been sought to further develop the ACEPP initiative and has contributed to a number of other developments. For example, a project funded through the NOW programme is facilitating access to training and employment in fishing areas

*Famille Rurales centre providing full, part-time and occasional care at Aubais.*



affected as described earlier by economic restructuring. In Honfleur, a training and childcare initiative is being developed for the wives of offshore fisheries. Other initiatives intended to provide women's employment have begun in Basse Normandie (La Manche) and in Quetthou. These include the establishment of workshops for making maritime furniture and sailmaking (SEGESA (1993) op cit).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### ACEPP centre, Barcelonnette

Centre providing part time, full time and occasional care for children aged 0-6 and school age childcare for older children.

#### Description

A centre within one of the ACEPP project areas - the Vallee de l'Ubaye in Haute Alpes. The valley area comprises sixteen communes with around 5,000 inhabitants centred around the small urban commune of Barcelonnette, the population of which has been increasing at the expense of the surrounding area. The principal areas of employment in the valley are government services, tourist related services and (of diminishing importance) agriculture. A reduction in the military presence in the valley prompted an examination of economic trends in the area and ways in which population and employment could be retained, contributing to the choice of the area for the ACEPP project.

The centre provides care for twenty children aged 0-3 years - full or part time and occasional care for fourteen children. The commune has two pre-primary schools taking children from the age of 2.5-6 and the centre provides care and lunch for children at the pre-primary schools over lunchtime and on Wednesday afternoons. The centre is open for eight hours a day and is run by a coordinator, one other childcare worker and six trainees. The coordinator is a qualified family daycarer as the Departement no longer requires the more formal childcare qualification the two year trained 'éducateur des jeunes enfants' (EJE's) or the four year trained 'puericultrice'.

#### Contact

Centre les Marmot's

#### Address

14 rue Bellon

04400 Barcelonnette

## **L'Esperou Centre, Gard**

Centre providing full-time, part-time and occasional care for children, the village and tourists.

### **Description**

L'Esperou is a small village at the foot of Mt. Aigoual in Cevannes, 95 kilometres from Nimes. The village is isolated with scattered houses and hamlets and children only have access to pre-primary schooling at five.

The centre is managed by parents and provides full or part time for fourteen children and two places for occasional care. There is one infant teacher (EJE) and one puericultrice. The centre is open to not only residents but also tourists. Tourists contribute to the running of the centre and some of them are attracted to the area by the centre. Funding is through the CAF, municipality and DASS.

### **Contact**

Mme Vadja

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Gardenie les Bousquets  
30570 Esperou  
Tel: 67 82 64 60

## **Family Daycare D'Olemps, Aveyron**

Publicly funded family daycare programme with family daycare support facility.

### **Description**

The commune D'Olemps has a population of 3000 which is increasing and has high levels of women in employment. The service involves twelve family daycarers who provide care for thirty eight children for six days a week throughout the year. A service is run by the coordinator who is an infant teacher (EJE), employed seventeen hours a week to develop and manage the service. The service is only for parents in paid employment and care is provided on a part time as well as a full time basis. Once a week on Thursday afternoons between 1430 and 1800 the children accompanied by their family daycarers visit a local hall equipped with games and material. 'La halte jeu' is organised and directed by the coordinator and enables the family daycarers to exchange experiences and concerns.

### **Contact**

M Carriere

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## **Famille Rurales Centre, Milhaud (nr. Nimes)**

Centre providing full time, part time, occasional care and school age childcare

### **Description**

Milhaud is a peri-urban dormitory village for Nimes with a population of around 4,250. The centre provides full time, part time and occasional care for children as well as school age childcare and has a total of sixteen places, six of which offer occasional care. The centre is open from 7.30 to 18.30 and employs seven staff, of which two are qualified and five are trainees. Milhaud has one of the oldest associations of Famille Rurales and has developed nine clubs with the socio-cultural centre and also runs an extensive holiday scheme for sixty children aged 4-12 encompassing theatre, judo, music, canoeing, camping, etc.

### **Contact**

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## GERMANY

RURAL AREAS AND  
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

There has been a strong trend in the west of Germany for families with young children to move out of the city. As a result, rural areas encompass many peri-urban areas with a higher proportion of children than in the cities. This trend has been most evident in West Germany; the contrast between rural and urban areas is greatest in the East, in the "New Bundesländer".

In West Germany employment rates for women have increased sharply in rural areas. Between 1983 and 1988 the employment growth rate for women was generally higher in agricultural (+11%) than in high density regions (+8%). The employment rate for women in rural areas is now 41% higher than the average for West Germany as a whole. Employment rates of rural women are significantly higher in some sectors. For example, in hotel and catering 66% of those employed are women compared to 59% in urban areas (Braithwaite op cit).

In peri-urban areas commuting levels are high. A survey carried out as part of a research project by the German Youth Institute (DJI) on rural kindergartens in three federal states found that farming families were a small minority within the villages - only 11% of the children's parents were involved in agriculture - and that labour force participation of the mothers was higher than the national average. Two thirds of the fathers and over half the mothers commuted to work outside the villages (Berger and Krug (1991) op cit).

In the new Länder there is now extensive unemployment - only a quarter of women formerly working in the agricultural sector are still employed.

CHILDCARE: NATIONAL  
LEVELS

Children start primary school between age 6 and seven. In former West Germany publicly funded services were available for approximately 3% of children under 3 in nurseries (2%), mixed age centres (taking children from 0-6), kindergartens or in the form of publicly subsidised places within private family daycare. For children from 3 to primary school the most common form of publicly funded provision is in kindergartens with some limited pre-primary schooling for around 6% of 5 and 6 year olds. Centres providing outside school hours care are available for 4% of children aged 6-10 and some age integrated centres take children from 0-15 years. The main form of privately funded service is family day care - there is no information on the number of places. In the new Länder an extensive system of publicly funded services was provided in 1987 for 81% of children aged 1-2 in nurseries and 94% of over 3s in kindergartens. Services were free.

## RURAL CHILDCARE

In the west of Germany, models of provision in rural areas are generally similar to those in urban areas but levels of provision are substantially lower for some services in particular, eg, day nurseries, afterschool care and full day kindergartens. Any form of daycare for under 3s is rare - some parent and toddler groups have been developed, often initiated by incomers to the area and often attached to churches. Children over the age of 3 are less likely to attend kindergartens. The German Youth Institute (DJI) survey on rural kindergartens found that only 15% of 3 year olds attended kindergarten compared with the national average of 33% (West German figures), and that at

Table 7

Proportion of children in former West Germany receiving publicly funded services, as % of all children in age group*				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
3%	65-70%	6-7	4-5 hours	4
Source: CEC (1990) <i>Childcare in the European Communities</i> , 1985-1990				

\* Statistics for former West Germany. Levels in the new Länder remain substantially higher. In 1990 there were places for approx. 50% of children under 3. (M. Jaeckel: CEC, *Employment, Family and Caring*, 1993)

the beginning of the project, none of the kindergartens were open over the midday period (Berger and Krug op cit). Attending kindergarten or other services frequently involves travelling as administrative reforms have involved grouping villages together with centralised schools and kindergartens. As the national questionnaire notes: "Children already at the age of 3 start a career as commuters." As a result of this some projects are now attempting to decentralise childcare services.

Levels of services are higher in the New Länder (East Germany) where full day provision is still the main form of kindergarten.

The minimum and maximum number of children for which services will be provided varies by lander. For example, in Bavaria funding of kindergartens is given for a minimum of fifteen children and up to twenty eight to thirty one children. Standards are in general the same in terms of space requirements, training and qualifications between urban and rural areas. However, kindergartens more frequently seek permission for larger groups in rural areas. One group kindergarten with one childcare worker and one helper and with 28-31 children are not uncommon. Group sizes are smaller in the New Lander. Special services for children with disabilities/special needs exist only in the cities. In rural areas, children are most commonly integrated into kindergartens without special support or reduction of group size although in some areas special integration groups have now been introduced with lower group sizes, special programmes and peripatetic support of staff attending to work with the children on a regular basis. There are no differences in training of childcare workers between rural and urban areas although there some differences between the new and old Länder. The lack of adaptation of training to rural circumstances is seen as creating many difficulties.

## DEVELOPMENTS

At a national level, childcare provision has been improving over recent years, involving more services and longer hours for existing provision. In July 1992 the German Federal Parliament announced that from 1996 every child between the age of 3 and 6 would be entitled to a place in kindergarten. The new Children's Welfare Law (KJHG) requires local planners to carry out a survey of demand which has raised many issues and considerable controversy over its implementation.

The DJI rural kindergartens project explored appropriate modes for rural areas. Its aims included:

- creating small scale local facilities for children and their families as opposed to larger, more centralised institutions

- finding ways of catering for fluctuations in demand caused by migration patterns and birthrate changes.
- meeting the diverse needs of families in terms of opening hours and facilities
- helping kindergartens to develop their own identity, drawing on the local environment and culture (DJI (1991)).

Adapted models are beginning to develop in some rural areas with for example some age integrated centres providing care for children from 0-6 and some extended hours for kindergartens which stay open until 14.00 hours. Whilst this has proved popular with part time working mothers it has led to the closing down of some afternoon groups. An innovative development in some services has been that of including a lobbying element within the jobs of childcare workers - for example on issues such as traffic, regional planning and the environment, all of which can affect children and are seen as increasing problems in rural areas.

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### Genderkingen Kindergarten

Kindergarten with environmental lobbying role.

#### Description

The kindergarten is situated near the Donau river in an area where groundwater has been exploited to provide drinking water supplies for some of the big cities of the region. This has affected the landscape and vegetation, caused cracks in the buildings and deprived the children in the area of many of the natural ponds which they visited to look at the frogs and waterplants and to play in the mud. Through discussions with older people in the village, they learned that the ponds had been big enough to swim in when the older people were young. The children established a project involving interviewing the older people who remembered what the river used to look like, collecting old photographs and stories, and made an exhibition on the landscape changes and its effects on everyday life. This event became a focal point for discussion, and activities in the region to prevent further lowering of the water table.

#### Contact

DJI (Projekt Landkindergarten)

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## Allgau Childrens Cook Book

Promoting interest in local food culture in rural kindergarten.

### Description

There is an emphasis in rural kindergartens in Germany on learning about regional dishes. The cook book was compiled in a kindergarten in the Allgau region, from regional dishes the children had helped cook in their kindergarten. The project had developed when opening hours of the kindergarten had been lengthened to accommodate working parents who were unable to pick up their children before lunch. Initially the cooking sessions were only intended to involve the children staying late, but soon all the children developed an interest in cooking and eating the meals. A cooking day has now been established on a regular basis, with children deciding what to cook, shopping, cooking, setting the table and cleaning the dishes. The kindergarten then embarked on cooking regional specialities as a way of familiarising children with their food culture. The parents began asking for the recipes, inspiring the production of the cook book.

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## Kindergarten/Parent and Toddler Group, Sulzberg

Adaptation of kindergarten to include parent/child support group.

### Description

The kindergarten has been opened up to accommodate a parent and toddler group. Parents (generally mothers) meet once a week in the gymnasium of the kindergarten. They divide the room using benches for a play area and an area where the mothers can sit and talk about playing with the children. The children see this arrangement as "the little kindergarten" and it has facilitated transition into the kindergarten. Childcare staff lend toys, make suggestions on group games and songs popular with children.

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## GREECE

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

An increasing proportion of the Greek population live in the principal cities which have acted as powerful magnets for the Greek rural population. The rural population was estimated in 1981 as 30% of the total population (defined by the Greek Ministry of Agriculture as living in municipalities and communities of up to 2,000 inhabitants) declining from 48% in 1951. However, agriculture remains important in Greece which has the highest proportion of population employed in agriculture in the European Union (22% in 1991). Almost a half are women (45% in 1989) although the total number of rural women employed in agriculture is declining. (Greek Ministry of Agriculture; Braithwaite et al op cit). According to a 1989 survey of women's occupations in rural areas, 78% worked in agriculture, 10% in tourism and trade, 7% in industries and just over 4% in other services and activities. Women have been increasingly involved in the growth areas of tourism and agri-tourism. The proportion of women in tourism has been gradually increasing and agri-tourism is mainly undertaken by rural women involving both small individual tourism units (eg, bed and breakfast, small hotels) and more extensive agri-tourism cooperatives identified as a promising area for development particularly for those living in disadvantaged rural areas (Braithwaite et al op cit). Nationally 46% of Greek women with a child aged 0-9 were economically active in 1991 (CEC (1993)(e)).

Many Greek rural areas have high levels of poverty and there are considerable problems associated with remoteness and depopulation. For example, a survey carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture in Greece in 1979 on conditions of development for infants and children of pre-school age in rural families in 51 Greek prefectures found that over half (52%) of children were described as sleeping 'with their parents'. 38% were sleeping 'with other people' and only 10% are sleeping 'alone' (information submitted by the AOO Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture). A family survey carried out in Thesprotia found that only 9% of households were connected to any water supply and less than half had a bath or shower. None of the villages had a medical centre and 8% of mothers received no medical attention during pregnancy. 12% of the 747 families in the Thesprotia study were one-parent families and a large number of fathers worked away from the area - 35% of husbands with four or more children, 22% with three were absent for periods longer than six months (V. Papadimitriou op cit).

## CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Children start primary school at 5.5 years. Publicly funded provision of children under 3 is in nurseries ('vrefikos stathnos') which take children from 8 months to 2.5, and mixed age centres with children from 8 months to 5.5 years. Many mixed age centres involve the adding of accommodation for children under 2.5 to kindergartens which take children from 2.5-5.5 and which accounts for most publicly funded provision for children under three. Most provision is run directly by the Ministry of Welfare but some places are provided by local authorities and private organisations. Publicly funded services for children aged 3-5.5 are in two forms of service - kindergartens (or mixed age centres) provided mainly by central government, open from 7.00 to 16.00 (with some in Athens open until 2000) and pre-primary schooling provided by the Ministry of Education available for children aged 4-5.5 and open for 3.5 hours a day. There is no publicly funded outside school hours care. Privately funded nurseries, mixed age centres and kindergartens provide places for around 2% of children aged 8 months to primary school age. Family day care is rare.

## RURAL CHILDCARE

Levels of services are reported to be substantially lower in rural areas. The 1979 AOO survey showed that only 5% of mothers were able to use day nurseries (1% of these in seasonal day nurseries); just over 50% of mothers left their child with a grandparent, 2% with neighbours, 5% with the oldest child, 1% left the child alone, 8% took them into the field while 28% of mothers stayed at home themselves. The results were the same for communities in mountainous and semi-mountainous and lowland areas. The later Thresprotia survey showed that of those mothers working outside the

home, none were able to make use of any formal childcare service, 27% used the grandparents, 32% used siblings and 12% used either neighbours or relatives. (V. Papadimitriou op cit)

A Network study visit to two areas in rural Greece - Macedonia and Ipiros revealed some of the considerable difficulties in providing services in these areas, resulting in low levels of provision and in some areas, non-existence of provision for under threes. In one area examined in the Kilkis area of Macedonia (see Table 9), out of a total of fourteen villages there were no services for children under three. There were kindergartens in nine of the villages, seven of them national kindergartens and two of them provided by the National Welfare Organisation (NWO). Winter conditions are described as very difficult, frequently making travel impossible.

In Macedonia, the coverage of seasonal daycare centres was found to be totally inadequate. In the small village of Krioneri in Macedonia, women spoke passionately of having to bring their children into the fields, leaving them in a hammock or in a cart while they worked - their normal working hours being 6.00 to 19.00 daily.

The most common form of provision in rural areas are kindergartens - national or provided by private organisations such as the National Welfare



*In Krioneri, women spoke passionately of their childcare problems and having to leave their children in hammocks or carts in fields while they worked*

Table 8

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
4%	65-70%	5.5	4-5 hours	Less than 0.5%

Source: CEC (1990) *Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-1990*

Organisation (NWO) - a government funded agency established in the Greek Civil War to provide support for children and which is now involved in developing a range of family services and community development projects including childcare, in some cases adapting the use of orphanages and residential homes. One centre at Oreokastro near Thessalonika and run by NWO is still in use as a residential home but also has two kindergartens and an after-school facility for the local community and offers ESF funded vocational training.

One form of childcare found in rural areas are seasonal kindergartens provided during busy periods of agricultural activity such as harvests. In 1988 there were thirty five seasonal kindergartens run by the Ministry of Agriculture, declining to eleven in 1991, and an estimated seventy three provided by NWO. Those provided by the Ministry of Agriculture are organised by a network of rural/domestic economy workers teaching families about hygiene, nutrition and sewing and with a wider community development role.

School age childcare services are particularly rare in rural areas although some NWO social centres which provide a range of community activities provide some informal and educational activities for school age children as well as some examples of school age childcare services. Family daycare is almost totally absent in Greece although it has now been encouraged in a number of European Union funded urban projects. The minimum thresholds for providing a national kindergarten is five children and twelve for an NWO kindergarten but this does not mean that these services are supplied. In the case of NWO kindergartens, the staff have only limited training. The

standards required are the same for rural as urban areas.

## DEVELOPMENTS

The development of some rural services has occurred because of the recognition of some of the wider problems of rural development and the problems presented by the social and health problems of families. Seasonal daycare centres have for example involved not only the National Welfare Organisation but also the Greek Ministry of Agriculture which has seen the need to address some of the underlying social needs of the rural population. An association of childcare with rural development has encouraged a wider perspective and facilitated some interesting proposals under the European Union's Structural Funds. The NOW programme, which is one of the European Commission's Community Initiatives, has been particularly relevant. It is felt that insufficient use has been made of the Leader programme. The National Welfare Organisation's work has encompassed housing and economic development as well as welfare services. It has for example been involved in establishing agricultural cooperatives and provides a wide range of training.

A wider perspective has also been encouraged by the family based approach of the welfare organisations in Greece. There are interesting examples of a family based approach to services with centres providing for children and elderly people, facilitating inter-generational contact. Both rural development and family based approaches have facilitated some multi-functional models but the development of services is

Table 9

Childcare Services in Kilkis area of Macedonia							
Village	Population	No. of children 2.5-5.5	National kindergarten	NWO kindergarten	NWO Social Centre (Community activities, after school informal activities, training)	Elementary school	Secondary and Lyceum school
Agii Spostoli	294	10	-	-	-	-	-
Bathi	500	11	-	-	-	1	-
Vathiohozi	1000	20	1	-	-	-	-
Gerakaszia	210	-	-	-	-	-	-
Guriva	700	19	1	-	-	-	-
Evezomi	800	25	1	-	1	-	-
Kemtaiko	243	-	-	-	-	-	-
Issoma	360	14	-	-	-	-	-
Miriofito	940	20	-	1	1	-	-
Polykastro	5647	90	-	1	1	1	1
Polypetro	550	15	1	-	-	-	-
Pontoiraklie	1083	15	1	-	-	-	-
Megali Sterya	500	10	-	-	-	-	-
Herso	1050	30	?	-	-	1	1

handicapped by the existence of two types of kindergarten and the absence of family daycare - now being introduced in some areas - for example in a European Union funded project being run by the Athens based Family Child Care Centre.

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### Kindergarten and social centre, Polykastro Greek Macedonia

Kindergarten and social centre run by the National Welfare Organisation (NWO).

#### Description

Polykastro is a large village with a population of around 5,600 in the Macedonian area of Greece. The village has both elementary and secondary schools but the kindergarten is the only pre-school service. It has places for twenty children aged 2.5 -5.5 of the ninety children in this age group in the village.

The kindergarten is open from 7.00 to 13.45 and the mothers of the children attending are either in paid employment or undertaking training at the Social Centre. There is a waiting list for the kindergarten. It is run by a coordinator (with no childcare training) and a cook and is hoping to have a cleaner/housekeeper. (It is currently cleaned by the Social Centre's cleaner.)

The Social Centre's activities include an after school computer programme (mostly used by boys) and an ESF funded sewing programme for thirty women.

#### Contact

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### Kindergarten, Sohos, Greek Macedonia

Social Welfare Ministry kindergarten

#### Description

Sohos is a large village with a resident population of around 3,000 and a further 4,000 registered to vote in the village but living elsewhere, usually in Thessalonika. Employment is generally seasonal in

agriculture and forestry and unemployment in the winter months rises to around two-thirds of the working population. Women are employed primarily in a clothing factory and in the tobacco fields.

The purpose built kindergarten was opened in 1985 and takes forty seven children aged 2.5-4.5 years. The Ministry of Education runs a kindergarten in the same village for children aged 4-5.5 years. There is a waiting list for the kindergarten and priority is given to those living in the village in employment or with family problems. The centre is open from 7.00 to 16.00 and has a director, one kindergarten worker, a cleaner and a cook. Some group work is undertaken with parents (usually mothers) and staff receive two days in service training per annum.

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### Kindergarten Kalpaki, Ipiros

NWO kindergarten and social centre with activities for school children.

#### Description

Kalpaki is close to the Greek frontier with Albania, an area with remote mountain villages.

The kindergarten is based at an NWO social centre and takes twenty six children aged 2.5-5.5 - a wider age range than usual in two classes. Priority is given to children of working mothers - in general working on farms or in a cheese factory. There is no childcare locally for children under 3 - grandmothers and mothers are the most common form of care, but there are considerable requirements for the centre-based provision for this age group.

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## IRELAND

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Ireland is a predominantly rural country with an overall population density of 51 inhabitants/km. 43% of its total population live in areas defined as rural, the population of which increased during the 1980s, following a period of continuous decline. Female activity rates are lower in rural areas - 29% of women are economically active compared with 38% in urban areas. According to employment data rural women are more likely to be employed in the professions, commerce and insurance, manufacturing than in agriculture. Statistics show that 7% of the female workforce were employed in agriculture but the contribution of women to agriculture is thought to be more extensive than this suggests. 1990 EC data records 111,000 farm wives, 24,500 women in ownership of farms and 14,000 in an 'assisting relatives' category. Just over a half of farm wives had young children. On average farm wives spent thirty eight hours a week on farm work including office work, administration and decision making. For 60% of them the work was seen as a family contribution and 17% received no payment at all (Braithwaite et al op cit). Nationally 38% of women with a child under 10 were economically active in 1991. The proportion of women in paid employment increased by just over 11% in the period 1985-91 (CEC (1993) op cit).

### CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Compulsory school begins in Ireland at 6, but many 4 and 5 year olds attend primary schools on a voluntary basis - there is no publicly funded pre-primary schooling except for one centre in Dublin and some centres for travellers. National rates for services are low with less than 2% of children under 3 in publicly funded services - in mixed aged centres (day nurseries) which take children up to 6 provided by private non-profit organisations and not available to

working parents. Between 2-3% of children aged 3-5 attend mixed age centres. In 1987 55% of 4 year olds and nearly 100% of 5 year olds were in primary school. Around 12% of children aged 3-5 attend playgroups on average from five to six hours per week.

### RURAL CHILDCARE

The publicly funded mixed age centres exist almost exclusively in the capital city of Dublin; elsewhere, including the rural areas, the only social services provision for children from socially disadvantaged families is in community playgroups. There is no information on comparative numbers of 4 and 5 year olds in primary schools.

### DEVELOPMENTS

The situation of women in rural areas has recently received more attention. One element in this has been an emphasis on rural development as a means of revitalising rural economies and the recognition that has been given to the issue of childcare in this context as well as increasing awareness of national shortfalls in provision. European structural funding has been significant in Ireland, which has Objective 1 status, in promoting recognition of childcare needs in relation to employment, education and training. It is thought that the NOW programme will have a significant impact in developing rural childcare services. A number of the services which have been set up as 'complementary measures' in women's training schemes have allowed the need for such services to surface for the first time. For example, in one rural community in Wexford, women have indicated that they need full daycare or as they put it 'more than a playgroup'. This has meant that community groups which received funding from the programmes are now seeking public financial support to maintain their childcare services after 1994 when the first NOW programme finishes. The NOW programme has also assisted the development of Irish medium provision - funding the training of some forty

Table 10

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
2%	55%	6	4.5-6.5 hours	Less than 0.5

young women in daycare in Irish speaking regions and contributing to the development of a childcare literature in the Irish language. This professional teaching material has been produced by individual NOW projects, with the assistance of **Udaras na Gaeltachta** (state body governing the linguistic-cultural and economic development of the Gaeltacht or Irish speaking regions) and **Bord na Gaeilge** (state body for promotion of Irish as a living language throughout the entire country).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLE

### Family daycare training programme, Co Donegal

Irish medium family daycare training programme funded through NOW.

#### Description

The training courses for family daycarers have been developed in a Gaeltacht area in N. Donegal which has a small industrial estate run by **Udaras na Gaeltachta**. The programme also facilitates networking of local family daycarers.

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## ITALY

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

According to 1991 census data, approximately one third of the Italian population live in rural municipalities, as defined by Italian administrative criteria (ie, less than 10,000 inhabitants). This compares with 45% in 1981. Italian rural areas encompass the poorer and marginal areas of the south and islands characterised by a traditional lifestyle, very low incomes and lack of basic services; areas of rural tourism where urban lifestyles and infrastructure are increasingly being adopted; and peri-urban areas with scattered industrial establishments, rich in 'agriculture and an influx of new country dwellers with urban models of life replacing traditional lifestyles' (Braithwaite et al op cit).

Approximately 46% of the total female rural population live and/or work on farms. Of these 43% are spouses, 19% are heads of farms, and 37% are daughters or relatives. Women are accounting for an increasing proportion of agricultural employment in some areas although some of this increase may be accounted for by their registration as farm workers to obtain benefits or as heads of farms where a husband obtains a salaried job. According to official statistics, female activity rates range from 25% in the south of Italy to 34% in the north-east. They are significantly lower than those of men - in the south, female activity rates are half the level of men. However, these figures do not reflect women's involvement in the informal economy (Braithwaite et al op cit). Employment rates of women with children are continuing to increase nationally. 42% of Italian women with a child under 10 were in paid employment in 1991, 37% working full-time - a 4% increase since 1985, 50% were economically active (CEC 1993e). As in many other countries in the European Union female employment in the service sector is of increasing significance accounting for two thirds of women's employment in rural municipalities.

### CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

In Italy, children start school at six. Publicly funded childcare services for children under 3 encompass daynurseries (*asilo nido*), for children aged 3-6 pre-primary schools (*scuola materna*) and some school aged childcare is available for primary school children. Nationally, publicly funded provision is available for just over 5% of under 3s and over 85% of children aged 3-5 years. Statistics are not available

for school age childcare. There are few places in private (for profit) nurseries and no statistics on family daycare although this type of care is not common. Nannies (own home care) are more common but there are no statistics on them.

## RURAL CHILDCARE

Models for childcare are substantially the same in rural as in urban areas, but rural areas are reported to have greater difficulties and incur higher costs in offering services. In 1986/87 only 260 municipalities out of more than 8,000 in Italy did not have elementary schools in their territory and these were for the most part in rural or mountain areas. Less than 14% of municipalities in rural areas did not have nursery schools. However, recent legislative measures aiming at rationalising school systems and networks (L. 426/88, 417/89, 148/90) have involved increasing centralisation of services as a way of improving quality in school organisation as well as for economic reasons and in response to falling birth rates. This has resulted, according to local administrators of rural municipalities, in a loss of locally based services in school for children.

There is a minimum threshold of thirteen children required by law for the provision of pre-primary schools. This figure can be lowered to ten for classes with handicapped children. For primary school children a minimum of fifteen registered children are required. This can be lowered by school authorities for specific reasons such as mountain areas, transport, etc. Standards relating to qualifications, etc. are defined by national legislation and apply throughout the country. However, rural schools are characterised by high turnover of staff. In many areas small schools, typically with mixed age classes have been closed down and children transferred to other nursery or elementary schools in larger villages or towns.

## DEVELOPMENTS

There has been little growth in publicly funded services over recent years in Italy. However, in some areas there have been some developments involving models offering more flexible provision to meet a wider range of needs including parents who work part-time, mothers who stay at home, families which prefer to have their childcare by a relative or a babysitter with flexibility in opening hours and diversity in providing for children from 0-6 years. The main objective has been to create centres where children and adults can meet and socialise. They are also operating at a lower cost as they employ a lower number of educators as parents are involved in the centres. The majority of these new services are located in urban areas where waiting lists for under 3s are longer. Some services have also been developed in small municipalities and rural areas. (See below) (Ghedini 1992).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLE

### Migliarino, Ferrara: Asilo Nido "Arcobaleno"

Mixed age centre established jointly by two municipalities.

#### Description

The centre has been developed by the two small municipalities of Migliarino and Ostellato with populations of 4,000 and 7,800 respectively, and located in the province of Ferrara in the Po Delta area - an agricultural area. The two municipalities are separated by a few kilometres and recognised the need to co-operate in providing a service.

The centre, located in the smaller of the two municipalities, occupies a single building and encompasses a municipal centre providing for children aged 0-3 and a nursery school with one class

Table 11

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
5%	85%	6 years	4 hours	No information

Source: CEC (1990) *Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-1990*

for children from 3-6, open from 7.30 to 18.00 for five days a week from September to mid-July, and a play centre with flexible hours involving both children and adults (parents, grandparents and other relatives). This provides a centre for children and families to meet and the outside area is open to all children in the community during the summer months. The service began with the opening of the play centre in 1989, followed by the daycare service and is part of a project jointly funded by the Emilia Romagna Region and the Van Leer Foundation. Initial activity focused on establishing a wood working workshop to construct toys for the centre and as a means of attracting the attention of parents. This successfully paved the way for the development of further educational projects and for an approach involving parents and other groups in the community.

The two municipalities meet 80% of the cost; parents' fees provide 4% and the remaining cost is covered by the Region.

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## LUXEMBOURG

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Just under three quarters of the land area of Luxembourg is classified as 'rural' but in Luxembourg no commune is located far from a town. Of Luxembourg's twelve cantons or districts, two are seen as predominantly rural. These are in the northern and eastern parts of Luxembourg and account for 29% of all children under five.

Under 8% of the Luxembourg workforce are employed in agriculture. Women account for a third of these but are more extensively involved as unpaid assistants. Farm women are seen as increasingly taking on new tasks such as farm accounts and administration and a marked trend towards working outside the farm is also reported (Braithwaite, et al).

Nationally, 40% of women with a child under 10 were in paid employment in 1991, a 6% increase from 1985 and 42% were economically active (CEC (1993)(e)).

### CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

In Luxembourg, compulsory schooling now begins at 4, following recent legislation. Provision for children under 3 is in mixed aged centres (*foyers de jour*) which also provide school age childcare for children over 4 and sometimes up to the age of twelve. Publicly funded centres are provided by private organisations or in some cases by local authorities. Part-time care is offered through '*garderies*'. Provision for children from the age of 3-5 is in pre-primary school or mixed age centres. School age childcare is offered in mixed age centres at schools and some local authorities run playschemes. A number of privately funded mixed age centres are run by non-profit private organisations, individuals and

employers, and some private family daycare is also available but in the absence of registration requirements the numbers involved in family daycare are not known.

### RURAL CHILDCARE

The childcare models offered are the same as in urban or semi-urban areas, but levels of provision are reported to be significantly lower. The provision of care by grandparents and other relatives - for which there are no official statistics - is reported to be more common in rural areas - and remains of significance everywhere.

A minimum of eight children is necessary for 'trading authorisation' or registration of centres with the possibility of public funding. Children with disabilities/special needs are admitted to all centres. Similar standards apply in rural as in urban areas.

### DEVELOPMENTS

The level of provision in rural areas has been increasing. One pilot model seen as appropriate for rural models for rural areas is that of the 'open door' mixed age centre - incorporating qualified education staff within mixed age centres and hence offering greater flexibility.

Table 12

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
2%	55-60%	5	4-8 hours	1%

Source: CEC (1990) *Childcare in the European Communities, 1985-1990*

**RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

Five of the twelve Dutch provinces are defined as rural, accounting for approximately one-sixth of the population. The rural areas are situated in the three northern provinces, Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe, including the northern islands; in the centre, the province of Flevoland (with reclaimed land) and, in the south west, the province of Zeeland. 40% of the 1800 small villages with less than 2500 inhabitants are situated in the north. (Uitterboeve ed 1990). Agricultural employment accounts for 5% of the Dutch labour force and is expected to fall further. Nationally there has been a significant increase in women's employment rates. In 1991, 40% of women with a child under 10 were in paid employment, a 17% rise since 1985 and a total of 46% were economically active (CEC (1993)(e). Eurostat data suggests that economic activity rates are higher in some peri-urban rural areas than in some urban areas. For example, 46% of women were economically active in the predominantly rural peri-urban region of Flevoland in 1991 compared with 44% in the highly urbanised area of Zuid-Holland (Braithwaite, et al). 1982 survey evidence found that of those rural women in paid employment, the majority were in the services industries. More women worked in a family enterprise (the majority on family farms) than had a paid job and an even greater number undertook voluntary work. A somewhat later local study (1988) found that of those women not doing waged work, nearly all said they would prefer paid to voluntary work but found it hard to find a job particularly if they had children (Braithwaite, et al).

Compulsory primary schooling begins at 5 with nearly all children starting primary school at four. There is no pre-primary schooling. Publicly funded provision for children under 4 - the normal Dutch age differentiation - is growing under a new government measure established in 1990 to expand the number of services - mostly in privately funded nurseries and mixed age centres. Playgroups which provide opportunities for play for children from the age of 2 and which children generally attend for less than ten hours a week are excluded from this measure. An increasing number of places are supported or sponsored by employers. Organised family daycare is also expanding under the government funded programme. In 1992, 9,279 children were cared for within organised family daycare, two thirds of whom were under the age of four. No statistics are available on private family daycare.

**RURAL CHILDCARE**

Levels of provision are reported to be lower. A national childcare survey carried out in 1992 by the Dutch agency CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) found that the proportion of children in daycare was significantly lower in rural areas. Of all children under 4, 2.5% were in daycare in municipalities with a population of 10,000 or less and only 1% in municipalities with a population of 5,000 or less compared with 16% in municipalities with a population of 100,000 or over. As in the UK there are higher levels of provision in rural areas in playgroups - 64% of 2 and 3 year olds compared with 42% in municipalities of 100,000 or more (CBS op cit). The most common form of daycare in rural areas is reported to be that of private family daycare and paid or unpaid care at home by members of the family - grandmothers in general - and others but there are no statistics on this.

**Table 13**

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
2%	50-55%	5	6-7 hours	1%

Source: (CEC) 1990 *Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990*

Identified problems in developing provision include small clusters of population insufficiently large to qualify for grants. This makes it more difficult in the absence of industrial activity or commerce to take advantage of the government funded programme begun in 1990 which requires additional funding from employers, parents and local authorities. An examination of the problems of small municipalities in providing services carried out in the province of Gelderland pointed to the need for increased co-operation between municipalities, improved information and advice, and highlighted the problems of finding accommodation. Smaller communities are increasingly joining forces to take advantage of the government scheme.

## DEVELOPMENTS

The government funding programme of 1990-93, the Stimulative Measure on Childcare (recently extended until the end of 1995), has contributed to a substantial national increase in places particularly within nurseries for children under 4 (see Pot, CEC (1993)(d)). Rural areas have found it more difficult to share in this for the reasons outlined above. A number of projects have been exploring rural needs.

An organisation for young farmers' wives in the province of Gelderland has initiated a family daycare scheme in one village as a means of offering flexible care, shorter travelling distances and strengthening social ties. The project was developed by the provincial organisation of young wives, the support organisation for childcare, Spectrum, and the childcare foundation of Neerinjnen. The family daycare scheme should offer flexible care at home on request by the farmers' wives. The initial take-up has

been very slow and up to now has not materialised. One of the problems has been the agricultural recession. A temporary solution has been provided by a day nursery in the nearby village of Neede which offers flexible childcare for children of farmers' wives.

Training is available in most rural areas for childcare and other professional courses. In the province of Friesland (including the four Wadden Islands) much attention is given to second language development of the Fries in most playgroups and day nurseries. There is also a new training programme in Friesland for women who have worked as volunteers in playgroups, qualifying them for a paid job in childcare.

Multi-functional provision is being explored in a number of rural districts. One example of this is in the village of Heeten in the province of Overijssel in a centre that combines daycare and out of school care for all 0-12 year olds. In the province of Drenthe a co-operative project between two villages (Zweelo and Oosterhesselen) involves a scheme for organised family daycare and centre based school age childcare for children aged 0-12 (see examples).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### Mixed age centre with school age childcare, Heeten, Overijssel

Combined centre providing daycare and school age childcare for children aged 0-12 years.

#### Description

Heeten is a village of around 3,500 inhabitants in the province of Overijssel. The village is too small to support separate facilities and a combined centre has been established through partnership between a number of groups, facilitated through the Stimulative Measure on Childcare. The centre provides full and part time care for children aged under 4, and school age childcare for children up to the age of twelve. It has twenty four places with small standard age groups and one vertical (age integrated) group.

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Mixed age Centre,  
Heeten



## **Organised Family Daycare and centre based school age childcare, Zweelo and Oosterhesselen**

Co-operative project between two villages for developing organised family daycare and centre based school age childcare for children aged 0-12 years.

### **Description**

Zweelo and Oosterhesselen are two small villages totalling approximately 8,000 inhabitants. The existing family daycare project comprising fourteen children developed an initiative for outside school hours care because a large proportion of the children in the project were older than 4 years. In March 1994 a small centre for school age children - offering six places - was opened. In co-operation with the neighbouring village of Sleen and Dalen they hope to gradually increase the number of places. 30% of the family daycare project is funded by employers (mainly for hospital employees).

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## **Stichting Kinderopvang Friesland (SKF) Second Language Training Programme**

Friesian language childcare training course.

### **Description**

Fries is an officially recognised language spoken almost exclusively in the province of Friesland and the four northern Wadden Islands. The language is of western Germanic origin and was previously also spoken in large parts of the German Ost-Friesland. It is more closely related to the Anglo-Saxon language than Dutch and most inhabitants of Friesland understand or speak Fries. Most children and staff in playgroups and nurseries speak Fries as a second language except in the city of Leeuwarden where monolingual (Dutch speaking) centres predominate. The provincial support organisation developed a Friesian training course for workers in childcare, which has been offered twice. Based on this experience, a third course will focus on the development of other languages in addition to Fries.

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## PORTUGAL

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Portugal is a predominantly rural country in terms of land area although three quarters of the population live along the coast where most of the large towns and cities are located. Rural areas vary considerably between north and south, coastal and inland regions and there are considerable differences also in the participation of women in social and economic life. Agriculture is said to still "define life" in much of rural Portugal, employing 17% full time and providing a strong sense of cultural identity to many more who retain connections with their native villages after moving to cities. Just over 21% of women were employed in agriculture in 1991 with, as noted earlier, sharp increases in women's share of agricultural employment in some areas (in Centro) and substantial increases in women's employment overall in some areas. In Centro and Acores female employment rose in the period 1986 to 1991 by 49% and 25% respectively in these areas (Braithwaite et al op cit). There are a number of initiatives supporting women's role in development and exploring new areas of employment. These include twenty two women's handicraft groups in the northern interior (Braithwaite et al). An increasing number of initiatives of this kind have been funded through various European Union programmes.

Nationally, Portugal has very high rates of maternal employment - 69% of women with a child under 10 were in paid employment in 1991, only 6% of these part time, and 75% were economically active. (CEC 1993)

### CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Children start primary school at six. Publicly funded childcare services for children under 3 take the form

of nurseries (*infantario*) and organised family daycare schemes. Over three quarters of these services are provided through private organisations, the rest mainly by regional social security centres and some local authorities. For children aged 3-5 years there is publicly funded provision in the form of pre-primary schools or kindergartens. School age childcare is mainly provided in centres often sharing a building with other services, for example, a nursery, kindergarten or both. Privately funded childcare services include a small number of employer provided services in the nurseries, kindergartens and outside school hour care centres, a small number of places in private for profit nurseries and 6% of 3-5 year old age group in private kindergartens. There is no information on own home care or private family daycare although a substantial number of children are thought to be cared for by private family daycarers.

### RURAL CHILDCARE

Services such as nurseries and organised family daycare schemes provided by the Social Security ministry are in very short supply in most rural areas; the majority of rural services are those provided through the Education ministry but these involve different models in areas of low density population. Scattered and declining population, poor roads and low car ownership are reported to contribute to substantial difficulties in delivering services which has led to the development of some peripatetic and other programmes of informal education involving parents and other family members. There is no information on the number of peripatetic and informal programmes. Peripatetic programmes are a means of giving children pre-school experience and assist in overcoming some of the isolation of families. However, they do not meet the care requirements of families. A project involving an itinerant pre-school programme in the Algarve (see below) reported on the isolation and economic marginalisation of the families involved. 15% of the mothers worked outside the home in generally low waged employment as maids and shop assistants and it was thought that more would want to undertake employment and training if

Table 14

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
6%	35%	6 years	6.5 hours	6%

Source: (CEC) 1990 *Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990*

opportunities were available (EC National Study Visit, Portugal).

Some of the programmes of non formal education were developed as a way of not only stimulating the learning and development of children, but involved the training of unemployed young women with the aim of encouraging them into a wider community development role - establishing women's groups as well as childcare programmes. Teresa Maria Sena de Vasconcelos gives a description of some of these projects, started in 1979 in the north of Portugal, in her 1987 thesis (Sena de Vasconcelos, 1987).

Poor housing and living conditions contribute to higher turnover amongst staff in rural provision. The Education Ministry is responsible for provision for children with disabilities/special needs. Some additional help may be offered to classes attended by children with special needs. Children with more severe handicaps attend special educational establishments run by social security departments and usually situated in urban centres.

## DEVELOPMENTS

Developments have focussed primarily on providing children with access to some pre-school experience through itinerant nursery teachers and work with families but it is difficult to be sure how significant in quantitative terms these are in the absence of statistical information. The community development approach, particularly when encompassing ways of meeting the needs of women and supporting their role in community development, has been evident in a number of projects, most recently involving European Union Funding. Funding, however, remains a major problem.

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### Jardim de Infancia de Santo Amaro, Sousel, Alentejo

Public kindergarten with curriculum reflecting local activities.

#### Description

The kindergarten was established in 1980 in a small rural village in the south of Portugal, and is part of the public pre-school education system. The initiative was taken by the local municipality, using premises which

had previously been first a primary school and then a school canteen. It currently has eleven children aged 3-5 and is open for five hours a day. It is staffed by one (male) kindergarten teacher and a (female) assistant, and is managed by the staff and a consultative committee including two parent representatives and a member of the local municipality.

Considerable attention is paid to relating the curriculum to activities within the community. For example, in late autumn/early winter when many of the mothers pick olives, a visit is organised for the children to the olive tree fields where they are working. Later the children are taken to visit the place where the olive oil is being prepared. Children print their own school journal which is distributed in the local village, make their own cheese and are involved in other agricultural projects, and visit local shops, farms and factories. Parents come to work with the children for festivals and other traditional events. The community and school are seen as working in partnership.

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### Educacao de Infancia Itinerante, S. Bras de Alportel, Algarve

Itinerant pre-school programme for isolated children

#### Description

S. Bras de Alportel is a hilly area to the north of Faro with some 10,000 inhabitants. The district's economy is largely based on cork production, agriculture and service industry including tourism. Roads are poor. The small town which gives the district its name - S. Bras de Alportel - has two primary schools, one pre-primary school and one mixed age centre with pre-primary school providing for children from 3 months to 5 years. In 1991 there were eight other primary schools but no other pre-school provision in the whole district. The programme was initially developed with financial support from the Van Leer Foundation as part of the ECO project as a means of giving children some pre-school experience in the year prior to them starting school.

Two trained pre-primary school teachers work with twenty nine families, the furthest family living fifteen kilometres from the town. The teachers visit the families for one hour per week and the child visits the pre-primary school three times in the year and is taken

on outings. Some sessions are organised for several families. Activities take the form of the development of two projects in the year, one of which is usually on animals reflecting the agricultural base of the area. It is predominantly mothers who are involved in the programme, but grandmothers account for a quarter of family members involved.

The ECO project is finished but the programme is now being developed by the Instituto das Comunidades Educativas and is being extended initially to four other areas. The salaries of the teachers are paid by the Education Ministry, material and other expenses for the children by the local administration, and the teachers' travelling expenses by the Instituto das Comunidades Educativas.

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*Pedro, aged 5 years,  
with mother and  
teacher, ECO project*



**RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

Spain's rural areas encompass a wide variety of regions, some experiencing population increase and development but many coping with an ageing population and extensive population decline. Between 1981 and 1988 the proportion of the population living in settlements of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants dropped from 20% of the total population to 8%. While some areas have an increase in women's share of employment in agriculture, overall farm women of working age are reputed to be leaving farms at twice the rate of men. For women in the 25-29 age group in small rural settlements, the principal occupation is now in the service sector (30%) followed by professional and technical occupations (19%), industry (14%) and family work (14%). In the 45-49 age group the principal occupation remains that of family work (55%) (Braithwaite et al p 138).

33% of women with a child aged 0-9 were in paid employment and 44% of women were economically active in 1991 (CEC, Mother, Fathers and Employment, 1985-91). Eurostat data shows a considerable increase in female employment in two out of the three regions examined over the period 1986-1991. Employment rates rose in this period in the regions of Aragon and Extremadura by 39% and 50% respectively (Braithwaite op cit)

**CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS**

Children start primary school at six. Publicly funded services for children under 3 comprise nurseries (*guarderías*) for children under 4 and mixed age centres taking children from 0 to primary school age with some 2 year olds in pre primary schooling. Children aged 3-5 may go to nurseries (until 4) or mixed aged centres until 6 but most are in pre

primary schools, usually attached to primary schools. There is no publicly funded school age childcare during term time, but increasing provision of playschemes in the summer holidays. National rates for publicly funded services are not known for children under three. 65-70% of children aged 3-6 and less than 0.5% of primary school children are in publicly funded services and there is a government commitment to provide for all 3-6 year olds by 1996. Levels of private nurseries and mixed aged centres are higher than publicly funded services; family daycare is not very common, own home care is more usual, but there are no statistics on this form of care.

**RURAL CHILDCARE**

Models for providing services in rural areas differ from urban areas. In areas of scattered population, services form part (where they exist) of the compensatory education programme and include itinerant pre-school services and home guided pre-school provision (*pre-escolar na casa*). In villages/towns of less than 1000 inhabitants the most common provision is in the form of unitary schools, with one or more teachers according to the number of registered children and the age group. Nurseries can be found in the smaller towns but are absent from areas where the population is more scattered. Seasonal childcare services are available in some rural areas for harvesting, etc. but the industrialisation of agriculture has diminished or changed the nature of the need for these services in many areas.

Surveys give some indication of the difference in levels of provision between urban and rural areas. National rates of coverage for children from 3-6 are 65-70% predominantly in pre-primary schools. A 1990 survey shows that that over two-thirds (69%) of the 3,436 rural schools in sixteen provinces had no pre-primary schooling. Over 80% of the schools in many provinces had less than eight units, ie, were without a class for each grade. In Asturias, three quarters of the schools in this category had only one classroom (questionnaire). A survey in the island of Menorca found that while 50% of 2 year olds, 90% of

**Table 15**

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in the age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
No information	65-70%	6 years	8 hours	Less than 0.5%

3 year olds and 100% of 4 year olds in urban areas had access to pre-school provision, in rural areas no 2 year olds, 10% of 3 year olds and 20% of 4 year olds were within provision. Ministry of Education and Science statistics on compensatory education programmes in rural areas showed that in 1989/90 there were sixty four project areas throughout Spain providing for a total of 710 children (Ministry of Education and Science, *Proyectos Y Experiencias Que Se Realizan en Distintas Zonas del Estado Propiciados por el Ministerio de Educacion y Ciencia, 1990*)

The provision of services is determined by an estimate of need, not by a minimum number and the standards required are in principle the same.

## DEVELOPMENTS

Ways of offering children in rural areas access to at least some pre-school experience have been explored through the establishment of centres of "compensatory education" resources, the purpose of which are to co-ordinate and provide support for rural schools and peripatetic and home based programmes. The centres encourage flexible programmes which allow for different age groups and varying requirements of the curriculum. Close links with the community are encouraged. Resource centres act in a variety of ways:

- providing support for teaching children in mixed age groups
- making provision for teaching of small groups or individual children unable to attend any school
- programmes to help parents teaching their children

Parent magazines, radio and television programmes and mobile libraries are used to support home-based education programmes. Since 1987 "children's houses" have been developing as a means of providing children in small towns with part-time educational and social opportunities and giving support to their parents (see examples).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### ■ Casa de los Niños (The House of Children) (Region of Madrid)

Public rural centres providing part-time educational and social opportunities for children and support for parents.

### Description

The centres have developed from 1987 in towns of between 1,000 and 5,000 inhabitants in the Madrid region. In 1992/3 there were forty six centres providing for 1,700 children aged 0-4 years. The centres are funded by the regional and local government and are open from 9.30 to 17.00 for eleven months of the year, the children attending on average for three hours per day. The children are divided into two groups, of 0-2 and 2-4 years.

The centres provide children with opportunities for play and learning and development and social interaction, and enable parents to discuss problems and receive advice from other parents and staff. The centres are also seen as a means of making the local community more sensitive to the rights and needs of children and are open to all those involved with children in the community. Parents are required to help in the decoration and equipment of the houses, to participate and collaborate in some activities. Parents (and other carers) bring their children to the centre and stay for periods of time specified by staff, meeting in small groups weekly and together once a month.

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## ■ Home based pre-school education programme Galicia

Rural pre-school education programme delivered at home by parents

### Description

The programme was developed as a way of reaching rural families in an area of low density scattered population. The programme was developed by a group of professionals in the mid-70s. Families have access to:

- A complete set of materials (regularly updated) for helping their children.
- A monthly magazine for parents.
- A mobile library.
- A radio education programme which is now being converted to television.

Parents and children meet every fortnight in groups to review the work undertaken in the previous two weeks and plan for the next two, and carry out group activities.

The programme is seen as benefiting children socially and developmentally. Parents have access to advice and they are also able to discuss common problems with other parents.

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**Seasonal childcare programme, El Palmar de Troya, Andalusia**

Childcare programme to meet the needs of agricultural workers.

**Description**

El Palmar de Troya is a district within Utrera in Andalusia, with a population of 2,400 inhabitants. Its economy is based solely on agriculture and progressive mechanisation, leading to unemployment, which has led to seasonal migration of workers during sowing and harvest periods to the province of Huelva in search of part-time employment. This causes problems in both El Palmar and the host city, where school and health services are unable to cope. Children's schooling is affected and there are children working in the fields.

The programme has been developed to enable children from 0-16 years of age to stay in their home town. The programme has three elements:

- Boarding schools providing total care.
- Partial board - children receive two meals and have access to organised free time activities but are cared for by a relative.
- Day schools with organisation of free time activities and cultural visits.

Trips are provided to enable children to visit their parents. The programme is seen as benefiting children, helping them with schooling and health and assisting their social development in addressing the issue of child employment.

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## UNITED KINGDOM

### RURAL AREAS AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The United Kingdom comprises England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1990 the overall population density in the UK was - at 235 persons per square kilometre - the fourth highest in the European Union but average density ranges from 871 in North West England to 65 persons per square kilometre in Scotland where the most extensive and remotest rural areas are found. Rural areas in the United Kingdom vary considerably encompassing in all parts of the UK an increasing number of peri-urban areas and dormitory villages but including farming, crofting, fishing and island communities and a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions.

In common with other EU countries, the UK has been affected by 'rural change'. Nationally there has been a significant increase in maternal employment rates. Over half (51%) of women with a child under 10 were in paid employment in 1991 - an increase of 13% since 1985, and 58% were economically active. Of those women in employment, 35% were in part-time employment, (CEC, 1993). These increases in maternal employment are reflected in varying degrees in rural areas. Changes in the rural economy have brought a significant rise in employment rates in some areas, associated in particular with the growth in the service sector and as a response to pressure on household income. These pressures have arisen from such factors as changes in the agricultural and fishing industries as well as the impact of the more general economic recession, which started earlier, and has lasted longer than in many other EU countries. Whilst an English survey found that employment activity rates for rural women of working age were significantly lower than the national rates - 46% compared with 68% (with a higher ratio than the national average of part-time to full-time workers), the maternal employment participation rates (a younger age group) in one Scottish study were higher

in some rural areas than the national average (Rural Development Commission (Palmer 1991)). A recent (unpublished) Scottish study in the Highlands and Islands found that 54% of all women with a dependent child were economically active in 1991 compared with 39% ten years earlier (Nelson 1994). The evidence from a number of surveys shows that in all areas demand for employment amongst women with children is substantially higher than economic activity rates suggest. One Scottish survey found that 24% of currently economically inactive women with a child under 5 would want to stay at home if childcare was available and affordable. The survey showed that fewer rural mothers of under 5s wanted to stay at home than others (21% compared with 24% in disadvantaged and 25% in non disadvantaged urban areas), although they were more likely to want to work part-time (56% compared with 47%) (Scott, 1989).

### CHILDCARE: NATIONAL LEVELS

Compulsory primary schooling begins at 4 in Northern Ireland, 5 in the rest of the country but many children attend school from 4 throughout the UK. Publicly funded services for children under 3 are mostly in mixed age centres and some subsidised family daycare primarily provided for children defined as 'in need' and with some children aged 2 in pre-primary schools. For children aged 3-4 publicly funded place provision is predominantly within schools - in pre-primary schools (predominantly part time) and through early admission to primary schools. As for under 3s, a small proportion of children are also in mixed age centres and when defined as 'in need' in subsidised places with family daycarers. Publicly funded out of school services are provided within schools and outside centres. A government funding initiative in this area is increasing provision. The most recent English statistics which for the first time cover this area of provision show places in out of school clubs for 0.7 children aged 5-7 and holiday schemes for 2.6 of children in this age group. (These

Table 16

Proportion of children nationally receiving publicly funded services, as a % of all children in age group				
Children under 3	Children from 3 to compulsory school age	Age of compulsory schooling	Length of school day	Outside school hours care for primary school children
2%	35-40%	5 years (4 - N. Ireland)	6.5 hours	Less than 0.5%

Source: (CEC) 1990 *Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990*

do not necessarily provide formal care.)

Privately funded services take the form of family daycare providing places in 1988 for 5% of under 5s; own home care estimated to provide for around 1-2% of under 5s and private day nurseries with places for just over 1% of under 5s in 1988 but increasing rapidly.

The most extensive privately funded service is that of playgroups which take children from 2.5-4 and with children attending for an average of five hours per week. In 1988 they provided places nationally for the equivalent of 34% of 3 and 4 year olds but are used by around 50% of children in this age group in shift systems. A small but increasing amount of mixed age centre provision is available for parents in paid employment and education and training through partnership initiatives and sometimes initiated by employers, sometimes by local authorities or other agencies. These can involve some public and employer subsidies, but are still primarily funded by parents themselves.

## RURAL CHILDCARE

Overall levels of services are significantly lower in rural areas and there are marked differences in the type of services available. No national statistics are available, but a number of surveys and studies provide information on rural provision in England, Wales and Scotland.

These show that rural areas have far fewer publicly funded services which provide care with many areas having no publicly funded mixed age centres. None of the rural families in the 1988 Scottish survey undertaken on behalf of Strathclyde Regional Council were using publicly funded mixed age centres and a further Scottish survey in 1990 also found no publicly funded mixed age centres in the four study areas in the Highlands and Islands in Grampian. A 1991 survey of rural parishes in England found only 3% had local authority mixed aged centres. (Scott 1989).

A recent analysis of government statistics on provision in England and Wales provides a somewhat more complex picture with less differences in some provision but English metropolitan districts offer twice as much pre-primary schools and four times as much local authority daycare as the English Counties. By contrast with some Scottish rural surveys, the study found a **higher** level of use of private family daycare (Statham et al (forthcoming)). The 1988 Strathclyde survey found significantly less use in rural areas of pre-primary schooling, less use of family daycare and more extensive use of private and mixed age centres and more informal provision such as playgroups. Survey evidence of this kind can only be

suggestive of the disparities in levels of provision - it conceals the total absence of some services from many "deep rural" areas.

Playgroups and parent and child groups are the only form of pre-school experience available to children in some rural areas. Average attendance is only five hours a week although a small but increasing number of playgroups have extended their hours.

Even attendance at services which are more common, such as playgroups, can involve parents in extensive travel. The 1991 Scottish survey found that 73% of the women in the survey always travelled by car when delivering or collecting their child and this not infrequently involved considerable travel time.

"At the present moment I have to travel twelve miles (twenty four miles round trip) to get to a playgroup".

"No sooner do I get home that it is time to go back and pick him up" (Palmer 1991).

In some rural areas separate playgroups are provided in the indigenous minority language (primarily Gaelic in Scotland and Welsh in Wales) as well as, or instead of, English. The need to provide services which support the indigenous language or dialect, frequently eroded by the overwhelming strength of the national language has significant resource implications in the context of any future shift from informal provision such as playgroups to services providing care and education. Separate language provision within pre-primary schools is less common.

A number of areas make use of peripatetic pre-primary school programmes with two or three sessions provided at different schools or in a mobile unit. Mobile provision is also used for play. In some cases buses also offer services for other groups such as elderly people or health education. School age childcare services, of which national levels of

Table 17

Service use in rural and non disadvantaged urban areas Strathclyde, Scotland 1988 (%)		
Service Used	Rural	Urban (non disadvantaged)
Pre Primary Schooling	18	25
Local Authority Mixed Age Centre	0	2
Private Mixed Age Centre	10	4
Private Family Daycare	4	6
Playgroups	39	32
Parent & Child	28	27
Creche (occasional use centres)	1	3

Source G. Scott (1989) *Families and Under Fives in Strathclyde*, Strathclyde Regional Council

provision are low but increasing, are scarce in rural areas. (Kids Club Network) 1992 statistics show that while inner London areas had places in out of school clubs for around 8% of children aged 5-7 predominantly provided by the local authorities, the more rural "counties" in Southern England had places for only 0.1% and clubs in these areas were much less likely to be run by local authorities. (Department of Health 1992).

Similar standards are required for services in rural areas as in urban areas but the most common form of provision in rural areas - playgroups - frequently meet in premises such as village halls which are not designed specifically for young children. In England and Wales local authorities now have legislative duties to provide services for children "in need" for reasons of disability or other disadvantage. One local authority in the Statham and Cameron study had included "children whose development is significantly impaired by rural isolation" as an indicator of need. However the study found that the indicators of deprivation used by most authorities were urban biased. In the absence of local authority provision most authorities made use of more informal provision or mobile services to discharge their responsibilities falling short in many cases of what is required. (Statham and Cameron). The same study also reports problems in organising training and the lack of specialist early years training for teachers in small rural schools teaching mixed age classes. A Scottish examination of the implementation of a duty to review services placed upon local authorities by legislation enacted in the 1989 Children Act found that local authorities which made reference to the needs of rural families expressed concern over the lack of services. In one authority, the disparity in levels of services revealed by the review process led to the appointment of two rural childcare development officers (Martin forthcoming).

## DEVELOPMENTS

Inadequacies in childcare provision have attracted increasing attention and concern over recent years and there is now considerably greater awareness of the particularly poor levels of provision in rural areas. This has been assisted by the reviews of childcare services which local authorities are now required to carry out every three years. Although a major thrust of government policy in the UK remains that parents themselves are responsible for finding and paying for services except where children or families are in need of provision on the grounds of welfare, there have recently been some initiatives suggesting acceptance of public responsibility in assisting in the development of services. To date these initiatives have been focussed primarily on school age childcare.

In 1989/90 a government circular issued by relevant departments drew attention to the possible use of school premises for out of school care schemes, and in 1992 a three year funding programme (of 58 million ecus for school age childcare initiatives was launched). The funding programme is being administered through Training and Enterprise Councils, reflecting an awareness of a labour market dimension to these services.

In England, the Rural Development Commission has published a number of reports examining women's employment and childcare in rural areas and their findings contributed to a rural childcare initiative launched in 1992 funded jointly in by the Rural Development Commission and the Department of Health. The initiative involves the appointment of a rural childcare adviser based at an English children's agency, the National Council for Voluntary Childcare Organisations, to raise awareness of rural childcare, and the funding of five to six three year demonstration projects showing a variety of approaches to meeting the needs of rural childcare in disseminating good practice. The Commission also funds a rural development officer for Kids Club Network - a voluntary agency involved with developing school age childcare.

In Scotland, an initiative managed jointly by Children in Scotland and Rural Forum aims to assist rural communities in the development of childcare services meeting the requirements of rural development and diversification initiatives as well as the social needs of children and their families.

The project involves:

- exploring the needs of children and families in a range of rural communities
- animating local actors to develop sustainable childcare and training programmes
- developing support mechanisms such as networking within Scotland and on a transnational basis to assist in development of childcare and relevant training programmes
- identifying a range of childcare needs and appropriate models for meeting their needs.

The project is being funded through Highlands and Islands Enterprise and with limited funding from the Scottish Office.

In Wales, an initiative developed by the children's agency, Save The Children, with the local social services department, aims to improve rural services through working with existing providers and extending services to isolated families.

Funding through the European Structural Funds and in particular the Commission's NOW Programme has contributed to a small number of rural initiatives for training of childcare workers and the establishment of

services. This funding has been particularly valuable in demonstrating the role which childcare can play in "animating" rural areas. Projects include:

- A rural telecottage funded through NOW and the English Rural Development Commission offering a centre based "rural women back to business" course with on site childcare.
- Access programme for fifty women in rural Devon to undertake a range of childcare courses funded through NOW and a partnership, Devon Childcare Links including the Daycare Trust, Devon Community and Children's Services, Devon Childminders and Pre-School Playgroups Associations.
- A training centre in South Uist, in the Western Isles of Scotland, funded through NOW and with childcare provided through a mixed age centre and offering training in a range of skills was including childcare to enable women to contribute to the development of their community.

Childcare funding under the Leader programme has been limited. A mixed aged centre was established in Portree in the Isle of Skye with funding from the Leader programme (see examples below). An application in Northern Ireland for a Mobile Play Bus was not accepted.

These initiatives constitute a valuable but fragile development requiring nurture and consideration of their long term future. Local authorities are the most obvious agencies to take these developments forward but major funding and policy co-ordination issues have to be overcome if this is to take place. These issues include the need for a more coherent national strategy and central government funding for developing and improving childcare services and other relevant provisions. They also include the need for more effective collaboration between relevant departmental interests within local authorities - including economic and rural development, social work and education as well as outside agencies including Training and Development Councils and the range of childcare agencies which, as demonstrated in these projects, have a major role to play in this area.

The significance of these developments should also not be over estimated. The author of a forthcoming report for the Rural Development Commission assessing programmes since her first study carried out in 1989-90 comments:

"Taking an overview and also looking in more detail at four case study areas, it appears that there has been very little, if any increase in the quantity of childcare in rural England. Provision remains patchy. There are some examples of interesting, sometimes innovative, practice - especially in the provision of care of school aged children. These examples however are a drop in

the ocean. For many, finding suitable childcare in rural England is very difficult and there is rarely the luxury of choice."

(Moira Stone, author of forthcoming report for the English Rural Development Commission).

## RURAL CHILDCARE EXAMPLES

### Portree, Isle of Skye, Scotland

Centre providing full time and part time care, pre-primary school and playgroup sessions.

#### Description

Portree is a small town with a population of 2,485 (1991) in the island of Skye off the west coast of Scotland. Prior to the opening of the centre, the only daycare option available was that of private family daycare of which there was a shortage. The centre developed when the hall used as premises by both English language and Gaelic language playgroups was

*Portree Nursery,  
Isle of Skye*



demolished to make room for new Council offices, and both groups had to relocate. The English language playgroup remained without premises and a steering group of parents was formed to look at possible options. The Local Enterprise Company (Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise) suggested that the group looked at extending their provision to include care and supported the group in their (successful) application to the Leader programme.

The centre is located in a new single story building and provides full time and part time care for nineteen children aged 0-4 years. It is open from 8.45 to 17.00 for fifty weeks of the year. There are three staff and one trainee and two registered reserve staff. A pre-primary school session is provided on one afternoon a week by a peripatetic local authority teacher and the centre is used by a playgroup on four mornings a week for children aged 3-5 and by a parent and toddler group on one afternoon a week. The parent and toddler group is also used by local family daycarers. One child also currently receives school age childcare.

The centre is registered as a non-profit company and is currently funded through the Leader programme, Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, Highlands Regional Council Community Development projects initiative and the playgroup funds and parents. Fees for full time daycare are £69 per week. The Regional Council Social Work Department and the Regional Council's Education Department Psychology Service currently fund places for two children. The centre was initially visited by a Social Work Department Child Protection Officer and medical staff but visits are not regular. The centre is seen as having contributed economically to the development of the area. It has created a total of five jobs and facilitated employment of nineteen parents.

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### **Cherry Tree Nursery, Market Deeping**

Centre within private home providing full time and part time care.

#### **Description**

Market Deeping is a large village in Lincolnshire in a periurban area with a large number of commuters. The centre originated in a privately run playgroup organised within a private home and begun with eight children in two half day sessions a week. This was

extended up to five mornings a week and following discussion over demand for daycare was registered as a mixed age centre. Initially it was registered to take children from 0-4 years. Following changes in registration requirements under the 1989 Children Act, it is now registered to take twenty four children aged 2-4 and is used by eighty children through the week. Occasional care is provided when available.

The centre is in an annex at the back of the private home and has one full time and eleven part time staff. It is run on what is described as a self funding basis covering its costs. There is a parent advisory group. Because of a considerable waiting list for places, the centre is now extending, and taking over an empty classroom in the local school where it will also be providing full and part time care and an additional school age childcare option. Demand is currently insufficient for after school care, but the centre is open on Saturday afternoons from 12.30 to 18.00 for children aged 3-10 years of age.

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### **Warwickshire Rural Enterprise Network Childcare Centre**

Centre providing on-site care to facilitate access to parents' work and training.

#### **Description**

The Centre is attached to a rural telecottage which offers business and IT support, training, counselling and a work, play and information service including teleworking. Training is provided through specific projects with open learning training always available. One project involved a mobile training course locating a day a week in different village locations in Warwickshire, offering twelve weeks IT training courses. Training and work opportunities are facilitated through an on-site sixteen place mixed age centre and temporary childcare facilities for mobile courses. Training projects are funded through the European Commission's ESF and NOW programme, the English Rural Development Commission and a range of other agencies including the local authority, local enterprise agency and the Post Office.

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### **Bizzy Bus, Play and Community Bus, Devon, England**

Mobile play and community bus providing play opportunities, occasional and after school care and activities for other groups in the Community.

#### **Description**

The Bizzy Bus is one of approximately 250 mobile projects in membership of the National Playbus Association. It is a fully converted double decker bus which serves as a mobile play and community centre during the school term and can be hired out for other play schemes and events during the school holidays. Activities offered on a regular basis include play sessions, holiday and after school play schemes as well as sessions for elderly people and adults with special needs and traveller groups. The bus has a project manager, two staff and two trainees and a large number of volunteers and is funded through trusts, government grants for volunteering and the local authority.

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### **Llanelli Community and Family Project: Mobile Playscheme**

Mobile facility to provide play activities to villages in the borough of Llanelli, Wales.

#### **Description**

A range of play activities are provided for pre-school and school age children through a mobile funbus. 50% of service users in the borough are Welsh language speakers and the bus provides sessions in some villages in Welsh. During the summer holidays, integrated play schemes are provided for children with special needs on both the funbus and in community halls, enabling children with special needs the opportunity of playing alongside their peers within the community in which they live.

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# DEVELOPING RURAL CHILDCARE: THE ISSUES

## RISING LEVELS OF DEMAND AND NEED FOR CHILDCARE

**Europe's rural areas are considerably affected by 'rural change' encompassing significant demographic, economic and social changes which are contributing to what may be described as 'a revolution in the countryside'. As described in Chapter One, these changes, as they affect families include:**

- **Economic restructuring** - contributing to changes in women's participation in the labour market and enhancing the significance of their economic role within the rural economy. There has been a general and in many areas a marked rise in employment rates of rural women and an increase in their share of the employment market.
- **Population decline and redistribution**, focussing attention on the importance of adequate social infrastructure in stemming population decline in many areas and in supporting those communities experiencing population growth.
- **Changing family structures** - an increasing number of single parent households and smaller households with decreasing childcare provided within the family, contributing to growing needs for family support services
- **Environmental change**, diminishing opportunities for children for safe play and activities without supervision.
- **An increasing emphasis on the role of quality childcare services** in providing long term social, educational and life opportunities for children.

In many communities these changes have highlighted the need for childcare services and contributed to substantially increased levels of demand. In the absence of systematic data collection, demand has often to be inferred - from the enormous gap in most areas between levels of services and maternal employment rates, limited demand surveys and waiting lists. Examples within this report include:

- In the United Kingdom one Scottish survey found that under a quarter of rural women with a child under five currently economically inactive would want to stay at home if suitable, affordable childcare were available.
- In Greece, in the small village of Krioneri in Macedonia, village women spoke passionately of having to bring their children into the fields, leaving them in hammocks or a cart while they worked - their normal working hours being 06.00 to 19.00.
- In Denmark, where levels of services are highest, rural municipalities have in general longer waiting lists.



Reports from all members states show that the question of how to provide **quality** childcare services which effectively meet the economic and social requirements of rural communities is now an issue of growing significance throughout the European Union.

### ■ Low level of services

Within all member states, reports and surveys show, in varying degrees, that the level of services in rural areas is not only not meeting demand in those areas, but in virtually all cases is substantially lower than the level of services in urban areas. For example:

- A 1992 survey in the Netherlands showed that 1% of rural children under the age of four living in municipalities with a population of 5,000 or less were in daycare compared with 16% of those living in municipalities with a population of 100,000 or more.
- In Denmark, a 1991 study showed that 60% of children aged 3-6 in the rural areas were in publicly funded childcare services compared with 85% in greater Copenhagen.
- In the Spanish island of Menorca, a 1990 survey found that 0% of 2 year olds, 10% of 3 year olds and 20% of 4 year olds were in pre-school services in rural areas compared with 50% of 2 year olds, 90% of 3 year olds and 100% of 4 year olds in urban areas.
- An English study has found that English metropolitan communities offer twice as much pre-primary schooling and four times as much local authority daycare as in the English counties, reflecting the findings of earlier Scottish surveys and this conceals the total absence of these services in many "deep" rural areas.

### ■ Variations in Services

There are also marked rural/urban variations in the structure of services. In some cases this reflects the development of models which may be more appropriate for rural areas; in most cases it reflects lower levels, or in many areas, total absence of formal services providing care and a greater preponderance in some countries of informal services which do not meet the care requirements of parents or provide the same level of educational opportunity. Rural/urban contrasts are greatest in relation to centre based care - totally absent in many areas and in short supply in most others. Levels of pre-primary schooling are significantly lower; in some countries levels of informal services are higher. For example:

- Centres providing care are rare in most rural areas in Spain.
- A 1990 Scottish survey found no publicly funded mixed age centres in the four study areas; a 1991 survey of English rural parishes found that only 3% of parishes had publicly funded mixed age centres. By contrast, English and Scottish surveys showed higher levels in rural areas of voluntary run playgroups and parent and toddler groups.
- In the Netherlands where levels of daycare in most areas are considerably lower or non-existent, there are higher levels of playgroup provision with places for 64% of two and three years olds in rural municipalities, compared with 42% in municipalities of 100,000 or more.
- In a study area in the Kilkis area of Macedonia in Greece out of a total of fourteen villages there were no services for children under three.
- A 1991 Danish study found less than 5% of children in rural areas were in childcare centres compared with 40% of children in this age group in the greater Copenhagen area.
- In Germany, a German Youth Institute survey found that only 15% of rural three year olds attended kindergarten compared with a West German average of 33%.

### ■ Staffing

There is evidence that rural services, providing care and education on a more formal basis, can experience difficulties in finding appropriately qualified staff. In some countries some exemptions from qualifications are possible. This is obviously a less satisfactory solution than addressing the shortages through training programmes adapted to the needs of rural communities, and highlights the issue of staff shortages in rural areas. Training problems relate not only to initial qualifications but also to inservice training.

### ■ Special Needs

Low level of services and less choice means that rural services in general are less able to meet the needs of particular groups. In many countries special support services for children with disabilities/special needs are in short supply or non-existent outside the cities leading in some cases to the use of residential institutions. In some countries the absence of publicly funded centres in rural areas means that only informal services providing limited respite are available for families recognised as requiring extensive support for

reasons of social or other disadvantage.

For example:

- In Germany support services for children with disabilities/special needs in general exist in the city with only a small number of innovative support schemes available in rural areas.
- In Ireland the only public provision available for children from disadvantaged families is in playgroups.

## Language requirements

In communities where families want support for their indigenous language or dialect, available services in some countries are often informal. Difficulties in supporting a parallel structure of services can considerably affect the level of support offered to children and families.

For example:

- In the UK the only services available in many communities requiring Gaelic and English or Welsh and English medium services are in general informal such as playgroups.

## Obstacles to development of services

There are a number of problems common to all Member States in developing provision in rural areas.

## Geographical factors

Small communities and areas with a scattered population fall below the minimum threshold for services - where these exist - and face substantially increased costs for providing services. The problems of delivering services in areas of low population density and scattered population have been compounded in a large number of areas by a declining birthrate and depopulation.

Low levels of services combined with the problems posed in some areas by a scattered population means that families have to travel considerable distances, restricting access in some cases to those who have transport or are able to pay the additional costs of transport. For those who do have access to transport the travelling time involved can diminish the effectiveness of the service. This problem is well illustrated in the comment of one parent (with a car) of her use of a playgroup in one Scottish survey - "No sooner do I get home then it is time to go back and pick him up" (Palmer, 1991). The German national

report comments that in many rural areas in Germany "children already at the age of 3 start a career as commuters".

## Inappropriate structures and models

In all Member States, services have developed historically in an unnecessarily fragmented form - involving the separate provision of services providing education, care and play. Whilst all of these purposes are important, it is not evident that they require separate provision or that such functional distinctions are particularly meaningful. In some rural communities, for example, a more meaningful distinction is that of language. Greece demonstrates in an extreme form the problems posed by unnecessary functional separation and overlapping of services. Few rural communities could envisage offering the complex range of services for pre-school children which have developed in Greece - encompassing nurseries from 8 months to 2.5, mixed aged centres from 8 months to 5.5, kindergartens run by the Ministry of Welfare for children aged 3 to 5.5 and pre-primary schooling run by the Ministry of Education from 4 to 5.5 years. Equally, few areas in the UK can offer local authority day nurseries for children from 0-5, playgroups for children aged 3 and 4 and pre-primary schooling for children aged 3 and 4. Unintegrated and inadequately co-ordinated structures cause problems in urban areas; in rural areas they are a major obstacle to the development of services.

Specialised development of services has resulted in models for services which may be inappropriate and too expensive to develop in many rural areas. Successful development programmes in rural areas suggest the importance of flexibility and multi-functional approaches. Particular challenges are posed in the development of models of provision in some areas by the need to take account of indigenous language requirements. Functional separation has created difficulties for the development of services in all areas - in many rural areas it frequently compounds the effect of low population density on the viability and cost of providing services.

## Staffing and standards

Rural services may have fewer children and consequently higher costs per child place in employing staff. Training programmes adapted to the needs of rural populations and taking advantage of technological advances in their delivery are still in short supply, resulting in shortages of appropriately qualified staff and difficulties in delivering inservice training.

Problems posed by distance and low density populations can also make it more difficult to properly support and monitor the quality of service. Standards can in some cases be inappropriately set for rural areas. This is not to suggest that there should be lower standards in rural areas but that they may in some cases require different standards. For example, in some climates and in some areas the ideal balance between indoor and outdoor play space may vary. Over rigid specifications concerning premises can cause particular problems in rural areas where suitable premises are in shorter supply and prevent the exploration of innovative models such as the Danish “wood kindergarten” model which takes advantage of natural resources within rural areas.

### **Awareness and information**

In many rural areas there have for long been very low levels of awareness of the increasing need for services. Such factors as the invisibility in some cases of women’s employment where this involved, for example, working on the family farm or business, and assumptions over family support networks have contributed to this; images of the poverty of children’s lives resulting from isolation have, in addition, never been as compelling as those of the poverty resulting from overcrowding and urban deprivation. Whilst European Union funding in childcare has been very limited, national reports suggest that it has been significant in raising awareness of the issues involved.

Low levels of awareness are often associated with a shortage or absence of information over what is possible and what can be achieved. Access to information may be affected by geographical isolation, and the costs of providing information services. In some areas it is affected by adult illiteracy.

### **Policies and resources**

National childcare policies are often developed in an urban environment and frequently take insufficient account of rural issues. This is of particular significance in countries where policies involve parents themselves being responsible for finding and paying for provision, or envisage a significant role for employers. As noted in Chapter 2, rural women often receive lower wages than their urban counterparts and frequently have to meet additional transport costs; employers willing to assist with childcare are in very short supply in most rural areas. In both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the current emphasis on the role of employers within national childcare policies is seen as particularly problematic for rural areas.

National reports demonstrate the need for adequate public funding in both developing and maintaining services. The cost of developing services and providing transport in rural communities can be heavier than in urban areas. Examples of successful programmes on a scale sufficient to make some impact **all** involve public funding. There are many examples within this report of valuable community and parent initiatives. Where these involve the development of formal services to meet the needs of the community as a whole, they in general involve some public or European funding, in addition to a contribution from parents, and in some cases community groups.

## **TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN PROVISION**

### **Flexible and multi-functional models**

A common feature of the successful examples of development of rural childcare described in Chapter 2 is flexibility - flexibility over hours and in combining the purposes and functions of services. For example, in France, rural centres frequently combine full, part-time and occasional care, in some cases for the wider age range of 0-6 years. In the Netherlands, there are now a number of examples of centres providing daycare and out of school care for children aged 0-12 years. In the UK there are examples of pre-primary schooling peripatetic sessions being run within daycare centres and playgroups. Functional integration in childcare has gone furthest in Denmark where all services for children from 0-7 and outside school hours care are the responsibility of one department at both national and local level. Structural integration, together with higher levels of resourcing, has contributed to the higher levels of provision in Denmark.

Flexibility and multi-functionalism can mean **making use of existing resources such as school premises**. Depopulation and declining birthrates have led to an increasing use of school premises for childcare. The threat to schools from a declining school role has sometimes prompted the development of provision. As described in Chapter 2, in the Danish village of Hover Bornehus, an important factor in the establishment of the childcare centre was as a means of keeping the school open and in France, the local family association in the village of Courteranges started to run an out of school care and meal service for children as a way of preventing children

transferring to school in a nearby town because of the absence of these services in the villages.

In some countries **functional sharing of premises** encompasses not only different services for children but for other groups such as services for elderly and disabled people as well as (more commonly) community activities. In Greece there are a number of examples of this in centres provided by the Greek agency, the National Welfare Organisation. An awareness of the benefits to be derived from promoting inter-generational contact informs developments in a number of countries.

Functional integration involves in some cases the **adaptation of informal services** in rural areas to include formal elements of care and/or education. For example, in the Netherlands a number of rural districts have explored ways of adapting playgroups to encompass the care element. In the UK where, as in the Netherlands, playgroups are the only service found in some rural areas, there are also some examples of this.

## Family and Community Associations

In a number of countries family associations and parent and community groups have played a significant role in the development of services facilitating in some cases a family based approach to services. In Greece a family based approach has also linked well with rural development. Funding strategies in a number of countries (see below) have assisted associations in extending services to "hard to reach" areas and in meeting particular linguistic and cultural requirements.

## Peripatetic services

In a number of countries, access to some form of pre-school educational experience has been facilitated through the development of peripatetic educational services. As noted earlier, these have in some cases been included within other services. Other forms of peripatetic services include mobile play buses, temporary short term care facilities, attached to mobile training services, or available for agricultural workers. Peripatetic services sometimes constitute a valid or appropriate service in their own right. In some cases they represent a second best, low cost alternative to full-time services.

## Association with rural development

Rural childcare is increasingly being seen in a number of countries within the context of population retention and rural development. Improving the quality of life is one feature of this but there is also a growing recognition of its role in facilitating diversification within the rural economy. There are two separate elements in this. **Firstly**, it is seen as facilitating the development and upgrading of labour market skills through facilitating women's access to training. **Secondly**, it is seen as contributing to the long term enhancement of skills within the area through improving the learning and development opportunities of children in this way.

There is also increased recognition of the direct contribution which can be made by services to local employment. As noted in Chapter One, an important feature of this is that the services not only create jobs, but also enhance the supply of labour through facilitating access to the labour market. In this way the bottleneck inflationary pressures associated with some other forms of infrastructural investment may be avoided. The combination of the enhancement of supply and quality of labour with the creation of jobs adds up to a 'galvanising' effect on local economies which can be of considerable importance for disadvantaged areas.

In Greece, the Ministry of Agriculture has, over a considerable period of time, recognised the need to address underlying social and educational needs of the rural population - organising, for example, networks of rural/domestic economy workers with a wider community development role and establishing seasonal childcare centres. In France, Scotland and England, government funded initiatives are specifically exploring the development of services in the context of population retention and rural development. In many countries, European funding (see below) has encouraged this wider perspective on the role of services in facilitating training and employment.

## Locally relevant curricula

In some countries there is increasing interest in ensuring that the childcare curriculum reflects the needs of the local community. In Denmark this is particularly evident in examples which involve farms attached to centres and in one form of provision - wood kindergartens - which bring children into very close contact with the local outdoor environment. In some of the Danish examples of provision, there is a very clearly articulated philosophy of ensuring that childcare centres relate to other groups within the community. There is a high level of involvement of

parents in all centres and as in the Svanninge centre described in Chapter 2 some centres work closely with the elderly people and their associations. As noted earlier, in some countries such as Greece the role of family agencies in developing services has facilitated the use of premises for both childcare services and for elderly people promoting inter-generational contact.

In many countries, the local rural environment features within the curriculum with some variation in what this means in developing understanding of the local history, culture or local language/dialect.

### **Role in supporting local language**

In some rural areas, childcare services are seen as playing an important role in supporting the local language or dialect. In areas where the local language has been considerably eroded by the 'national' language and where, in some cases, the indigenous language has become a minority language, this involves an emphasis on separate 'immersion' services requiring the development of parallel services. An example of this is the development of parallel Gaelic and English speaking playgroups in Scotland and to a much more limited extent, parallel pre-primary schooling. In Friesland in the Netherlands where Fries is officially recognised as a second language, a professional training programme now offers students a two language programme encouraging all childcare workers in Friesland to acquire both languages. With language now seen as an important element in protecting the identity and self confidence of the local community in many areas, there are significant policy issues to be addressed in the context of rural childcare services.

### **Promoting development of services**

From the available evidence, the key to the development of services would appear to lie in high levels of public support for services in general combined with funding strategies which stimulate local community initiatives. The two countries with the highest levels of provision - Denmark and France - have high levels of investment in publicly funded childcare services.

Service levels are highest in Denmark which also has coherent and more effectively integrated policies for the development of services providing care and education, and models of age integrated provision which effectively lend themselves to the kind of development required within rural areas. A funding

strategy facilitated through legislation in 1990, the so-called 'bag of money' or 'pooling' arrangement, is seen as having been particularly effective in assisting development in rural areas and in addressing the gaps in services. This involves funding from municipalities to enable parents, groups and organisations to establish and operate their own nursery subject to meeting the criteria specified by the municipality.

In France, a similar extension in the use of the Family Allowance Funds (CAFs) to provide access to groups such as non profit private organisations and employers has also facilitated the involvement of agencies such as ACEPP and rural family organisations in developing provision in a flexible form.

Funding initiatives in the Netherlands and the UK - in the UK in relation specifically to school-age childcare - have also encouraged the development of services but it should be noted that the funding initiatives in both the Netherlands and the UK are time limited and require contributions from employers or other agencies. This contrasts with both the Danish bag of money funding which is not time limited and the funding structure provided by the Family Allowance Funds in France which also provides a long term funding structure (although individual contracts may be time limited).

### **Role of European funding in rural childcare**

European funding has been only limited in quantitative terms and take up within the mainstream funds has been particularly disappointing. As previously noted, the most visible childcare funding has been in the Commission's own NOW programme, although only 6% of projects funded through this involved the establishment of centres (as supplementary measures to facilitate training) and it is not known how many of these projects were in rural areas. However, Chapter 2 provides a number of examples of funding through these programmes which demonstrate the significant role that European funding can play in raising awareness of the role of childcare in equal opportunities and rural development. In Ireland, the NOW programme has been significant in bringing the need for daycare services to the surface. In Scotland, a centre established in the Isle of Skye under the LEADER programme, has highlighted the economic significance of childcare services within a rural community. The element of transnational exchange has been successful in actively sharing ideas and experiences across the Union and has, for example, been responsible for assisting in developing the concept of family daycare to Greece.

At the time of writing, childcare funding applications under the revised structural funding programme of 1994-99 have not been finalised. It is, however, evident from funding applications under the last programme that only programmes which specifically refer to childcare generate any significant uptake and that the central funds are likely to remain very much underutilised without very considerable promotion of the possibilities they provide. European funding could play a major role in promoting the development of services on a basis which takes account of innovative models being developed in a number of countries. The most effective way of achieving this is through an explicit funding programme, accompanied by a programme of dissemination and exchange of information.

### **Rural Childcare Policies within member states**

Concern over the low level of services and recognition of rising levels of demand and need are growing in many countries. In some countries, strong national childcare policies have benefited rural areas as well - in Denmark for example with levels of services lower in rural than urban areas, they are still higher than in many urban areas throughout the European Union as a whole. In all countries however childcare policies have tended to be urban-led. The historical development of childcare involving a diverse structure of services, usually administered separately, has not been particularly successful in coping with rising levels of demand and need in many urban areas. In rural areas, the effect of this complex structure, amplified by low density and scattered populations, has presented one of the most significant obstacles to the development of services.

The variety of problems presented to developing rural services within a variety of rural contexts are being addressed in varying degrees in many countries, often in very imaginative ways. In some cases this is taking place as a means of systematically implementing national childcare policies in rural areas, sometimes through specific government-funded initiatives. In two Member States, governments have been involved in limited initiatives of this nature, initiatives linked in to programmes of rural development. The importance of policies which recognise the diverse range of functions which childcare serves and which are able to locate childcare within a context of overall community development, meeting not only the longterm needs of children and communities but facilitating economic diversification and upgrading of skills, plays a small but significant role in empowering communities, may be seen as applying to disadvantaged urban communities as much as disadvantaged rural areas. The development of rural childcare policies within Member States may in this

way enhance the effectiveness of national childcare policies as they apply to some urban as well as rural communities.

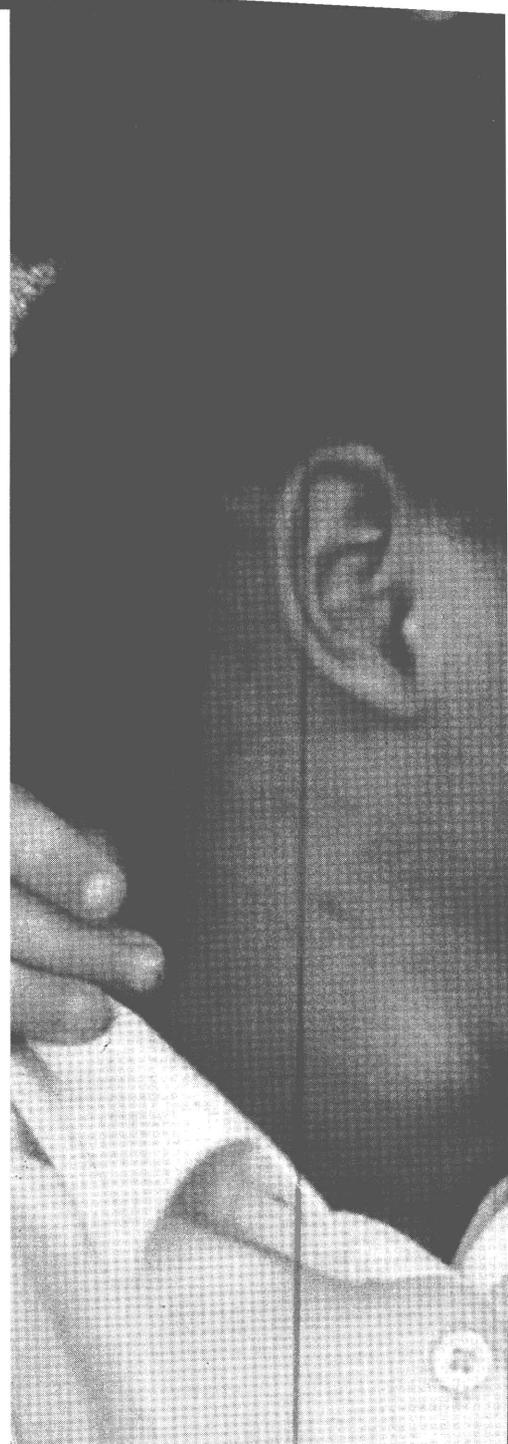
### **Other aspects of work and family policies**

This report is concerned with rural childcare services. However, the European Union's Childcare Recommendation notes the importance of action across a wide range of work and family provisions encompassing not only services for children but leave arrangements for parents; making the environment, structure and organisation of work responsive to the needs of workers with children; promoting the sharing of responsibilities for children between women and men. Reports from Member States for this report and for the study on Rural Women prepared for the European Commission provides evidence of the considerable need for consideration of these other aspects of work and family provision. The uncertain employment status of many rural women, who are more likely than urban women to be self-employed or working as "assisting spouses" and the greater amount of time spent on family and domestic work by rural compared with urban women, raise significant issues over access to leave provision and social security, flexible working and replacement services as well as highlighting the very considerable need for childcare services.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Improving the level and quality of rural childcare services within the European Union requires better policies, more appropriate models, and more effective resourcing. The responsibilities for this must lie primarily within Member States but the findings of this report suggest the importance of action at a European level, both in the form of specific actions by the Commission and through more effective use of the European Union's Structural Funding programme, encompassing all the relevant funds - the ESF, ERDF, EAGGF - as well as the Commission's own programmes. Developments within rural childcare can be promoted through partnership between the European Commission and Member States.**

The European Commission could make a significant and effective contribution to developments in this area through funding innovative rural childcare projects as envisaged in the European Union's Third Medium Term Action Programme and, in conjunction with this, supporting a transnational exchange of information, models and good practice in rural childcare. The valuable role which can be played by such exchanges has been recently highlighted within



the Commission's Green Paper on Social Policy and could be facilitated through Article 10 of the ERDF or other appropriate funds.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEMBER STATES

1. Member States should develop a **comprehensive and coherent policy** to ensure access of rural children to good quality services, with a clear timetable for achieving this objective and on a basis which takes account of rural diversity and diversity in needs.
2. Member States should **facilitate the piloting of**



**appropriate models and funding strategies** for the delivery of services on a basis which takes account of the full range of needs. In some areas this includes indigenous and other minority language requirements.

3. Member States should **examine legislative requirements and funding mechanisms and training in relation to rural requirements**. Member States should collect and analyse information on comparative levels of services in urban and rural areas, as well as other relevant information including childcare arrangements made by parents, parental satisfaction with existing childcare and parental preference for childcare, and relevant employment data. (For fuller discussion on information requirements, see Humblet (1994)).

4. Member States should encourage a **collaborative approach between relevant government departments**, encompassing not only those involved with welfare and education, leisure and recreation, but also agricultural and rural development. Member States need to ensure that childcare policies take full account of the full range of functions of services and are not either solely led by, or totally detached from, the labour market.

5. Member States should collaborate with the European Commission in disseminating information, facilitating exchange of ideas and information on ways of delivering services in rural areas, and encouraging effective use of the structural funds in developing childcare infrastructure.

## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

1. Member States are required to report to the European Commission in 1995 on the implementation of the Recommendation on Child care. The Commission should disseminate guidelines for the collection of data on a basis which compares urban and rural areas and permits the Commission to assess implementation of Article 3(1) relating to the availability of services in urban and rural areas.

2. Following this Report on the implementation of the Recommendation, the Commission should make arrangements to continue to monitor and review on a regular basis rural childcare provisions in Member States.

3. The Commission should promote rural childcare policies which take account of the variety of rural areas and diversity of need by:

a. using Article 10 of the ERDF and technical assistance provisions of ESF and EAGGF to facilitate the exchange of information, innovative models and good practice between Member States in the European Union.

b. exploring the potential for a Rural Childcare Programme of up to 250 innovative projects to:

- increase awareness and recognition of possible childcare applications for the use of the structural funds.
- support the development of services.
- assist Member States in developing appropriate models of childcare for different rural areas focusing in particular on flexible models with a multi-functional approach and possible ways of adapting some existing services.

c. working with Member States to ensure that rural childcare services receive adequate support and attention within the European Union's structural funding programme and other relevant programmes.

d. ensuring that rural areas and their needs receive explicit recognition in any subsequent measure or initiatives concerning childcare policies and services or, more broadly, policies for the reconciliation of employment and family policies, and childcare is explicitly recognised in rural development policies.



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

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### ABBREVIATIONS FOR MEMBER STATES

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