



Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce

Briefing on the *Working for Inclusion* research findings



Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood

Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce, January 2010

The *Working for Inclusion* programme

The research forms part of the two year *Working for Inclusion* programme, funded by the European Commission under the EU Progress (Employment and Social Inclusion) programme with the support of the Scottish Government. The programme is led by Children in Scotland with partners and associate partners in nine other countries. The main partners and countries are:

- Scotland and UK : Children in Scotland
- Italy: La Bottega Di Geppetto
- Norway: Norland Research Institute
- Poland: Comenius Foundation for Child Development

Other partner countries are Denmark, France, Hungary, Portugal Slovenia and Sweden. The *Working for Inclusion* programme is about focusing attention and strengthening understanding on how the early years workforce can support social inclusion and address poverty. The project aims to encourage discussion and an exchange of ideas and information across member states and is part of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) introduced in Lisbon in 2000, to support member states learning with and from each other in addressing the goals set out in the Lisbon Treaty. Each of the main partners has led on a specific theme. Two of four study visits and national seminars have taken place (Jan 2010). The four themes are:

- 1. Working with the child as protagonist** (active agents in their own learning).
Lead partner La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy May 2009
- 2. Working with diversity**, particularly ethnicity, language, disability and gender.
Lead partner: Children in Scotland, Scotland and UK September 2009
- 3. Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas.** Lead partner Nordland Research Institute Norway January 2010
- 4. Working inclusively with children and families across agencies and age groups** – e.g. the role of the pedagogue. Lead partner Comenius Foundation for Child Development Poland May 2010

The programme also includes a web based discussion forum and a wide range of online publications. The final report with the overall findings and recommendations will be published in December and will be discussed at a major conference, hosted by Eurochild, to be held in Brussels in December 2010. The programme director is Dr Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland. Working for Inclusion is funded by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013) and supported by the Scottish Government. **Contact:** Sandra Mitchell, project coordinator, smitchell@childreninscotland.org.uk

Research

The research explores:

- How early childhood education and care services (ECEC) can support social inclusion
- The benefits of a holistic approach to the child and engaging effectively with children, families and communities
- The needs of the working poor, single parents, migrant families and families with disability
- The early years workforce as a source of good quality employment

Publications

The full report “*Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce*” launched 29 January 2010 at a national conference in Bodo, Norway by the Nordland Research Institute. The report and the individual country reports on which it is based (Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Norway, and the UK) are available online www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi.

The research has been carried out by Dr John Bennett, former Project Manager for OECD National Reviews of ECEC Policy and Peter Moss, Professor of Early Childhood Provision, Institute of Education, University of London, supported by national experts in each of the countries profiled individually. This briefing outlines the key findings of the report, and offers select statistics and examples.

Key findings

1. Child poverty and child wellbeing

Countries with low levels of child poverty and high child wellbeing also have consistently the highest levels of early childhood care and education provision, that is a high quality, well-paid workforce, high levels of universal entitlement and access to services, with strong parental leave policies, and fully integrated services. This is not a simple causal relationship. Welfare states with high levels of early childhood education and care also have generous benefit systems and strong income redistribution, and all are based on strong values of equality, rights and democracy.

2. Inequality and access

What are integrated systems? In most of the 28 European countries studied, early childhood education and care is split into two parts, each with its own government ministry or agency responsible for services, and its own arrangements for access, funding, regulation and workforce. Typically the division is age-related. Services for children under three years are located within the welfare (or health) system, while services for children over three years are in education; the former emphasises ‘childcare’ and child welfare, the latter often school-like education.

This division is mirrored in the language used to describe early years services, i.e. ‘care’ and ‘education’. The broader concept of ‘Early childhood education and care’ (ECEC) attempts to integrate these historically divided terms.

Six countries (the four Nordic states: Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden; plus Latvia and Slovenia) have a fully integrated – or ‘unitary’ – ECEC system, meaning one government department is responsible for services (welfare for Denmark and Finland, elsewhere education) and a common framework for access, funding, regulation and workforce. Four countries (Germany, Austria, Spain and the UK) fall in between, and their partially integrated systems are designated ‘partial unitary’. (*see Table 6*)

Education and care systems that are not integrated or are only partially integrated can exacerbate inequalities. Workers in childcare services (for those under three years) often have low earnings and education. Access to these services is limited and is often more difficult for low income families. The report finds that the cost of services for under threes in the UK is 25% of the earnings of an average production worker compared with 6% in Sweden, 8% in Finland and Denmark and 10% in Norway.

Fully integrated systems generally employ a more highly qualified and certified workforce across the whole early childhood age range, which means improved standards of education and care for children under three. Full integration has been associated with making access a right for all children, providing direct funding to services rather than parents; offering reduced costs to parents; introducing educational curricula; and bringing about significant improvements to the education and status of the workforce.

For the education of young children with special needs to be effective, staff with specialised qualifications and skills are needed. For-profit providers are often reluctant to hire such personnel. Integrated systems funded by the state make greater efforts for these children and employ more specialised staff.

Fully integrated systems are more effective in reaching families with poor educational backgrounds. In Denmark, Sweden and Finland, where services are fully integrated and where there are high overall attendance rates at formal services for children under three, there is little difference in attendance rates between children of mothers with lower and higher levels of education. (In Denmark attendance rates for under threes, according to maternal educational level, vary between 70-75% with children of mothers with high education having the lowest attendance rates; the corresponding figures for Sweden and Finland are 47-52% and 22-25%) By contrast, children whose mothers have a low educational level attend formal services significantly less in many other countries, such as the Netherlands and UK, which have split and partially integrated services respectively. In the Netherlands, the difference between children with low and high levels of maternal education is 16% to 59% and in the UK, the difference is 13 to 39%. In these two countries children with mothers with high levels of education are more than three times as likely to attend or make use of formal early years services. Other sources support this evidence of social difference in use of services for young children. Flemish research shows that whilst 55% of all children are accessing childcare only 21% of children from low-income families and 12.7% of children from ethnic minority families are doing so.

3. High quality, higher paid, sustainable workforce

The full integration of childcare and early education systems results in a higher quality, higher paid workforce, which is a major factor in ensuring more stimulating, warm, and supportive interactions with young children. The early childhood workforce – their level of education, their certification in early childhood pedagogy and how they are treated – is a major determinant of whether services are good or bad. A well-educated, well-supported and valued workforce not only ensures the quality of children’s experience in services but can also contribute to the economic wellbeing of communities. The *Working for Inclusion* report finds that countries with fully integrated ECEC systems require a similar, graduate level of education for those working with children *under and over three years of age*.

Low qualifications of workers, matched by low salaries and poor working conditions are typically found in the childcare parts (services for under threes) of split systems. Childcare workers in England earn around a third of the salary of nursery and primary school teachers whilst in Sweden the pre-school teachers and free-time pedagogues earn around 12% less than school teachers. Most early childhood staff are female, and only Norway has policies in place to attract men into the profession. In some early childhood systems – especially in market-driven, for-profit services – wage levels are so low that many women working in early childhood care services can be numbered among what is called the “working poor”.

A poorly educated, poorly paid early years workforce is unsustainable. Relying, as many countries do, on low paid, low qualified childcare workers is undesirable in terms of quality and sustainability. The report finds that educational levels among women are rising rapidly, reducing the supply of traditional childcare workers, and there are other job opportunities for the diminishing number of low qualified women. The same problem confronts services for older people.

4. Parental leave and early childhood education and care

Only the Nordic countries and Slovenia, where systems are fully integrated, have a clear connection between parental leave policies, education and care. Most countries do not have a well-paid parental leave system coordinated with entitlement to a good early childhood service. The exceptions are the countries with integrated ECEC which typically have around 12-25 months of well-paid leave followed by the right to attend and ECEC service with a well-qualified workforce (Finland offers a choice to parents between leave and services). Other countries offer low paid leave or there is a gap between the end of well-paid leave and entitlement to a place in an early childhood service with a well-qualified workforce. At the other end of the early childhood age range, most children in Europe enter school at six; the UK is in a minority starting children at four or five.

So, at one extreme, children in a Nordic country, children may typically be cared for at home by mothers and fathers during their first 12 to 18 months, then start formal early years services in their second year, and leave to enter school at six, having been entitled to a four-to-five-year period in early childhood services, often spent in one age-integrated centre (e.g. a kindergarten or pre-school) and often for more than 30 hours a week. At the other extreme, the English child may typically spend the first year at home with it mother on low paid maternity leave, followed by informal care or care in childcare services with a low qualified workforce before entering part-time nursery education at three years and admission to the first year of primary school between four and five, having been entitled to a one-to-two-year period in early childhood services, usually spent in an age-segregated centre (e.g. a nursery class in a primary school) and usually for fewer than 30 hours a week.

When parental leave is followed by entitlements to high quality early years services, parents choose formal rather than informal (family and private) care. In countries which have the most well developed early years services (e.g. from age one, after one-year's well-paid parental leave in both Denmark and Sweden), the use of informal services e.g. relatives or private family daycare, has dropped to a low level either. In Denmark, 73% of children under three attend formal early years services, and only 1% are in informal services. In Sweden, the numbers are 44% and 2%. The comparative figures in the UK are: – 33% and 38% and in the Netherlands 45% and 56%.

Conclusion

The report cautions that whilst good early years services have a major contribution to make they are not a magic bullet. As noted above, child poverty is strongly related to an active welfare state including social transfer levels (income redistribution). The report highlights the recent study by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009)* which points to the role played by inequality itself in contributing to a wide range of health and social indicators, including child wellbeing. The report concludes that early childhood education and care services “cannot ‘cure’ unequal societies” But “plentiful and good ECEC services are most likely to be found in more equal societies, a product of sufficient tax-based funding and a value system that supports a view of these services as a universal entitlement and a child’s right.”

The experience of the countries examined for this research shows that those countries which have fully integrated systems are also the countries which have the lowest social differences in the use of services, the highest use of formal services and a well qualified better paid workforce which makes significantly less distinction between those working with children under and over the age of three years. There are no examples of non-integrated ‘split systems’ which have brought the under threes workforce up to the same high level of education and pay as those working with the over threes.

* Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K (2009) *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, London: Allen Lane

Data and case studies – extracts from full report:

Sweden – Parental fee policies influence access

At the beginning of the 1990s, responsibility for early childhood services was transferred to the municipalities, at the same time as Sweden was affected by an economic crisis. Follow-ups to the transfer showed that parental fees for child care increased during the period, as well as the variation in the fee level among municipalities. To prevent certain groups of children from being excluded either temporarily or permanently from pre-school activities, a reform of child care was carried out between 2001 and 2003, focussed on the reduction of parental fees and making services available to non-employed parents. Measures included making services available to children of parents who are unemployed or taking parental leave, setting a maximum fee (less than £100 a month) and providing free pre-school to all four- and five-year-olds. These measures were intended to increase the availability of ECEC services for all young children.

Subsequently, Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education, was asked to review the results of the reform (Skolverket, 2007). It found that the extended entitlement to pre-school activities and the free periods of attendance for four and five-year-olds had significantly increased overall attendance and had reduced inequalities:

- Between rural and urban areas, e.g. in 1998, less than 50% of rural children attended pre-school as against almost 70% in urban areas (a gap of 20%). By 2004, 70% of rural children were enrolled and urban attendance had increased to 80% (a gap of 10%, that is a 50% reduction).
- Between social categories: in 1998, a significant difference in attendance at pre-schools was noted between children of well-educated (tertiary level) parents and other children. By 2004, this difference had almost disappeared, as had recourse to informal services by any category of parents.

As noted in the profile of Sweden, Skolverket also identified a similar reduction in the impact on attendance of other ‘background factors’, including parental occupation and foreign background of children. Furthermore, “the reform has above all led to an increase in the availability of pre-school for children whose parents are on parental leave with younger siblings, but also for children whose parents are unemployed” (Skolverket, 2007: 18-19): opportunities for children with a non-employed parent to attend pre-school have increased. Between 1999 and 2002, the proportion of parents who wanted an ECEC place but did not have one halved – from 4% to 2%.

Source: Five years with the maximum fee (Skolverket, 2007)

Table 1: An overview of early childhood offers and uptake in the selected countries

Country	*Parental leave- months	Entitlement to an ECEC service	Full day in EE c. 8 hours	Unitary or split system	Staff & age integrated	Formal enrolments	
						0-3	3-6s
Denmark	12	Yes – 6 months	Yes	Unitary	Yes	70%	97%
Norway	12.5	Yes – 1 year	Yes	Unitary	Yes	33%	80%
Sweden	13	Yes - 1 year	Yes	Unitary	Yes	47%	91%
France	4	Yes – 3 years	Yes	Split	No	28%	93%
Italy	4.5	No	Depends	Split	No	25%	90%
Portugal	5	No	Yes	Split	No	27%	75%
U. Kingdom	1.5	Yes – 3 years	No	Partial Unitary	No	38%	84%
Hungary	25	No	Yes	Split	No	8%	84%
Poland	4	No	No	Split	No	2%	31%
Slovenia	12.5	Yes – from end of PL	Yes	Unitary	Yes	30%	84%

Notes

*Parental leave is statutory maternity, paternity and parental leave paid at two-thirds or more of normal earnings

Formal enrolments means enrolments in formal services, that is, in services subsidised, regulated and inspected by the state.

Table 5: Parental leave and access to and attendance at ECEC

	5.1 Length of well- paid parental leave (months)¹	5.2 Compulsory school starting age (CSA) (years)²	5.3 Entitlement to ECEC service and from what age³
BE Belgium	4 (10)	6	Yes-2½ yrs
BG Bulgaria	NI	7	NI
CZ Czech Rep	6.5 (36)	6	No
DK Denmark	12 (11)	7*	Yes-6 mths
DE Germany	15 (36)	6	Yes-3 yrs
EE Estonia	15 (36)	7	NI
IE Ireland	6 (16)	6*	Yes-4 yrs
EL Greece	4 (9)	6	No
ES Spain	4 (36)	6	NI
FR France	4 (36)	6	Yes-3 yrs
IT Italy	4.5(13.5)	6	NI
CY Cyprus	4	6 (4.8)	Yes-4.8 yrs
LV Latvia	4	7 (5)	Yes-5 yrs
LT Lithuania	12	7	NI
LU Luxemb'rg	10	6 (4)	Yes-4 yrs
HU Hungary	25 (36)	6 (5)	Yes-5 yrs
MT Malta	3	5	NI
NL N'lands	4 (8.5)	5*	Yes-4 yrs
AT Austria	4 (24)	6	Yes-5 yrs
PL Poland	4 (36)	7 (6)	No
PT Portugal	5 (34)	6	No
RO Romania	NI	6	NI
SI Slovenia	12.5(11)	6	Yes, end of PL*
SK Slovakia	6.5	6	No
FI Finland	9 (36)	7*	Yes- birth
SE Sweden	13 (36)	7*	Yes-1 yr
UK U.K'dom	1.5(18)	5* (4,N. Ireland)	Yes-3 yrs
EU27	NA	NA	NA
NO Norway	12.5(36)	6	Yes-1 yr

¹ Period of statutory maternity, paternity and parental leave paid at two-thirds or more of normal earnings. Figure in brackets indicates total number of months (some paid and unpaid) of leave available

² Compulsory school age (CSA); figure in brackets indicate age at which attendance at ECEC is compulsory.

*-indicates many children start school before CSA on a voluntary basis

³ Includes countries where attendance at ECEC is compulsory as well as countries where an entitlement exists for voluntary attendance. *end of PL – indicates entitlement from end of parental leave

	5.4 Attendance rate (%) at ECEC services, 2006⁴			5.5 Attendance rate (%) at formal ECEC, 0-3 years, by mothers educational level, 2005		
	0-3 years Formal	Informal	3-CSA Formal	Low	Med	High⁵
BE Belgium	40 (23)	30 (8)	98 (62)	25	40	48
BG Bulgaria	NI	NI	NI	No information		
CZ Czech Rep	2 (1)	20 (2)	67 (39)	0	1	5
DK Denmark	73 (66)	1 (0)	96 (80)	75	72	70
DE Germany	18 (7)	27 (3)	93 (27)	15	12	25
EE Estonia	18 (12)	32 (10)	85 (78)	3	17	13
IE Ireland	18 (5)	36 (14)	93 (13)	9	7	24
EL Greece	10 (8)	54 (29)	61 (20)	0	7	19
ES Spain	39 (19)	27 (9)	91 (44)	28	39	44
FR France	31 (17)	28 (14)	94 (42)	17	30	48
IT Italy	26 (16)	35 (13)	90 (66)	19	27	35
CY Cyprus	25 (18)	53 (40)	87 (37)	18	15	18
LV Latvia	16 (14)	14 (9)	60 (56)	5	13	20
LT Lithuania	4 (4)	21 (14)	56 (47)	7	9	14
LU Luxemb'rg	31 (17)	41 (11)	58 (16)	18	27	36
HU Hungary	8 (6)	48 (6)	79 (58)	3	9	6
MT Malta	8 (3)	16 (5)	57 (25)	No information		
NL N'lands	45 (4)	56 (3)	89 (7)	16	37	59
AT Austria	4 (1)	36 (5)	71 (16)	5	3	14
PL Poland	2 (2)	36 (18)	28 (21)	1	1	8
PT Portugal	33 (32)	46 (37)	75 (66)	19	37	36
RO Romania	NI	NI	NI	No information		
SI Slovenia	29 (26)	60 (23)	81 (66)	17	24	28
SK Slovakia	5 (4)	23 (8)	73 (63)	0	2	5
FI Finland	26 (21)	5 (2)	77 (56)	22	22	25
SE Sweden	44 (27)	4 (2)	92 (58)	52	56	47
UK U.K'dom	33 (5)	38 (8)	89 (24)	13	30	39
EU25	26 (12)	NI	84 (40)	No information		
NO Norway	34 (22)	7 (1)	80 (52)	No information		

⁴ 'Formal' covers centre-based services, including schools, and family day carers in organised services. 'Informal' covers private family day carers, nannies, relatives and friends. Unbracketed figures are for all children; bracketed figures are for children attending 30 hours or more per week.

⁵ Low=below upper secondary; Medium=upper secondary; High=above upper secondary

Table 6: Structure of early childhood education and care services

	6.1 Unitary or split ECEC system ⁶	6.2 Ministry mainly responsible for services for:		6.3 Services age- integrated or age-separated ⁷
		0-3 years	3-CSA	
BE Belgium	Split*	Welfare	Education	Separated
BG Bulgaria	Split	Health	Education	Separated
CZ Czech Rep	Split	Health	Education	Separated
DK Denmark	Unitary	Welfare		Both
DE Germany	PT Unitary*	Welfare		Separated
EE Estonia	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
IE Ireland	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
EL Greece	Split	Welfare	Education	Both
ES Spain	PT Unitary**	Education		Both
FR France	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
IT Italy	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
CY Cyprus	Split	Welfare	Education	Both
LV Latvia	Unitary	Education		Integrated
LT Lithuania	Split	Welfare	Education	Both
LU Luxembourg	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
HU Hungary	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
MT Malta	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
NL Netherlands	Split	Welfare	Education	Both
AT Austria	PT Unitary*	Welfare		Separated
PL Poland	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
PT Portugal	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
RO Romania	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
SI Slovenia	Unitary	Education		Integrated
SK Slovakia	Split	Welfare	Education	Separated
FI Finland	Unitary	Welfare		Integrated
SE Sweden	Unitary	Education		Integrated
UK U.Kingdom	PT Unitary**	Education		Both
EU27	NA	NA		NA
NO Norway	Unitary	Education		Integrated

⁶ Unitary: government responsibility, access, funding, regulation and workforce integrated across all ECEC services; Pt (part) Unitary: government responsibility integrated, but not all of other dimensions; Split: government responsibility for ECEC split between two ministries; all other dimensions split between two systems (Education or Welfare). * = federal state; ** = ECEC responsibility devolved to Autonomous Communities (ES) or nations (UK)

⁷ Centre-based services only. Integrated – services take children for 4,5 or 6 years from end of paid parental leave, though there may be an age-separated service for 1-2 years before CSA; Separated – services are organised for different age groups, usually taking children either under or over 3 years. Both – some integrated and some age-separated services