



## Country profile: Hungary

A report for the cross-European programme *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*



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**This report forms part of *Working for Inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*. It is a European Union-wide programme funded by the European Commission and supported by the Scottish Government.**

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### The programme

*Working for Inclusion* is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children is helping to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion.

Taking place from February 2009 - January 2011, the programme encourages and facilitates discussion and debate over the role of the early years workforce. It will enable greater, more extensive and effective dialogue between local and national governments, education and qualification providers, employers, practitioners and policymakers.

### Programme partners

The programme is led by Children in Scotland in partnership with:

La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy  
Nordland Research Institute, Norway  
Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland

### Research

The programme encompasses research, which offers a clear picture of early years services and their workforce across the EU and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion.

In addition, country profiles of Scotland and the UK, Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary have been produced. This data will contribute towards policy development at EU level as well as Scotland and the rest of the UK. The research is led by Professor Peter Moss and Dr John Bennett.

### Study visits

Study visits in the four partner countries will address four key themes relating to poverty and social inclusion and the early years workforce. These visits will form the basis of a report on each theme, published by Children in Scotland on the project website ([www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi)), and publicised throughout member states at local and national levels.

Each partner country will provide the context for exploring particular key challenges within the early years workforce:

- Working with the child as an active agent in their own learning (Italy)
- Working with diversity, in particular ethnicity, language, disability and gender (Scotland)
- Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas (Norway)
- Exploring the role of the pedagogue in working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups (Poland).

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## Glossary of key terms

### Main services

*Bölcsőde* – centre for children under three years

*Óvoda* – centre (kindergarten) for children from three to six years

*Családi napközi* – family day care for children from birth to 14 years

*Iskolai napközi* – school-based out-of-school care.

### Main occupations

*Gondozónő* – qualified worker in *bölcsőde*

*Óvónő* – *Óvoda* (kindergarten) pedagogue

*Dajka* – *Óvoda* (kindergarten) assistant, not pedagogical staff

*Családi napközi ellátást nyújtó személy* - family day care provider

*Napközis tanító and tanár* – teacher who is an out-of-school worker; *tanító* is a teacher in grades one to four; *tanár* is a teacher in older grades.

### Other terms

Szülési szabadság– maternity leave

Gyermekgondozási segély(GYES) – parental leave for non-insured parents

Gyermekgondozási díj (GYED) – parental leave for insured parents.

# Context

## At a glance

**Population:** 10 million; **Density:** 108 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>; **Total fertility rate:** 1.3; **Children in lone parent households:** 11%.

**Part-time employed** as % all employed: 4.2% (women), 1.6% (men); **maternal employment:** 16% (child under three years), 61% (child three to six years).

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita** at Purchasing Power Parities as % EU average: 63%; **Children 'at risk of poverty':** 20% (all), 33% (lone parent); **Ratio of income of top 20% to income of bottom 20%:** 5.5.

**Tax receipts as % GDP:** 39%; **public expenditure on education as % GDP:** 5.1%; **public expenditure on social protection as % GDP:** 21.9%, of which 2.5% on family/children.

**Period of leave after birth:** 36 months, of which 25 months paid at two-thirds of previous earnings.

### Demographic, social and economic

Hungary has a population of 10 million, with a density about the average for the EU and a low fertility rate; in 2005, 11% of children lived in lone parent households, slightly below the EU average (SPC, 2008: Table A8a). For 95% of the population, the mother language is Hungarian; the largest minority groups are the Roma (2.1% according to the 2001 Census) and Germans (1.2%). For historical reasons, significant Hungarian minority populations can be found in the surrounding countries, most of them in Romania (in Transylvania), Slovakia, Serbia (in Vojvodina); sizable minorities live also in Ukraine (in Transcarpathia), Croatia (mainly Slavonia) and Austria (in Burgenland). Only about 3% of the population is foreign born, and there has been little inward migration in recent years.

Employment is largely full-time, with less than 5% of employed women and men in part-time work. Women with children under three have a low employment rate, less than a third of the EU average, due to a long and relatively well paid

parental leave and relatively low levels of ECEC provision for this age group of children; the impact of parenthood on employment is, therefore, high for Hungarian women. Employment for women with a child aged three to six years is much higher, though still below the EU average (see 'Related policies for young children and their families' below). Given high (and above EU average) employment among fathers of young children, there is a large employment gap between mothers and fathers, especially when there is a child under three in the household.

Hungary has a low level of per capita income by EU standards, about two-thirds of the EU average, and an average to poor position for disadvantage and inequality. About one in five children live in poverty, slightly above the EU average, and the level of income inequality (using the income ratio of the 20% highest and lowest in the population) is above the average. Hungary is one of eight member states where child poverty is above average *and* children have a significantly higher risk of being in poverty

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than the overall population (SPC, 2008: 15, Table 1). Hungary is in the bottom seven EU member states for child wellbeing, and is 60<sup>th</sup> in the world on the Gender Gap Index.

Hungary has been particularly badly hit by the current economic crisis, so that the economic and employment situation overall and for households with children will probably have deteriorated considerably over recent months.

### Government

Hungary is a unitary state, with three main levels of government: national, county and municipal, following major decentralisation of power to local levels in the 1990s (see 'History overview' below). There are 19 counties plus the city of Budapest, which has similar responsibilities to those of the counties and responsibilities related to the functioning of the city as a whole (eg main roads, water, sewage, public transport, etc).

Municipalities are the basic units of the system and are organized by settlements, which include villages, cities and cities with county rights; districts in Budapest have similar responsibilities to those of municipalities. There are more than 3,100 municipalities, many small with less than 2,000 inhabitants. Their main responsibilities include the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, primary schooling, basic health and welfare services, and the protection of the rights of ethnic and national minorities. There are large differences between municipalities in size and income, ranging from villages with a few thousand inhabitants to Budapest with about two million.

### Tax and social expenditure

Taxation levels are around the EU average. Hungary spends an above-average amount (proportionate to GDP) on education, but below average on social protection expenditure. This latter category includes a wide range of policies, including old age, healthcare, disability, families

and children, unemployment and housing. For the group 'family/children', expenditure is substantially above the level for the EU.

### Leave policies for young children and their families

There is 24 weeks of maternity leave, four weeks of which must be taken before birth, paid at 70% of earnings. Hungary was the first country in the world to introduce post-maternity 'childcare leave', in 1967. Originally for women only, it has become 'parental leave' available to both parents. Today it provides paid leave for up to the first three years after birth, including two years of income-related leave (at 70% of earnings) for eligible (insured) parents, the longest in Europe, followed by one year with a flat-rate payment. There is no information on what proportion of parents take parental leave or how long they take. It is thought, however, that the number of fathers taking leave is very small, while a high proportion of mothers take leave (accounting for the low employment rate amongst this group); and that mothers with higher education and better paid jobs take shorter periods of leave, especially as the last year is paid at a flat rate and because of the implications for careers of prolonged absence from work (Korintus, 2009).

There is an entitlement to leave to care for sick children, paid at 70% of earnings, the length depending on the age of the child: under one year it is unlimited; from 12 to 35 months up to 84 days per child per year; and from 36 to 71 months, 42 days.

### Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing

Social policies have changed frequently during the transition years, but perceptions of women's role in society and within the family have changed far less. The overall picture emerging from a survey by the National Institute for Family and Social Policy indicates that the respondents:

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- favoured the option of the mother staying home with a young child;
- think that *bölcsőde* are used mainly because the mother needs to have a job to ensure enough income for the family;
- are of the view that a wife would rather work part time, or not work at all, if the husband earned enough for the family to live on (Korintus, 2008).

The review by Plantegna and Remery (2009, Box 7) says, based on a 2008 national report, that 'there is general agreement that until approximately 18 months of age, the infant's physical and emotional needs are best served by parents at home'.

But such responses have to be interpreted carefully, given the shortage of services for children under three; it is not known what percentage of parents have a real choice between taking up leave or using childcare.

## Historical overview

1828: first *óvoda* (kindergarten) opened in Buda, to provide protection for children from poor families. The number of kindergartens rose gradually to 89 at the end of 1847. In their early years, they were similar to contemporary elementary schools.

1837: first training institution for kindergarten workers who were mostly men at that time.

1852: first *bölcsőde* (nursery) opened in Pest, to provide day care for children of poor mothers while they worked.

1879: first state-funded kindergarten in Hungarian part of Austro-Hungarian Empire; numbers grew rapidly from 1880s (to 527 by 1906), especially in areas with significant ethnic minority and working class populations, with the aim of promoting Hungarian language and sustaining religious values.

Second half 19<sup>th</sup> century: increasing differentiation between *óvoda* and school.

1891: Childcare Act (*évi kiseddóvási törvény*) defined the purpose of *óvoda* as: looking after and caring for three to six-year-old children, protecting children from dangers in the absence of their parents, getting children used to order and cleanliness, as well as promoting bodily, intellectual and moral development. The *óvoda* were recognised as public education institutions, though the law stated that school-like teaching had no place in them. The act began the development of the state *óvoda* network; the parallel system of community and church *óvoda* also grew gradually.

1936: 1891 law amended, including a shift in the focus of *óvoda* from education to health, with special emphasis on poorest families. Control over budget from Ministry of Education to Ministry of Interior.

1945: Ministry of Finance given role in administration of *óvoda*, controlling investment and budgets, and with authority over openings,

personnel decisions etc; Ministry of Interior supervised local implementation of laws; Ministry of Education continued to supervise educational programmes.

1948: Communist take-over. Developing ECEC became a State responsibility, and promoting women's employment and public role required the extension of *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* places. In 1954 and 1953 respectively, the first national guidance for working with children in these settings was published.

1949: responsibility for *óvoda* moved from welfare to education ministry. Responsibility for *bölcsőde* remained with health. Universal right and obligation for women to work.

1960s and 1970s: many new centres for children under school age were opened. Service provision was exclusively by the state, and both services were highly centralized.

1967: introduction of paid childcare leave (GYES) until the child's third birthday, designed to address two problems: the need to balance work and child rearing, and the possibility of emerging unemployment related to economic reforms. New leave quickly taken up by the majority of parents (in practice, mothers).

After the 1970s: the pace of building new centres slowed, then stopped almost entirely. Centres were closed down from the mid-1980s onwards; the reasons given were the low number of births and difficulties of financing existing services. Between 1984 and 2003, more than half of *bölcsőde* places and a substantial number of *óvoda* places disappeared.

1989: end of socialist regime. This was followed by decentralisation of government, with establishment of municipalities and transfer of responsibility for ECEC services to them. (Under the old regime, the maintenance of *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* was the responsibility of local councils, which were not the same as present-day municipalities; they had no independence and

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acted as agents of the central state).

1993: Social Act (*Szociális törvény*) placed *bölcsőde* in the child protection system, completing the move from health. The ministerial responsibility was jointly for welfare and health at the time.

1993 and 1997: Education Act (*Oktatási törvény*) and Act on the Protection of Children (1997. évi törvény a gyermekek védelméről és a gyámügyi igazgatásról) legislate for *óvoda* and *bölcsőde* respectively. Regulations govern the system of administration and inspection, define minimum criteria, set educational content, establish quality standards and access to childcare, respite care, long term care services, kindergarten, and after school care. Both pieces of legislation focus on children's rights, equality, and the involvement of parents in the programmes. Licensed family day care and home childcare were included in the 1997 legislation as basic services to be provided for families with young children. 1993 law defines *óvoda* as "professionally independent educational institutions whose most important functions are protective, social and educational"; and their function as providing care for children while their parents are at work and preparing children for school. The Act defines *óvoda* as the first phase of the education system and as places of *nevelés* (see 'key concepts' below)

## Key concepts and important influences in ECEC

### Key concepts

The term '*nevelés*' has a central role in discussing and practicing early childhood work in Hungary. It does not have an exact English equivalent, the closest translation being 'upbringing'. It is a holistic concept, including not just care and education (considered as very closely related, if not inseparable), but also health, behaviour and social skills – everything needed in life. It has, therefore, much in common with the concept of 'social pedagogy' (as used, for example, in Denmark or Germany) or 'education in its broadest sense'.

The term has had an important, though varying, place in the history of ECEC services. The *óvoda* (kindergarten for children over three) has had two main responsibilities over the years: protection for children from poor families and *nevelés*. But at times, eg in the 1950s, the focus on education (in the narrow sense) as the role of *óvoda* became more pronounced; until 1993, they were considered to be institutions of *nevelés* and education. *Óvoda* has always been considered as the first step in the public education system, so the term 'education' (*tanítás*) has been used in legislation and public discussion.

But since the Education Act in 1993, and following successful lobbying by the 'kindergarten lobby', *óvoda* is classified as an institution only of *nevelés*, reflecting the negative connotations of *tanítás*, which is linked to an idea of teaching in elementary schools. *Óvoda* has always resisted *tanítás* being used in relation to its work, as this term for education is often not used in a broad sense. *Óvoda* has understood its role to be preparing children for school *but not* by using school methods.

Today the concept of *nevelés* increasingly applies also to *bölcsőde*, providing an overarching approach for both services, the main aim of which is the overall development of the child. Work in these centres with very young children originally was not so evidently *nevelés*; there

was a strong emphasis on health. But the work changed in the late 1970s when nurseries opened up. At that point children did not have to spend the whole day there – a gradual introduction was possible. Parents had an opportunity to come into the *bölcsőde*, so perceptions of the workers changed and it was increasingly realised that their work was not just about looking after children. By the early 1990s, workers became very conscious that they were engaged in *nevelés*, and that their work had gradually changed from looking after children to *nevelés*. In 2000, a 'programme for *nevelés*' was agreed for *bölcsőde*; after a long fight for recognition that *bölcsőde* workers are 'educating' children in the broad sense, *bölcsőde* were accepted as places for *nevelés*.

This process of change has been accompanied by a growing awareness that work in *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* is similar. Today, work in *bölcsőde* is generally referred to as doing 'care work and *nevelés*', the 'care work' emphasising the physical care; workers in *óvoda* talk about doing *nevelés*; while elementary school teachers refer to doing education and *nevelés*. So *nevelés* – as a concept and practice – runs through services from birth to 11/12 years (and families are supposed to '*nevel*' their child.)

The Hungarian word for 'care' also carries a broad meaning. *Gondoskodás* refers to satisfying human needs – not only physical, but also emotional, social and mental. This holistic approach is found in policy. *Bölcsőde* are intended to offer a comprehensive programme concerned not only with children's physical needs but also with their psychosocial development.

# The structure of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Hungary has a split system of ECEC, with separate government responsibility, types of provision, regulation and workforces for services for children under three years and from three to six years.

### Service organisation and provision

#### *Main types of service provision*

There are two main types of ECEC provision in Hungary. *Bölcsőde* are for children under three (or up to six for children with disabilities); and *óvoda* are for children from the age of three until they start elementary school around the age of six or seven (children can start elementary school in September of the year when they become six years old by 31 May if they are ready for school; if they become ready for school later, they can start later, up to the age of eight if they were born after 31 August (the guiding principle is readiness for school, not age). There is an entitlement to attend *óvoda*, and the last year of attendance (for five year olds) is compulsory.

Both are usually open from 6am to 6pm (offering four meals a day) and for 46-48 weeks a year; when one service is closed for a holiday, care should be provided in another *bölcsőde* or *óvoda* in the area for those children whose parents request it, ensuring services are offered to families for 50 weeks a year.

Although both types of provision have traditionally been independent, since the 1990s (supported by the 1993 Children Act), municipalities can integrate the administration of different institutions into one organization, eg *bölcsőde* integrated with health or education services. More recently, multi-purpose institutions have emerged where a nursery group of children under three has been set up within an *óvoda* (*bölcsőde-óvoda közös intézmény*). These mergers are mainly to cut costs and address the shortage of *bölcsőde* in some parts of Hungary. In these cases, though sharing a site and/or building, each type of

provision has to be run according to its own legislation and guidelines, and there must be separate directors. The number of such services is small at the moment (mainly in the Southern part of the country), but they are becoming more widely known.

Another recent variation on the traditional pattern of services is the multifunctional centres (*egységes óvoda-bölcsőde*) where two year olds and older children of *óvoda* age can attend. This arrangement, permitted since 1 September 2009, is for municipalities that are not legally required to maintain a *bölcsőde* (ie with populations below 10,000), and where the small number of children does not make it viable to set up separate (*bölcsőde* and *óvoda*) groups for children under and over three years of age. Certain criteria have to be met to ensure age-appropriate care and education for the youngest children.

The size of *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* varies. The biggest have places for 120 children, while the smallest only have 20 places; on average, though, they both provide around 60 places.

Provision of services, in particular *bölcsőde*, varies considerably from place to place, and is higher in large, urban municipalities, and lowest in small, rural ones. Although municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants are required by law to provide *bölcsőde*, a number still do not do so (14 according to Plantenga and Remery, 2009: Box 2). Overall, only 12% of municipalities provide any services for children under three.

There is also family day care (*családi napközi*), operating as a service since 1990, with regulations introduced in 1993. There is a very low level of provision.

#### *Providers*

Both of the main types of provision are overwhelmingly provided by the public sector, meaning municipalities. An estimate (by the

## The structure of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

national expert) is that for *bölcsőde*, 95% of places are provided by municipalities and 5% by Church organisations and non-profit or for-profit organisations; while for *óvoda*, the respective distribution is 94% municipal and 6% Church and others. There are a number of reasons for the low level of private sector providers, including the financing system (see 'system financing' below).

### The governance of early childhood services

#### National level

Hungary has a split system of ECEC, starting with divided governance at national level. *Bölcsőde* and family day care are the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour; within the Ministry, the Division for the Protection of Children and Youth has the responsibility for *bölcsőde* and family day care. There is one person within the division whose sole responsibility is early childhood care. Child protection work, in the same Ministry, has a higher profile with far more officials attached to it.

There are regional offices called Guardianship Agencies (*Gyámhivatalok* - GAs). GAs are responsible for ensuring the whole child protection system meets legal and professional standards, including *bölcsőde* and family day care homes.

There is a 'methodological nursery' (*módszertani feladatot ellátó bölcsőde*) (MNs) in each region (there are eight in Hungary, including one in Budapest), which has responsibility for developing work in *bölcsőde* in that area. MNs mediate between different levels of government and services, helping to translate legislation into practice, sharing good practice and making recommendations based on their consultations with services. Professional support for *bölcsőde* is provided by appointed MNs, which have additional resources and whose staff monitor other services in a given geographical area; organise ongoing training, conferences,

exchange visits, etc; provide consultation and guidance; and circulate information. MNs work with GAs to inspect nurseries, acting as expert advisers to GAs on inspections – but not on inspections in their own county.

*Szociálpolitikai és Munkaügyi Intézet* (Institute of Social Policy and Labour – SZMI) is another example of a 'background institute' (*minisztériumi háttérintézmény*), an 'arms length' agency that has funding and a remit from a particular Ministry but is not a part of it. The Institute was established in the 1970s to support the development of *bölcsőde*; it existed in this form until 1997 when child protection was added to its responsibilities. In 2000 it was given responsibilities for training and social services, and later labour and youth issues. Each change has followed reorganisation of the Ministry responsible for SZMI. Originally, its responsibilities for *bölcsőde* were Research and Development (R&D) and training, but now only encompass R&D (though it also coordinates the work of methodological nurseries).

*Óvoda* is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, situated in the Department for Public Education. There are two officials whose sole responsibility is working with this service, which seems to reflect a low level of importance attached to *óvoda* in the education system. The Ministry has no regional or local offices, but it funds 'background institutes', which include the *Oktatási Hivatal* (Education Office), whose responsibilities include assessment, inspection, and evaluation; the *Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet*, the Research and Development Agency; and the *Educatio Kht.*, whose main responsibilities are to coordinate EU co-funded projects within the education system.

#### Local level

Different legislation (such as the Education Act and the Act on the Protection of Children, the Social Act, etc) define the duties of local governments, including what basic services they

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are required to ensure for the population in their area. Among these are the so-called basic social and child welfare services (including childcare for children under the age of three) and public education. Municipalities have the right to prioritise and to meet their duties by setting up their own management structures. As a result, the organisation of responsibilities can be different from municipality to municipality. Some have different departments responsible for nurseries and educational institutions (including *óvoda*); others integrate administration of nurseries in health or welfare, etc.

Duties can be fulfilled by the municipalities by setting up and operating services – including *bölcsőde*, family day care and *óvoda* – either directly or in partnerships, as well as by contracting out the services. In practice, most children's services are provided directly by municipalities themselves, because of the substantial co-funding needed to match central funding, which can only be allocated from the general budgets of municipalities; the type of services funded this way and the amount of co-funding is decided by the council of the municipality. Consequently, not all municipalities provide services they are legally required to, especially in municipalities in disadvantaged areas and with limited budgets.

Municipalities are the issuing agents for operating licenses, and are responsible for regular inspections tied to licensing.

### System financing

Unit cost per child (US\$ using Purchasing Power Parities): *bölcsőde*; *óvoda* – US\$3,475)

Proportion of costs paid by parents (average): *bölcsőde* – 10%; *óvoda* – 10%

Costs for a two year old as % gross earnings of average production earner: 6%<sup>1</sup>

Funding comes from three sources, for both *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*: the state; the municipality; and parents. The ratio of these is somewhat different, but in both cases municipalities have the biggest share (around 60%), while state funding is also substantial (25-30%); funding from both is direct to services (ie supply funding).

Parents pay only for the cost of meals (which comes to about 10% of the full cost) with government regulation setting the maximum level of parental fees. These fees are lowered or cancelled completely for those with low incomes, and the rest is covered by local government. The cost to parents for a two year old attending a centre was the third lowest among 25 member states analysed in an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) study (this figure is based on 2001, but the system has not changed significantly since then).

The financing system helps to explain the low level of private sector ECEC provision. Central government funding covers only about one third of the full cost of a place and is accessible only for those Non-Governmental Organisations or other private providers that have a contract with a municipality. This and the regulation capping parental fees means that a provider of services has to be able to fund almost two-thirds of the full cost. At the same time, central and local governments have very high expectations of service quality; providers from all sectors have to meet the same standards set in legislation and tied to licensing.

Family day care has received far less public funding, leaving parents to pay most of the cost, which is one reason put forward for the slow development of this new service. Since 2003, the state has begun to provide a subsidy for children going to family day care, but at a lower rate than for centre-based services.

The system of parental leave subsidises home care by parents during the first three years of a child's life; the payment can be transferred to

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grandparents from a child's first to third birthday if the child is cared for in its own home.

### Data collecting, monitoring and research

The Hungarian Central Statistical Office and the Educational Statistical Agency collect regular data on *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* respectively. These are mostly basic data on: the number of *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*, enrolments, the number and age group of children attending, the number and qualification of staff, group sizes and special needs children.

There has not been any research or systematic evaluation of *bölcsőde* during the past 10 years. There were two research studies by the *Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet* (Educational Research and Development Institute) covering the implementation of educational programmes in *óvoda*.

# Access levels and strategies

Attendance at formal ECEC services (EC, 2006): birth to three years: 8% (6% attend 30 hours a week or more); three to six years: 79% (58% attend 30 hours a week or more)

Attendance at informal ECEC services (EC, 2006): birth to three years: 48% (6% attend 30 hours a week or more)

Attendance rate at formal services for children under three years by educational level of mother (2005): low education = 3%; medium education = 9%; high education = 6%

Attendance rate by area for children under three years (2001): highest regional rate: 11.1%; lowest regional rate: 2.6%

### Access levels and admission criteria

For *bölcsőde*, there are places for 8.3% of children under three years and the attendance rate is around 11% (2007). There are places for 91% of children between the ages of three and six in *óvoda* and the attendance rate is 85% (2007).

Children over three are entitled to a place in *óvoda* and attendance is compulsory from the age of five. However, children under five are only admitted if there are sufficient places, and about 5,000 children are turned away every year due to lack of places. Working families and disadvantaged families have priority for places, though actual priorities can be decided locally by the council of the municipality (Eurydice: 54).

Far more children under three use informal than formal provision, though the great majority of children using informal provision attend for less than 30 hours a week.

### Access levels for different groups

Overall, children under three have much less access to services than three to six-year-olds, and the limited provision is not evenly distributed. Today, only about 15-20% of municipalities have *bölcsőde*, and most of these are bigger towns and cities; 43% of families with a young child live in municipalities with no

services (Plantenga and Remery, 2009: Box 2). These local differences are reflected in considerable differences between counties in levels of attendance for children under three, with a ratio of 1:3.6 (in 2001) between the lowest and highest counties. Young children in rural areas are less likely to have access to services (see 'service organisation and provision' above).

Most children under three attending *bölcsőde* are in the 24-35 month age range, and about a third of children in these services are over three.

Children under the age of three whose mothers have a low level of education are least likely to attend formal services, while children whose mothers have a medium level of education are most likely to attend.

### Children with additional support needs and rights

Until the late 1980s, public policy encouraged segregated provision for children with disabilities and other additional support needs. Today there are eight segregated *óvoda*, with some boarding places, and they take about 0.3% of the age group (Eurydice: 54). But from the early 1990s legislation has recognised and encouraged mainstreaming. Since 1988 it has been possible to integrate children with additional support needs into *bölcsőde*, and about a third of these services now work in an integrated or semi-

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integrated way. There is also legislation both for *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* to guide work with children with "special educational needs", which is defined in a broad sense to include children with developmental delays, learning difficulties, behaviour and social problems.

However, implementation is difficult. Only about 2% of children admitted in *bölcsőde* in 2007, and only about 0.6% of children in *óvoda* in the 2008-2009 school year had a recognised disability - although some change is occurring, with financial incentives available since 1996 to take children with disabilities and to ensure the necessary additional support needs personnel in both types of centres. Obstacles to increased integration in ECEC services, or, to be more precise, difficulties of implementing the legislation, are due to the criteria/regulation attached to enrolling these children, the special equipment required and ensuring/organizing specialists to work with them. One of the criteria is to have less children in a group that includes a child with additional support needs, but as demand for places increases, centres are under greater pressure and often decide not to have children with additional support needs.

There is also legislation covering disadvantaged children, which is a wide category. Many Roma children fall into this group. Besides priority admission for such children, there is a variety of targeted financial support available to help their families (eg reduced or free meals, financial support for parents with a low level of education and who enrol their child in *óvoda* before the compulsory age of five and if the child attends regularly for at least three months) and for the *óvoda*, which admits these children and has this stated in the founding document.

Data is collected only about the access rate of disabled children in *bölcsőde*, but educational statistics for *óvoda* and public schools include the number of children in care, at risk, with learning difficulties, behaviour and social problems, and the number of socially disadvantaged children for each year. Socially

disadvantaged children constitute the largest group, representing about 20% of all children in *óvoda*. Between 2002/3 and 2006/7, the number of Roma children attending *óvoda* doubled from 8,312 to 18,383 (Eurydice: 69).

### Strategies to promote inclusion

The Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities (1993) is intended to ensure individual and collective minority rights. For example, municipalities must arrange for a separate class or service if parents of at least eight pupils from the same minority group request this; there are *óvoda* for children from six larger minority groups, with teaching in the minority language for some of the smaller groups. As outlined above (6c), specific provision is made to promote and support attendance at ECEC services by disadvantaged groups, including Roma families. Such measures aim to get parents to bring their children to centres as early as possible, since the problem is thought to be the reluctance of disadvantaged and Roma families to enrol their children in *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*, even though these services are considered to be one of the best means of addressing child poverty and developmental delays/problems.

Since 2003, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has been running model programmes intended to introduce an adapted version of the English Sure Start programme in several municipalities in Hungary. Programmes to evaluate their experience and develop monitoring indicators have started, as have attempts to find ways of incorporating these programmes into the existing system of services. Related work on assessing local needs is also planned.

Work on developing new, integrated services especially for rural areas has begun. Guidelines have been developed for multi-purpose centres in municipalities with only a small number of young children, where a nursery group of children under the age of three can be set up

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within an *óvoda* (*böcsőde-óvoda közös intézmény*) or where two year olds and older children of *óvoda* age can attend (*egységes óvoda-bölcsőde*). There are plans to develop the criteria for establishing age-integrated centres for children from the ages of zero to seven.

In 2007, the Parliament passed a National Strategy called *Legyen jobb a gyermekeknek* ("Making Things Better for our Children") for the years 2007-2032, the goal of which is to reduce child poverty and improve lifelong prospects for children. The strategy refers to supporting parents' labour market participation and developing services for children, including childcare, as the main means of reducing poverty. It requires the government to prepare an action programme every three years, based on the National Strategy, to define the tasks involved in designing the legislative, professional and organisational conditions required.

According to the justification, a National Strategy is needed to successfully fight poverty and disadvantage among children and their families, and to improve children's opportunities for development. The Act covers all children, but priority must be given to those in greatest need.

One important aim of the National Strategy is to provide satisfactory services and improvements to reduce inequalities in access to healthcare, and to educational, welfare, and child protective services and institutions. It also aims to offer the basic conditions for high-level professional activity in these areas.

The National Strategy has three comprehensive goals:

- To reduce poverty among children and their families, and in the process to close the gap in children's chances of continuing their education and in their future prospects.
- To put an end to the exclusion and segregation of children as well as to extreme forms of poverty.

- To fundamentally transform the operations and outlooks of institutions and services which today contribute to the reproduction of poverty and exclusion. These institutions must make a greater contribution to recognising and developing the talents and abilities of children.

Targets are concerned with improving personal and specialised services focusing on families with children. These targets are based on the view that the professional qualifications of workers in the services has to be significantly improved. The attitudes of service providers working with children need to be altered by making changes in their training, exerting stronger supervision, and by retraining as required. All basic services have to become available in all sub-regions, leveling out regional inequalities and guaranteeing equal access. Clear-cut professional standards are to be developed, including protocols, and user satisfaction with the services is to be monitored. The goals set are:

- The vast majority of additional support needs children to continue their education in an integrated environment and with professional support, enabling them to advance to the maximum of their abilities
- Non-segregated institutions
- Equal opportunity in accessing services
- Professionals with up-to-date knowledge
- Radical reduction in the number of children
- 'falling through the cracks'
- Flexibility, with services able to change to respond to needs
- Regular and continuous cooperation among professionals in all areas.

However, issues about implementation and

## Access levels and strategies

scaling up have emerged. Legislation is in place, but questions of financing, insufficient number of qualified workers, training needs, and capacities have to be solved. Unless they are, the legislation will not be implemented as intended on the local level.

## Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

### Workforce (Structure and education - basic and ongoing)

Type of provision	Title of lead staff & assistant	Pre-service education required	Qualification level
<i>Bölcsőde</i>	<i>Gondozó</i> – infant and childcare worker	3 years @ vocational secondary school	Diploma (post secondary level) (SCED 4)
		From 9/2009: 3 year @ tertiary teacher training college	From 9/2009: Degree (Bachelor level) (SCED 5)
	Unqualified worker	None	None
<i>Óvoda</i>	<i>Óvodapedagógus</i> – kindergarten pedagogue	3 year @ tertiary teacher training college	Degree (Bachelor level) (SCED 5)
	<i>dajka</i> – kindergarten assistant	No initial education required; if wanted, a 30 hour course is available	None
Family daycare	<i>családi napközi ellátást nyújtó személy</i> - family day care provider	No initial education required; if wanted, a 40 hour course is available	None

## Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

The workforce, like government responsibility and provision, is split with separate groups of workers for children under and over the age of three. Workers with the youngest age group - *Gondozó* (infant and childcare worker) - are educated within the social vocational system, which emphasises health and care aspects. The initial education of *gondozó* consists of a three-year course in a vocational secondary school, taken after the completion of secondary education; out of a course of 4,600 hours, some 5% is allocated to pedagogy and the division between theory and practice is 50/50. There is a central curriculum, but some scope for schools and teachers to emphasise certain topics and choose their methods, so there are some differences between the schools.

Since September 2009, however, a new form of basic training is available for nursery workers. It is at a degree (bachelor) level and will be taken at teacher education colleges; this means it will be at the same place and level as the qualification for kindergarten pedagogues. Increased attention will be paid to pedagogy, which will have the same weight as health, emphasising the equal importance attached to care and education. The proportion of time allowed for practical placements falls to 33%. Like the current training, it will be a qualification to work in *bölcsőde* or residential children's homes. The intention is that eventually all workers in *bölcsode* will have the new qualification, but at the moment both types are still available. The main question is whether there will be sufficient people who take the new training and then go on to work in *bölcsode*.

*Óvodapedagógus* (kindergarten pedagogues) are the main group of workers with the three to six-year-old age group and are educated to degree level at teacher education colleges; 30% of the course is allocated to practical placements. Their education has recently been integrated with universities; courses are still organised at teacher training colleges, but in close cooperation with university faculties of education. The central role of *nevelés* in

kindergarten work and changes in the interpretation of the concept have strengthened the academic aspects of the profession, and ensured a higher level of initial education.

There are assistants in both *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*. The former make up about 10% of the workforce, and are unqualified. The latter (*dajka*) account for a third of the *óvoda* workforce; they do not need to be qualified but may take a 2,200-hour training course if they choose.

The lowest level of qualification is found among the relatively few family day carers, who require no initial education to do the work but must attend a 40-hour course (covering issues of safety, environment, child development, running a small business, etc) to obtain a license.

Further training is compulsory for staff both in *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*, as the system requires both groups to obtain a certain number of credit points every seven years by completing accredited courses.

### *Work conditions and support*

The workforce, with few exceptions, works full time (40 hours per week), reflecting the low level of part-time employment overall in the country. Staff work shifts to cover full-day opening hours.

All public employees in Hungary receive earnings according to a wage table and based on the level of qualification and the number of years worked. Salary increments are guaranteed: an increase of one additional level every third year. Therefore, in theory, the pay of *óvoda* pedagogues and elementary school teachers does not differ since their qualification is on BA level. However, in practice, the basic pay of elementary school teachers can be supplemented by various additional payments (eg for overtime, undertaking extra tasks, working in a disadvantaged area, etc).

# Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Childcare workers in *bölcsőde* earn less because of the lower (upper secondary) level of their qualification.

Career opportunities are very limited, with no prospect of moving between *bölcsőde* and *óvoda*, and very little likelihood of moving from either of these services to other work with children: a qualified worker could become the coordinator of centres in a district of Budapest or in a municipality, but there are only a limited number of such jobs. In reality, therefore, workers in *bölcsőde* or *óvoda* will remain working there.

### *Workforce profile*

The ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly female, with hardly any male workers. There has been no public discourse about the issue, either under the socialist regime or subsequently, and no policy about it. People generally call childcare workers *gondozónő* and kindergarten pedagogues *óvónő*. The word ending “*nő*” means woman in Hungarian. Even the training schools for kindergarten pedagogues were talked about as schools for women kindergarten pedagogues. It has been only lately that the terms *gondozó* and *óvodapedagógus* were introduced into legislation, but it will take time for the public to adopt these terms.

It is also an ageing workforce, with the average age being 41. In 2008, 38% of staff in *bölcsőde* were aged 50 or more and only 9% were under 30. Many have worked in the field, and indeed in the same setting, for many years; it is a very stable group with low turnover. The reasons for this ageing of the early childhood workforce are not known. The popularity of the profession may have decreased, or possibly working with children is not seen as being a “profession”. Other possibilities are that more young people are choosing to study for higher education degrees, and that the prestige of the work is not great enough.

There is no information on the ethnicity of the

workforce.

### *Workforce recruitment and evidence of shortages*

There is a shortage of workers in *bölcsőde*, arising from an ageing workforce, low pay and low status. The situation is becoming more and more problematic. Most of the staff working with children are qualified, but until now the qualification has only been at a medium vocational level, below the tertiary level for kindergarten pedagogues in *óvoda*. From September 2009 a higher, tertiary level qualification has been made available for *bölcsőde* workers. However, it will take a long time for most or all workers to have this high-level degree.

The average age of staff in both types of service increases, and the younger generations do not seem to want to follow in their footsteps.

### *Trade unions and other workforce organisations*

A separate trade union for *bölcsőde* workers was set up at the beginning of the 1990s. Although small, it has been the most representative trade union, having the highest percentage of members within the profession. Eventually, confederations emerged, and the trade union for *bölcsőde* workers joined the confederation of public employees. The membership has been decreasing over the years.

Kindergarten workers do not have a separate trade union; they are included in the pedagogue trade union.

Both professions have professional associations. The one for *bölcsőde* workers was founded in the early 1990s and has been active since. There is more than one for kindergarten pedagogues. The Hungarian Pedagogical Society has a section for professionals and researchers working with the zero to seven age group.

## Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

### Other conditions

#### *National standards (including staffing, environment) and curriculum*

The national standard for *bölcsőde* was first published in 1997. It is a 59-page document defining the service and its functions, covering the basic principles of working with young children, and setting the criteria for the environment (space and other environment standards for the children and the adults, indoors and outdoors space/rooms/toilets, equipment and toys), children's groups and staff (number, qualification and in-service training), health, first-aid, and meals. It also includes sections on the terms and conditions for admitting and working with children who have additional support needs; documentation; health and safety; and accident prevention.

The curriculum - or pedagogical programme (*nevelési program*) - is a 13-page document related to the work with children. It describes the aims and tasks of *bölcsőde*, the principles and organisation of daily life for children (including the induction process to *bölcsőde* for children, the key-worker system, and daily schedule), the main activities of pedagogical work, the relationship and cooperation with families, services to support family childrearing, the ways of following children's development through observations and documentation, and the main characteristics of the child by the end of the *bölcsőde* years.

There are also methodological guides developed for some areas of work in these centres. These are related to the daily schedule, children's play, adapting children to *bölcsőde*, working with families, care routines, meals and cooking, and work with children with additional support needs. Their length varies, averaging about 10 pages.

*Bölcsőde* organize children into groups of 10 to 12; each group has two qualified workers, and every two groups has one technical support person (for cleaning and other support but not to work with the children). For every two groups

(which is considered a unit) with children under the age of one-and-a-half (ie infant groups) there is usually a fifth worker; and *bölcsőde* having more than 60 places have a deputy director. The directors are required to have the highest level of training.

There is no separate national standard for *óvoda*. The Education Act regulates all aspects, together with all the other institutions of public education. Some of these are the same for all, and some are specific to *óvoda*.

A National Framework Curriculum was first published by the Ministry of Education in 1997. It is a 16-page document (called *nevelési program*, the same title as the document for *bölcsőde*), which sets the basic principles of pedagogical work with children. The framework has been formulated to support staff in developing their work, but *óvoda* are free to develop their own programme within this or use a number of alternative curricula. Up to 70% of *Óvoda* have written their own local programmes (Eurydice: 50), within the guidelines provided by the National Framework.

The official framework principles emphasise a child-centred and rights-based approach. The main tasks are seen to be encouraging a healthy lifestyle, and supporting emotional and social development. The need for community networking is emphasised, and a number of *óvoda* activities are outlined. These include: play; poems and stories; singing, music and singing games; drawing; other manual activities; physical activities; learning about the environment/world; and practical everyday skills such as looking after plants and animals, laying the table, etc. The goals to be achieved by the time children leave *óvoda* are described, along with organisational aspects and the tasks of *óvoda* staff.

Since 2003, *óvoda* are required to evaluate their own programme and adjust it to local needs.

*Óvoda* organise children into groups of 20 to 25; each group has two *óvónő* (kindergarten

# Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

pedagogues), and half of the groups have a *dajka*, or assistant. Support staff assist in children's routines, and are responsible for cleaning. Directors in smaller centres also spend some part of their work hours working with the children.

### *Licensing and inspection*

Inspection of *bölcsőde* and family day care is undertaken by the county Guardianship Agencies once every four years and by the licensing municipality once a year. They are monitored by the county methodological centre to assess the quality of their service.

The inspection of *óvoda* is the duty of providers, which are mostly municipalities. The provider also evaluates the professional work in the *óvoda* on the basis of the pedagogical measures and evaluations of pedagogical service, the expert opinion of persons in the national register, the report written by the institutions of public education, and the opinion of the supervisory body of kindergartens. Registered professionals have to be asked to comment on plans for setting up or closing down services.

*Oktatási Hivatal* (Education Office) is responsible for assessment, inspection, and evaluation, mainly for compliance with the law and regulations, but partly also for the professional work (not just in *óvoda*, but also in all institutions of the education system). The Office also has the authorisation to fine.

### *Quality control and attention to children's outcomes*

Professional monitoring and evaluation is done by the so-called 'methodological nurseries' (see 5b). There is one in each region in Hungary. These are required to monitor and support other nurseries to meet the national standards, to achieve its aims and to deliver good quality service.

The 1993 Education Act requires *óvoda* to have in place a quality assurance programme that

emphasises self-evaluation; and service providers (usually municipalities) to inspect the work and effectiveness of *óvoda* and elementary schools every four years.

In *bölcsőde*, children's outcomes are assessed by the child's key worker who regularly makes observations and takes notes. Each child's achievements are compared to his/her earlier performance. No national or systematic assessment is made. In *óvoda*, children's development is followed by the pedagogue, who also has to make recommendations for further activities based on her observations. The pedagogue has to assess if the child is ready for school. If she has any doubts, the child is sent to the relevant agency for an examination by a psychologist.

No national evaluation or research has been done on these systems of self-evaluation.

### *Family and community involvement*

The 1993 Education Act requires the participation of parents in kindergarten education. Parents are not involved in the management of centres, but can comment on the pedagogical programme of the *óvoda* and can express their opinion about prospective directors. However, there are other types of contact, both formal and informal, including: introductory meetings before children begin to attend centres, which in Hungary take the form of visits to the families by staff; a settling-in period and procedure for children under the age of three, involving the parents; regular family visits to the older children; parent meetings; and talking at pick-up and departure times.

Both *bölcsőde* and *óvoda* organize parent meetings for each group of children and also for the whole centre. Issues related to children and the management of the centre are discussed. Parental views are to be taken into account. In *óvoda*, collecting parental views is part of quality assurance. There is no evidence showing how all these procedures work.

## Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school

Óvoda have always understood their role as preparing children for school but they have resisted using what they see as traditional school methods of education (see 'key concepts' above). They have, therefore, sought to maintain a distinct identity different to that of elementary school. Óvónők working in óvoda receive initial education in teacher training colleges, but their education is separate and at a lower level (three years instead of four); they are not qualified to work in elementary schools (nor are elementary school teachers qualified to work in Óvoda).

Since the 1970s, there have been recurring discussions and attempts to extend kindergarten pedagogy and practice to elementary schools, on the basis that children are not able to adapt quickly to the different structure and routine of schools. During the 1970s some schools set up so-called "correction classes" (a very unfortunate choice of term!). The idea was to have smaller groups of children, more flexible schedules, and less material to learn, which was thought to suit better children who were slow in learning and/or in their development during the first two years of school. The methods used reflected the strong influence of kindergarten pedagogy and practice, even though the environment in the schools could not change to match entirely the new ways of working. After some initial success and despite good intentions and good ideas, these classes became stigmatised and were thought to be examples of segregating children with learning difficulties, who were quite often of Roma origin.

Nevertheless, the struggle – schools trying to influence kindergartens and kindergartens trying to influence schools – has not stopped. New initiatives appear and disappear from time to time. For example, there was an experimental training course leading to a qualification for both kindergarten and elementary school work. Another project, called "kindergarten school" has been successfully running since the mid-1990s. Adults working with children have qualifications both for kindergarten work and elementary school teaching; they stay with the same group of children during the kindergarten years and for the first two years of elementary school; and the first two years of school take place in the kindergarten building. Some critics say the programme is successful, while others think the results are contradictory since the school system seems to have a greater influence on kindergarten pedagogy than expected.

The discussion among professionals and in the public continues, while the efforts to make elementary schools more "children-friendly" are less successful than expected. One of the explanations can be found in the general view of parents. Public opinion seems to become more and more focused on achievement and as a result, parents look for services that "show results" with their children. Kindergarten pedagogues and elementary school teachers often feel forced (by the parents and the public, in general) to be able to demonstrate how much children have learnt. Therefore, the struggle between pedagogy and more direct teaching continues.

# Note on out-of-school services

Elementary schools organise out-of-school care services for children between the ages of six and 14 attending those schools. These are available for all pupils, in the morning before teaching begins and in the afternoon after teaching is over. Sometimes children are in small groups with the same *napközis tanár* (out-of-school worker), sometimes they have a choice of 'club' activities.

In the 2007/2008 school year, the number of children in after-school service was 265,749, about 33% of all elementary school pupils. However, the ratio is much higher in the lower grades, with practically no children from the 7-8<sup>th</sup> grades attending. *Napközis tanár* have usually trained as an elementary school teacher, taking a four-year degree course at teacher college. Most of the time they are the same teachers who teach during the day, but schools can also employ free-time educators/organisers for the after-school hours.

### Current developments

New forms of more age-integrated provision are emerging, especially to meet the shortage of places in *bölcsőde*. These include the establishment of a nursery group for children under three years within an *óvoda* and centres for both two year olds and older children of *óvoda* age. Guidelines have been developed for these new types of centre and there are plans to develop the criteria for establishing age-

integrated centres for children between the ages of zero and seven.

A new form of basic training has been available for nursery workers since September 2009. It is at a degree (bachelor) level and will be taken at teacher education colleges, ie at the same place and level as the qualification for kindergarten pedagogues. The intention is that eventually all workers in *bölcsode* will have the new qualification, but at the moment both types of training are still available.

A National Strategy for the years 2007-2032 - *Legyen jobb a gyermekeknek* ("Making Things Better for our Children") – has been introduced, the goal of which is to reduce child poverty and improve lifelong prospects for children. The strategy is intended to support parents' labour market participation and develop services for children, including childcare, as the main means of reducing poverty. The government must prepare an action programme every three years, based on the National Strategy.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Immervoll, H. and Barber, D. (2005) *Can parents afford to work? Childcare costs, Tax-benefit policies and work incentives*. Paris: OECD. Available at: [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/23/35862266.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/23/35862266.pdf)

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