

# **OECD Country Note**

## ***Early Childhood Education and Care Policy***

*in*

## ***the Czech Republic***

December 2000

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Purposes of the Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for the Czech Republic is an output of the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*, a project launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998. The impetus for the project came from the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers assigned a high priority to the goal of improving access and quality in early childhood education, in partnership with families, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). The goal of the review is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.

2. The Czech Republic is one of twelve countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Australia, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches toward the education and care of young children.

3. The scope of the review covers children from birth to compulsory school age, as well as the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the review has adopted a broad, holistic approach to study early childhood policy and provision. To that end, consideration has been given to the roles of families, communities and other environmental influences on children's early learning and development. In particular, the review is investigating concerns about *quality*, *access* and *equity* with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulations; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; funding and financing.

4. As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team for an intensive case study visit. After each country visit, the OECD produces a short Country Note that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. The present report for the Czech Republic will be one input into the final OECD Comparative Report that will provide a review and analysis of ECEC (early childhood education and care) policy in all 12 countries participating in the review. A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998).

### The Czech Republic's participation in the Review

5. The Czech Republic was the ninth country to be visited in the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in the Czech Republic was prepared by a working team, co-ordinated by Mr. Jaroslav Sekot at the Higher Vocational Pedagogical and Social Secondary School in Prague. Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC

policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important output of the review process, because they provide a state-of-the-art overview and analysis of policy and provision in each participating country.

6. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of an OECD Secretariat member and three experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix I) visited the Czech Republic from 1-10 March 2000. The 10-day visit was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Higher Vocational Pedagogical and Social Secondary School in Prague. In the course of the visit, the team met with many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice and had the opportunity to observe a number of examples of early childhood programmes for 0-6 year olds in the Czech Republic (see Appendix III). Discussions revolved around six main issues:

- the ECEC context, major policy concerns, and policy responses to address these concerns;
- the roles of national government, decentralised authorities, NGOs and other social partners, and the institutional resources devoted to planning and implementation at each level;
- feasible policy options that are suited to the Czech context;
- the impact, coherence and effectiveness of different approaches;
- innovative policies and practices, and their potential for replication; and
- types of data and instruments that exist, or should be developed, in support of ECEC policy-making, research and evaluation.

### **Structure of the Report**

7. The Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in the Czech Republic. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, written materials collected during the visit, and the observations of the review team. Following this introduction, *Chapter 1*, the structure of the report is as follows:

- *Chapter 2* provides an overview of the context in which policy making for children takes place by describing some historical, labour market, economic, demographic, and social features of the Czech Republic.
- *Chapter 3* provides an overview of the key features of the ECEC system in the Czech Republic: the forms of provision, access, quality, staffing, research and evaluation, funding, parental involvement, and children in need of special support.
- *Chapter 4* outlines key issues related to policy and practice in ECEC that were identified by the reviewers in the course of the review visit: (1) access and diversity; (2) staffing and training; (3) quality; (4) programme content and implementation; (5) research and evaluation; (6) financing; (7) parental involvement; (8) innovations; (9) children in need of special support; and (10) gender issues.
- *Chapter 5* offers some concluding remarks that policy makers in the Czech Republic may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision.

## Acknowledgements

8. The OECD team members would like to express our thanks to our hosts involved in preparing and organising the review visit. The team appreciated the warmth of the welcome, the professional manner in which the visit was conducted, the open access we enjoyed to all levels of the system, and the richness and variety of the programme. We were privileged to visit several geographic locations, observe diverse forms of provision, and discuss with a variety of decision makers, stakeholders, staff, and parents. We also would like to acknowledge all those who took the time to share their expertise with us and engage in an open and critical debate.

9. This OECD Country Note for the Czech Republic represents the views of the OECD team after an intense ten day visit, aided by a comprehensive and thorough Czech Background Report. It was very challenging for four non-Czech speakers to review the educational and care provision for young children. Our reflective comment is offered in a spirit of professional dialogue, basing our judgements on our discussions and observations. Despite the varied expertise of the review team, including prior experience in cross-national studies, we are fully aware that our views are shaped by our own cultural lenses. While we have received every help from our hosts, the facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. To mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the Country Note will be read in conjunction with the Czech Republic Background Report. The two documents are intended to complement one another.

## Terminology

10. All Czech terms are explained throughout the text. The age for compulsory school attendance and the first year of the basic school in the Czech Republic is six years old. The predominant form of non-parental ECEC for children between the ages of three and six is the *mateřská škola*, which means literally ‘maternal school’, but is translated into English as ‘kindergarten.’ These institutions vary in terms of ownership, management, and funding, but most are operated and supported by the municipalities. At the national level, responsibility for kindergartens and for the education of children from three through compulsory school lies with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. The Ministry of Health is responsible for child and maternal health care and for centre-based ECEC for children birth to three, known as *crèches*.

11. The currency of the Czech Republic is the Czech Koruna (CZK). In April 2000, 10 CZK = 0.26 USD = 0.28 EUR.

## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL ISSUES SHAPING ECEC POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

12. Early childhood education and care policy and provision in the Czech Republic at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be considered in light of the massive political, economic, and societal transformation that the country has experienced over the past ten years. Following the “velvet revolution” in 1990 -- when the communist system was replaced by a system based on democratic principles and pluralism -- the political, economic, and social changes have included, among other things, an orientation towards liberal market economy, an increased role of the private sector, a multiple political party system, and decentralisation of decision-making from national to local levels. Some of the contextual issues with particular relevance to the development of ECEC policy are discussed in the sections that follow.<sup>1</sup>

13. The Czech Republic was formed in 1993 after the division of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republics into two independent states. Covering an area of about 79 000 square kilometres, the Czech Republic is comparable in size to Austria, Hungary or Portugal. The Czech Republic is a member of the OECD (since 1995), the International Monetary Fund, and, in 1997, started negotiations to become a member of the European Union. In 1999, the Czech Republic was admitted into NATO, along with Poland and Hungary.

### Labour market and employment

14. After the political changes which started in 1989, the Czech Republic has undergone an economic transformation based on the gradual deregulation and privatisation of the economy and on the reform of the tax system. These economic changes are clearly observable in labour-market statistics for the period 1990-1998. While central planning favoured employment in industry, to the detriment of the service sector, economic transformation is correcting this imbalance, with employment rising in services and declining in industry. Following a policy favouring privatisation, the percentage of people employed in the private sector has increased from 7% in 1990 to 69% in 1998. In 1989, a relatively small percentage of the population worked in agriculture and the numbers continue to decline.

15. Unemployment rates have increased from 3.2% in 1990 to 8.9% in 1998. In the second half of the 1990s, the unemployment rate has been gradually rising to 9%, on average, with an unemployment rate of over 20% in some regions and districts. The unemployment rate among the Romany population is, by some experts on ethnic minorities, estimated at almost 90%.

16. From a gender perspective, it is interesting to note that, whereas in the middle of the 1980s almost 90% of all women were employed, and usually full-time, the figures today are down to about 70%. This change is explained by several factors: one is increased unemployment among women, but a larger number of women are also enrolled in higher education. Changing rules linked to retirement age also explain part of the decrease in female labour force participation. In addition, one of the factors that has led

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1. The information for this section and the sections that follow is drawn from the Czech Background Report, OECD (1999b), Unicef (2000), and the web sites <http://www.czech.cz>, <http://www.unicef.org/statis/>.

to a massive decrease of female employment has been a shift in attitudes among young women and young parents toward parenthood. There seems to be growing consensus within Czech society that it is better for young children to be brought up at home by their mothers than for them to attend pre-school institutions.

### **Educational attainment**

17. The labour market evolution during the past five years has, to some extent, contributed to the growing demand for education as well as to the increasing employment opportunities in the educational and vocational sector. Until 1990, there were little differences between wages of the highly educated and those with low education. Often manual labour paid better than intellectually demanding professions and the wage differences between these two social groups did not take into account the expenditures on education and losses resulting from a longer preparation period for a more demanding job. In addition, the length of employment was valued more than level of educational attainment. In the past few years, the situation has reversed, and the salaries of doctors and teachers, for example, have slowly improved. In general, however, wage increases have been linked more to the sector of activity, than to education level and qualifications.

18. With the growing economic returns to human capital investment over the past decade, there has been an increase in the proportion of people completing each level of education. The proportion of the population which has completed only primary education has dropped, while the proportion with higher education has risen. Currently, 84% of the adult population has completed at least upper secondary education and 10.4% has completed a university education.

19. The increased importance of education and schooling is also demonstrated in figures which indicate that the unemployment rate is as high as 18.9% among citizens with only compulsory education or less, whereas among university and college graduates, the unemployment rate reaches only 2.8%.

### **Standard of living**

20. After a period of decline, gross domestic product increased by 3.5% in the first half of the 1990s, reaching \$5 371 per person (1998), or roughly half the GDP per capita in Greece and Portugal.

21. The former Czechoslovakia had a markedly compressed income distribution, even by comparison with other communist countries. During the past five years, income inequality in the Czech Republic has increased, as a consequence of the growing range of wages possible in the non-state sector and the improved returns to investment in education. According to the Background Report, the social situation in the Czech Republic was most problematic during the rapid inflation growth during the 1993-1994. The real income of the population, which has been influenced by low inflation over the past three years, started to rise in the second half of the 1990s.

22. Although the recent period of economic and social transition has brought unemployment, greater inequality in wages, and cuts in government spending, it is notable that the government so far has kept child poverty figures in check by maintaining significant redistributive taxes and social transfers (see below). Child poverty (defined as the percentage of children 0-14 years who live in households with income below 50% of the national median) in Czech Republic rose about three percentage points in the first half of the 1990s and now stands at 5.9% -- among the lowest rates in the OECD area (Unicef, 2000).

## Demographic and family changes

23. There are 503 000 children under five living in the Czech Republic, representing about 5% of the total population. More than three-quarters (78%) of the 10.2 million people in the Czech Republic live in urban areas, with Prague (1.2 million), Brno (387 000), and Ostrava (333 000) being the largest cities. The population density is 131 inhabitants per sq. km.

24. During the past 20 years, fertility rates have dramatically decreased from 2.2 to a record low of 1.17 in 1998, placing the Czech Republic among the countries with the lowest fertility rates. In 1997, only 90 657 babies were born, compared to 106 579 in 1994, and this last figure was the lowest figure since 1785. The total growth in population in the Czech Republic is 0.8 persons per 1 000 inhabitants.

25. As a result of the decrease in birth rate and the migration of young people of childbearing age, there is an historically low number of pre-school aged children in a number of regions (particularly central and eastern Bohemia). On the other hand, western and northern Bohemia have experienced a relatively higher concentration of children in the pre-school age. As we will discuss below, these demographic patterns have implications for future policy development and planning for ECEC services.

26. In general, Czech society is less ethnically diverse than many of its European neighbours. The majority (81.2%) of inhabitants in the Czech Republic identify themselves as Czechs. The situation in individual regions differs however, according to whether these regions are considered Czech or Moravian. The only region where a large number of people claim to be Moravian is in southern areas of Moravia. Czechs and Moravians speak the same language and there are only minor cultural differences between the two groups. There are also small Polish and German communities, consisting in total, about 1% of the total population. While the ethnic composition of the Czech population has been quite stable since the 1950s, there has been a recent increase in immigration of Romanians from Slovakia. Although just 33 000 people declared themselves as Romany in the 1991 census, there are estimated to be approximately 200 000 Romanians in the Czech Republic, or nearly 2% of the population. There also has been an increase in immigration from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus which has contributed to the growing diversity of the population.

27. Family structures in the Czech Republic have also changed post-1989, following the trends that many European countries have witnessed since the 1970s. Young couples are postponing their marriages, and the arrival of their first (and second) children. Abortion rates have decreased and there is greater knowledge available of the pre-natal, natal, and post-natal needs of mothers and infants. At the same time, the Czech Republic also is experiencing a trend toward increased numbers of children being born to unmarried couples and to unmarried women without a stable partner. In 1998, about 18% of children were born to single mothers. The divorce rate in the Czech Republic is among the highest in Europe. Since 1995, it has declined to 24 000 per year. Divorce still contributes significantly to the growing number of single-parent families, usually lone-mothers with children.<sup>2</sup> These demographic developments and changes in family structure raise new challenges for the educational system.

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2. Following the 1998 Family Act which has made obtaining a divorce more difficult, there has been a decrease in the divorce rate.

## Family and social policy

28. New social support systems with particular emphasis on families have been designed and launched as a consequence of the political changes in 1990. These family support systems are either *general*, in that they are offered to all families, or *specific* if offered to families with incomes below a certain level.

29. In the Czech Republic, the *parental leave benefit* is an example of a general support payable to a parent, regardless of income, who takes care of at least one child under four years of age. The parental leave benefit replaces wages and salaries during a parent's leave of absence from employment to take care of a young child. A parent who chooses to reduce his/her working hours is entitled to receive partial wage and salary replacement. A parent who is responsible for the care of a chronically ill or long-term disabled or handicapped child is entitled to the parental benefit until the child is seven years old.

30. *Child allowances* and *social contributions* are specific and means-tested benefits to families with young children. In addition, if a family's total income (salaries, pension, sick pay, state benefits, etc.) does not reach the minimum living income defined under the Minimum Living Income Act, the household will receive additional social care benefits to compensate financially up to this level.

31. Political, economic, and social macro-level factors like the ones briefly touched upon above are essential to bear in mind when trying to analyse and understand how a society is organising early childhood care and education, since they affect, mediate or interact with behaviours and attitudes of people involved in these organisation processes, be they politicians at national or local levels, educators, administrators, parent, or members of society-at-large. We now turn to an overview of the ECEC system in the Czech Republic.

## CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION

### Historical roots

32. From the Background Report we learn that historically, public pre-school education and care in the Czech Republic found its starting-point in the Law of 1869, which made possible the establishment of institutions for “taking care of and educating children not yet of school age”. Three years later, ministerial ordinances identify three types of such institutions, kindergartens, nurseries, and *crèches*.

33. Kindergartens, serving children 3-6 years old, had as their main goals: to support families in bringing up and educating their children, to prepare children for compulsory schooling, and to help improve physical, sensory and mental capacities of the children. The goals, methods and content of education in kindergartens were defined in the legal acts, which clearly identified play and meaningful activities to be the fundamental components of education. Nurseries also served children in the 3-6 year age-span, but without intentions of preparing children for school; caring was the only defined purpose. Children younger than three years could be cared for in *crèches*, which were defined as health care institutions.

34. During the reform movement in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of respecting the rights of the individual child began to gain increased support, and the adoption of structured, directive educational methods in kindergartens were strongly questioned. Increasingly, alternative pedagogical principles, approaches, and methods developed by Maria Montessori, among others, influenced the kindergartens.

35. The later half of the century saw women in the Czech Republic, like in many other countries, entering the labour market in large numbers. This was true also for women with pre-school age children. The roles and functions of the ECEC-settings changed, from having been primarily focusing on the children to becoming more of a family support system as well. Equalisation of gender roles, and making it possible for mothers to work outside of the home, was also part of the official ideology of the state. In former Czechoslovakia, communist party goals for the pre-school system were also linked to the interests of ideologically influencing new generations. In particular, the ideology of early collective education was related to an official distrust of the family, which, as a private institution, was difficult for the state to control and direct.

36. In the 1960 School Act, *crèches* and kindergartens were classified as parts of the same educational system. In other words, all children from birth to six years old became part of one group in relation to the goals and principles of early child care and education. Existing kindergarten curricula were replaced by educational programmes for *crèches* and kindergartens, supplemented by a large number of detailed methodological guidelines linked to the various parts of the educational programmes. During this time, the pedagogical function of the kindergartens was strengthened, with an emphasis on preparing children for primary school. Enrolment continued to rise, and between 1984 and 1988, when the female employment rate was nearly 90%, 97-99% of all children between the ages of three and six attended

kindergartens. In 1989, 99% of all three to six year olds had a place in a kindergarten, whereas 20% of children from six months to three years were enrolled in *crèches*.

## ECEC after 1989

37. The political, social and economic changes in the Czech Republic after 1989 have affected the ECEC system in ways similar to other parts of society. Decentralised decision-making, increased parental influence, establishment of privately- or church-operated alternatives have become factors contributing to a larger variation among Czech pre-school programmes, than was the case before 1989. An ongoing issue has been the division of responsibility for ECEC policy and provision among three different ministries, which raises issues of co-ordination for the sector. Only kindergartens and special kindergartens are part of the educational system, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport; *crèches*, serving children aged 0-3 are administered by the Ministry of Health; and therapeutic child care centres fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The main features of the current ECEC system are described below.

## Access and diversity

### Age period 3 - 6

38. Early childhood education and care outside of the family in the Czech Republic focuses on children in the age-period from three to six years of age. Responsibility for this age-group is mainly found in the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, the regional School Authorities, and the School Inspectorate. Since 1989, a gradual decentralisation has moved much of the decision-making down to authorities at the municipal levels and to the individual pre-schools and special kindergartens in operation. Private and church-organised ECEC settings for the three to six year olds, although on a small scale (see Table 2). As Table 1 shows, pre-school attendance is high in the Czech Republic, compared to many other countries, averaging 85.5% in three to six age group, with a high of 98.4% the year before children enter primary school. Coverage is commonly assessed as meeting the needs although some discrepancy exist between rural and urban areas and among urban quarters in Prague. About 96% of kindergartens are open all-day, down slightly from almost 100% in the 1980s. These opening hours correspond to the fact that most women in the Czech Republic work full-time.

**Table 1. Number and percentage of children in kindergartens according to age in 1999-2000**

	Number of children placed in kindergartens	Percentage of children from the population of age group in kindergartens	Number of pre-school children
3 year olds	59 829	66.5%	89 951
4 year olds	84 986	89%	95 497
5 year olds	104 240	98.4%	105 911
6 year olds	25 899	21.5%	120 200
Total	249 055	85.5%	291 359

Source: Czech Republic Background Report, 2000

39. As Table 2 shows, most kindergartens are established and administered by municipalities and are legally independent entities. Occasionally, kindergartens are run by church or private bodies.

**Table 2. Kindergarten administration in the school year 1999-2000**

Administrator	Kindergartens	Classes	Children
Municipality	5 825	12 820	296 196
Ministry of education	0	0	0
Church	16	35	743
Private institutions	70	151	3 253
Total	5 911	13 006	290 192

Source: Czech Republic Background Report, 2000

40. Special kindergartens (see Table 3) are established and administered by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, and occasionally by municipalities (with the approval of the Ministry); special kindergartens in medical institutions are established and administered by school authorities.

**Table 3. Special kindergarten administration in the school year 1999-2000**

Administrator	Kindergartens	Classes	Children
Municipality	27	67	793
Ministry of education	188	489	5 234
Church	4	6	53
Private institutions	19	31	299
Total	238	593	6 379

Source: Czech Republic Background Report, 2000

### **Age period 0 - 3**

41. Care and education outside of the family, for children under three in the Czech Republic is administered and supervised primarily by the Ministry of Health. Traditionally, these services have been offered in child care centres, called *crèches*. In 1989, about 20% of all children in the age-group six months to three years were cared for in *crèches* while their mothers were working. There is no tradition of organised family day care in the Czech Republic, and nannies or other in-home carers employed by parents are neither regulated nor subsidised by the government. There also is limited access to organised early childhood programmes (both public and private) including, baby-sitters, mother-child centres, clubs, etc.

42. The political changes after 1989, particularly the introduction of an extended period of maternal leave, drastically reduced the demand for public child care outside of the home. As described earlier, the parental benefit entitles parents (usually mothers) to stay home and care for their children during their first four years, with full parental leave benefits for the first six months and then a reduced allowance for the remaining period. Since then, the number of *crèches* have rapidly decreased. In 2000, there were 67 settings covering 1 913 children under auspices of Ministry of Health.

### **Staffing**

43. In 1998, a total of 26 000 pre-school teachers were caring for and educating 307 000 children, three to six years of age, in 6 152 kindergartens. This represents a decrease over the past 10 years from 38 000 pre-school teachers educating 395 000 children in 7 300 kindergartens, which is linked to the changing birth rates (and possibly the decrease in female labour force participation) in the Czech Republic. Kindergarten teaching is basically an all-female area of occupation; the number of male pre-school teachers is insignificant. The qualification requirements for kindergarten teachers, special kindergarten teachers and pre-school directors are defined by a state regulation. At a minimum, all kindergarten teachers must complete a secondary education with an orientation toward pre-school education.

44. *Crèches* under the auspices of the Ministry of Health are staffed by child nurses, who are educated at secondary vocational schools or higher specialised schools. The three-year course, which is completed with a final examination, has a strong health and hygiene orientation. Until 1995, child nurses were educated exclusively in secondary medical schools with the same qualification as that of nurses in hospitals. It now is possible to train for this profession at higher vocational schools (VOŠ).

45. More than 95% of the teachers in kindergartens have completed secondary education, usually through a four-year programme in one of the 18 secondary vocational schools with a pedagogical orientation available in the Czech Republic. This programme has three different parts: 45% of the overall content represents general education, whereas 33% consists of a basic vocational part of the programme focuses on pedagogical and psychological disciplines and special and social pedagogy. Particular emphasis is placed on skills and knowledge in art, music and sports, areas which traditionally have been considered very important in the training of pre-school teachers in the Czech Republic. During the programme, students are also required to complete 822 hours, or 21% of their specialised education, of supervised practice in the field to gain personal experiences in working with children.

46. The number of students in pre-school teacher training programmes has dropped during the 1990s from about 7 000 to 2 500 students. Due to the decrease in the number of kindergartens during that same period, and corresponding difficulties for graduates in finding appropriate jobs, a new type of study programme has been created, which has a broader base and also qualifies students to work in the school-age child care area, with leisure-time activities, and in institutions providing compensatory family care. Tertiary education is also available, albeit on a smaller scale. Since 1970, there exists a possibility to obtain a graduate qualification at pedagogical faculties in Prague and Olomouc. Students also may pursue a B.A. degree at universities in Prague and Pilsner, since 1993.

47. Continuing education of pre-school teachers is organised in several different forms. Regional centres for further education of pedagogues offer courses to a large number of teachers every year, the content of which are based on the interests of the participating teachers. Most continuing education is voluntary, allowing pre-school teachers choose according to their own interests or identified needs of their particular kindergarten. Some programmes are mandatory, such as courses specifically targeted to directors, inspectors or administrators. At the regional or national levels, centres for further education organise, for example, competitions of pedagogical creativity where pedagogues take part in various arts and sports contests and present projects from their schools or teachers.

48. Average wages of teachers in kindergartens were in 1999, 9 454 CZK, approximately 2 600 CZK less than the average wage in the Czech Republic that year. Regulations require teachers in kindergartens and special kindergartens spend 31 hours per week working with children. Directors in kindergartens are required to carry out a minimum of 13 teaching hours with children.

### **Quality guidelines and monitoring**

49. Following the political changes in 1989, the 1983 education programme for *crèches* and kindergartens ceased to be the mandatory steering document for kindergartens in the Czech Republic, although it is still followed, to some extent, in many pre-school institutions. Today the educational programme, methods and profile used in a given kindergarten is largely the choice of the local school director. In the absence of a national curriculum, assessment criteria and quality indicators have yet to be defined. There are, however, various types of guidelines, recommendations, alternative programmes, etc. in circulation, often used as background materials when local programmes are designed.

50. Quality assessments through the monitoring of activities and relationships in Czech pre-schools are carried out on a regular basis by the state school inspectors during their visits. The planning and conditions of education, the organisation, form and methods used, interaction and communication patterns, etc. are all areas included the detailed check-list filled out by the inspectors during their visits, and used as a way of evaluating quality of the various pre-schools. The school inspectors suggest changes based on their observations, and sometimes return to check whether these suggested changes have been carried out properly. The school inspectors also provide some national statistics of the ratings of those pre-schools which have been visited during the year. Below (Table 4) is an example of the rank ordering of pre-school institutions based on the assessments of the school inspectors in 1997/98. The evaluation criteria used were: school educational programme; technical and material conditions; fulfilment of the educational programme; personal conditions; and school management.

**Table 4. Overall results of pre-school institution assessments in 1997/98**

Criteria	Evaluation of kindergartens on the rating scale						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Results of inspectors visits (%)	4.82	26.69	33.87	28.67	5.20	0.61	0.14

*Source: Czech Republic Background Report, 2000*

### **Research and evaluation**

51. The ongoing transformation of the Czech educational system has been strongly supported by teachers, directors, parents, and professional groups during the past ten years. To buttress the numerous initiatives in programme development undertaken by many kindergartens and pedagogues, the ExTra programme was established for the lower educational levels. The specific goals are to provide moral and financial support to creative, active and inventive teachers, directors and other employees in kindergartens, and to assist in identifying key issues of transformation, finding ways of solving problems, and collecting information related to the future directions of change and the potentials of identified developmental trends. Funds were distributed to local programmes by the Ministry of Education on an annual basis, and the number of programmes receiving support increased from 70 in 1992 to 235 in 1996. The amount of money spent on these activities increased during this period from 3.6 mil. CZK to 62.5 mil. CZK.

52. When it comes to research and evaluation in the ECEC field, the authors of the Background Report are critical of the present situation and feel that comparative research, and recommendations for programme improvements linked to that research, have not been appropriately used. They report that new educational programmes and innovations are not systematically analysed and evaluated, and state that there is presently a missing research capacity in the country. In order to fill some of the data gaps in the field, and supplement the information provided in the Czech Background Report, the authors carried out a survey of a sample of kindergartens. The research was aimed at evaluating the range, access and level of quality of pre-school education and care, satisfying educational needs of children in pre-school age and children with special educational needs and the attitudes of those involved in the educational process to a number of issues concerning ECEC in the Czech Republic.

### **Financing**

53. A new system for financing pre-school activities in the Czech Republic was adopted in 1990, when the previous system of state financing was replaced by a system of multiple funding sources. Today the state, municipalities and parents are all contributing financial resources to ECEC. Sometimes additional funds to improve the material conditions of the kindergartens (e.g., furniture, toys) are generated through

local sponsoring contracts with private enterprises. The total cost per child per year for a place in a kindergarten has been estimated at about 24 000 CZK. Parental contributions vary locally, but they are not to exceed 30% of the total costs for a child. Some parents have their fees reduced to a minimum, should they be considered in need of special financial support. Basically, the school authorities pay for teacher salaries and equipment, whereas the municipalities cover the costs for investments, and running costs, etc.

54. Table 5 below shows the development of total public expenditures in kindergartens between 1989 and 1998 and the break-down between contributions from the Ministry of Education and the municipalities.

**Table 5. Public expenditures in kindergartens between 1989 and 1998 (thousand CZK)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Municipalities</b>
1989	1 947 780	-	1 947 780
1994	5 530 361	3 632 501	1 897 860
1998	7 284 190	4 836 807	2 447 383

*Source:* Czech Republic Background Report, 2000

55. A reform of funding is being prepared in accordance with newly redrawn administrative districts and regions. This reform will take into consideration regional differences in revenues and expenditures, allowing for more flexible financial solutions in districts and local communities with smaller number of children and fewer kindergartens in operation.

### **Parental involvement**

56. In the Czech Republic, the family is recognised as the most important educational environment for young children. Today, parental involvement in ECEC outside of the home is considered to be very important to improve the quality of education and care. Prior to 1989, family involvement in pre-schools was not very common. The situation is gradually changing and parents are becoming more involved with the kindergarten activities. As discussed in Chapter 4, this is evident through the ways the entrance to the kindergarten is designed, how parents are informed about the kindergarten activities, how easy it is for parents to have a chance to talk to the director of the kindergarten or what types of activities are organised to invite parental participation. It has become more usual for parents to spend time in classes during an ordinary day or to participate in special holiday activities organised by the kindergartens, but still many parents do not take advantage of these opportunities. Some parents might participate as ‘sponsors’ providing extra materials or financial contributions to the kindergarten. At the national level, the Union of Parents operates as an interest group to strengthen the influence of parents within the Czech educational system.

### **Children in need of special support**

57. During the post-war period and until the political and social changes in 1989, children with special needs in the Czech Republic, were cared for and educated in special institutions separated from the children in regular ECEC settings. Since then, there has been a systematic shift in theory and practice in relation to children in need of special support, and inclusion into the regular pre-schools have become the designated aim. In the past few years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of public and private organisations providing care and education for children with various types of handicaps or special needs.

58. In 1999-2000, there were 593 special kindergarten classes, serving 6 379 children. Only 37 of these classes were organised by private institutions or churches. Special kindergartens are based on the following principles:

- Emphasis on close co-operation with parents;
- Flexible opening hours;
- Non-traditional educational methods and advisory offers;
- Integration of children with serious impediments;
- Co-operation with experts on speech therapy, neurology, etc.;
- Supporting parents through self-help groups; and
- Linking with other special kindergartens and special pedagogical centres.

59. According to the Background Report, more and more special classes are established as part of the standard kindergartens and an increasing number of children with special needs are included in regular classes. The basic philosophy, however, is to keep the child in the care of his or her family as long as possible, since family care is considered to be the most valuable form of care for children in need of special support. Early intervention in the Czech Republic aims to assist the families in as many ways as possible, including through regular home visits to support the development of children with special needs.

60. A system of preparatory classes was introduced in 1993 for children of compulsory school age (usually age 6-7) from socially or culturally disadvantaged families. Statistics indicate that, in 1998, a total of 1 237 children were enrolled in 99 preparatory classes, 86 of which were located in primary school buildings. In these classes, groups of 8-15 children, all with postponed entrance to compulsory schooling, are offered special preparation for school. The teacher in a preparatory class may have a specially appointed assistant available in the classroom, often a person familiar with particular cultural issues and backgrounds of the children in the group. In classes with a majority of children from Romany backgrounds, for example, the class teacher can appoint a special assistant from this ethnic minority group. This programme is currently under evaluation. Similarly, there are preparatory classes in the first year of primary school to link kindergartens to schools and forms a bridge between the two institutions. These classes are designed to help mainly children with more severe mental disabilities.

## CHAPTER 4: ISSUES ARISING FROM THE VISIT

61. In a period of rapid change and transition, the Czech Republic has maintained its long-standing public commitment to kindergarten provision as part of the educational system. Despite budgetary constraints, expenditure levels on pre-school education remain high and costs to parents have been kept reasonable. At the programme level, we learned that over the past ten years, kindergartens have undergone what the Czech Background Report calls an “inner transformation.” During our visit, we heard and observed enthusiasm for and commitment to:

- Increased respect for children’s individual needs and development;
- More flexible routines and programmes;
- More open relations with parents;
- Greater emphasis on free play and children’s creative expression (art, music, dance);
- Experimentation with mixed-age grouping and other new pedagogical methods; and
- Increased efforts to integrate children with special needs.

62. Acknowledging these achievements, the review team noted a number of areas that seemed to warrant further consideration. These include: (1) access and diversity; (2) staffing and training; (3) quality; (4) programme content and implementation; (5) research and evaluation; (6) financing; (7) parental involvement; (8) innovations; (9) children in need of special support; and (10) gender issues. The above issues were all identified by Czech experts, both in the Background Report and during the review visit. It is in the spirit of support that the reviewers offer their outsiders’ perceptions on these issues.

### **Access and diversity**

#### ***Age period 3 - 6***

63. Pre-school attendance is high in the Czech Republic, compared to many other countries, averaging 85.5% in 3-6 age group, with a high of 98.4 % the year before children enter primary school. Coverage has decreased over the past decade, attributed in part to declining labour force participation rates among women and kindergarten closures in areas of declining populations of children. It should be noted that there are signs that more women are entering the labour market and participation in kindergartens is on the increase. Supply is commonly assessed as meeting demand -- except in some rural areas and among certain urban quarters in Prague.

64. Different types of pre-school programmes (private, church) are beginning to become available to give parents a choice among providers. Innovative teaching methods are appearing within the traditional public pre-schools, increasing the alternatives for parents who would like to choose education based on individual interests or abilities of their children. Changes in family patterns and birth rates have raised concerns about sustaining this diversity of provision, especially in municipalities outside of the major urban areas. A decrease in the number of children might endanger the possibilities of offering alternatives, since the financial situation would be tighter with fewer children generating less state funding.

65. A major goal for pre-school education has been set to compensate for “uneven development of children growing up in different social, cultural and language environments before they enter school” (Czech Background Report), making the availability of pre-school education and family support particularly important for families from the poorest educational and social backgrounds. The team has learned, however, through reading background materials, talking to key informants, and visiting pre-school programmes, that those families considered to be most in need are among the last to enrol their children into pre-school settings. As discussed in more detail below, it is very challenging to encourage Romany families to enrol their children in kindergartens, and few children from Romany backgrounds attend ECEC settings (including preparatory classes). Another concern is that it is difficult to place a handicapped child in kindergarten in more rural areas, because there are few staff with specialisation in special needs education. Strategies for changing this pattern should be given highest priority in the years to come.

66. One issue worth discussing here, concerns the limited access to kindergartens for three to four year old children whose mothers are receiving the parental leave benefit. These children may only attend the pre-school -- participating in activities and meeting peers -- only for three days a month. Even though these three days might be seen as valuable additions to the experiences of these children, many children would have liked additional access to playing and friends. We also heard pre-school teachers talk about the difficulties of integrating these sporadic visitors into the continuing educational themes or daily routines of the setting. As one of the teachers phrased this dilemma: “I don’t know which is the worse for these children, to be part of a group of friends starting a project and not being able to finish it, or to help finish something that they never saw from the beginning.”

### ***Age period 0 - 3***

67. Care and education outside of the family for the 0-3 year olds has traditionally been offered in *crèches*. In 1989, about 20% of all children in the age-group six months to three years were cared for in *crèches* while their mothers were working. As noted earlier, the political changes after that year, and the prolongation of the parental leave period, reduced the need for public child care outside of the home and the number of *crèches* has rapidly decreased.

68. From what we have heard in discussions with people in different parts of the political and administrative system, this change has been in accordance with policy intentions as well as in line with the needs and wishes of the parents of young children. There seems to exist a general consensus that children 0-3 are better cared for and educated by their mothers on maternity leave -- and that ECEC settings are not needed for this age-group. The most common argument we heard in support of this position was that, “it’s better for young children to be cared for by their mothers.” Others explained that: (1) the quality of care in pre-revolution *crèches* was limited to basic hygiene and health care; (2) the *crèches* were used as ways of imposing communist values on families; and (3) women were forced to become part of the labour-force against their interests and preferred to be at home with their young children. While these claims are understandable, there appears to be a lack of reliable survey data on parental preferences and a lack of

systematic research into possible harmful effects of child care outside of the home for young children to support or refute such statements.

69. Many people at various levels in the ECEC system commented on the fact that there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes and practice concerning non-parental care for infants and toddlers. The pre-revolution collectivist ideologies linked to the importance of raising children in public institutions from an early age had been uncritically replaced by the view that it is better for the child to be at home with the mother at least until age three. Such statements have been used as justification for closing down *crèches* and creating a system where mothers stay home to take care of their young children. Yet, these statements lack scientific evidence. In fact, research carried out in other countries over the past 25 years has shown that good quality child care outside of the home for children under the age of three does not harm the development of the child, when compared to child care in the homes (e.g., Andersson, 1992). On the contrary, for some children it might even be an advantage, providing the child with a stimulating environment of peers and adults, interesting activities and challenges, and a well balanced diet. Children from culturally and economically disadvantaged families have been found to benefit the most from this collaboration between public ECEC and family care (e.g., OECD, 1999a). *Crèches* may also complement family care by working intensively with parents and children in order to prevent the need for institutional care and to provide a therapeutic environment for children who are exposed to deprivation in the home.

70. The team feels that there are several reasons for taking a closer look at the situation of the 0-3 year olds and their parents in order to discuss and consider alternative positions and solutions. Some of these reasons are linked to gender equality and the sharing of responsibilities for household and family between mothers and fathers. Changing family patterns, with large numbers of single mothers and rapid decrease in birth rates might be indications worth analysing further. Choice and alternatives have become key issues in the Czech Republic in relation to ECEC as well as to other aspects of life in a modern, liberal, pluralistic society. As indicated in our discussion on gender issues later in this section, many women we have talked to expressed a desire for more choice and alternatives in their present situation as young mothers.

71. From what we heard and saw, most of the (former) *crèches* were well situated and accommodated. Many buildings are now being sold or allocated to different bodies. Those which still exist are under the threat of closing. Their lack of “clients” should be questioned: is it only due to lack of need, or does the traditional structure and organisation of the *crèches* not fit with the young parents’ new expectations and aspirations? Would it be possible to open up the *crèches* to other types of family support, such as playgroups, parental *crèches*, part time care, family counselling, etc.? We saw a good example of a more varied list of services offered in one of the *crèches* we visited in Prague. This setting offered mother-toddler groups, part-time care, and a type of “home-care” where a caregiver would go to a sick child’s home to look after her, when the parents had to go to work, or for some other reason was unable to take care of the child that particular day. There was also some discussions about a relatively new initiative, the family resource centre which provides multiple, flexible services to families. The introduction of licensed family day care homes in the Czech Republic was also discussed as a possible response to address the difficulties in finding good quality child care for the 0-3 year olds.

72. Care provision could be provided with a larger span of choices, insuring affordability and good quality for all. This could be found in comprehensive locally and culturally adjusted programmes, in which all stakeholders including parents would be involved. Continuing education and in-service training of child nurses would combine experience and innovation. From the perspective of lifelong learning, this would not be starting too early: recent research confirms the importance of this early phase for the child to forming attitudes and patterns of thinking, and to gain confidence as an active learner, curiously exploring and mastering the surrounding world (Shore, 1997).

## **Staffing and training**

73. In the Czech Republic, more than 95% of the teachers in pre-schools have completed secondary education, usually through a four-year programme in one of the 18 secondary vocational schools with pedagogical orientation. Hence, in general, staff are very well-prepared for their responsibilities, and in addition there is a growing interest on the part of the state and municipalities to provide continuing education for pre-school teachers, according to their own choices and interests.

74. Despite this stable base, a number of issues and concerns linked to the future training and recruitment of personnel, have been raised by various individuals and groups during our visit. We will address and reflect upon some of these here:

75. One concern today is the low number of students who graduate from the programmes and then actually start to work as kindergarten teachers. Only 10% of the current teachers are under the age of 30, which means that in the near future, the majority of the teaching force will be eligible for retirement. Another concern is the feminisation of the kindergarten teaching workforce. We learned that there is only one man working as a kindergarten teacher in the entire country. However, army duty may be replaced by service as assistants in nursery schools and other institutions, bringing a young male presence -- and alternative role models -- to young children. To attract and retain qualified male and female staff, kindergarten teaching needs to be recognised as an important profession. One way of doing this is to increase salaries. In 1999, the average wage of teachers in kindergartens were about 80% of the average salary in the Czech Republic, and about 75% of the wages of an elementary school teacher. It is possible that higher status and salaries might also help facilitate more equal partnerships between staff and parents.

76. One way of justifying increased salaries, and at the same time raising the status of the job, might be to shift the education to the tertiary education sphere (university and non-university), as has been suggested in the Czech Background Report. At the moment, there is much discussion and debate regarding the level of education among pre-school teachers in the Czech Republic. From the team's perspective, a move from secondary vocational level to tertiary level training might have both positive and negative effects depending on where the focus of the additional education is placed. Some people expressed concern that the very young teachers coming out of the current teacher training are at a disadvantage when trying to communicate on an equal basis with older, more experienced and maybe more educated parents. A higher level of education is a good way to give students time to mature and be able to interact better with parents, building self-confidence and providing an in-depth knowledge of the field. More importantly, raising the initial training of pre-school educators to tertiary level would provide more opportunities for students to broaden their professional competencies and deepen their specialisation in early childhood.

77. Additional training also may help support future teachers for the changing context in which they work. As alternative education methods become more common, teachers will need to be comfortable with variation and flexibility in their day-to-day work; they also will need to be able to work closer with parents, and to adjust daily activities to meet the needs of parents, and the needs of the actively exploring and learning child. Given the trend toward inclusion, there is a need for more attention within initial and continuous training to working with children with special educational needs. In addition, there should be opportunities to focus on work with children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly the culture, language of the Romany populations living in the Czech Republic. A stronger focus on multiculturalism, tolerance, and conflict resolution in teacher training would make a more productive learning environment for all students.

78. However, raising the level of initial training does not mean that theory should be given priority over practice. During our visits, children showed us outstanding examples of creative activities in areas like music, art and crafts, dancing and theatre, performances which should be seen as indications of the enthusiasm and competence found among the teachers stimulating these types of creative activities. It is important that the emphasis in teacher training on creativity and the arts be preserved. Indeed, teachers and administrators who objected to this change in teacher education were concerned that if the education of pre-school teachers became more similar to that of the elementary school teachers, child focused activities in areas like painting, singing and dancing would be lost to more school-like programmes aimed at improving reading and writing skills.

## Quality

79. Quality in ECEC might be defined and measured in various ways. *Structural quality* tends to refer to objectively measurable variables like size/composition of children's groups, adult/child ratios, educational level of personnel, physical design of the settings, etc. Our impressions from visits in a large number of pre-schools, serving 3-6 year old children, are that Czech pre-schools meet high standards and provide children with good conditions for development and learning. The pre-schools we saw were well organised and equipped. More than 95% of the pre-school teachers have completed secondary education. We observed generous space in classes or dormitories, good quality equipment, meals served three times a day for an affordable price (social support being available for families with low incomes), easy access to outside furnished playgrounds and a reasonable teacher/child ratio.<sup>3</sup>

80. *Service quality* is linked to serving the needs of the families in terms of availability of places (access), geographic location of settings (close to home), opening hours (in relation to parents' working hours), or available choices (forms, programmes). For most parents with 3-6 year olds in the Czech Republic, pre-school places are usually available, fairly close to the home, and with opening hours adjusted to the needs of the parents. Since many changes have occurred during the last ten years, and schools are organising their own routines locally, some pre-schools might be considered more attractive, and parents might choose them, even though they might be located further away from their home.

81. In rural areas, the school is sometimes the only public setting around, and, as such, it plays the important role of a cultural centre. To that end, rural pre-schools tend to be maintained and kept open, even when the number of children has decreased below the normative. Some of these kindergartens raise their own funds and strengthen their budgets through creative ways of signing sponsor agreements or by offering specific afternoon clubs, where parents pay a small fee. Sometimes kindergartens in rural areas are integrated into the primary school buildings. This seems to be a cost effective strategy as long as the kindergartens have full access to the facilities of the primary schools. It can also help smooth the transition from kindergarten to compulsory school.

82. If we are interested in *results quality*, assessments of developmental progress and competencies in individual children, and changes over time in such outcome variables might be measured, and related to programme goals or developmental level. In some of the new programmes found in Czech pre-schools, the progress of each individual child is being monitored by both the teachers and the parents (i.e. the Step-by-Step programmes) as part of the programmes themselves. *Process quality*, on the other hand, relates to the understanding of quality of activities and relationships in ECEC settings, processes likely to affect the

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3. According to regulations a pre-school class should have a maximum of 20 children enrolled, a number which, however, often had been increased to 25-28 children, for financial reasons. Some justification for this was found in the fact that not all children attend at the same time, and that some children only attended the pre-school for three days per month, if the mothers were still on maternity leave.

outcomes. High process quality calls for well-functioning relationships between teachers and children, carefully planned activities, systematically analysed and evaluated, and mutually trusting relationships among personnel and parents. The teachers we observed were working hard to reflect on their practice and find new ways of teaching. They also were skilled in fostering cultural sensitivity among young children, and in supporting their creativity.

83. As suggested in the Czech Background Report, the development of a national curriculum, where fundamental goals of pre-school education, in the perspective of lifelong learning, are specified, should facilitate local attempts to develop and evaluate programmes and activities in Czech ECEC settings.

### **Programme content and implementation**

84. With the increase in pedagogical freedom, there has been an impressive diversification of programmes in the kindergarten sector. In our discussions, we heard many calls for a national curriculum framework to guide practice and ensure an even level of quality across provision. Some practitioners felt lost without any national guidelines, while others wanted to codify good practice that was currently developed for their monthly plan in an overall framework. There was some debate concerning the degree of specificity that would be desirable, but the overall consensus was that a national curriculum should be broad and flexible enough to apply to all forms of pre-school education and allow for alternative programmes and innovations to flourish. In that way, it would be more a shared philosophy to guide practice than a set of prescriptive tasks for teachers to follow. It is important that any national framework build on good practice in the field and encourage similar experimentation and innovation. Parents would continue to have a choice among a range of different kindergartens, with assurance of a more even level of quality across provision.

85. By ensuring that kindergartens follow a common set of principles, a national curriculum framework could help close the gap, and facilitate transitions, between pre-school and basic education. While there are efforts in the field to make children's early learning experiences more coherent, parents, practitioners, and politicians expressed concern about the transition from kindergarten to school. Specifically, they argued that the first year of primary school is too rigid and teacher-directed. The pressure on performance and competition in the beginning of compulsory schooling increases the possibility that children will face difficulties. Also, the relatively high percentage (approx. 20%) of children who postpone primary school entry suggests that the expectations of children beginning school might be too high. By postponing their child's school entry, parents may be trying to avoid the potential for their early school failure. Thus, there is a need for compulsory education to be more flexible in the early grades, better oriented to the individual needs of the child, and more strongly connected to the kindergartens.

86. It was suggested that these difficulties are linked to the different traditions in the kindergarten and the school spheres. A framework that makes the goals and purposes of ECEC explicit might help reinforce the specificity of the early childhood period and may help promote a bridge from the kindergarten to school. Not only could such guidelines help kindergartens to resist downward pressures from the primary school curriculum, but they could also help make the early years of primary school more flexible and child-centred. To that end, it would be especially helpful if the kindergarten curriculum linked to the primary school curriculum.

87. We heard during our visit that work to develop a national framework for kindergartens is currently underway. The content of the curriculum will focus on five spheres -- biological, psychological, interpersonal, sociocultural and environmental. Consultation with those in the field, throughout the development process would help ensure that the framework takes into account multiple perspectives. It is likely that a bottom-up approach that builds on good practice in the field would strengthen staff

commitment to the curriculum and its principles. In-service training with all staff involved and ongoing monitoring will be important steps to ensure successful implementation of the framework. Finally, we learned that many people in the Czech Republic view the kindergarten primarily as a form of care that supports parental employment. The Ministry of Education has made an effort to refocus the kindergarten as the first stage in the education cycle, a period in which important skills and personal attitudes are formed. From the perspective of the review team, the development of a new framework will provide an opportunity to reinforce the role of ECEC in lifelong learning to the wider public.

## **Research and evaluation**

88. The need to systematically evaluate, analyse and compare new educational programmes and innovation projects is clearly stated in the Czech Background Report. Based on our own observations and meetings with enthusiastic innovators in the field, the review team strongly supports these calls for increased investments in research and evaluation efforts on national as well as local levels. Research and evaluation is necessary to ensure flexibility and variation in programme development, to inform parents about alternatives, and to continue the attempts to base activities and relations in ECEC settings on the view of the child as an active explorer and learner. We would support the development of a national ECEC research and evaluation framework, with short-term and long-term priorities and sustained public funding, as a tool to strengthen the links among research, policy, and practice.

89. Some specific research issues worth exploring in the years to come include:

- Evaluation research, as part of improving and implementing innovative ECEC programmes, and as part of the training of teachers to become skilled self-evaluators of programmes as a way of addressing quality issues and inform parents.
- Systematic process studies to observe and analyse teaching methods and social interactions patterns of pre-school teachers with different types of educational background, as a way of better understanding the possible impact of changing the educational system for ECEC personnel.
- Collecting of state-wide reliable and systematic statistical data on children and families as a basis for the fair allocation of resources to less affluent rural areas hit hardest by recent structural changes in the Czech society. In addition, there is a need to collect information on the private institutions that are not licensed (not part of the school network) and are not under the authority of the ministries.
- Systematic research aimed at answering questions like: What are the attitudes and beliefs of today's young parents toward families and childrearing in a rapidly changing society? Do these attitudes and beliefs differ among parents in ethnic minority groups (i.e. Romany), and what might be some possible consequences of these differences for public policy?
- Systematic research aimed at answering questions like: What do pre-school age children who do not attend kindergartens do during the day? Who are caring for and educating these children if parents need to or want to work outside of the home? Relatives and neighbours might be available to some young parents in need of child care, but do we know that this is the case? Does privately arranged unlicensed family day care meet the standards of high quality ECEC, or would licensing and training of public family day care mothers be an option? What are the alternatives available in rural areas where ECEC-settings are being

closed due to lack of children? What are some cost-effective strategies to expand and broaden the currently available provision of voluntary activities for young children and their parents?

## **Financing**

90. In discussions with politicians, administrators and economists, some of the financing issues raised were linked to teacher salaries, housing costs, and decreased birth rates affecting the financial base for the municipalities. Even though there seems to be general agreement on the need to increase teacher salaries to make the job as a pre-school teacher more attractive, increased costs need to be justified by indications of increased quality. As one representative from the Ministry of Education phrased it: “Because of the financial pressure, there needs to be convincing evidence that quality improves with higher education and higher salaries for the pre-school teachers.” Producing such “convincing evidence” will create a need for more research and evaluation, which was also pointed out in some of our discussions.

91. Fewer children being born also creates financial problems for the municipalities, since state contributions are based on number of children. As a result of these financial pressures, and closures of pre-schools, we learned that children in some rural communities must travel very far in order to attend a kindergarten. In addition, with the number of *crèches* and pre-schools being reduced, some municipalities have been tempted to sell the unused buildings to private homeowners so as to temporarily strengthen municipality budgets. Should a need for more space arise, renting these previously owned buildings would require considerably more resources. With regard to provision for children under three, the expansion of the parental leave period has led to a dramatic reduction in number of *crèches* in operation, and many unused facilities. One cost-effective solution that would also provide parents of 0-3 year olds with good quality child care alternatives would be to make available additional space in the presently unused or underused facilities for the development of open pre-schools, mothers’ clubs, family day care arrangements, etc. The team recognises, however, that it may be challenging to co-ordinate the diverse and complicated competencies and funding streams involved in this effort.

92. As the Czech Background Report notes, the lower birth rates and the decreasing numbers of children of pre-school age does not necessarily have to endanger the existence of public ECEC. Instead, state funding could be allocated for the improvement of quality, rather than expanding provision, while at the same time, maintaining the accessibility of pre-school facilities in all regions and districts.

## **Parental involvement**

93. We found many examples of successful efforts to improve relationships between pre-schools and families during our visit. We had been told that, before 1989, pre-schools were not very open to parents. Parents had few opportunities to contribute to the development of pre-school curricula or to engage in their children’s ECEC in other ways. For several reasons, this situation seems to have changed markedly during the past ten years, and parents now are invited to co-operate with the pre-schools on a more equal basis. We had the opportunity to meet with the national Union of Parents, formed in 1991, and were told that parents, and particularly those from high-resource families, were more willing than earlier to make their voices heard and influence the organisation and content of the pre-school setting where their child was enrolled. Teachers have started to recognise new opportunities in improved parental involvement. We saw examples in some of the innovative new pedagogical programmes, where parental co-operation was an essential part in carrying out activities and monitoring the outcome in terms of child performances. The entrance halls of the programmes were filled with information materials, for parents to read or bring home, when leaving or picking up the children. Parents were also welcome to spend time in the settings.

94. We were also informed that pre-schools might receive extra financial resources (or additional staff) from parents when they plan special events such as field trips or art festivals. Often parents participate in these types of group activities to support staff. Parents as well as pre-school teachers acknowledged the fact that the more parents are informed about routines and activities, and the more they are familiar with the staff, the more likely are the children to feel that there is a supportive link between the home and the pre-school, which will encourage their own enthusiasm and increase their self confidence.

95. Informing parents about activities and programme content has also become important for pre-schools as a way of “recruiting new clients”. With more options available to parents (alternative pedagogical methods, private/church-run programmes), the need to inform parents becomes more obvious, especially in a situation when the number of pre-school aged children is decreasing and settings are competing to attract families and children. At present, most parents choose the pre-school closest to where they live, but this might be less true in the future when alternatives are made more available, which is more likely to happen in the major cities (Prague, Brno) than in cities or villages in rural areas, where families with children might be few and far apart.

96. When painting this bright picture of improvements in relationships between homes and pre-schools, it is important to acknowledge the fact that different groups of families have different involvement patterns. Active participation is more typical of parents in middle- and high-income families, where flexible working-schedules, extra financial resources, or child rearing ideologies might facilitate co-operation with the kindergartens. Parents from weaker socio-economic backgrounds -- often with less education and limited proficiency in the Czech language -- might find it more difficult to fit into the new model of parental involvement. In particular, families from ethnic minorities (e.g., Romany) who may have different child rearing perspectives and communication patterns would seem to be especially hard to reach, without special efforts by pre-school staff.

97. We saw a good example of a successful attempt to bridge the gap between the school culture and the culture of ethnic minority families in a preparatory class serving primarily Romany children in Prague. In this setting, a male teaching assistant from the Romany community had been hired to assist the regular teacher in her work. We were told that since the beginning of the experiment, only one child had been sent to a special school, while all the other children went off to the regular school at the end of the preparatory period. Maybe a similar strategy might be applied also in ECEC settings, where the use of culture-bridging link-persons working with the children might facilitate the communication and links between the homes of families from ethnic minorities and the staff in the pre-schools.

## **Innovations**

98. “In this country *everything* is an innovation nowadays, after the long period of communism ending in 1989”. This dramatic statement by a young student in Prague, was shared in reference to Czech ECEC in other conversations. Others recognised that the strong tradition of pre-school education in the Czech Republic provides a solid foundation upon which new initiatives may build. The authors of the Background Report describe innovation and change following the political change in 1989 as concentrating mostly on “inner content and change of style of pedagogical work, because material equipment and organisation structure could be borrowed from the previous period”. In our visits we saw many examples, and listened to stories from teachers and parents, of how the pre-school system had opened up and become more flexible in content of activities, in relationships with parents and in ways of perceiving the child as an active, exploring individual.

99. The number of innovative pedagogical programmes within the public pre-schools is increasing rapidly, which calls for systematic in-service training of the pre-school teachers. We visited a *Zdravá materská škola* (Healthy Kindergarten) in Prague and were able to fully appreciate the openness and variation in this programme, based on spontaneous play and free movement of the child in a social climate of respect and co-operation, and in a physical environment aimed at facilitate well-being and health through a friendly and aesthetically stimulating architecture and design. We also visited several of the *Zacit spolu* (To start together) kindergartens and primary schools, described as the Czech version of the international Step-by-Step programme, and were met by enthusiastic and proud teachers and lively, curious children. This programme is based on integration of play and activities into education and care, theme-based, problem-oriented projects, careful observations of the children by the teachers, and active co-operation with parents. Close co-operation with organisations and companies in the local community is also among the goals of the programme.

100. The wide range of alternative programmes for pre-school age children now beginning to be offered in the Czech Republic, by public as well as private organisers, including programmes focusing on foreign language training, swimming, yoga, sauna, or religion, are also being discussed and questioned. There is some concern that these alternative programmes are somewhat trendy innovations based on commercial interests. Moreover, as one organiser of public pre-school activities in a Prague district with decreasing number of children put it: “There is only a certain number of children available to join the various programmes available. With too many alternatives competing, there is a danger that stable, well-functioning programmes will have to close down because of lack of customers, when they do not match the trend-of-the day, be it ‘IT and computers’ or ‘healthy wrestling in clay’.” Our overall impression, however, is that there is a lot of enthusiasm among teachers, parents and children in support of the more flexible and open system now beginning to win ground, and also a demand for continuing education of teachers to be able to fully respond to and benefit from the challenging innovations.

### **Children in need of special support**

101. In relation to children with special needs, it is quite clear, that over the past ten years there has been, in the Czech Republic a clear shift in policy goals from the traditional deficit model, with segregated institutions, to a model supporting integration and systematic family support. This shift has been appreciated and supported by most professionals and experts in the area of ECEC. We saw several good examples of kindergartens in Brno and Prague where strategies to integrate children with special needs into mainstream settings seemed to be very successfully implemented by enthusiastic and dedicated staff. We also learned that many of these programmes relied heavily on short-term private initiatives and resources, and that some districts did not have the resources to adequately accommodate children with special needs into mainstream pre-schools.

102. Our analyses from reading background materials, discussing with key informants, and making site visits, are that those families most in need of support, i.e. culturally or socially weaker families, are the ones who tend to be excluded from, or avoid ECEC settings for their children. The fact that children from these families less often have a place in a pre-school setting might be explained by a lack of interest on the part of the parents, distrust of the educational system, lack of adequate information from society, fear of social control, lack of cultural awareness on the part of teachers or pre-school directors, or lack of extra resources to cope with children in need of special support, especially before the period when children are about to enter the compulsory school system.

103. In particular, problems of poverty, lack of appropriate health care, social exclusion and education under-achievement are most acute among the Romany population, and yet children from Romany families are far less likely than other children to benefit from quality kindergarten experiences before beginning school. It is estimated that over 75% of Romany children in the Czech Republic do not complete their education in the mainstream school system. Some of these children end up isolated from mainstream schooling and placed in special schools for children with disabilities, sometimes because they have not adequately mastered the Czech language. As in other countries around the world, Romany children and adults are among the most marginalised groups in Czech society and have been the targets of hate crimes and other forms of discrimination. We recognise that there are efforts underway in the Czech Republic to address these human rights issues and provide more educational opportunities for children from Romany backgrounds. The team would support the allocation of additional resources to develop culturally appropriate strategies for ensuring that this high-risk population has better access to and participation in education -- starting with kindergarten. Most Romany children come from a very different social and cultural environment than children from majority Czech culture. In order to create welcoming learning environments, pre-school and primary teachers need to be familiar with Romany language, history, culture, music, etc.<sup>4</sup> It was also suggested to us that culturally appropriate educational materials, such as books and songs, need to be developed and integrated more regularly into pre-school programmes. Co-operation between Romany communities and schools also needs to be improved so that families more fully involved in the educational process. As noted earlier, Romany assistant teachers can help communicate with parents and children in their own language and make the mainstream education more hospitable. In these ways, ECEC can lay the foundation for all children to develop tolerance and respect for human differences.

104. We also heard some words of caution over the fact that children under age three usually did not take part in ECEC outside their home. Reluctance on the part of the state to being involved in providing early childhood services for the 0-3 year olds, might lead to a delayed identification of many children with special educational needs, and missed opportunities to provide these children extra support and early intervention. Since the youngest children are more likely to be cared for in their homes than in monitored ECEC settings with educated personnel, the health care system has become an important part of the family support system, with its opportunities to monitor and identify children or families in need of special support through the repeated contacts between physicians, nurses and children. The team had the opportunity to visit a local doctor in a small village in the countryside, and observe the multidimensional aspects of his work and appreciating his role as a link between family, pre-school or social service agencies. As a well-known and well-respected professional in the community, this local doctor served several important functions both in respect to medical care and treatment and preventive medical, social and psychological support.

105. During our visit, we heard informants talk about the importance of a closer co-operation among the different ministries responsible for the care and education of young children. Family support, health support, social support and the care and education of children are all sectors closely interrelated, calling for co-operation and sharing of expertise among the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Health. The need for close co-operation between local and national authorities governing health, social services and education is particularly important to serve children and families in need of special support in a comprehensive and holistic manner. We did observe examples of collaboration between different ECEC programmes in the same area, but these instances were few. Usually the programmes operated without such co-operation and links with organisations or other providers in the different family support sectors. This is an area which might be strengthened through the opening up of new channels of communication and the building of formal and informal social networks of professionals and/or parents.

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4. It should be noted, however, that there may be different traditions within the Romany communities.

## Gender issues

106. More than 99% of the pre-school teachers in the Czech Republic are women. This is no different from the situation in most other countries, but the fact that men are absent in the daily activities and relationships of pre-school age children is identified in the Background Report as a concern, and a situation that needs to be addressed. As in most other countries, a combination of factors are explaining this fact: caring for and educating young children have traditionally been perceived as the responsibility of women, inside the family as well as in settings outside of the family. Working with young children has been considered a low-status activity with wages well below average. Recognising that changing traditional gender roles takes time, changing educational requirements and increasing salaries to upgrade the status of early care and education might be easier and quicker, granted that there is the political will and the resources to do so.

107. During our visits we observed positive examples of gender-mixed personnel groups: we mentioned earlier the male, Romany assistant, employed in a preparatory class with children from socially disadvantaged families -- and very much appreciated by the children and the other teachers. In a different kindergarten in Brno based on the innovative Step-by-Step programme, a young man did his alternative military service with the children, concentrating his work on children in need of special support. He was well accepted as part of the team by teacher colleagues and the children (and in his own words, perceived of as 'exotic' by his friends).

108. From a gender equality perspective, the generous parental leave programme, allowing mothers to stay home and care for their children during the first four years has been perceived as a counteracting force by some young women with whom we discussed this issue. It was argued that the parental benefits might work well for mothers with low income, or without a job, who would have a guaranteed minimum level of income, and it might work well for those mothers who would not need to work to contribute to the family income. Other groups of mothers, however, might find limits to the system, i.e. if the father is not making a good salary, or if the father is absent (single-mother families). For some mothers the difference between their previous salaries and the parental benefits might be too large to make the parental leave period a very attractive alternative.

109. It seemed that the length of parental leave was being questioned by many young women, especially today, when the Czech Republic is becoming an active member of the global economy and facing its constraints. A long time out of the working sphere might impede the current trend towards updating competencies and knowledge. It seems that many well-educated young mothers feel their maternity leave period as a threat to their potential career. Financial dependence on husbands is seen as a handicap to changing roles and models for better equity between genders. Women with a secondary education or more were reluctant to stay out of the work force for a period of four years. Since the labour market is currently undergoing rapid changes, there is the danger of "falling behind" if one's competence-level is not upgraded on a regular basis. Some women also brought up the fact that the legal right to get back to one's job was sometimes made difficult by the employers through a diversity of strategies.

110. Some of our informants suggested that the extended parental leave programme might also, on a hidden agenda, be politically justified by a desire to keep women out of the work-force in a weak economy. If these suggestions are accurate, there are reasons to raise a word of caution: this policy might backfire in a situation where companies in the public or private sector in a growing economy need qualified employees on short notice, but young women are unable to join the labour force due to lack of quality ECEC for their infants and toddlers.

111. At the official level, we were often told that the current parental leave policy was based on the assumption that women do prefer to stay home and take care of their children. However, there has been no

reliable survey data available to confirm these assumptions. As we have suggested earlier, making good quality child care alternatives available to those women who would like to return to work before the end of the parental leave period would seem like a worthwhile support for parents seeking to reconcile work and family responsibilities -- and an essential policy, from a gender equality perspective.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

112. The Czech Republic has a strong tradition of pre-school education. The Ministry of Education has officially recognised kindergartens as an important part of the educational system and the first step in the process of lifelong learning. Over the past ten years, there has been an increase in diversification and pedagogical freedom in the kindergartens. The understanding of education as conformity to accepted knowledge and social norms has given way to a spirit of enquiry and innovation. Decentralisation is taking place, and great efforts have been made to change the relationships between the education partners. There is an appreciation of the child as a subject of rights, reflected both in the desire to lessen the pressures placed on children in pre-school institutions, and to integrate children with special needs. Pedagogical approaches and methods of work more suited to the young child's needs have been encouraged, and daily routines in pre-schools have been relaxed. Greater emphasis is placed on free play and creative expression. Innovative experiments with age-integrated classes are also becoming more widespread. Outreach to parents as equal partners with staff has improved immeasurably. Work on the preparation of a framework curriculum has begun and, hopefully, will broaden public understanding that kindergartens provide not only an important support for working parents, but also an opportunity for children to develop important skills and personal attributes. In order to build on these signs of progress and promise, this final chapter suggests a set of policy areas for further thought and action:

113. *Stronger co-ordination across ministries and sectors:* In order to meet the diverse needs of children and families in the Czech Republic, there is a need for closer co-operation and sharing of expertise across the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Health. Given its support for lifelong learning from a young age, the Ministry of Education -- in partnership with other interested ministries -- may wish to take a strong lead in developing a policy framework that includes all children under six. In addition, co-ordination between local and national authorities governing health, social services and education is particularly important to serve children and families in need of special support in a comprehensive and holistic manner. At the national and local levels, it may be worth exploring the development of inter-departmental committees or other co-ordinating mechanisms to develop more integrated policy and practice for children under six and their families.

114. *An informed public discussion of gender issues and policy for children under three:* Given the drastic shift in policy in recent years, it seems timely to bring together different stakeholder groups, including parents, to engage in a broad public discussion about the needs of very young children, women, and parents in modern Czech society. It seems that if this issue is not carefully addressed, the Czech Republic might face a critical shortage of ECEC provision for the coming generation of parents and children, with potential effects on women's access to the labour force and on birth rates. Surveys and other research studies can help assess the implications of various policy options for child and family well-being. In particular, government may wish to consider the extent of coverage for children under three and the role of Ministry of Education in monitoring the quality of these settings. From the review team's perspective, it is important to expand the range of currently available full-time and part-time educational opportunities for children under three. Given the high incidence of lone-mothers in the Czech Republic, there is likely to be a increasing need for supportive and flexible services for very young children and their mothers. Using traditional *crèche* facilities for alternative forms of family support may be envisaged, e.g. as a drop-in

centre for young parents, infant health centres, play groups, parental *crèches*, part-time care, family counselling.

115. *Improving access to kindergartens, especially for children and families in need of special support:* Despite marked improvements in outreach to parents and families, socially or culturally weak groups still have serious difficulties in trusting the municipal kindergartens or entering into close relationships with kindergarten staff. As a result, children from these groups are underrepresented in kindergartens. The practice found in preparatory classes of employing bridge staff from the Romany community might be extended to the kindergartens as a promising initiative to welcome Romany children and parents into educational settings. In-service training for teachers to work with low-income and ethnic minority families also needs to be strengthened. While there is a positive trend to mainstream children with special educational needs into regular kindergartens, the team feels that additional public support, i.e. financial support for adequate equipment and special in-service training programmes for staff members would be very valuable to strengthen future attempts for inclusion. Another area for future attention concerns the limited access to kindergarten for children living in some rural areas with declining populations. The team supports integrating these kindergartens with primary schools, as long as these classes are treated as an integral part of the school with access to all facilities. Another possibility would be to develop mobile kindergartens to serve areas with few children. Finally, for equity reasons, it seems that there is a need to reconsider the policy of limiting access to kindergartens for three and four year olds whose mothers are home on maternity leave.

116. *Supporting ongoing training for pre-school teachers:* Resources spent on continuing education in the form of in-service training would be a good investment. A cost effective strategy might be to group teams from different schools around themes and workshops. To further support policies of inclusion, additional funding is necessary to train staff in working with diverse children and families, including children from ethnic minority families and children with special educational needs and disabilities. There also seems to be a need for additional in-service training to work with parents in order to foster stronger co-operation between kindergartens and the home. Moreover, the team supports the introduction of a compulsory accreditation system for further training, where credit points would be collected and accumulated by participation in accredited training courses over a period of time. This approach would encourage staff to build on prior knowledge and assist in maintaining and assuring quality in the settings in which they work.

117. *Addressing work conditions and initial training of staff:* An important area for policy attention concerns the recruitment and retention issues in the early childhood field e.g. the reluctance of many young women who have completed pre-school teacher training to embark upon kindergarten teaching as a career. There is a need to improve the wages, but also the low status of the profession. Another challenge concerns the lack of men working in the profession. Some of these workforce issues may be addressed by shifting initial training to the tertiary level, although care should be taken to preserve the focus on practical skills that is a strong part of the current training. In addition, raising the level of training also may allow for a greater focus on topics that have been accorded less attention in the past, including: alternative pedagogical methods; outreach to parents; working with children with special needs; and research and evaluation. The team suggests that a transition from vocational to tertiary (university and non-university) studies could be arranged for those students who wish, while the debate concerning an appropriate new teacher training curricula continue. If training requirements for new staff are raised, there need to develop mechanisms to support teachers who are already working in the field to upgrade their training to tertiary level as well.

118. *Encouraging self-evaluation and reflective practice as part of quality assurance:* In order to encourage ongoing reflection and improvement of practice, training teachers to evaluate results or process quality should be an important part of their basic training as well as in continuing education. There seems to be a genuine interest among teachers in the ECEC field for this type of education. Inspectors could

continue to play a critical role by validating staff self-assessments. In addition to promoting quality assurance and improvement, it is important for teachers to be skilled in defining and describing their programmes to parents in a way which will attract clients to their settings. In a situation with decreasing birth rates, it may become more important for teachers to be able to articulate to local authorities the nature of their work with young children to avoid having their programmes closed for financial reasons.

119. *Developing a national framework to make the goals of ECEC explicit and to guide practice:* The development of a national pedagogical framework currently underway will be an important step toward ensuring greater coherence in children's early learning experience and a more even level of quality across different kindergartens. The development of a national curriculum may help inform and persuade the broader public of the educational purposes of the kindergartens. In addition, more continuity from ECEC to primary school may be desirable, as many children experience difficulty in the transition into formal education. It may be helpful if the kindergarten and primary school curricula were linked in order to reinforce the importance of child-centred discovery methods throughout the early years. The team encourages widespread consultation with those in the field (i.e., across disciplines), throughout the development process, so that the framework takes into account multiple perspectives. In addition, a bottom-up approach that builds on good practice in the field is more likely to increase the sense of ownership and commitment to the principles among staff than a top-down approach. Moreover, in-service training with all staff involved and ongoing monitoring will be important steps to ensure successful implementation of the framework.

120. *The need for more national research and evaluation:* In the light of current social and economic trends, more national research on the needs of families and children in the Czech Republic is necessary to provide policy makers with reliable information. Several areas for research have been identified in Chapter 4. It also will be important to identify present data gaps and future needs of the early childhood field and to support ongoing data collection on public and private ECEC settings. The Ministry of Education may wish to consider building up the early childhood research capacity by financing the development of a national framework to support research and evaluation in the field. Finally, participation in future projects involving international co-operation would provide an important opportunity to build on the experience of the OECD review and promote the ongoing exchange of good early childhood practice across countries.

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121. Throughout our visit, representatives of the parliament, ministries and local authorities, school inspectors, teachers unions, professional associations, teachers, and parents, expressed their pride in the Czech Republic's long tradition of providing quality care and education to a large percentage of pre-school age children. "Many other countries have things to learn from us in this area, we don't need to copy other countries," as one administrator in the Ministry of Education expressed. The OECD team agrees that the Czech Republic has many reasons to be proud of its commitment to pre-school education. To that end, our analyses and suggestions have attempted to build on the strengths of the past, support the positive elements of the current system, and use these lessons to inform and improve future ECEC policy development for young children and families.

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## APPENDIX II: INFORMATION ON THE CZECH REPUBLIC BACKGROUND REPORT

The OECD project on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy is supervised and organised in the Czech Republic as follows:

National Co-ordinator: Ing. Jan Koucký, Advisor, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Czech Republic (MŠMT ČR)

Steering Committee:

Mgr. Petr Roupec, Deputy Minister for Regional Education of the MŠMT ČR

Mgr. Aleš Vondráček, Director of the Department for Primary and General Education, Pre-school and Out-of school Education of the MŠMT ČR

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**1 - 10 March 2000**

### *Wednesday 1 March*

Prague

9h00

The Higher Educational College - Evropská 33, Prague 6

Welcome and overview of OECD visit, including Background Report, information discussion, first preliminary research results, working material etc., with the Project Team and authors of the Background Report: Jaroslav Sekot, Kateřina Smolíková, Milada Rabušicová and Antonín Mezera

11h00

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport - Karmelitská 7, Prague 1

Overview of National Policy in Education New ECEC Policy Initiatives, White Paper and Background Report with key staff of the Ministry: Deputy Minister Jan Sural; Deputy Minister Petr Roupec; Jan Koucký, Advisor; Jan Kovařovic, Advisor; and Jaroslav Sekot, Project Leader

14h30

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Ministry of Health - Na poříčním právu 2, Prague 2

Overview of national policy in ECEC, family and social strategy and goals, social and health care and policy with the key staff of the Ministries and the Committee for Human Rights of the Czech Government: Dr. Beneš, Dr. Niederle, Dr. Novotná, Doc. Ing. Průša, Dr. Špírek, Dr. Šteflová, pí. Bernatová and Dr. Sekyt

16h00

Kindergarten - Římská, Prague 2

Principal: Dana Moravcová

Meeting on the participation of parents on ECEC and their needs as stakeholders with representatives of the Union of parents: Mgr. Bečvářová and Dana Moravcová

### *Thursday 2 March*

8h30 - 11h45

Visits of two public schools and meetings on ECEC implementation in education with the staff and personnel: Mgr. Bečvářová, Dr. Jakoubková, MUDr. Šteflová and V. Bezoušková

Kindergarten - Na výšinách, Prague 7

Principal: Dr. Věra Jakoubková

Nursery school - Kotorská 1590, Prague 4 – Pankrác

Head Nurse: V. Bezoušková

13h00

The Czech School Inspectorate - F. Šrámka 37, Prague 5

Meeting on monitoring and evaluation of ECEC with the Chief inspector and inspectors of pre-school facilities: Ing. Marie Kalábová, Dr. Bláhová and Ing. Černá

***Friday 3 March***

The Higher Educational College - Evropská 33, Prague 6

9h00

Meeting on activities of pre-school associations and in-service training framework with representatives of pre-school associations and educational centres: OMEP, SPKMŠ and others

13h00

Českomoravský odborový svaz pracovníků ve školství - W.Churchilla 2, Prague 3

Meeting on employment and working conditions of ECEC workers with representatives from the Czech Union of Teachers: Mr. Martínek, Mrs. Soukalová and Mr. Müllner

15h30

Školský úřad (School Board) - Ondříčkova 48, Prague 3

Meeting on financing and support of ECEC with representatives of Employers in Education: Ing. Medek, Dr. Drtina, Dr. Najmon, Mrs. Hrabínová, Mrs. Václavová and Mrs. Antonová

***Monday 6 March 2000***

Karlovy Vary (Western Bohemia)

Visits of two local public ECEC pre-school facilities with Mgr. Bečvářová and meetings with pre-school staff

8h30

Kindergarten - Krymská 12, Karlovy Vary

10h30

Kindergarten - Sedlec, Karlovy Vary

14h00

Town Hall of Karlovy Vary - Moskevská 21, Karlovy Vary

Meeting on municipal policy in ECEC with Mayor and representatives from different political parties in the Municipality of Karlovy Vary: JUDr. Josef Pavel, Mayor; members of Municipality, Mgr. E.Maršíková

17h00

Kindergarten (local facility) - Žlutice u Karlových Var

Meeting on pre-school education and care for children and parents' needs and problems with parents as the stakeholders of ECEC

Travel to Prague

## ***Tuesday 7 March***

9h00

Health kindergarten - Zdravá mateřská škola, Sokolovská 182, Prague 8

Principal: Mgr. Šprachtová

Visit of kindergarten with experimental ECEC educational program; discussion with Mgr. Bečvářová, Mgr. Šprachtová, PhDr. Havlíková and Ing. Černá

11h00

Elementary School - ZŠ Havlíčkovo nám.10, Prague 3

Principal: Meisnerová

Visit to a school with innovative educational programs and ethnicity initiatives in ECEC where they have combined ECEC, preliminary and primary classes for children and pupils and out-of-school activities for minority groups; discussion with Mgr. Bečvářová, Mgr. Jurková and Mrs. Tancošová

15h00

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport - Karmelitská 7, Prague 1

Meeting on Czech ECEC and its position, national policy and context, with: Eduard Zeman, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport; members of the Project Team; and Ing. Koucký, ECEC National Co-ordinator

Travel to Brno

## ***Wednesday 8 March***

Brno (Central Moravia)

9h00

Kindergarten with the educational program "Start together" - Heyrovského 11, Brno – Bystrc

Principal: Mgr. Božena Havelková

Visit with Mgr. Bečvářová and PhDr. Rabušicová of innovative educational ECEC programs in the town kindergarten and discussion with the staff

11h00

Day-Centre for mother and child (crèche)

Visit with Mgr. Bečvářová and PhDr. Rabušicová of health and social care for pre-school children and their families in the day-care centre and discussion with the staff

14h00

Town Hall of Brno

Meeting on municipal policy in ECEC with Mgr. Bečvářová and PhDr. Rabušicová, and the Mayor and representatives from different political parties in the Municipality of Brno

16h00

The Masaryk University of Brno

Meeting on Graduate Initial ECEC Training and in-service framework and activities with representatives of Faculties of Education and Moravian associations of pre-school teachers

Return to Prague

### ***Thursday 9 March***

City Hall of Prague - Mariánské nám.2, Prague 1

Meetings with the representatives of the Prague Council, school committee and department for education

8h30

Meeting on municipal policy in ECEC in the framework of Prague with representatives from different political parties in the Municipality of Prague

10h30

Meeting on municipal policy in ECEC in the Czech Republic with the representatives of the Union of Czech cities and local authorities

11h30

Meeting on municipal support of ECEC in Prague with Ing. Jan Kasl and the Mayor of Prague

15h00

The Charles University of Prague - Myslíkova 7, Prague 1

Meeting on Graduate Initial ECEC Training and research with representatives of the Charles University and Higher Education Colleges [Faculty of Education, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute for Research in Education (VÚP)], the project team and ECEC researchers: Ing. Koucký, Prof. Kotásek, Doc. Drs. Opravilová, Prof. Helus, Drs. Kremlíčková, Drs. Vališová and Drs. Spilková

16h00

Team work on results and recommendations

### ***Friday 10 March***

9h00

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport - Karmelitská 7, Prague 1

Final session on conclusions and recommendations with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, other Ministries, and members of the project team: Minister Eduard Zeman, Deputy Ministers and key staff, OECD experts, project team and invited experts

12h00

Valdštejnská hospoda - Tomášská, Prague 1

Official lunch before the end of the visit of OECD experts in the Czech Republic with OECD experts, Ing. Koucký, Mgr. Jurková, PhDr. Sekot, PhDr. Rabušicová and PhDr. Smolíková