

Hungary

Population: 10 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.3. **GDP per capita:** USD 13 900. **Children under 6 years:** data not available.

Female labour force participation: 54% of women (15-64) are employed, 5.1% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 2.2%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

Labour force participation rate of women with young children: For mothers with children under 6 years: 30%, who account for 8% of total part-time employment (OECD, *Society at a Glance*, 2005). For mothers with children under 3: 30.5% of mothers are in employment (2004) (EUROSTAT).

Maternity and parental leave: Insured (employed) women are entitled to a maternity leave period of 24 weeks, remunerated at 70% of the person's average salary, and then at a flat rate into the third year. Hungary provides also a universal (including mothers who were not employed) parental leave child care allowance (called GYES) for a maximum of 135 weeks (or 53 weeks if the mother has not previously taken maternity leave) at a flat sum equal to the minimum old age pension (HUF 23 200 in 2004).

Average duration of parental leave: Data not available.

Compulsory school age: 6 years, but final kindergarten year (5-6 years) is also compulsory.

Social expenditure: 20.1%. **Child poverty rate:** 8.8% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

Funding of pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0): 0.79% of GDP (0.73% public and 0.07% private), that is, 14.7% of education budget with 16.9% of education enrolments.

Unit cost per child (in USD converted using PPP): USD 3 475 (public institutions only) (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

Funding of services for children under 3: Data not available.

Average costs to parents: Relative to GDP per capita, the annual parental expenditure on ECEC amounts to 8.2% for child care and 3.5% for pre-school education (Hungarian Government, 2004).

Legal entitlement to a free service: In principle at 6 months, but not all children are able to access. Preference is given to children of employed parents.

Major service types: Two kinds of full-time services exist: *bölcsde* for under 3 (referred to as child care centres and/or crèche); and *óvoda* (referred to as kindergarten and/or pre-school and/or nursery school) for children between 3 and compulsory school. Both service types offer long-day (c. 10 hours) services for 50 weeks per year. Licensed family day care is only now beginning.

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: 8.5%; children 3-4 years: 85%; 4- to 5-year-olds: 91%; 5- to 6-year-olds: 97%; OSP for children 6-12 years: over 40% of all pupils attended these services (National Statistical Office, 2004).

Designation and professional qualifications of key staff: *Gondozó* (child care workers), *óvodapedagógus* (kindergarten pedagogues) and *napközis tanár* (school pedagogues). Each group undergoes separate training. Training models and arrangements are in a process of change, affected by the Bologna process, which is addressing the parity of education qualifications.

Percentage presence of tertiary qualified staff in kindergarten services: About 50% of staff in kindergarten are trained pedagogues, and other staff are trained day care pedagogues. Over 90% of total staff are fully trained.

Child-staff ratios: FDC (family day care): 7:2; crèche: 12:2; kindergarten: 22:2; OSP for children 6-12 years: 26:1.

Maximum group size: FDC (family day care): 7; crèche: 12; kindergarten: 25; OSP: 26.

Auspices

Responsibility for ECEC policy in Hungary is shared between two ministries: the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities is responsible for centre-based care for under-3-year-old children. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the much larger kindergarten education system for children 3-6 years, which is seen as the first stage of public education.

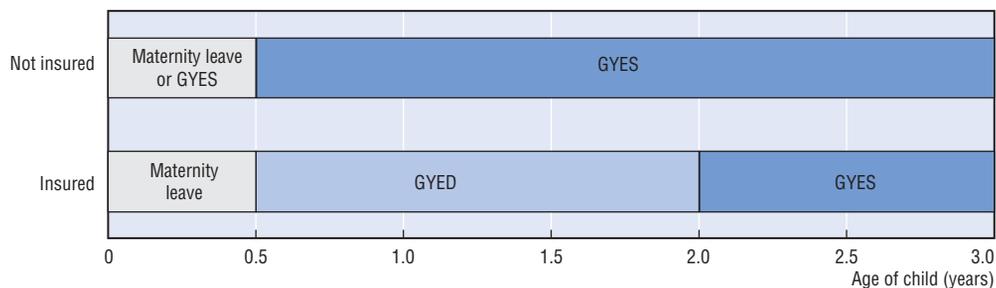
Since transition, public administration in Hungary has been decentralised, and is shared across different levels. With regard to ECEC provision for children aged 3-6 years, the Ministry of Education oversees the preparation and issue of legislation and regulations, develops a national curriculum document and organises the associated inspection system. In addition, this Ministry develops and oversees schools of education and training for kindergarten pedagogues. However, different administrative, supervisory and political responsibilities are divided among several parties at central, regional (county), local (settlement) and institutional levels. At local and regional levels, education – including kindergarten education – is integrated into the general system of public administration. Public administration at these levels is under the control of elected bodies which enjoy political independence. The most substantial responsibilities including funding reside, however, with local governments at settlement level, which receive block grants from the central government.

For 0- to 3-year-olds, the 1997 Law 31 assigned child protection and child welfare provision, under the supervision of the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs (currently, the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities). For 0- to 3-year-olds, the Ministry develops and oversees legislation, and the training of child care workers. As in the kindergarten system, the regulation and inspection of day care provision is a state task supervised by the Ministry, but carried out by county guardianship authorities. The central government provides funding to local (settlement) authorities who are responsible for service provision and inspection. The Association of Hungarian Child care Centres (*Magyar Bölcsődék Egyesülete*, MBE) and the Democratic Trade Union of Child care Centre (*Bölcsődei Dolgozók Demokratikus Szakszervezete*, BDDSZ), take an active role in child care centre provision. The law also regulates co-operation between trade unions and the government, stating that it is obligatory to hold discussions with the representative trade unions of the affected groups prior to the formulation of legislation.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 54%, decreasing from 57.3% in 1990. Of those, 5.1% work part-time, while 2.2% of men work part-time (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). Mothers with a youngest child under 6 years had an employment rate of 30% in 2002, and constituted 8% of part-time employment (OECD *Society at a Glance*). Mothers with a youngest child under 3 had an employment rate of 30.5% in 2004.

Maternity and parental leave: A comprehensive series of support and leave measures are accessible to Hungarian mothers. In summary, two different regimes are available: the GYES or universal child-rearing allowance for uninsured (unemployed and not receiving unemployment benefit) women; and the GYED for insured (employed) women. For uninsured parents, the GYES child-rearing allowance (equivalent to the old age pension) is available for 2.5 years. Under certain conditions, this allowance is also available – but for a shorter period – to the grandparents of the child and to insured women who can combine it with their own regime. Insured women (women who have been working) receive a pregnancy-confinement and maternity leave allowance, paid up 70% of an average salary (capped at HUF 83 000 per month) for a period of 168 days (24 weeks). It can then be followed – for a period of 53 weeks – by the GYED – still remunerated to 70% but to a ceiling level. Thereafter, the beneficiary can avail of a year long GYES, paid at the flat rate.



Notes: Maternity leave: 24 weeks, up to 4 weeks before birth. 70% of earnings.

GYES: Until the child's 3rd birthday. Flat-rate payment.

GYED: From the end of the maternity leave period until the child's 2nd birthday. 70% of earnings up to a ceiling.

The GYED is taxable income, and the period spent in it is considered to be part of the years in service and thus entitles the recipient to a pension. In sum, all mothers in Hungary have the possibility of State support for at least 36 months after the birth of their child, and in the case of most women, for nearly 3 years, when, in general, kindergarten becomes available. Existing legislation ensures that employers provide women returning from child care leave the same job or equivalent to that worked before childbirth. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the legislation because the low return to work levels may also be due to a depressed employment situation.

Access and provision

ECEC provision in Hungary in all types of services is offered as a full day programme for the working year. Kindergartens are open 10 hours per day, 50 weeks per year. Child care centres are open 8-10 hours per day, closing only for the summer holiday or 4-5 weeks. Opening hours are set by the maintaining authority, which is the local authority in most cases. Usually, the hours are adjusted to family needs and hence, they can vary from centre

to centre. Access to a place in child care for all children under 3 whose parents cannot care for them during the day is assured under law. It is the duty of local authorities to provide the places needed. In practice however, access is often denied to parents who are unemployed, or live in poor municipalities or neighbourhoods that cannot afford to fund a crèche service. In addition, children of parents receiving the child care or other allowances are normally not accepted in services. Although child welfare services can refer children in need to attend child care services, priority criteria often deny access to at-risk children who need these services most of all. Payment (primarily for cost of food) can be waived based on the family socio-economic situation. Many families receive places at no direct cost to them.

Rates of provision

0-1 year: Almost all children are cared for by parents or, informally, by relatives at home. 0.2% of babies are in ECEC settings.

1-3 years: 4.3% of children aged 1-2 years attend services, the proportion increasing to 14.2% for 2- to 3-year-olds. Some 9.3% of 0- to 3-year-olds access a publicly licensed service for at least part of the day. After three years, access and involvement is much higher, corresponding to the end of parental leave.

3-6 years: Approximately 85% of 3- to 4-year-olds attend kindergarten, as do 91% of 4- to 5-year-olds and 97% of 5- to 6-year-olds. Enrolment of children in kindergarten depends on the parent until the first day of the academic year in which the child reaches the fifth birthday. From that point, parents are obliged to ensure each child takes part in kindergarten as a preparation for school. There are no separate educational programmes within kindergarten, but all children must attend regular kindergarten between 5-6 years of age. Overall 87% of 3- to 6-year-olds attend kindergarten, although some children older than six are in kindergartens because eligibility for this programme extends beyond a child's sixth birthday. 93% of eligible children attend kindergarten. Although there is little official data available, the children who are most likely to be absent from kindergarten or be retained there after they turn 6 years may come from low-income and Roma families.

Out-of-school care: Elementary schools organise after-school care services, for the children between the ages of 6-14, attending those schools. These services are available, in the morning before teaching begins and in the afternoon after teaching is over. Sometimes children are in small groups with the same *napközis tanár* (day care pedagogue), sometimes they have a choice of after school "club" activities. Among the 3 696 elementary schools 3 151 provided after school care in the 1999/2000 academic year. In 2003/04, 40.6% of all elementary school pupils attended these services according to National Statistical Office (KSH) data.

Summer camps can be organised by schools that have access to a recreation site somewhere in the countryside (sometimes in the same town, sometimes elsewhere). These sites are usually owned by the local authority where the school is located. Kindergarten children can attend such camps for different time periods, usually between 1-2 weeks. The camps provide day care and various leisure activities for children. Sometimes, the activities include, or are focused on school-related programmes such as mathematics, etc. In these camps, usually the teachers of the school and/or some parents take turns and reside with the different groups of children. Summer camps can also be organised by different voluntary and private sector organisations, although these may not be related to schools.

Children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: Until the early 1990s, public policy encouraged segregated education for children with disabilities and other special needs, and a number of specialist institutions for specific conditions were in place. More recently, children are being integrated into mainstream child care settings with 173 of 532 centres (almost a third) working in an integrated or semi-integrated way. However, as coverage is weak in the child care sector, many children remain at home without accessing services that can provide sufficient support for their developmental levels. In kindergartens, segregation is still the norm, although change is evident. The 1996 revisions of the Public Education Act gave an impetus to kindergarten enrolment of children with additional learning needs: a child with a speech-based need or light mental disability should receive a normative grant equivalent to that of two healthy children, whereas, children with a physical or sensory disability, autistic children and children with medium severity disabilities should receive a grant equivalent to three children. In 1999, 0.6% of the total kindergarten population comprised children with designated disabilities (Country Note for Hungary, p. 32).

Children from low-income families: Child poverty in Hungary is concentrated on rural and Roma children. In 2003, some 18.6% of children 0-6 years live in poverty (TARKI, 2003, *Stabilizálódó Társadalomszerkezet, TÁRKI Monitorjelentések, 2003 – TÁRKI is the Social Research Centre in Hungary*), but more recent estimates indicate the level has declined, and is currently at 8.8% (OECD average is 11.2%). Since 2003, a free-meal policy is in place for all disadvantaged children in kindergartens, and early kindergarten enrolment of Roma children is improving.

Ethnic and bilingual children: Hungary has a comprehensive charter, under the Minorities Law of 1993, to ensure individual and collective minority rights. Hungarian minorities can establish self-government in settlements and districts, with children given in the law, priority status and particular advantages. These include special normative grants for language, and in the case of Roma, for transmission of Roma culture. Since 2004, Roma children in kindergartens also are eligible for free meals if parents so wish. Kindergartens may also receive grants attached to children from disadvantaged backgrounds and claim rights for integration education. Under this law, if parents of (at least 8) minority children so request, the local authority must arrange a special minority class or study group. In recent years kindergartens that develop programmes supporting inclusive education and/or fostering Roma culture and traditions are eligible for an additional normative grant (Country Note for Hungary, p. 34).

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: Child licensing regimes vary according to the type of service. In family day care, registration is required and irregular health checks are conducted on the services. The local authorities provide monitoring and support to administrators and ECEC services. Licenses are issued under strict conditions and inspections occur every four years. A Register of Child Care Experts is maintained, and external evaluations commissioned as deemed necessary. In kindergartens, registration, health checks, and curriculum requirements are ensured by in-service training (professional development) requirements and pedagogical supervision provided by accredited supervisory bodies.

Funding: Expenditure on kindergarten for children aged 3-6 years is 0.79% of GDP. Almost 91.7% of this expenditure came from public sources, and 6.2% from household expenditure. 14.7% of all expenditure on educational institutions is allocated to pre-primary whereas 16.9% of the children/students are enrolled at this level of education (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). 90% of total ECEC expenditure in Hungary goes towards maintaining public provision. The remaining government funding is channelled towards the small non-profit sector, that is, to kindergartens provided by voluntary organisations and churches. Public subvention of child care and kindergarten exists in the form of set grants for ECEC from central government, alongside complementary funding from the local authorities. Overall, the central government provides 25-30% of costs; municipal local government provides about 60%, and parents the remaining 10-15%. Effectively, parents pay only for the cost of food. Fees are subsidised for all parents, leaving parents to contribute about 10% of the overall costs of child care and 12% of the costs of early education provision. Relative to GDP per capita the annual parental expenditure on ECEC amounts to 8.2% for child care and 3.5% for pre-school education (Hungarian Government, 2004). Public expenditure per child, based on full-time equivalents and expressed in USD is USD 2 758 for crèche and USD 3 475 for kindergarten. Spending has greatly increased since 1998 (indexed at 100), reaching 224 for child care and 172 for kindergarten. In calculating this expenditure, two kinds of full-time services are included: *bölcsde* for under 3 (referred to as child care centres and/or creches); and *óvoda* (referred to as kindergarten) for children between 3 and compulsory school age.

Staffing and training: In child care and early years settings, staff – both child care workers and pedagogues – are almost exclusively female. Staff are also ageing (the average age is now 41 years) and candidates for the training colleges are declining in numbers. Between 1986 and 1996, the proportion of child care workers aged between 19 and 25 dropped from 18.5% to 4.1% (Korintus, 2005, “Overview of ECEC in Hungary”, *Children in Europe*, Issue 10, Edinburgh). Specific data on full/part-time appointment of staff are not available although most staff work full-time. Two-thirds of staff in kindergartens working directly with children are tertiary-trained pedagogues, and according to estimates, 60% of the remaining one-third are trained assistants. In centres for children under 3, 90.1% of child care workers (they are not nurses) working directly with children are qualified.

Training requirements: Kindergarten pedagogues and child care workers undergo separate training, the former being trained at tertiary level, the latter generally at secondary vocational level. One-year and two-year post secondary courses are also becoming available. Kindergarten training courses have also been available for decades and 98% of kindergarten teachers have a 3-year tertiary degree from an approved training college. The OECD visiting team noted particular expertise in music, handcrafts and the visual arts. Training models and arrangements are in a process of change, affected by the Bologna process, which is addressing the parity of education qualifications. Basic training for nursery workers is being moved up to a post-secondary level, and plans are underway to lift it to a tertiary level, which many would like to see integrated with kindergarten training. Where kindergarten training is concerned, concern is expressed that the number of hours spent in the field on teaching practice during study years may decrease, and that the new pre-service curriculum may not provide sufficient in-depth pedagogy and psychology for pedagogical work. There is also hope that the recent integration of teacher training colleges with universities will further improve the quality of training for kindergarten pedagogues. *Dajka* (kindergarten assistants) support the kindergarten

teacher's work. The *Dajka* help the children with care routines, and ensure the cleanliness of the environment. There are no qualification requirements for these workers but if they wish, there is a 2 200-hour training (40% theory and 60% practice) secondary certificate developed specially for them, which they can obtain.

Work conditions: Statutory working hours are 40/week both for pedagogues and assistants, although the daily hours to be spent with children for child care workers have been reduced from 8 hours to 7 (Background Report for Hungary, 2004). Staff work in shifts, as kindergartens normally open for 10 hours per day, from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. The organisation of shift hours varies, but the aim is to ensure full deployment of staff during the core hours of the day. For both child care workers and kindergarten pedagogues, there are statutory minimum levels of staff development. Child care workers receive at least 60 hours and kindergarten pedagogues receive 120 hours per 7 years of service. Courses taken must be accredited to be counted in the hours and funding is available to cover the full cost of recently accredited courses. A shortage of child care workers exists in centres for children below 3 years. This situation, combined with training colleges having few students because the prestige and salary of ECEC workers is low, will present a serious challenge to staffing in future years.

Child-staff ratios: For family day care the maximum group size is 7, requiring a child-staff ratio of 7:2. In *bölcsde* (crèche) the maximum group size is 12 with child-staff ratio at 12:2. *Óvoda* (kindergarten) provision has a maximum group size set at 25. In these settings, a child-staff ratio of 22:2 is in place. Regulations do not specify that the required ratios must be met at all times of the day.

Curriculum and pedagogy: A specific curriculum or pedagogical methodology is available for all 3- to 6-year-olds. A National Framework Curriculum has been formulated to support pedagogues in developing their programmes, but centres are free to use a number of alternative curricula. The modification of the Education Law in 2003 made it compulsory for kindergartens to review and adjust their educational programmes according to local needs, thereby formally involving parents in the process. As in the northern and other central European countries, an integrated concept of pedagogy, *nevelés*, permeates the approach to children. *Nevelés* has a meaning close to the concept of “upbringing” and involves the inseparable concepts of care, pedagogy, and education. Services are seen as providing a setting that meets children’s physical and psychological needs as well as supporting their learning and development. The focus is on promoting children’s autonomy and creating opportunities for active learning (Korintus, 2005). Child care workers in nurseries give priority to “teaching the children how to do everyday tasks and become self-reliant and autonomous” while pedagogues in kindergartens emphasise “passing on cultural values and preparation for school”.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: The 2003 Education Law specifies that kindergartens should have in place a quality assurance programme which emphasises self-evaluation. Service providers (normally local municipalities) are required under the same law to inspect the work and effectiveness of public education institutions (kindergartens and schools) once every four years. However, it is alleged that kindergartens are assessed less often than schools.

Parent and community involvement: The Education Law of 1993 states the legal rights of parents and requires their participation in kindergarten education. The modification of the Law in 2003 strengthens this requirement further. The development of local quality

assurance in accord with the recent Education Law (2003) will ensure that families are more directly involved in kindergarten education than they have been in the past. As far as child care for under 3 is concerned, Law 31 of 1997 also states the legal rights of parents and places the duty on *bölcsde* (child care centres) to set up a “forum” that deals with complaints and problems, and which involves representatives of parents.

OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified by the OECD Review team were:

- *Addressing administration, co-ordination and decentralisation:* Two major challenges that hampered efforts to improve ECEC across the country were the division between early education and care and difficulties in implementing policies because of the highly decentralised nature of Hungarian administration. In particular, smaller settlements in low employment or rural regions faced the greatest challenges in providing and assuring quality ECEC services to young children in their jurisdiction.
- *Addressing challenges to access and quality:* Access to services is variable in Hungary, with rural areas often lacking services. Local authorities have many duties to fulfil, and the funding necessary for these tasks is often not enough. In particular, access for children below the age of 3 is limited and the need to improve access for children with additional educational needs – children with disabilities, children in under-served rural areas and Roma children – are aspects of current service provision needing development and increased funding. In addition, the ageing, training and status of the *bölcsöde* workforce are a major concern. Recruitment is becoming difficult as the economy expands, with training levels and remuneration too low to attract younger recruits.
- *Addressing weaknesses in quality:* The overall management of quality, sensitive and responsive programming for diversity groups, especially for Roma children, and more effective recruitment and training of staff were considered to be at the core of quality improvement. Such management could be further helped by greater attention to research on children’s services from the research and evaluation facilities that exist in Hungary.
- *Strengthening general funding:* The favourable investment by Hungary in kindergarten education is beneficial to many young children. However local criteria for entry tend to keep out disadvantaged and Roma children despite the strong national laws in favour of these groups. Although economic circumstances may pose numerous challenges across social and educational programmes in Hungary, experiences in other countries call for caution in cutting back funding to early childhood services. In particular, reductions in staffing levels can result in substantial lowering of quality especially in services for at-risk children.

Developments

Significant recent developments include:

- The National Development Plan prepared for the EU, which proposed the aim of establishing *bölcsde-s* (child care centres for under 3) in every settlement with a population of at least 10 000.
- The modification of the Education Law in 2003, which now requires *óvoda-s* (kindergartens) to admit Roma children from the age of 3.

- The re-shuffle in government in 2004 resulting in the new Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, which is strongly motivated to expand child care for children under the age of 3.
- Access to EU funding sources, which have increased the budgets for ongoing training, and for new buildings for children's services (both *bölcsde* and *óvoda*).
- New governmental allocations and designated funding for special needs children in *óvoda*-s.