

# **OECD Country Note**

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

***in***

***Italy***

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Purposes of the OECD Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for Italy 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.<sup>1</sup>

2. Italy is one of 12 countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, 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 Italy 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.

5. Italy was the third country to be visited in the course of the review. In preparation for the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in Italy was commissioned by the Italian Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione (referred to hereafter as the Ministry of Education). The work is referenced throughout this text as the Background Report and cited as (Italian Background Report, 1999). Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, Background Reports are intended to provide a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available quantitative and evaluation data. They are an important source of information in the review process, and their preparation should normally provide a

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1. A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998a).

forum of debate for the different actors in early childhood in each country. Following authorisation by the issuing countries, they are placed with the Country Notes on the OECD website (<http://www.oecd.org/els/education/ecec>).

## The review process

6. In Italy, central government responsibility for the health and well being of young children from 0-3 years rests mainly with the Ministry of Health. Between the Ministry and the actual target population lies a whole series of devolved and decentralised mechanisms, so that *de facto* responsibility for the delivery of programmes for young children lies with regional and local authorities. For children aged 3-6 years, major responsibility shifts to the Ministry of Education. However, half of the children attend municipal, church and private *scuole materne* or pre-primary schools.

7. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of OECD Secretariat members and experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visited Italy from 8 to 19 March, 1999. The two-week visit was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education. In the course of the visit, the team interviewed 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 (see Appendix 3 for the programme of visits). Following consultation with Ministry officials and other national figures in the field of early childhood, six cities situated in central, southern, and northern Italy were selected to participate in the review, namely, Rome, Naples, Palermo, Milan, Reggio Emilia, and Pistoia. The selection of cities and the particular sites visited reflected not only a concern for geographic diversity but also the desire to show the review team a representative selection of both typical and innovative services.

8. Prior to the actual site visits, the review team met in Rome with the Minister of Education and several of his senior officials. Both the Ministry and OECD representatives reiterated the intent to consider policy implications not only from the perspective of policy makers but also from the point of view of the individuals who administer, participate in, and benefit from the services. On that basis, members of the review team were invited to meet and talk with a wide variety of individuals associated with Italy's *servizi per l'infanzia*, including city officials and representatives of several of Italy's public and private universities. In the course of these first briefing sessions, the review team also gained valuable insights into the commitment of the government to extend and improve early childhood services. Indeed, a vast majority of the issues identified by the review team and to be discussed in this report were anticipated in these initial meetings.

9. Site visits covered a range of services for young children from four months to six years. The review team was given the opportunity to visit: communal and private *asili nidi* (infant-toddler centres); state, communal, and private *scuole materne* or *scuole dell'infanzia* (pre-primary programs for 3- to 6-year-olds); and several examples of the *nuove tipologie* (new typology) services. The latter included communal parent-child centres in Rome and Milan, a hospital-based programme in Naples for children with chronic illness, and two educational resource centres for children, families, and educators in the city of Pistoia. The site visits were hospitable, stimulating, and highly informative. By the end of the two weeks, members of the review team had an improved understanding of the diversity and contexts of Italian early care and educational services. Many additional quantitative and descriptive materials were provided by the hosts in each of the various cities where the review team travelled. The site visits concluded with a final debriefing at the Ministry in Rome.

10. Lack of time deprived the team of an opportunity to visit ECEC programmes in more rural settings, nor was there opportunity to visit or raise issues associated with the provision of services to

culturally or linguistically diverse populations of children and their families. With the exception of the visit to Reggio Emilia, there was also little opportunity to talk directly with parents, but many informants referred to the need for a flexible system of services responsive to the changing needs of Italian families.

## Structure of the Country Note

11. This Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in Italy. In the light of Italy's current ambitious reform initiatives, it seeks (a) to review current early care and educational policies and practices as they currently meet the needs of Italian children and their families; (b) to consider the many local initiatives and national reform proposals, particularly those with potential for replication in diverse settings; and (c) to make tentative recommendations that would render success more likely, as well as to indicate areas for possible future effort and emphasis. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, literature surveys and the rich experience and observations of the review team.

12. In addition to the present introduction, which forms *Chapter 1*, the structure of the Country Note is as follows: *Chapter 2* provides an overview of the various contexts of early childhood programming found in Italy. Political pluralism, regionalism and active social participation linked to a changing demographic situation, increased participation of women in the labour market and wide disparities in economic and social development all lead to a great diversity of approaches to young children and families. *Chapter 3* provides a short history of ECEC in Italy, followed by an overview of the current policies and provision, innovation and experimentation, and current reform efforts. In *Chapter 4*, the main issues related to policy and practice in ECEC that were identified by the reviewers are outlined. Five issues are chosen for comment: policy coherence and co-ordination; accessibility; quality; training and professional development; and funding and financing. The conclusions, in *Chapter 5*, offer some brief policy recommendations for future thought and action.

## Acknowledgements

13. The OECD wishes to thank the Italian Ministry of Education for making this review possible and, in particular, all those involved in preparing the *Background Report* and the comprehensive programme proposed for the team review visit. The reviewers also wish to place on record their appreciation of the hospitable, open and informative meetings that were held in the Ministry in Rome and in each of the six municipalities that they had the pleasure of visiting.

14. Throughout the *Country Note*, the analyses and suggestions offered are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a visiting review team—no matter how well briefed—in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. In addition, the state of early childhood care and education in Italy is both dynamic and volatile, characterised by ongoing negotiations between state, church and municipalities. While all the members of the team are very experienced as researchers and policy analysts in the field of ECEC, they are clearly influenced by their own cultural perspectives and histories. A two-week fieldwork period, even when multiplied by the number of members of a team, is limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified.

15. The facts and opinions expressed in the *Country Note* are the sole responsibility of the review team. While the reviewers acknowledge with gratitude the valuable help received from ministry officials, researchers and practitioners in Italy, they have no part in any shortcomings which this document may present. To mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the *Country Note* will be read in conjunction with the *Background Report* issued by Italy, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

## Terminology

16. The terminology used throughout the report follows the usage of the former European Commission Network on Childcare. Children aged 0-3 years covers children from birth up to 36 months, i.e. up to their third birthday, but does not include 3 year olds. Children aged 3-6 years covers children from 36 months to 72 months, i.e. up to their sixth birthday, but does not include six year olds.

Among the Italian phrases used throughout this report are the following:

- *Asilo nido*: a centre for children aged 3-36 months, usually open on a full-day, all-year basis.
- *Scuola materna*: a pre-primary school for children from 3-6 years that remains open up to eight hours per day. More than half of these schools are directly founded and funded by the state, especially in the South. The remainder are run by municipalities and private (in majority, Catholic) providers. Municipal pre-primary schools are often called *scuola dell'infanzia* (infant school).
- *Nuova tipologia* or *servizio integrativo*: a centre for children aged 0-3 or 0-6 years and for their caregivers, offering flexible opening hours, diversified services and opportunities for part-time care, play and socialisation. Examples of such services can also be called *tempo per la famiglia*, *centro gioco*, *spazio bambini*, *area bambini*.

17. The exchange rate for the Italian lira was in November, 1999: 1 Euro = 1936.26 Italian lira; 1 US dollar = 1822.26 Italian lira.

## CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL FEATURES SHAPING ECEC POLICY IN ITALY

### Political and social context

18. Italy is a democratic republic organised on the basis of a Constitution drawn up in 1946-47, which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1948. Its history since the Second World War has been characterised by tremendous economic growth and unequal advances in modernising the social and political structures of the country. Much negotiation has taken place between the different political tendencies and between government and the traditional institutions. Over more recent decades, local, provincial, and regional entities have joined the debate, with a very-present emphasis on the values of diversity and decentralisation.

19. During the 1970's and 1980's, numerous social policies—some of which were regarded as the most advanced in Europe—were explicitly designed to improve the living and working conditions of women, families, and young children. Issues associated with the care of young children were increasingly seen as public concerns rather than “women's personal problems”. Among the many laws passed that contributed to dramatic and almost immediate changes in some corners of the Italian social landscape were those supporting parental leave and pre-primary schools for children 3-6 years of age (New, 1993). Today, the principle of universal services for families with young children enjoys firm support in Italian public opinion. It was the review team's experience in interviewing representatives of all groupings—political, municipal, teachers and parents—that public opinion in Italy not only favoured but was highly enthusiastic about educational reform and investment in early childhood. Indeed, great hopes are pinned on the early childhood sector as an area where enthusiasm, initiative, autonomy and sensitivity to local needs can be pursued.

### Economic context

20. Within the past 50 years there have been two major sources of influence on how Italy has managed its economic resources: World War II and the European Union. The repair of Italy following the war and the rapid modernisation which characterised the “Italian miracle” entailed changes that occurred “more rapidly and were more widespread in their effects than in any other Western European country” (Agnew, 1990, p. 772). While many of these changes were associated with Italy's shift from an agrarian to an urbanised, industrial society, other influences—such as the decrease in average family size and a spate of new laws based on egalitarian principles and individual rights—convey Italy's commitment to the ideologies as well as the economic bases of a modern society. Requirements for membership in EU have more recently served as an impetus to efforts to stabilise Italy's economic status.

21. Italy is a wealthy country with a GDP per capita (using purchasing power parities) of almost \$21,800, just under France's GDP of \$21,900 (OECD, 2000). As early as the 1950's, per capita incomes in Northern Italy were similar or superior to those in the rest of Northern Europe. Cities such as Reggio Emilia and Trento enjoy currently some of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe and neighbouring

cities in the region boast some of the finest industries in Europe. Yet, a metropolis such as Naples in the south struggles with the unemployment of 25% of its adult population. Such disparities in economic levels manifest themselves in a variety of ways affecting the quality of life for young children and their families, including but not limited to the provision and type of early care and educational services for young children.

22. The economy of the south has also long been characterised by under-industrialisation and reliance on public service jobs. A tradition of social differentiation with low levels of civic engagement (Putnam, 1993) has contributed to gross inequities in terms of life styles and educational opportunities. Achievement rates in education in the south are lower than in the north, while rates of unemployment are much higher (over 20% compared to around 5% in the north). Over two-thirds of Italy's impoverished families and most of the country's young children live in the southern part of the nation (Italian Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998).

23. According to the most recent OECD economic survey on Italy (OECD, 1999), adverse forces in the south include an inefficient public administration and a chronic lack of infrastructure, mainly in the area of electricity, telecommunications and water. The 1990s witnessed a decline in public investment owing to corruption scandals. In particular, the participation rates for women in the labour force—a factor which in the north has fuelled demand for public child care—remain low, with less than a third of women being employed in the southern provinces, compared to over 40% for the whole country. In addition, unemployment rates for women who have been in the work force reaches a national mean of 16.8% but reaches a level of 35% in Campania (ISTAT, 1998). The effects of such economic disadvantage and the weak access of women to salaried activity are felt most keenly in families with young children.

24. The OECD report points, however, to more hopeful signs that have recently become discernible. The number of new firms in the South is on the increase, while unemployment is falling and exports have begun to grow. The government too has initiated a more comprehensive and focused approach so as to bring the economy of the south closer in parity with the north. A newly created Treasury department, *Dipartimento per le politiche di sviluppo e di coesione*, is now co-ordinating development efforts made by central and local governments, the EU and the private sector.

25. Similar attention is being directed by the state toward improving early childhood services in the south. Some of these efforts have been partial and top-down, for example, directed to providing pre-schools for children aged 3 to 6 years in communities that were unable or unwilling to sustain such an effort. Yet it is clear that a strong intention is present to improve educational opportunities for young children in the south. In addition, as we shall later develop, several promising early childhood initiatives are being sponsored in southern municipalities in partnership with northern municipalities and the support of the state.

## **Education**

26. Two broad features of Italian education have a bearing on this review of early care and education:

- the significant increases in the average educational levels of Italian citizens, and particularly of Italian women, since World War II;
- the tripartite (state/church/municipality) nature of the pre-school sector, in the age range three to six years.

27. In 1948, the Italian Constitution affirmed the right of children to benefit from compulsory education for at least eight years (since 1999, an extra year of compulsory schooling has been added). The “Italian Miracle” of the 1950’s concretised this right through a vast programme of public school building. By the late 1960’s, the Italian government had made public education accessible, overcoming many though not all of the prior obstacles (such as lack of facilities and transportation). Enrolment rates today are high at all levels of education, with 56% of the Italian women and over 43% of Italian men now having at least a high school diploma (CENSIS, ISTAT, 1998). In addition, many of these adults have themselves personally attended a *scuola materna*. In spite of these educational accomplishments, difficulties persist, with drop-out from secondary education remaining a problem in many regions of the country.

28. As in many other countries, the recognition that the state should invest in educational and socialisation services for infants and toddlers is more recent. In fact, in terms of state intervention, the early childhood system in Italy has been focussed almost exclusively on the 3-6 year olds. There is very limited public provision for children under three years—only 6%-8% of children are placed in infant-toddler centres (*asili nidi*), which increasingly have been taken in charge by the municipalities. Over three-quarters of the *asili nidi* are situated in north central and northern Italy, far fewer being available in central Italy and the south. In addition to the *asili nidi*, it is estimated that care for children under three in Italy is provided in the following way: 27% in full home care by mothers with another 48% in part-time care by mothers and relatives (nearly always a grandparent). Another 15% are cared for by child-minders coming into the home, while fathers, family day care and other minders make up the rest (European Commission Childcare Network, 1996).

### **Decentralisation, civic engagement and social progress**

29. Through the decentralisation law of 1975 which authorised regional governments to distribute national revenues, the Italian state contributed to the establishment of numerous strong regional and local governments and initiatives, particularly in the north and central parts of the country (Agnew, 1990). By the late 1970’s, well over half of Italian cities, and especially those in the north and central regions, had neighbourhood councils established for the most part by local initiative. While a 1976 law limited the actions of such councils, those in the major cities of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, for example, were integrated into the larger municipal organisations, thereby creating a synergy to improve social, educational and cultural environments (Agnew, 1990). In short, devolved government has proven particularly useful in regions whose citizens have become accustomed to participating in the establishment of local social agendas, school management, and cultural activities.

30. This Italian approach to citizen participation has become a subject of study by international scholars, such as Robert Putnam (1993), who are interested in the relationship between various levels of civic engagement and the quality of life found within democratic societies. However, it would be naïve to suppose that the ideal of civic participation is always reached. Chronic economic, social and educational inequalities have limited the possibilities of many communities for collaborative engagement with outside agencies. In such situations, family networks and local patronage are the recognised bases for a common approach to social issues, generally within traditional frameworks. Social attitudes can remain unsympathetic to women with young children who wish to join the work force or to supporting parents in their task of rearing and educating young children.

31. A common difficulty is the “manifesto” approach to laws and regulations that can exist at central level. In educational matters, much time and effort, it seems, was spent in the past in drafting laws, decrees, framework agreements and the like, with insufficient attention given to actual grassroots needs and to supporting local initiative (OECD, 1998b). For early childhood policy, such an approach would

pose real difficulties, as successful early childhood initiatives must take into account the family and cultural contexts of the young child.

32. It is not surprising then that the benefits of the tripartite system of governing (state, regional, and local) have been especially apparent in initiatives for young children and their families, which, for the younger age-group at least, have remained mostly within the field of competence of the local authorities. Some of these authorities have been able to initiate programmes for young children that are widely recognised for their outstanding levels of theory, implementation and quality. The power of Italian regionalism will therefore be revisited in the discussion to follow regarding innovations in early care and educational services.

### **Demography, families and young children**

33. The decades following World War II were characterised by a number of events and activities that resulted in significant changes in the circumstances of many Italian families. Perhaps most significant has been the increasing prominence of Italian girls and women in education, the workforce, and on the political scene. Throughout the 1970's and 80's, women continued to join the workforce. Their visibility further contributed to a level of acceptance of work for women, even those with children, as normal and legitimate. Assuming what Italian sociologists have referred to as *doppia presenza* [double presence], Italian mothers now play major roles both inside and out of the home.<sup>2</sup> Several decades later, these changes, in turn, are apparent in the standard demographic indices, as well as within the more socially and personally experienced aspects of daily living, including family size and composition.

34. While the overall size of the Italian population (approximately 57 million) appears to be relatively stable, with no net increase over the last 10 years, its features are changing in ways that are both dramatic and subtle. For much of the twentieth century, Italy has been a highly homogenous society, with Italian citizens tracing their ancestors back for decades if not centuries. In part because of economic pressures in North Africa and, more recently, as a result of war and civil unrest in the Balkans, an increasing number of immigrants (conservatively estimated at just under 1 million) have settled in cities small and large across the Italian peninsula, with particularly high representation in the more industrial settings in the north. To these figures must be added the hundreds of thousands of Italian families migrating internally from the countryside to the cities, since the Second World War. Thus, compared to the average national density of 191 inhabitants per square kilometre, the region of Lombardia, which includes the city of Milan, now has a population density of 377, a figure exceeded only by the region of Campania (home to the city of Naples), whose population density is 426. Obviously, these changes in number and cultural diversity have a direct bearing on the efforts of such cities to provide health and educational services for families of young children.

35. Research undertaken by the Italian Ministry of Social Affairs (1998) shows that in comparison to other European countries, actual social expenditure on young children is low compared to expenditure on the elderly (over 65 years). Up to recently, family and child allowances in Italy were meagre in comparison to its northern neighbours, and their allocation was linked to means testing and having employment. Recent governments have taken measures to link increases, not only with inflation but also with family income and size. Yet, poverty levels (household income less than 50% of national household expenditure) have remained high, touching in general around 20% of families (the averages for the south are much greater). In particular, families with three or more children are disproportionately poor. On the other hand, other indices suggest continuing improvement in Italian health services for children and families, although, as in many other EU countries, children born to non-European immigrant families do not benefit sufficiently

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2. Although research points to an increased level of participation on the part of Italian fathers in child care, their level of involvement has not corresponded with the changing image of the Italian mother.

from social and health services (Italian Ministry of Social Affairs, 1998). Concern has also been expressed about the efficiency of the maternal and infancy services and the equitable access to health care for all mothers and infants, factors that weigh significantly on the development of children and that are important in integrated childhood policy.

**Table 1**

<b>Population</b> source: ISTAT,1998	57,563,354 [of which almost 1 million or 1.7%, are immigrants]	Approximately one-third of Italy's immigrants are from Africa; another third are European.
<b>Birthrates</b> Source: ISTAT, 1999; CENSIS, 1999	9/1000. The range is from 12.3/1000 in Campania to 6.7/1000 in Liguria]	Fertility rates declined from 2.67 in 1965 to 1.22 in 1994, to 1.19 in 1998. The trend is nation-wide, with a 1996 average family size of 2.7 persons.
<b>Infant mortality</b>	5.3/1000. ISTAT, 1999	Just above the European average.

36. The transactional nature of the relationship between the socio-economic context, cultural beliefs, and childcare practices is apparent in the Italian family. Although, divorce (5%) and broken families are still rare in Italy, Italian families are undergoing profound change. Italian men and women are delaying marriage, a factor which in combination with Italy's current high cost of living, are likely contributors to the rapid decline in the births (from 2.67 in 1965 to 1.19 in 1998), now giving Italy one of the lowest birth rates in Europe. This phenomenon is certainly linked with greater employment opportunities, improved educational levels and the passing of liberal family legislation.

37. The relatively short duration of maternal leave (21 weeks with 80% wage replacement) and the lack of suitable childcare also make it difficult for many women to reconcile career with family responsibilities. A consequence is that although many women are engaged in industry and public life, the majority of women remain at home to look after their children in their early years. In fact, according to OECD statistics, only 40% of women are in salaried work. The availability of Italian women for the labour market remains therefore low in comparison, for example, to France with 60% of women in the labour force, Germany with 61%, and Denmark with over 74%.

38. Again, a dramatic change in the popular image of the Italian family has occurred through the rise of single-child families. Italian newly-weds clearly no longer feel compelled to add children to the family unit in a society where, up to recently, people thought in terms of a future extended family made up of aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews. Rather, Italians as a whole have embraced the principle of "less is more" and, drawing upon liberal contraception and abortion policies, are experiencing an extremely low birth rate and a marked ageing of their society, e.g. in the 1951 census, 18.25% of the population was aged between 0 and 4 years: in the 1991 census 9.68% but by 1996 this age group represented only 4.78% of the population (Italian Background Report, 1999). This change in the number of children per household is also felt at the community level, with significant implications for both the provision and the interpretation of early care and education services.

39. Not only are Italian families declining in terms of the number of children; extended family households are also increasingly rare and contemporary Italian families are now much less likely to include grandparents or other relatives beyond the nuclear family. The growing frequency with which young Italian children attend *scuola materna* has contributed to favouring the child's need for increased time with a peer group over time spent with *amici, vicini, e parenti* [friends, neighbours, and relatives]. Indeed, the

child's rights to relationships with other children outside of the family, particularly in the one-child family context, is now seen by many as a primary rationale for early childhood educational services. Yet, the value of family relations is maintained whenever modern Italian families remain in close proximity to one another. Links to grandparents and bonds between the generations are strong, a fact that is taken into account by many of the more innovative municipal programmes.

40. What seems to have remained constant amidst the newly negotiated roles of adults is the intrinsic value of children in twentieth century Italy, testimony of which may be found in the Background Report as well as much of the literature shared with the review team during the two-week site visit. "Children in the first years of their life are central to our society" (Italian Background Report, 1999, p. 2). This does not imply a single or simplistic image. Rather, the traditional image of the Italian child, if ever there was just one, has been replaced with multiple and sometimes competing interpretations of children and early childhood, each a reflection of other changes in the larger Italian cultural context. For example, even as most Italians agree that a small family size is more conducive to contemporary life styles, the rationale is also provided that, with fewer children, adults can more adequately address the demands and challenges of child rearing. Thus, while some express unease about the declining presence of children in families and society, others see the smaller numbers as an opportunity to enhance the status of Italian children and to place them from the earliest ages—whatever their background—onto the path of lifelong learning.

### CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT POLICY AND PROVISION IN ITALY

41. In order to understand and evaluate early education and care services in Italy, it is helpful to consider previous efforts and accomplishments as they set the stage for current conditions and future aims. The following section is, therefore, divided into four parts: a) a short history of ECEC in Italy; b) a description of current policies and provision; c) examples of innovation, experimentation, and research in the early childhood field; and d) a brief discussion of current and pending reforms in Italy's educational system as they impact on Italian assessments of current services for children in the first six years of life.

#### Historic Roots of ECEC in Italy

42. Interest in national provision for the care and education of young Italian children has not been limited to contemporary Italy. During the decade of Italy's unification the president of the National Association of *Asili Rurali per L'infanzia* [rural care for young children] advocated in favour of pre-schools directly to the king (Mamiani, 1869). In addition, the Catholic church has sponsored out-of-home care for disadvantaged pre-school children in the form of charitable social service and religious training for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. For most Italians, however, and for much of the 20th century, a collaborative model of home-based child care has been the norm and the ideal. Responsibility for the care of the young child, particularly of infants and toddlers, was considered a family responsibility involving both nuclear and extended family members, generally women.

43. Given this history, it is significant to note that, by the turn of the century, some Italian communities and private entrepreneurs—particularly those in the more industrialised regions—were experimenting with the concept of child care for pre-school age children. By 1907 Maria Montessori had established her *Casa dei bambini* in Rome and her approach had expanded to the city of Milan as early as 1915-16. By that time Milanese citizens had begun to recognise the needs of working mothers and the *commune* opened up its own pre-school programme in 1917, drawing upon the work of the Agazzi sisters as a source of pedagogical influence. Under Mussolini, a system of state-run ONMI services [National Organisation for Mothers and Infants] was established from 1925, for the care and support of children in large, poor families. They were abolished, however, in 1975, four years after the introduction of the *asilo nidi* as “a social service in the public interest” (Law 1044). In spite of the successes associated with these programmes, the demand for child care or early educational programmes was minimal for the first half of the century.

44. Following the Second World War, interest grew in out-of-home experiences for pre-school-aged children, especially in the industrial settings in the northern part of the country. A number of local administrative bodies developed some form of municipally sponsored child care for pre-primary children, among them, Reggio Emilia. Other cities in the wealthy region of Emilia Romagna, including Bologna, Parma, and Modena, were also engaged in the provision and development of pre-primary schools for young children. The successes of these local experiences influenced the growing public sympathy for high quality out-of-home care, particularly for children of working mothers.

## The scuola materna for three to six-year-old children

45. In 1968, the government passed Law 444 providing national funds for pre-primary schools and proclaiming the right of Italian children to pre-primary education. The 1968 Law marked Italy's changing cultural interpretation of ECEC as a response to children's needs and rights rather than solely as a form of assistance for working mothers. This decree not only led to the development of a state-run *scuola materna* system; it also formalised the "three-pronged" (state, communal, private) system of Italian early childhood care and education that would characterise the field up to the present time.

46. In terms of staffing, the requirements for teachers in the state *scuola materna* were simple and straightforward: young (less than 35 years old), with a vocational high school diploma from a specialised *scuola magistrale* (a three-year secondary school). Teachers were selected through an open competitive examination, that included the evaluation of other cultural and professional qualifications, e.g. diplomas, university degrees, specialisations, participation in experimental projects, etc. As national leaders in the field advocated for formal university-level training for all teachers of young children<sup>3</sup>, the vast majority of cities with communal pre-schools developed their own *concorso* [workshops followed by examination]. In general, distinctions need be made between state-run, municipal and private pre-schools, with regard to recruitment procedures and criteria.

47. As state *scuole materne* were established throughout much of Italy, a steady stream of legislation was developed to regulate and improve these services. In 1969, the Ministry enacted *Guidelines for Educational Activity* in the state *scuola materna*, which included a strong emphasis on collaboration with parents, religious education, and play. In recognition of the implicit partnership that was beginning to develop among municipalities, private entities and the state in providing sufficient places within the *scuola materna* for all 3-6 year-old children, Law 1073, passed in 1962, allowed state contributions, under certain conditions, to the regions, provinces or other institutions of social relevance, as for example at that time, the "Cassa per il Mezzogiorno". A primary requirement was to provide meals free of charge to a number of disadvantaged children. Adherence to minimum programme standards and an acceptance of the general aims as outlined in the 1969 *Orientamenti* was also taken into account.

48. Following the policies established in numerous municipal programmes throughout Italy, Law 360 (1976) and Law 517 (1977), established the rights of handicapped children to be educated in public school settings. Also in 1977, Law 616 transferred the responsibility for construction of *scuola materna* to the regional government. This decision had unfortunate consequences for many parts of southern Italy, where massive funds were dedicated to construction projects that were never completed. Some ten years later, DPR 268 (1987) detailed some of the standards of the state *scuola materna*, including the number of hours worked by *scuole* personnel as well as the number of children per section (maximum 25).

49. As the state attempted to give direction to their *scuola materna* through these various pieces of legislation, municipal programmes in Reggio Emilia, Milan, and Pistoia were documenting their work with children and their families in ways that not only promoted professional development in their respective programmes but also served to contribute to discussions regarding the nature of *scuola dell'infanzia* at the national level as well.

50. At the close of the 20th century, Italy is close to achieving universal provision of pre-primary education, through a combination of services under different auspices, each with their own programmes, costs, availability, and goals. Attendance at a *scuola materna/scuola dell'infanzia* is now commonly accepted as the first and essential stage of the educational system and a vast majority (over 95% state-

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3. To date, teachers of Italian elementary schools have also had limited post-secondary training. Pre-service teacher training at the elementary level has typically taken place in a specialised *istituto magistrale* that includes one additional year beyond high school.

wide) of Italian three-, four-, and five-year old children now attend some form of pre-primary school. The distinctions among types of pre-primary schools are variously identified, both in conversation and in the literature, as (a) public or private, (b) state or non-state, or, most commonly, (c) state, communal, or private.

**Table 2. Child care and education services for children aged 0-6 years**

<i>Form</i>	<i>Age of children</i>	<i>Opening hours</i>	<i>Administrative Auspices</i>
<i>Scuola materna</i> (pre-primary school) state, communal, private	3 to 6 years 95+% national coverage (over 90% in south)	8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. but municipal and private scuole often open longer	Ministry of Education (55+%) Local education authority (c. 15%) Local religious authority (c. 20%) Private provider (9%)
<i>Asilo nido</i> (day nursery, creche) communal, private	0 to 3 years 6% to 8% national coverage - over 30% in the North, where over 75% of <i>nidi</i> are found	Flexible hours 9 hours daily average minimum of 24 hours weekly	Ministry of Health Local social or educational authorities Local religious authority Private provider

51. As noted in the Background Report, the distribution across these types of systems varies widely across regions. In cities with well-established municipal programmes, a minority of children attend the state pre-school. In most cities, however, a majority of children are in the state pre-schools, with most others attending private or religious schools. Because of funding shortages or changes in priority, there is tendency for municipal schools to be taken over by the state. In consequence, state provision has passed from covering 52.3% of the children in 1990 to a coverage rate of 57.6% in 1998. This trend has been observed not only in Southern Italy, but also throughout the country.

#### ***Administrative responsibility for the scuola materna***

52. At the national level, all pre-primary schools are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Yet, the organisational systems associated with the three systems vary. In the state *scuola materna*, national laws are expected to be implemented by a three-tiered hierarchy of authority and responsibility, beginning with the director of the school or schools (many are responsible for more than one). While directors ostensibly report to a *provviditore* or superintendent, the organisational and pedagogical quality of the programme is monitored in fact by the state inspector, who may be assigned to as many as 50 or more schools.

53. Municipal programmes have typically developed their own system of administration, depending on the size of the city. In a large city like Milan, for example, *dirigenti* [managers] supervise a group municipal *scuole materne*. These *dirigenti* report to a head administrator [*assistente di settore*] for one of the 20 zones within the municipal system, who in turn reports to the *assessore* [local minister]. Reggio Emilia, a much smaller city, has a team of *pedagogisti* who report directly to the *assessore*. While only a few *dirigenti* in Milan are responsible for both *scuola materna* and *nidi*, in Reggio Emilia it is the norm for the *pedagogista* to work across the full age span 0-6.

### ***Programme content in the scuola materna***

54. Following twenty years of experimentation and innovation in some regions, and several years of negotiation between representatives of the state, church and communal early childhood programmes, long-awaited new *Orientamenti* or guidelines for state pre-primary schools were distributed in 1991. The guidelines focus on: (a) social relationships and experiences as they contribute to the child's emotional well-being and intellectual growth; (b) the value of a pre-primary school experience as a friendly transition to the more formal elementary school; and (c) the critical importance of home-school relations. The guidelines were written in the hope that organisational and pedagogical characteristics would flow from them, with teachers making decisions about the particular processes that reflect the general principles. National goals were also addressed in these guidelines, including those of improving accessibility, utilisation, and home-school communications. Such a collaborative relationship was described as essential to satisfying the needs of the child, the family, the school, and the larger community.

55. Educational continuity has been mandated for all compulsory education in Italy since the passage of Law 148 (1990) which makes specific reference to the role of curriculum co-ordination in the final year of the scuola materna and the first years of the elementary school. Later, in a ministerial circular (*Circolare ministeriale n. 339*), the Ministry of Education expanded on the theme of educational continuity and emphasised the need for effective communication with families, who are seen as essential sources of knowledge about the young child. For children coming from diverse cultures and for those with handicaps or other disadvantages, the circular emphasised the importance of a "rapport of exchange and communication with the families and the community." Further, it called for collaborative relationships between the school, the family, and such local institutions as the health and sanitation departments.

### ***Staffing in the scuola materna***

56. Two laws have been enacted with the aim of raising the qualifications for pre-school and elementary teachers to university level (June, 1997 & July 1998). Up to 1992, the training of pre-school teachers had taken place largely in Catholic training institutes, *scuole magistrali*, recognised by the state, and in eight small state institutes. In both, teacher training has been largely didactic and pitched at a mid-secondary school level. The recent legislation requires new teachers in a *scuola materna* or *elementare* to have completed a university-level degree. Hopes for improved quality as well as greater continuity, as outlined in the most general of terms in the 1991 *Orientamenti*, are clearly part of the rationale behind this new requirement. Beginning, therefore, in the Fall of 1998, public and private universities throughout Italy began admitting students to degree programmes that were still in the process of being developed. In terms of in-service opportunities, municipalities design their own professional development agenda for communal schools, while professional development opportunities for teachers in state *scuola materna* are at the initiative of the head teacher/director or state inspector.

### ***Funding and costs in the scuola materna***

57. The Background Report outlines the distribution of costs associated with running *scuola materna* services and describes the typical fees paid for by families. Some of this information is worth repeating here as it contributes to an understanding of issues of access and affordability for parents and of resources for individual schools. Teachers' salaries (equivalent to those of teachers in primary schools), children's play equipment, and educational materials are financed by the municipality for the communal *scuole materne* and by the state for the *scuole materne statali*. The municipality, however, is expected to provide the building, maintain the premises and furnishings, and pay the salaries of all auxiliary personnel in both

the municipal and the state system. State subsidies may also be directed at both municipal and private schools, depending on resources and need.

58. Reflecting the separate nature of the funding sources, parent fees for the *scuola materna* can vary according to system and location. The average fees paid to attend public (state and municipal) *scuola materna* are low, based in general on costs of children's meals. Fees in the church pre-primary schools are also generally modest; but high fees can be charged by private *scuole materne*. In 1998-99, fees for parents of children attending a private Montessori pre-school in Rome were as high as 800,000 lire per month, while the city of Pistoia charged a flat rate of 130,000 lire per month for full-time enrolment in a municipal *scuola*, plus an additional yearly fee for transportation by bus. A majority of municipal, provincial, and regional programmes have a sliding fee scale to cover their costs, but even that varies as a function of the city's policies and economic circumstances.

### **The asilo nido for children from birth to three years**

59. Three years after the law proclaiming children's rights to a pre-primary education, Law 1044 (1971) announced the state's intent to support child care services for infants and toddlers of working mothers in the form of *asili nido* [infant-toddler centres]. In the same month, Parliament passed the parental leave law (Law 1204). The parental leave law served two purposes: they enabled thousands of Italian women to maintain their positions in the world of work while participating in the care of their infants, either by staying home for the first year or sharing in the care provided by other extended family members. They also reduced the perceived need for full-time child care for infants, which was rapidly increasing during this period.

60. In contrast to Law 444's principle of universal provision for the *scuola materna*, the aims of the *asilo nido* law were much more modest, reflecting the anticipated costs of providing such services, despite the rapidly increasing demand for child care for children under the age of three. Described as an "individual service on demand," the perception that children's experiences within the *nido* would be more custodial than educationally focused was reflected in the use of the term *puericultrice* [care givers] for *nido* personnel in contrast to that of *insegnante* [teachers] for the *scuola materna*. The financial support for *nidi* was tied directly to the demand at the regional level, with annual increments from the Ministry of Health to be distributed to the regions in anticipated allocations through 1976, for the construction and opening of at least 3,800 *nidi*.

61. In the decades since the passage of Law 1044, relatively few national laws have addressed the conditions and aims of the *asilo nido*, in contrast to those for the *scuola materna*. For the most part, laws governing services for the youngest children have been developed and implemented at the regional and local levels. In the absence of national policies or training on the nature and potential of early care in the child's development, the *asilo nido* has served as a reference for research and experimentation.

62. In part because of the relatively small numbers of *nidi* that have operated in Italy and because accurate counts have not been a priority of the Ministry of Health, it is difficult to describe the evolution and current status of the Italian *nidi* (as was also noted in the Background Report). Based on regional surveys and locally generated data (some of which was provided to members of the review team), it is clear that availability varies tremendously, currently ranging from services for 30% or more of the 0-3 population in some parts of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany to few or no services in parts of Southern Italy. Centres are jointly funded through state, regional authorities and municipal authorities, with parents contributing the remaining percentage (36% on average) of costs.

63. Responsibility for the *asilo nido* service fall under the administrative auspices of the Ministries of Health, but real responsibility lies at the regional and municipal levels. A proposal under consideration, suggests a shift of responsibility toward the Ministry of Education, while retaining a decentralised organisational system. A major reason for this proposal is that there is no equivalent to the *Orientamenti* or other national guidelines, which would strongly promote child development in the *nidi*. Staff must rely on guidelines and directives, where they exist, from various municipal and regional projects. There are some exemplary regions (e.g., Lombardia, Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Umbria and Veneto) and municipalities (e.g., Reggio Emilia, Milano, and Pistoia) serving this age group. Outside these regions, however, there are insufficient resources available to improve infant-toddler services, although strong initiatives in Rome, Palermo and other municipalities are beginning to develop.

64. Although reliable data is lacking, it seems that the vast majority of the out-of-home programmes for infants and toddlers are community-based, many of them in the same northern cities that also played a leadership role in establishing communal pre-primary programmes. In northern Italy, industry-supported child care is not uncommon. In economically disadvantaged areas, as well as in Trentino, many private programmes—often for two-year olds—are run by the Catholic *scuole materne*. Flexibility about entry age and operating hours allows many private centres to remain in competition with the free-of-charge, state pre-schools. In many cities, communal administrators contract with private *nidi* to serve the growing number of infants and toddlers who would otherwise remain on waiting lists. However, in spite of waiting lists and in contrast to the growth in funding for *scuola materna*, there has been a marked decrease over the last years in the number of *nidi*. With the exception of some regions such as Emilia Romagna, the regions have reduced rather than increased expenditures for infant-toddler services.

### ***Staffing in the asilo nido***

65. While the language describing the *nido* professional was changed to that of *educatrice*, by DPR 268 (1987), requirements for personnel are few. Staff must complete one of several diplomas in secondary or vocational school associated with the study of child care and/or child development. DPR 268 defined working conditions for *nido* personnel and provided some criteria on which to base children's care (e.g., class size). Maximum group size is 10, and children are generally grouped according to age: 3-12 months, 12-18 months, 18-24 months and 24-36 months. One member of staff is responsible for five to seven children. Six hours daily are spent with the children and a further six hours per week are allocated for planning, preparation, co-operation with parents and in-service training (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997).

### ***Costs to parents of the asilo nido***

66. In spite of the intention of Law 1044 to provide national funds to regions seeking to develop infant-toddler services, financial supports for *asili nido* are almost entirely dependent on regional wealth and municipal priorities, with the resulting fees for families typically much higher than those paid for children in the *scuola materna*. Generally, fees for infants and toddlers in private *nidi* are higher than those of communal programmes, although the private *nidi* can offer parents longer and more flexible hours. However, private *nidi* are not compelled to provide the same range of services as have come to be expected from municipally-based programmes. For example, the previously mentioned Montessori school in Rome charges the same monthly rate (800,000 It. Lire) as does a small private *nido* in Milano for full time care; the Montessori programme, however, does not offer services for children in the first year of life. Church-sponsored programmes for infants are rare, although, as mentioned above, some programmes for toddlers are included in church *scuola materna*. Those that provide services for two-year-olds rely on the volunteer time of nuns and increased class sizes to charge fees that are not significantly higher than those charged for communal services. Reflecting the various priorities (and economies) of municipalities, minimum fees of

municipal *nidi* range from a low of 30,000 It. Lire per month in Palermo to a potential high of 1,500,000 per month in Varese.

### **Innovations, experimentation, and research**

67. While all pre-primary schools are under the aegis of the Minister of Education, the reality is that the national government has demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in allowing local programmes to set their own criteria for admission, to develop their own examinations and teacher development strategies, as well as their own pedagogical orientations. This autonomy has led to highly regarded innovative programmes in some settings and much-less favourably perceived interpretations in others. In contrast to the visibility associated with communal and state initiatives in the *scuola dell'infanzia*, individuals working directly with the *nido* capitalised on their relative independence to experiment in developing programmes that would be successful within their respective communities.

68. While the number of regional and local initiatives, innovations and experiments that have taken place are far too many to enumerate in this report, the regions of Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, and Tuscany have contributed substantially to the advanced programmes that many now associate with Italian early care and education. Three of the cities visited by the review team—Milano, Reggio Emilia, and Pistoia—have developed quality services for young children and their families that highlight the potential for creative innovation and the value of local interpretation within the Italian culture. In each case, these efforts have focused on the needs and potentials of children from birth to six and their families (see Box 1).

### Box 1: Routes to Excellence

**Reggio Emilia:** The most widely known, innovative programme for young children in Italy is the municipal programme of Reggio Emilia, established well in advance of the 1968 law. By the early 1970's, Reggio Emilia's approach to early child care and education had become the subject of much international interest, particularly in northern Europe. Among those features that make Reggio Emilia unique in Italy is its incorporation of educational services for children 0-6 years within the same administrative structure. The pedagogical dimensions of what is now referred to as "the Reggio Emilia approach"<sup>4</sup> include an emphasis on children's multiple symbolic languages, the use of long-term projects as contexts for children's learning and teacher research, and careful attention to the role of the environment as it supports relationships among the three protagonists—teacher, parent, child. Many aspects of this work—including the Reggio approach to continuous assessment and documentation and its well-developed strategies for teacher development and parental participation—are relevant to national reform aims.

*Communal responsibility* - The longevity of the Reggio Emilia innovation can be explained partially by the inspired leadership of its late founder, Loris Malaguzzi, and the high level of quality sustained in the schools by their dedicated staff, many of whom are among the original programme developers. Underpinning the pedagogical excellence of the centres, however, is the commitment of the Reggio Emilia municipality to education. A motto of the city for many years has been "Investment in children is a productive investment". As much as 40% of the municipal budget is allocated to education. Both stable funding and excellent home-school relationships attest to the high level of civic engagement regarding the provision of services to young children. The sustained commitment to parent and citizen participation reflects the philosophy behind the city's schools as "a system of relations."

*The hundred languages of children* - In the Reggio approach, young children are encouraged to explore their understandings of their experiences through different modes of expression considered natural to them, "the hundred languages of children": words, mime, movement, drawing, painting, constructions, sculpture, shadow play, mirror play, drama and music. Elaborate levels are reached by Reggio Emilian children in these expressive efforts (both in their discussions as well as other forms of symbolic representation, particularly the graphic arts), which in turn are documented by the pedagogical staff and the children themselves. Small groups of children work together—often with an adult—all around the educational setting, which has been organised so as to facilitate social, cognitive, verbal and symbolic constructions.

*Educational projects* - Schools in Reggio Emilia seek to provide a nurturing social and learning environment in which the child's curiosity and desire to communicate is encouraged. The school community—municipality, teachers, *pedagogistas*, staff, parents and Advisory Council—regularly deliberate on their educational objectives for the schools, but the programme of each year is elaborated by children and teachers based on particular interests, concerns, and opportunities. From their experience and knowledge of children, the teaching staff will formulate what many describe as an "emergent curriculum" that follow the interests of children. Thus, Reggio Emilia *progettazione* are hypothesised projects characterised by a wide array of educational resources and objectives that are flexible and adapted to the particular needs and desires of each group of children. While it is often the children who lead and learn to propose, teachers assume the responsibility to sustain the cognitive and social dynamics of the group while they are in progress, and to provide at all moments suitable learning resources for the children. These resources include not only the space and materials for learning, but also the organisation of situations and occasions, including the participation of families. The teacher has the responsibility of establishing a genuine personal and pedagogical relationship with each child in addition to documenting the efforts of the project group.

*Documentation* - Documentation refers to the recording the children's project experience in words, drawings, photos, videos, etc. The process as well as the final product of each project is recorded, incorporating the ideas of the children, their memories and feelings and teachers' observations of the dynamics of children's explorations and social engagements. Documentation serves three key functions. 1) to provide children with a concrete and visible memory of what they have said and done, using images and words to serve as a jumping off point to explore previous understandings and to co-construct revisited understandings of the topics investigated. Children become even more interested, curious, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved; 2) to give the educators an insight into the children's understanding and misunderstandings of everyday institutions, objects and events, and is thus a tool for research and a key to continuous improvement and renewal; 3) to provide parents and the

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4. For additional information, see Edwards et al. (1998).

public with detailed information about what happens in the schools as a means of eliciting their reactions and support. In turn, children learn that their parents feel at home in the school, at ease with the teachers.

### Routes to Excellence (continued)

**Pistoia:** Although both cities have a well-established tradition of quality early childhood services for children in the 0-3 and 3-6 age range, Pistoia provides an interesting contrast to Reggio Emilia. Long interested in the relationship between the needs of young children and the community as a whole, the city has now expanded provision beyond the *scuola dell'infanzia* and *asili nido* to include a network of psycho-educational services. In 1987, the municipal government initiated this system of services in the form of special places for children with and without their parents as a part of a larger set of resources and services for children of all ages. A major rationale for the resulting *area bambini* [children's centres] is to provide a form of child and family support for those families not in need of full-time child care. Grandparents and parents can attend various enrichment activities with and without their young children, such that the centres serve as a form of community meeting place for adults as well as a source of play and experimentation for children. Researchers in Pistoia have focused on spatial and environmental influences on infants and toddlers and on fostering early child-child interaction. These children's centres also serve as after-school environments for school-age children and educational resource centres for teachers of the city's elementary schools and the state and municipal *scuole materne*.

**Milano:** Yet another form of *nuove tipologie* [new typology services] can be found in Milano. Milano's first *Tempo per la famiglia* [Time for the Family] was opened in 1986, and the city now has 12 such family-child centres. Distinct in purpose from that of the *nido*, the *Tempo per la famiglia* was designed as a flexible and informal service revolving around the needs of families with children three years and under, offering both children and their parents a caring environment that supports social experiences as well as learning opportunities. These municipal services were developed for several purposes particular to the changing demographics of Milan. As an alternative to the traditional *nido*, it includes the provision of a space where parents and professionals can interact around the care and development of the young child. Another equally important goal in Milano is that of connecting families of young children with one another, particularly those whose parents are young, culturally or linguistically diverse and/or socially isolated. Like Pistoia's *area bambini*, Milano's system of *Tempo per la famiglia* represent only one type of service in addition to the municipally supported *asilo nido* and *scuola materna*. Innovations have also taken place in Milano's system of *scuola materna* and the *asilo nido*, some of which are as simple as the decision to not use substitute teachers, but to hire an additional teacher for each school to cover other teachers' absences.

69. In addition to innovations that are associated with typologies of programmes at the local or institutional level, numerous research and experimentation projects have taken place over the past 20 years regarding the developmental needs and potentials of very young children and their parents. A majority of this research has taken place within the context of local and regional early childhood programmes. Reggio Emilia, for example, has long considered its particular approach to curriculum a form of action research. Teachers work collaboratively with one another and with their *pedagogista* to hypothesise, experiment, and debate the significance of their observations of and experiences with young children. In Pistoia, staff have worked closely with the researchers at the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR) in Rome to study the influences of space and environment on infants and toddlers, and early child-child interactions.

70. In other settings, much of this research has been carried out with support from scholars at Italy's state universities. One such area of research that is particularly noteworthy is directed at the possible traumatic effects of separating the child from family members and the home. This collaborative action research has been organised inside *asili nido* and *scuole dell'infanzia* using attachment theory as a lens through which to examine and facilitate mother-child-teacher relations during the transition (*l'inserimento*) from the home to out-of-home care. Based on this research, many of Italy's regional and local policies now mandate provisions to assist the child and the family during the delicate *inserimento* process. Diverse interpretations range from inviting parents to accompany the child during his or her initial transition into out-of-home care to having the parent stay with the child in the centre for as long as it takes for both to feel

at ease in the new setting. These practices, in turn, have contributed to the establishment of labour laws as well as to regional and local policies providing for parental leave for this first out-of-home experience.

71. State *scuole materne* have also been encouraged to experiment with new interpretations of school organisation and curriculum methodologies, in part as a first step toward the new autonomy that schools will have beginning in 2000. The ASCANIO project (Co-ordinated Experimental Activities Introducing New Organisational Trends) grew out of two recent Ministerial documents (the latest one was issued in 1998) and was intended to interpret, through experimentation with diverse organisational and teaching strategies, the educational aims outlined in the purposefully general *Orientamenti*.

72. An even more recent initiative supported by the national government has involved a number of municipal programmes already heavily invested in research and innovation. These communities and their municipal programme administrators have developed partnerships of exchange with communities in Italy's impoverished south with the general aim of sharing knowledge and experiences related to the improved provision of services for young children. A more specific aim is to determine the extent to which programmes and practices developed in one context are applicable, feasible, and useful in another—particularly when that other context is characterised by different traditions and socio-economic conditions. The review team had an opportunity to meet with representatives of two of these partnerships, one involving Reggio Emilia and its “twin” city Naples and the other involving Palermo and Pistoia.<sup>5</sup>

73. Within each of these projects, a growing interest in the role of assessment and evaluation has been expressed. The ASCANIO project is based on the premise that schools will assess the results of their experimental projects against national standards, even though, at present, there is no such system or tool of evaluation that has been agreed upon. The topic of evaluation, in fact, has been the focus of various regional and municipal programmes, particularly those that serve infants and toddlers. Some programmes, (e.g. in Emilia-Romagna and Umbria) have drawn upon evaluation instruments developed for use in other cultural settings (the two most frequently mentioned have been developed in the USA). In some cities (e.g. in Umbria, Trento and Pavia), teachers and experts, including university researchers, are experimenting with the development of their own tools and strategies for assessing the quality and consequences of services. Many of these initiatives are being closely watched by a recently established agency charged by the Ministry of Education to develop a National Service for Quality in Education.

74. In 1980, Loris Malaguzzi took the initiative to invite teachers, administrators, and university professors to join together in the formation of a *Gruppo di Lavoro e di studio sugli Asili Nido* [Working Group of the Asili Nido]. Within a very short period of time this group came to serve as a critical resource and reference point for the “promotion of a culture of childhood and for research and experimentation” in the services provided for young children. The regional and national experts associated with the *Gruppo di Lavoro* have supported, debated, and participated in many of these innovative efforts. Now known as the *Gruppo di lavoro e di studio nidi e infanzia* [Working Group of Nidi and Early Childhood], the group—with many of the original members<sup>6</sup>—has continued to play a major role in influencing both policy and practices. More recently, many of these same local, regional, and university experts have been instrumental in the development and the details of some of Italy's current educational reform initiatives.

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5. These “twinning” initiatives will be discussed further in the section to follow on educational reforms.

6. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the group, died in 1994.

## Current and Pending Reforms Pertaining to the ECEC Sector

75. As a result of several decades of advocacy as well as the initiatives and efforts of the current national government, early childhood education and care is receiving an unprecedented degree of attention at different levels of Italy's national and local systems of government. Moreover, after years of debate between the church, the regions, their municipality, and the state, representatives of each are moving to a more collaborative stance on behalf of young children. In each city that the review team visited, informants acknowledged the dynamism of current policy context for ECEC provision. Indeed, several of the following laws or proposed reforms were debated and modified during, and subsequent to, the review team's two week visit.

76. Motivation for the current and pending educational reforms in Italy comes from two sets of concerns: those associated with the young Italian child and her family and those related to the needs and potentials of the Italian society as a whole, as part of a lifelong learning agenda. In addition to the reform of university training for early childhood teachers described earlier, the following laws and proposals related to educational reform—and more broadly to children's well-being—were central to the review team's assessments of ECEC in Italy:

- *Decreto Legge 451 (1997)* - Conceptually linked to the United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child, the law calls for a parliamentary commission to study and evaluate Italy's current system of services for children, and a National Observatory for Childhood that would consist of experts representing a wide range of social and educational services. This law also calls for a National Centre of Documentation and Analysis for Early Childhood as a means of supporting the work of both the commission and the observatory. Aims of this consortium of experts are many, among them to establish a normative base and financial support as a means of documenting, analysing, and co-ordinating social policies related to the period of early childhood. Other goals are to serve as a means through which technical-scientific knowledge can be made accessible to policy makers; and to enhance national discussions in a manner that will contribute to concrete actions on behalf of young children.
- *Law 59 (1997)* or "Law Bassanini" is one of several new laws delegating authority to regional and local authorities, and guarantees institutional autonomy in all forms of public administration, including education. In the spirit of Law 59, the Minister of Public Instruction signed the *Decreto sull'Autonomia Scolastica* [Decree of Scholastic Autonomy] granting all scholastic institutions, "the first experiences of autonomy." Prior to this law, the control over all state *scuola materna*, elementary, and secondary schools was centralised and directives came from Rome. Without negating the pedagogical principles contained in the 1991 *Orientamenti*, this new law, which is to be fully implemented in the fall of 2000, gives individual state *scuola materna* increased decision-making authority and responsibility over such aspects as organisation, curriculum projects, experimentation and research. Some key areas would remain under state control (e.g., personnel recruitment, criteria, and employment).
- *Disegno di legge 2741* - This proposed law falls under the rubric of the Ministry of Education's lifelong learning agenda. The principle aim of the proposal is to legislate parity among the diverse bureaucracies that currently provide educational services in Italy. Within this proposed draft, the perceived success of Italy's three-pronged approach to the *quasi*-universal *scuola materna* is used to illustrate successful collaboration and cost sharing among state, local, and private authorities. The proposed bill advocates for citizens' right to study and learn regardless of their preferred educational choice, and specifies the period of early childhood as the place to begin acting upon this principle. This proposed law specifies the need to maintain coherence with generally accepted guidelines and standards of quality related to successful teaching and learning. The proposal also makes reference to constitutional precepts that guarantee the parity of scholastic treatment; the provision of economic

measures that support the family in its parental responsibilities; and the right to high quality and meritorious instruction regardless of economic circumstances.

- *Law 285: Disposizioni per la Promozione di Diritti e di Opportunità per L'Infanzia e L'Adolescenza* [Disposition for the promotion of rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence] (August, 1997) - The primary purpose of Law 285 is to provide funding (at the current level of 800,000,000 It. Lire) for various organisational sponsors to open part-time services for children and families. The law gives priority to projects planned jointly by cities, state schools, and private organisations (including the church). It has already promoted discussions between diverse groups and agencies, thereby contributing to one of its more implicit goals, which is to help develop competencies and resources within the community or region.
- *Bozze di Disegno di Legge sulla Riforma dei servizi per i bambini da 0 a 3 anni e le loro famiglie: Verso una nuova legge nazionale* [Draft project of law on the reform of services for children 0-3 years and their families: Toward a new national law] (August, 1998) - This document, commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and written by an interdisciplinary group of ministers and national experts, has been the object of years of discussion, professional input, and widespread citizen advocacy (including a petition submitted in July, 1992 that had collected 150,000 signatures supporting the request to open new services for infants and toddlers). Acknowledging the *nido*'s educational role, the draft advocates for a transfer of the administration of the *asilo nido* from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Education.<sup>7</sup> Based on the principle that *asilo nido* will no longer be regarded as a service on individual demand, the primary goal of this proposal is to create a system of support for a variety of services according to the different needs of parents and children including full-time, part-time, or flexible hours of child care. It prioritises the importance of participation of families, the need to monitor quality, and the necessity of developing a system to insure professional training.

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7. This proposal to shift the responsibility for the *asilo nido* has been welcomed by the Minister of Education, who has stressed that the aim would be to provide guidelines, objectives, and support for the *nido* at the national level.

## CHAPTER 4: OBSERVATIONS AND ISSUES

77. As in many countries, the context for ECEC policy in Italy is very dynamic. In light of the multiple and complex policy initiatives underway, the conditions for early childhood education and care continued to evolve during the course of the review team visit and the subsequent period of reflection and analysis. This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the general diversity of services observed, followed by an outline of key issues as identified by review team members and informants. Issues to be discussed begin with those of greatest concern—policy coherence and co-ordination, accessibility and quality—followed by issues directly related to the overall improvement of Italian services for young children, including professional training and development, and funding and financing.

### **Policy coherence and co-ordination**

78. According to many commentators, fragmentation of responsibility has been a longstanding obstacle to the efficacy of early educational and care services in Italy. Educational programmes for children over three years come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, while responsibility for the under-threes falls to the Ministry of Health, the regions and municipalities. This splitting of responsibilities at governmental level, gives rise to different policy orientations and implementation mechanisms. The situation is further complicated in the field where other parallel, partially overlapping systems also co-exist. Not only, as we have already indicated, does the state directly supply services, but so also do local authorities and the private subsidised sector, on a very large scale. The situation is characterised by competing networks, with independent organisational structures and different, if overlapping, funding sources. With some exceptions, there are few formal mechanisms for co-operation and co-ordination, to ensure that all children have access to services of high quality. The cohesion of the different strands, toward providing a public service to Italian children, has still to be achieved.

79. Renewed efforts are being made, however, to steer the system toward unity of purpose in the best interests of children. From the 1990s, evidence of a new interest at state level in early childhood services became apparent. A significant moment was the promulgation of the 1991 *Orientamenti*, which posit a conception of the child far in advance of the 1968 law on pre-schools. The child's rights to education and respect, the role of the school in protecting those rights, the changing nature of the Italian family, and the continuing importance of continuity—both within the school setting and between the home and the school—are discussed at length. Consistent with the Italian tradition of mainstreaming special needs children into regular classroom settings, issues of diversity and integration are expanded to include children of ethnic and linguistic minorities. These conceptions of child development reflect best theory and practice in the field, e.g. in the *Orientamenti*, the domains of reading, writing, measuring are incorporated into the broader perspective of communication and symbol systems.

80. In more recent years, the ministries have taken further important steps. The Ministry of Social Affairs, with the support of much of Italian society, has sought to promote consensus about children in Italy around the principles outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Ministry of Health has sponsored early childhood conferences all over Italy that highlight research on child development, and

expose practitioners, administrators and academics to innovations in young child and family policy. On its side, the Ministry of Education and the education authorities at regional level lay even greater emphasis on appropriate pedagogical methods in early childhood settings. There is a desire for greater cohesiveness in the system and better implementation of policy. Yet, despite real advances—such as the law on teacher training, dynamic twinning arrangements between Northern and Southern cities (see Box 2), new in-service training initiatives across the traditional divides—weaknesses are encountered. In several regions, problems of access and quality persist.

### **Box 2: A model partnership for children and families**

When we visited Palermo, a core group of professionals were working, in collaboration with another group of professionals from an entirely different city - Pistoia - to improve children's early childhood experiences. Members of the local administration of both municipalities with whom we spoke were convinced of the merits of this "twinning" initiative and shared the conviction that each city had something to learn from the other. Thus, the mayor of the city of Pistoia cited his city's lack of experience of a very limited budget or having to cater for significant numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse families. Most impressive was the level of personal pride and commitment that educators and lay citizens in each of the two cities conveyed with respect to their work together. The administrators, teachers, and psychologists serving as consultants to Palermo's fledgling effort to establish *asili nido* were candid about the economic and social challenges of the city's post-war and post-mafia efforts to reduce elementary school drop-outs and enhance services for the period of early childhood. And yet these same individuals expressed optimism and enthusiasm, as they talked about the role of the *nido* in giving young and uneducated parents a place to meet and a reason to hope. The personal enthusiasm, the public commitment, and the local pride associated with these efforts are not only quality indicators; they are indicators of promise.

## **Accessibility**

### ***Services for 0-3***

81. As described previously, there are considerable shortfalls in Italy in services for families with children 0-3, in contrast to some, but by no means all, European countries. Despite the creation of remarkable services in some municipalities, the national profile for family support and the provision of services for young children could be much strengthened.

82. For a society that cherishes family care and the importance of the parent-child relationship, it is surprising that there is such limited public investment in policies to reconcile work and family responsibilities, or to provide services for parents at home with young children. Although generously paid (up to 80% of salary if the mother has been insured), maternal leave is relatively short, placing Italy among the median EU countries in this regard. Real progress in parental leave has been achieved, however, through the recent statutory entitlement voted by Parliament in January 2000, which grants parental leave of 10 months (11 months if the father takes at least three months), paid at 30% of earnings.<sup>8</sup> In addition, publicly organised *servizi integrativi* and *nuove tipologie* services, e.g. afternoon centres for mothers with infants to meet and socialise, are not uncommon in municipalities in the north and north centre, but they are absent in most of the country. Other means of reconciling work with family responsibilities—such as family-friendly work policies, job-sharing with benefits, flexitime and home-based work—are uncommon.

83. The provision of ECEC services for children in the first three years is much weaker than for older children. Current provision does not meet adequately the expectations of working parents, even though the 1971, *Law 1044* defined the *asilo nido* as a social right of children and working mothers. In fact, in several

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8. In comparison, each parent in Sweden is entitled to 18 months of full-time leave, with 80% payment for 360 days, and further possibilities of extending paid leave.

provinces, the supply of public *nidi* has decreased considerably in recent years, with the exception of the north and north/central parts of the country, where demand for services continues to grow. In cities in the north, *nidi* services may reach a third of all toddlers but can be completely absent in other parts of the country. Several reasons are put forward to explain the overall decrease in services, such as cultural reluctance to separate mother and infant, the fall in fertility rates and the maintenance of extended family and neighbourly relations that still ensures part-time childcare through grandparents or neighbours. But there are more disquieting reasons. The reliance on local and regional financing has contributed to the failure of the 1971 law to reach even the original and modest aim of creating services for 6% nationally of young Italian children. According to the Italian Background Report, “the public *nido* is a precarious institute, often opening and then closing down, relinquishing premises for other uses, starting *nidi* and then not finishing them.” As in many other countries, giving priority to young children and the needs of parents is still rare in local politics in Italy. The educational value of high quality, public settings for young children and their families is not always recognised.

### ***Services for 3-6 years***

84. Although services for the 3-6 year olds are infinitely more extensive, numerous representatives with whom we spoke acknowledged that the goal of universal provision of pre-primary education, proclaimed in 1968 as a right of Italian children, has not yet been fully realised. As indicated above, the combined coverage produced by Italy’s mixed-provider system has not always been flexible enough to respond to rapid increase in demand, or reach out effectively enough to the more difficult areas. The OECD team was informed of waiting lists in many cities, with over 6000 children in Rome hoping to have a place soon in a *scuola materna*. To address excess in demand, most local services have instituted a points system that corresponds to family and child needs as a means of dealing with the inadequate number of spaces for all children seeking them. In some areas, the points system has given priority to older children, effectively excluding some three-year-olds from the *scuola*. In other settings, where families of cultural and linguistic minorities had begun to fill the numbers of available slots, some administrators expressed concern that their system of categorising needs would serve to further marginalise those families. Some fears were also expressed that families who paid for the services through local taxes might be excluded.

85. Among the many issues that came up for discussion, the very low provision of publicly-funded after-school, leisure-time, and holiday activities received little mention, although in some parts of the country, non-state *scuole materne* and elementary schools may be open only in the morning and are closed during school holidays, including the summer months.

## **Quality**

### ***Variations in quality***

86. Many outstanding *nidi* and *scuole* exist, and large-scale efforts to define quality and evaluate it have been undertaken at state level and in several municipalities and regions, with Tuscany, Emilia Romagna and Umbria to the fore. Ministry of Education efforts have concentrated on the *scuola materna*, through the ASCANIO (Co-ordinated Experimental Activities Introducing New Organisational Trends) programme involving 1,117 pre-school classes. The purpose of the programme (terminated in 1999) was to construct new organisational and pedagogical models in line with the 1991 Orientamenti. According to the evaluation of the project, ongoing *innovation and experimentation* emerge as fundamental to the achievement of quality in the *scuola materna*, a conclusion that contrasts starkly with the conformity of much current practice. With the exception of a few regions, innovation and experimentation are more a function of teacher or local initiative than of regional efforts to reflect on, monitor and improve services for

children. It would seem that in many Italian communities, the services upon which young children and their families depend reflect little of the knowledge and understandings that have been developed in the best Italian programmes, and low quality is a real concern.

### *Quality and demand*

87. Although rates of female participation in salaried occupations have a major influence on demand, the link between the availability of quality services and the creation of demand also merits consideration. Thus, in the city of Reggio Emilia, where high quality services for children 0-3 have been the norm for almost three decades, the demand for increased provision continues to grow. In the south, where services have been virtually non-existent until recently, parents are only now beginning to imagine the positive role that out-of-home services might play in the development of young children. A striking example is Palermo, where, as knowledge of its early childhood services has grown, so too has the waiting list, to the point that it now numbers more than 400 families waiting for *nido* spaces for their children. These examples show that high numbers of parents on a waiting list may be indicative of the presence as well as the absence of high quality services. This transactional relationship between quality and demand and the importance of convincing the general public of the value of out-of-home care within an educational environment was acknowledged by one senior official who noted: “you cannot ask for something if you do not know it exists.” The issue of choice is therefore twofold: some parents are not getting what they are asking for, and some are not asking.

### *Quality and pedagogical guidelines*

88. The 1991 *Orientamenti* provided a comprehensive values framework and pedagogical orientations for Italian early education services. Indications of child outcomes are given and areas of learning experience are defined (the body and movement; speech and words; space, order and measures; things, time and nature; messages, forms and media; the self and others, etc.). Sound pedagogical theory is outlined, giving particular emphasis to play, opportunities for exploration and discovery, and the importance of social relations. It appears, however, that the implications of these principles still need to be worked out in curricular and pedagogical terms within the networks and at local levels. The OECD team observed in Italy a broad spectrum of early childhood practice, in which significant variation could be seen in terms of images of the child, understandings of developmental domains, and abilities to link contemporary theories of learning and development to pedagogical practices. Much early childhood practice was of high quality, but much also remained conventional and uninspiring for children, with over-reliance on direct transmission of knowledge.

89. These concerns are even more applicable to experiences within the *asilo nido*. There is no set of national guidelines or any other directives for *nidi* staff other than that available from various municipal and regional projects. Likewise, national guidelines do not yet exist for professional training or programme evaluation of proposed new forms of daycare, such as the “fai-date-te” *nido* or family daycare, proposed in *Law 285*. Informants at the local level were concerned that sufficient resources might not be provided by the national government to successfully implement the law. What is perhaps most promising in this respect is the extensive research currently being conducted with university researchers and other experts within existing *nidi* services to develop meaningful evaluation instruments. The *Centro Europeo dell’Educazione di Frascati* has an important function to play in this regard, which is to insist on a balance between the need for national evaluation and assessment tools and their cultural relevance and local utility.

### *Quality, monitoring, and evaluation*

90. The issue of quality is closely linked to monitoring and evaluation. Effective quality monitoring implies consistent implementation of national policy, regulations and curricular aims across the system, and the effective use of evaluation and in-service training to achieve this goal. Monitoring implies also effective data gathering on which to base evolving policy. As in many other countries, educational data gathering, though highly professional, is often not specific enough for the needs of early childhood planners. The Ministry of Health does not collect regular data on *nidi*, nor do such data normally appear in the annual report that the CENSIS publishes on the social situation of the country. Information has to be derived either from specialist studies or from statistics on social security, health and welfare published by ISTAT. Yet, municipalities, especially in the large cities, need to be able to map accurately potential demand for child and family services, and foresee the necessary funding and human resources before crises occur.<sup>9</sup> As the recent *Law 285* emphasises, early entry into an educational programme is a timely means of enhancing the young child's potential. Good contact with a centre can also establish effective home-school relationships with the parents at a developmental period when the family is most open to such supports. These relationships, it is hoped, will ultimately contribute to the prevention of school failure and parental support of children's education.

91. Ongoing evaluation of compliance with national standards and regulations also needs to be improved. The state utilises a small group of inspectors to visit periodically the *scuola materna statale*, to offer assistance, and intervene when necessary (often in crisis situations). Because these inspectors have many schools (as many as 50) and little authority, it seems that their roles vary as a function of the personal relationships they develop. In theory, the state, elementary school, didactic directors are responsible for monitoring the state system, as well as the municipal and private schools in a certain geographical area. However, the review team was informed that they lack proper assessment tools, making it difficult for them to evaluate and improve quality. As noted, however, in the previous discussion on programme quality, teachers seemed to feel free, for the most part, to organise the classrooms and their curriculum activities as they saw fit with little expectation that they would be advised to do otherwise. Formative, self-evaluation methods have not yet become a feature of the *scuola materna* system, nor has intensive in-service training across the networks to build strong and coherent pedagogical practice.

92. Many people with whom we spoke expressed the view that the Bassanini law would exacerbate present weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation. Although the reform aimed to improve the rapport between the schools and the territory, teachers and administrators expressed the fear that, with increased autonomy, many *scuole materne* would be isolated without access to help. An administrator acknowledged that one of the risks of increased autonomy was the school that did not understand its own role, and whose programme did not meet the real needs of children and parents. The most negative reaction to the autonomy reforms was an interpretation of its motives, based on the belief that it reflected the central government's inability to govern the schools. Regardless of perspectives about governmental intent, all agreed that increased autonomy would increase rather than resolve educational problems in the absence of sufficient monitoring, support, and fiscal resources.

### **Training and professional development**

93. The review team visit took place at a propitious moment - five months after the country initiated its first efforts at implementing a university based course of study for *scuola materna* and *scuola elementare* teachers. Most professionals to whom we spoke were pleased that the state had given recognition to the current and potential role of universities in contributing to teacher preparation. Although

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9. Innovative mapping of future social needs is now taking place in Rome, but, at the time of writing, did not yet include the needs of young children and families.

few considered the former preparation of teachers in the *scuola materna* to have been sufficient, several educators and university professors cited the need to preserve also the traditional strengths of early childhood training in Italy. The issue of maintaining a good balance between the teaching of practical, creative skills and the more theoretically oriented university courses was especially mentioned, and also the importance of quality, extended practicums for undergraduates. In addition, increased emphasis on teacher preparation in bilingual and multicultural education was seen to be a need, based on the increasing number of non-Italian speaking children and families coming to the early childhood services.

94. At the same time, our correspondents were not overly confident that the new university degree programme would solve all of the problems associated with the development of a competent corps of early childhood professionals. Anxieties were directed at the lower-than-anticipated number of students applying in 1989-99 for the available spaces in Italy's universities (approximately 60% of the 7370 posts proposed for the first cohort of teachers were filled by students who passed a variety of entrance exams determined by their respective universities). While some assumed that these numbers would increase once more information was made available to prospective student teachers, others feared that it was indicative of the high costs/low returns of a university diploma for what is still, relatively speaking, a low paying job.

95. There were also many uncertainties regarding the university teacher preparation programme. There was no clear indication, for example, of how pre- and in-service training would be managed or coordinated at state or municipal levels, nor was there a clear plan to integrate teachers with university degrees into school settings where a majority of teachers have traditional training provided by *istituti magistrali*. Since the team's visit, however, the Ministry has established the ALICE programme (to succeed ASCANIO), which will provide funding and guidance for student practica and in-service training. The programme will be further reinforced in certain municipalities, e.g. Milano, Trento, and Reggio Emilia, where students will practice in well-established and highly-rated municipal pre-primary schools.

96. Another important issue for staff is the problematic status of the early childhood professional within the *nido*. Many regions now require additional training these teachers, and numbers of professionals working in the *nidi* have now the same qualifications as teachers in the *scuola materna*. Yet, it remains a challenge for these professionals to gain recognition of the educational nature of their role, in terms of status and salary. Overall, staff working in the *nido* have less favourable pay, working hours, status, and access to in-service training than teachers in the *scuola materna*. Moreover, it seems that terms and conditions vary not only between services for 3-6 and 0-3, but also among the different *nido* and *scuola materna*. This wide variation has potentially strong impacts on the quality of staff and turnover rates across the early childhood sector. It would seem in contradiction also with the recent *Law 285*, which sees the *nido*, not as a service to be based on individual demand but as a response to every child's entitlement to an educational service.

### **Funding and financing**

97. Although funding for early childhood services has been maintained, and even slightly increased, in recent years in Italy, several issues of funding and finance were raised during the OECD visit. There are three main concerns. First, as already we have mentioned above, the uncertainty regarding the availability of adequate resources to successfully implement the various reforms underway, including *Law 285* (providing funding for new, part-time services for families and young children). Second, there seems to be a need for substantial public investment to address the access issues and unmet demand - especially with regard to provision for infants and toddlers - and to even out current regional disparities. Third, and finally, while the state relies on local authorities and private schools to provide half the provision for 3-6 year olds, non-state *scuola materna* only receive token financial support from the government, unless they pass over into the state system. As a result, many private *scuola materna* depend on volunteer staff to make ends

meet. There are real concerns that without more equitable funding, some non-state schools will have difficulties in meeting quality standards.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

98. During the course of the two-week Italian review, members of the OECD review team were very impressed by the will of the Italian educational authorities to re-examine national policy for young children, within the framework of the ongoing educational reforms. In a context of tight budgetary control, investments in ECEC had been maintained and in fact slightly increased. The OECD team found a great deal of positive energy in Italy, not least in the South, where early childhood teachers and administrators worked together to determine how changes could be best implemented in their context. During our intensive two-week visit, we were invited, in a very open way, to visit a wide array of services and to interview many experts—policy-makers, administrators, researchers and practitioners—from a wide variety of backgrounds. While we received every help from the Ministry and the experts whom we interviewed, the measures for consideration that we make below are based on our own judgements and observations. These views are offered in a spirit of professional dialogue. They are intended to stimulate reflection rather than to advance solutions for what we recognise is a very complex situation.

99. Prior to beginning the discussion, it is important to recognise that Italy is among the few countries in the OECD—with Belgium, France, New Zealand and Iceland—to fund universal, free educational services for children from three years of age and to achieve high participation (about 90%) rates from that age. The effort made by successive governments since 1968 to ensure that a place in a pre-primary institution should become not only a right but also a reality for every Italian child merits acknowledgement. In addition, although enrolment rates are far lower and places are partly funded by parents, the team visited some outstanding early childhood services for infants and toddlers. While non-Italians are primarily familiar with the municipal programme of Reggio Emilia (which includes both the *asilo nido* and *scuola dell'infanzia*), other Italian services for young children and their families also merit recognition and acclaim. Infant-toddler centres in Modena, Parma, and San Miniato; Pistoia's *area bambini* and San Miniato's mixed age *nido*; and Milano's system of *tempo per la famiglia* are among the programmes that also attract visitors from many countries, hoping to observe and learn from these Italian innovations. A striking feature of Italian provision—especially for very young children—is the presence of high levels of parent and community participation, including from local officials and university researchers.

### **System co-ordination and coherence of services**

#### ***Reducing fragmentation and strengthening the agency of the Ministry of Education***

100. At the moment, auspices at governmental level are divided between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. As the new *Law 285* underlines, accepted thinking in Italy sees early childhood services within a lifelong education perspective. For this reason, we would propose for consideration that a *special early childhood unit* should be established within the Ministry of Education, with responsibility for in-field policy, executive, administrative and steering tasks. Such a unit would have as a task to increase the dynamism of early childhood policy, especially toward provision for the 0-3 age group, and to take in hand the crucial question of effective policy implementation across the entire sector. Incorporation of the

dynamic elements of the Ministry of Health into this Unit should be considered, so as to maintain the emphasis on the health and socio-emotional development of children, and strengthen co-operation with preventive child health services, including pre- and post-natal services. To preserve the emphasis on the holistic needs of children and families, in particular the present, unmet needs of infants and toddlers, the newly established Parliamentary Commission and the National Observatory of early childhood experts may be invited to play a advisory role in policy matters to the Ministry.

101. Such a consolidation of goals and activities at one ministry, within a specialised interdisciplinary policy and executive unit, should normally enable clearer objectives and policies for early childhood to be formulated and a more rational use of resources to be achieved. It should facilitate also the support and services necessary for the management of a large and complex sector, including statistical collection and analysis, the mapping of actual services and of present and future demand.

### ***Ensuring strong technical support to local authorities and non-state providers***

102. The improvement of vertical co-ordination of the early childhood sector, with leadership from the Ministry of Education, is a crucial goal. The Ministry has responsibility for legal frameworks, co-ordination, major policy orientations, standard setting and regulatory steering. The present situation in which there are excellent guidelines, e.g. the *Orientamenti*, but uneven implementation is a cause for concern. Formulating clear and measurable national objectives, with effective financial and other steering mechanisms would help assist implementation. Likewise, renewed attention may be given to negotiating agreements which would strengthen the various monitoring tools of an early childhood system, e.g. data collection, research, quality measures, etc.

103. Where the regions and local authorities are concerned, various strategies may be employed to raise their awareness of childhood issues and provide them with the necessary policy and managerial expertise to formulate and carry out effective local policies including the move toward school autonomy. Initiatives, such as enlisting the help of other local authorities and establishing twinning arrangements, have already been successfully experimented, and deserve the support of the state. In Italy's large, decentralised system, continual consultation between the national government and the local authorities (both regional and municipal) will be necessary. Information and discussion can help to ensure that national objectives are understood and that the large-scale programmatic elements, best taken in charge at decentralised level, are properly devolved. This may mean providing training to local administrations and agencies to use system management and monitoring tools effectively, e.g. to collect and analyse local data and information; to set municipal or local priorities in consultation with the local partners and allocate budget and personnel accordingly; to establish effective pre- and in-service training; and to encourage a culture of evaluation and quality control.

104. Relations with the private providers can also be negotiated at regional or municipal level, with the state ensuring that recognised non-state providers of quality should also receive adequate funding and resourcing from the local authorities and the state. Such funding assistance could be the basis of negotiations—perhaps within the framework of the present parity discussions—which, while preserving a mixed system, would also provide assurances for the implementation of frameworks, monitoring, technical support, professional development and quality control.

### ***Giving greater responsibility and funding support to effective local authorities***

105. Direct service provision by the state is necessary in a situation where local authorities may not have the expertise, and/or have not made the choice, to deliver services for young children. The reason for state investment in (or take-over of) *scuole materne* in the weaker local authorities is then amply justified.

Concern was expressed, however, during our visit about excessive consolidation of early childhood services within a national schooling model, which might fail to give sufficient place to broad family needs or would not be able to capitalise on local expertise and dynamism. The view was expressed that when an authority is doing excellent work, all early childhood services, including the *scuola materna*, may be entrusted to its responsibility, leaving the state to concentrate on providing services where they are needed in other regions, and on building up weaker regional or local authorities. If such a devolution of responsibility were acceptable and funding were made available—which eventually might be very cost-effective—clear and credible criteria to justify devolution and the distribution of funds will need to be established. A consensus seems to be general that several regions, such as Tuscany, Emilia Romagna and Umbria are already well capable of taking over all early childhood services, if adequate funding mechanisms were negotiated, leaving an appropriate policy and regulatory role to the state.

## **Going to scale in access**

### ***Increasing paid maternity leave and strengthening family-friendly work policies***

106. In all countries, many factors—other than the best interests of young children—influence the take-up of parental leave policies, such as uncertainties about future career prospects for women or labour market requirements at a given moment. There is an argument to be made for providing a real choice to parents, whether to return to work soon after the birth of their child or to take parental leave. Choices are often inhibited, however, by low, short or non-existent parental leave subsidies. Yet, in countries with adequately paid, extended and protected parental leave, there is less utilisation of costly early services for infants. In addition, it may be noted that when children reach a year or 18 months, high employment rates for women are renewed with a corresponding high utilisation of child services. The choices of parents are limited too by the weakness of family-friendly work policies. It was not possible for the review team to pursue this issue in any detail, but breast-feeding leave, job-sharing with benefits, flexitime and home-based work are measures that are practised in other countries with the full agreement of employers.

### ***Expanding supply of a range of quality services for infants and toddlers***

107. When good quality programmes for infants and toddlers exist, parental demand rises up to a certain threshold, which in most countries with quality early childhood services is far above 6%. As mentioned, parents are only now beginning to imagine the positive role that out-of-home care might play in the development of young children. A striking example is Palermo, where, as knowledge of its early childhood services has grown, so too has the waiting list. As mentioned in Chapter 4, some of the most innovative settings for young children are the *nuova tipologia* or *servizio integrativo* found in Italy. These services are an excellent introduction to parents of the benefits that high quality ECEC can bring to their young children. They also can provide opportunities for isolated or marginalised families (e.g., ethnic minority) to develop important social networks with other parents and members of the community. The development of such flexible services should be supported, starting with areas of greatest socio-economic need.

## **Raising the quality of provision across the country**

### ***Providing technical support for quality improvement***

108. The development of a national quality framework of goals and strategies that are flexible and adaptable to local needs and interpretations may help ensure that all early childhood settings meet the broad and holistic philosophy of childhood contained in the *Orientamenti*. Given the current diversity of quality and access, it is important to revisit mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the system at various administrative levels. Careful thought needs to be given as to which professional groups should be charged with the ongoing task of improving quality in each region and municipality: inspectors, didactic directors, school directors, *dirigenti*, *pedagogista*, etc. What form of quality evaluation is most suitable for the early childhood context and what group can most gain the confidence of personnel and parents? Is a traditional evaluation process ensuring conformity to national standards sufficient or is a more dynamic process of support to quality necessary? For the early childhood field, it may be advisable to separate the function of quality improvement from the functions of regulation, inspection and enforcement.

### ***Attention to the organisation of quality***

109. Many Italian programmes are known world-wide for their high quality. However, the quality of programmes stems not just from a philosophy of childhood or a highly innovative pedagogical approach. Equally important is the practical organisation at local level of funding, professional development and daily practice. In this respect, Reggio Emilia provides not only a pedagogical approach, but also a paradigm of how to organise a quality system at municipal level. Among the strategies used to raise quality has been the creation of *integrated, in-service training policies for administrators and teachers*, that reaches across service provision boundaries. Municipal-funded advisory services, professional training and staff development are made available to state and FISM personnel inclusively. It may be useful also to encourage the use of such effective models of local organisation in other “action municipalities or zones”, with contractual funding for reaching quantitative and qualitative targets agreed with the local authorities, who in turn engage the private providers.

### ***Encouraging self-evaluation in ECEC***

110. To meet the concerns expressed by many people we interviewed that the Bassanini law (school autonomy) would exacerbate present weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation, a real effort is needed to establish a culture of self-evaluation in services through ongoing action planning. Much work has been done abroad on observation scales and self-evaluation methods,<sup>10</sup> but many examples of less external evaluation methods exist in Italy, of which perhaps the best known is the documentation practice employed in communities, such as Reggio Emilia (see Box 1). Again, the team would encourage the dissemination and organised take-up of the best Italian practices, keeping in mind that if services are expected to meet quality goals, and cope with increased autonomy and responsibilities, they must have adequate human resources, technical support, and financial means.

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10. Examples include ECERS (Early Care Environment Rating Scale), ITERS (Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale), EEL (Effective Early Learning), and the EXE (Experiential Learning Project) in Flanders.

### **Supporting a reliable system of data collection and monitoring**

111. Issues related to access and quality cannot be effectively addressed *without a reliable and co-ordinated system of data collection and analysis*. A sustained attempt to identify both the demand for services and the resources available to meet those demands is needed in the rapidly changing Italian context. As noted earlier, present educational statistics are not sufficient for the needs of the early childhood sector. National policy makers in the early childhood field need not only reliable maps of existing services for young children; their analyses must follow also the evolution of adult/child ratios; personnel profiles including aims, age, education and years of service; quality standards, etc. Likewise, the socio-economic profiling of young children and families using or not using services is necessary, if suitable programmes are to be created to bring in, as early as possible, the young children who most need early development services (e.g., children with special educational needs, children from language and ethnic minority backgrounds). The combined resources of the Parliamentary Commission, the National Observatory, the National Documentation Centre and the local authorities can be invited to provide central, regional, and local governments with information on current and potential services.

### **Improving staff training and professional development**

112. Achieving the goals of quality and access depends on a well-trained and knowledgeable core of early childhood educators. Several ambitious teacher training programmes are currently underway at Italy's state and private universities. To support and monitor these efforts, we recommend *the creation of a network of early childhood experts* that would guide the design, co-ordination, and implementation of a national set of criteria on which to base approved programmes of study leading to a university degree in early childhood teacher education. For example, given the increasing diversity of Italian society, it is important that the new teacher preparation programmes include training in bilingual language development and multicultural education. It is also critical that the new teacher training programmes are inquiry-oriented, building upon a tradition established in many municipal teacher development initiatives.

113. It may be wise also to consider how *a flexible career ladder for early childhood workers* could be promoted, with different roles and responsibilities for those with different levels of training. A career ladder could reduce barriers for those who wish to enter the profession without a university degree and ease the tensions between new university-trained staff and those already in the field. Current conditions for staff working in the *nidi* may have a negative effect on the government's plans to extend and improve services for the younger children. Although often as highly trained, these staff have less favourable pay, working hours, status, and access to in-service training than teachers in the *scuola materna*. Limited opportunities for advancement can lead to high rates of turnover and little motivation to take on professional development courses. A related challenge will be to *provide adequate in-service training for all levels of staffing*. This in-service training could continue to take place within the schools or, with support from the state, a network of teacher training centres could be established. In order to promote a more even level of quality across services, it also is important to facilitate opportunities for staff from the three networks of provision to come together in the same training courses.

### **Promoting ECEC research and dissemination**

114. Italian early childhood educators have a wealth of knowledge about young children and high quality early educational services in their own country. To date, however, much of what has been learned in the various cities and schools in Italy has remained in those settings, to the benefit of small numbers of children and their families. In spite of the growing frequency of local, regional, and national conferences for teachers of the *asilo nido* and *scuola dell'infanzia*, there is still no nation-wide system for insuring that

all Italian early childhood educators have access to the new understandings and innovations that have been and are being developed in Italy. One way to promote more research and innovation in the schools is to provide more time, more resources, and more incentives—for example, additional time allotted within the school calendar—for teachers to participate in research or professional development activities.

115. The ASCANIO project was a potential means of support for such teacher research and programme innovation, though this project may need to include more incentives for teachers and programme directors to participate. One such incentive, that would also contribute to further dissemination of experiences and understandings, is to invite teachers participating in ASCANIO or ALICE projects to national and regional conferences at which their efforts would be shared and discussed with others in the field. In addition, several government bodies or professional organisations, including the National Association of Municipalities (ANCI), might play a role in helping to disseminate knowledge through written materials or the Internet, and developing collaborative action research.

116. Finally, state-supported twinning—such as found between Pistoia and Palermo; Parma and Ragusa; Reggio Emilia and Naples—could contribute to more shared understandings of local initiatives and innovations (see Box 2). These twinning projects have already made clear that diverse social, economic, and political histories are not barriers to the establishment of common ground and effective partnerships. In each instance, community leaders have recognised that they have something to give and something to gain by exchanging experiences, ideas, and understandings.

### **Ensuring adequate funding and financing**

117. Additional funding to successfully implement the various reforms underway, including *Law 285*, which entails funding to support the infra-structure of new, part-time services for families and young children. Investments to address the access issues—especially with regard to provision for children in the age group 0-3 years—and to even out current regional disparities. Increased state funding to non-state *scuola materna*, which, at the moment, provide half the provision for 3-6 year olds and yet receive little financial support from the government. In some instances, instability of funding has had a negative impact on the quality of programmes. In addition, several of the measures proposed already in this chapter will also require further investment.

118. If the Ministry of Education is to establish a early childhood unit to strengthen its agency in the field and, in addition, to take responsibility for overall policy for all children from birth, then a significant increase in budget for its early childhood activities will indeed be necessary. In this context, streamlining and sharing of costs with the regions and municipalities will need to be envisaged, not forgetting that, at the moment, reliance on municipal and regional funding alone has proven unsatisfactory for early childhood services, including the *scuola materna*, many of which have transferred into the state-funded system. For this reason, the team would suggest that a costing of these various measures should be undertaken, and in parallel, an estimation made of the savings that might be obtained through other approaches to sharing costs and responsibilities.

119. Cost saving measures need to be considered also in the context of wider family, educational, social welfare and labour market aims, and not least, from the perspective of poorer families. According to a recent UNICEF (2000) study on child poverty, the numbers of poor children in Italy are high, even after income transfers and social benefits. Cost-saving measures should be careful not to limit access among families whose children can benefit most from early childhood services.

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120. In summary, Italy has attained close to universal coverage of 3-6 year olds within its system of *scuola materna*—a strong achievement by international standards. These services enjoy widespread political and public support. Ambitious national efforts are underway to raise standards, particularly through improved teacher training and professional development. Provision for children under three is far less developed than for older children, but the unmet need has been recognised as a challenge to be faced. Imbalances in the coverage and quality of ECEC services for children from birth to six are also being addressed. For this effort to be effective, dynamic system management will be necessary on the part of all public authorities, and not least, the Ministry of Education. Finally, the team would like to pay tribute to the quality of Italian programmes, which are often both highly innovative and effective. Communities throughout Italy—and abroad—would benefit from increased opportunities to know more about the organisation of these programmes and to share their ideas, experiences, and understandings.

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## APPENDIX II: INFORMATION ON THE ITALY BACKGROUND REPORT

Mr. Mario Dutto, Ministry of Education, was the National Co-ordinator for the OECD review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Italy. The visit was organised primarily by Mr. Lucio Pusci, Ministry of Education. Professor Egle Becchi of the University of Pavia prepared the Background Report for the Ministry of Education.

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## APPENDIX III: PROGRAMME OF THE REVIEW VISIT

8 March to 19 March 1999

### *Monday 8 March*

9h00 - 10h00

Meeting with Ms. Rosa Angeli Giombolini, responsible for the Pre-primary School Service, Mr. Italo Fiorin, Inspector, and the Inspectors for pre-schools

10h30 - 11h45

Visit to municipal asili nido (two sub-groups)

Sub-group A: Asilo Nido comunale, Via Vespucci 41

Sub-group B: Asilo Nido comunale, Via Zabaglia 27/C

12h00 - 13h00

Ministry of Education: Meeting with Central authorities responsible for the ECEC project and pre-schools: Dr. Mario Dutto, Dr. Guisepe Martinez, Dr. Marcello Limina

15h00 - 16h00

Meeting at the Ministry of Education with representatives of the Region Lazio, and the Municipality of Rome responsible for education and care of young children (0-3 and 3-6)

### *Tuesday 9 March*

8h45 - 12h00

Visit to state-run and municipal pre-schools (two sub-groups)

*Sub-group A:* Scuola materna statale Francesco Cesano, Via Parboni 7 and Scuola materna comunale Scala, Piazza della Scala 22

*Sub-group B:* Scuola materna statale Francesco Crispi, Via Barrili 13 and Scuola materna comunale Bardini, Piazza S. Alessio 34

15h00 - 17h00

Meeting with experts: Dott. Paolo Onelli (Ministry of Social Affairs), Prof. Ottavia Albanese (LUMSSA), Prof. Ferdinando Montuschi (3<sup>rd</sup> University of Rome)

### ***Wednesday 10 March***

9h00 - 10h30

Visit to Montessori pre-school Nerina Noè, Via di Villa Pepoli 13

11h00 - 12h00

Visit to private scuole materne (two sub-groups)

*Sub-group A:* Scuola materna and Asilo nido Anna Martorano, Via Affogalasino 75 (ang. Via del Casaletto)

*Sub-group B:* Scuola materna FISM Anna Micheli, Via L. Albertoni 41

14h00

Travel to Naples

17h00 - 18h30

Meeting with the Assessore of the Municipality of Naples, the Head of Service for Nidi and Scuole Materne, Head of the Health Services, the Assessore of Region Campania and the Head of Education Service at Region Campania

### ***Thursday 11 March***

9h00 - 13h00

Visits in two sub-groups

*Sub-group A:*

9h00

Visit to Nido (30 children, 3 to 36 months of age), Ponticelli, Naples, Via Sambuco

9h45

Visit to Infanzia in gioco (setting for children 18 to 36 months of age and scuola materna), Barra, Naples

11h00

Visit to Scuola Materna Statale Oberdan, Via Carrozzeri alla Posta, downtown Naples

*Sub-group B:*

9h00

Visit to Scuola Materna Comunale Carlo Poerio (Progetto Margherita, with experimental setting for 2-3 year olds)

10h45

Visit to Scuola Materna Statale Montessori, Pozzuoli (near Naples)

12h00

Visit to Scuola Materna, special setting in a hospital in Naples

15h00 - 16h15

Meeting with the Provveditore agli Studi, the Sovrintendente Scolastico Regionale, the Inspectors responsible for pre-primary schools, and the Head of the provincial services for pre-primary schools in the Building of the Provincial School Authority, Piazzetta Matilde Serao 7

16h30 - 18h00

Meeting with the Presidents of the University courses in Naples and Salerno for pre-primary school teacher training, the President of IRR SAE Campania (responsible for in-service training) and his officials

18h30

Travel to Palermo

### ***Friday 12 March***

9h00 - 10h30

Visit to state-run pre-primary schools (two sub-groups)

*Sub-group A:* Scuola materna statale Borgo Nuovo II, Largo Gibilmanno 10-8 and Asilo nido comunale Tornator

*Sub-group B:* Asilo nido comunale Braccio di Ferro and Scuola materna statale Turrisi Colonna, Piazza Gran Cancelliere

10h45 - 13h00

Meeting with representatives of the Region Sicilia, the Province and the Municipality of Palermo in the Building of Provveditore agli Studi

15h00 - 17h00

Meeting with the Provveditore agli Studi, the Sovrintendente Scolastico Regionale (Regional School Authority), and the Inspectors responsible for pre-primary schools

### ***Saturday 13 March***

9h30 - 11h00

Visits in two sub-groups

*Sub-group A:* Scuola materna privata Istituto Fiaba

*Sub-group B:* Scuola materna privata Ist. S. Anna

### ***Sunday 15 March***

Travel to Milan

### ***Monday 15 March***

9h00 - 10h30

Visits to a state-run and to a private pre-primary school (two sub-groups)

10h45 - 12h30

Meetings with the Provveditore agli Studi (Dott. Francesco De Sanctis), the Sovrintendente Scolastico Regionale (Dr. Antonio Zenga), their officials, and the Inspectors responsible for pre-primary schools (Dr. Maria Teresa Tripodi, Dr. Salvatore Foscarini, Sr. Adriana Giampaoli) at the Centro di Documentazione, Via Dandolo 5

15h00 - 17h00

Meetings with representatives of the Faculties of Training Science (Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione): Univeristy of Milan Bicocca (Prof. Susanna Mantovani, Prof. Anna Rezzari, Prof. Carmela Covato), Catholic University of Sacro Cuore (Prof. Guiseppe Vico) and University of Pavis (Prof. Egle Becchi) at the Centro di Documentazione, Via Dandolo 5

### ***Tuesday 16 March***

8h45 - 10h00

Visits to a municipal pre-primary school and a municipal asilo nido (two sub-groups)

*Sub-group A:* Private Asilo nido Locomotiva di Momo, Corso Italia 16

*Sub-group B:* Municipal Asilo Nido, Via Arena 21

10h00 - 11h00

Municipal Scuola materna, via Giacosa 10

11h00 - 13h00

Meeting with representatives of private sponsors of asili nido and pre-primary schools (FISMI, AMISMI, FOE) and unions

15h30 - 17h00

Meeting with the Assessori of the Municipalities of Milan (Dr. Giovanni Testori), Genoa, Turin (Dr. Paola Pozzi), Bergamo, Verona

18h00

Travel to Reggio Emilia

### ***Wednesday 17 March***

9h15 - 12h30

Visit to asili nidi and scuole materne (two sub-groups)

*Sub-group A:*

9h15

Municipal Nido Arcobaleno (or Belelli)

10h30

Autonomous pre-school Figlie di Gesù (FISM)

11h30

Municipal scuola dell'infanzia Villetta (or Balducci)

*Sub-group B:*

9h15

Municipal Nido Panda (or Belelli)

10h30

Municipal scuola dell'infanzia Diana (or Balducci)

11h30

State-run pre-school Renzo Pezzani

15h00 - 17h00

Meeting with the Assessore, the Provveditore agli Studi of Reggio Emilia, a representative of FISM (private asili nido and pre-primary schools) and people responsible for teacher training

***Thursday 18 March***

8h00

Travel to Pistoia

10h45 - 11h45

Visit to Areabambini Verdi, Via Montalese

12h00 - 13h00

Meeting with the Mayor of Pistoia, the Provveditore agli Studi, the Assessore alla Pubblica Istruzione, the Officers responsible for the education and care services and the responsible for health services in the Building of the Comune di Pistoia

14h40 - 15h45

Visit to Areabambini Gialla, Piazza Monteoliveto

16h00 - 17h00

Visit to nido Lago Mago, Via del Lago

17h00

Travel to Rome

***Friday 19 March***

9h00 - 10h30

Meeting of the reviewers at the Ministry of Education

11h00 - 13h00

Meeting with the Minister of Education Prof. Luigi Berlinguer, Director General Dr. Mario Dutto, Director General Dr. Guiseppe Martinez, Dr. Marcello Limina and Dr. Rosa Angela at the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione