

OECD Country Note

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

in

France

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Purposes of the Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for France 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.¹

2. Twelve countries were reviewed between 1998 and 2000 (Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States). A comparative report—*Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*—was published by the OECD in 2001. France is one of nine countries participating in a second round of reviews that began in 2002. The others are Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, and Spain. 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.

France's participation in the Review

5. France was the fourth country to be visited in this second phase of the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in France was prepared by the Ministry of Education (*Ministère de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche*), the Ministry of Social Affairs (*Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail de la solidarité*), and the Ministry of Health, the Family, and Handicapped Persons (*Ministère de la santé, de la famille, et des personnes handicapées*). Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise

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

overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data (see Appendix 2). The Background Reports prepared by participating countries are an important output of the review process, because they provide a state-of-the-art overview and analysis of policy and provision in each participating country.

6. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of a member of the OECD Secretariat and four experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visited France from 2–6 June 2003. The five-day visit was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs. In the course of the visit, the team met with many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice and had the opportunity to observe examples of early childhood programmes for 0–6 year olds in Paris and Créteil (see Appendix 3).

7. At the request of the Ministries, the review visit focused on three main issues:

- Reconciliation of work and family responsibilities in order to promote equal opportunities and the interests of children; the benefits for families with very young children of family policies, parental leave schemes, and supportive measures in the workplace;
- Pedagogy and pedagogical frameworks in the early childhood years; and
- Inspection and monitoring of ECEC arrangements and the evaluation of results obtained in light of increasing demands for transparency and participatory evaluation.

8. A focused review of five days necessarily involves making difficult decisions about what can be included in the programme. In this case, the choices were influenced by the fact that the review team visit coincided with national strikes in France, which prevented the team from meeting with the full range of stakeholders originally scheduled in the programme. For example, the team did not meet with union representatives of parents, teachers, or employers. Due to transportation difficulties, the full team also did not have the opportunity to meet with representatives of the main early childhood professional association (*Association générale des institutrices et instituteurs des écoles maternelles* - AGIEM), teacher training institutions (*Institut universitaire de formation de maîtres* - IUFM) and schools for early childhood educators (*éducatrices des jeunes enfants* and *auxilières de puéricultrice*). Site visits were limited to the Paris-Île-de-France region. To help compensate for these cancelled meetings and visits, the team received detailed written information. Subsequent to the visit, the rapporteur and the member of the OECD Secretariat conducted three additional interviews to help complement the earlier meetings.

Structure of the Country Note

9. This Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in France. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, reviews of public policy documents and published articles, and the observations of the review team. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the context in which policy making for children takes place by describing some features of the French government, geography, demography, economy, and society. Chapter 3 includes an overview of the main forms of ECEC provision in France, as well as the key features of staffing, programme content, family engagement, and funding. Chapter 4 discusses the key issues that policymakers in France may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, we offer some policy recommendations and concluding remarks on the ECEC system in France.

Acknowledgements

10. The OECD team would like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs for organising the programme for us. Our meetings and site

visits allowed us to gain a better understanding of some of the key ECEC policy issues in France during a short period of time. In addition, the Background Report provided us with a wealth of information on the French system and will be an invaluable resource for those working on policy development for young children and families in France and abroad. This Country Note represents the views of the OECD team, based on our discussions and observations during our intensive five-day visit. We offer our reflections and analyses in the spirit of professional dialogue. While we have received guidance and insight from policy officials, researchers, and practitioners in France, they have no part in any shortcomings that this document may present. In order to have a complete picture of ECEC policy and practice in France, it is assumed that the Country Note will be read in conjunction with the French Background Report, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

11. All French terms and services are explained throughout the text. The following provides a brief overview of the main forms of ECEC in France:

12. Almost 100% of three-, four-, and five-year-olds and about 35% of two-year-olds attend the free *écoles maternelles* (literally “maternal schools”) or preschools that are formally part of the primary school system under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Children have a legal right to a place in a preschool from the age of three. Outside of school hours and on Wednesday afternoons, children may attend leisure-time activities (*garderie* or *Centre de loisirs sans hébergement - CLSH*). There are also *jardins d’enfants* for three- to six-year-olds which vary in terms of opening hours and fees.

13. Provision for children under three falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health, the Family, and Handicapped Persons, the *Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales* (National Family Allowance Fund), and the *départements* and municipalities (*communes*). *Crèches collectives* are centre-based services run by the municipalities, the *départements* or non-profit organizations. Parent co-operatives (*crèches parentales*) involve parents in the daily management and operations of the *crèche*. There are some employer-sponsored *crèches d’entreprise*, mostly in the hospital and public sectors. *Halte-garderies* operated by municipalities and non-profits provide part-time and occasional care, often for parents who work non-standard hours. Parents pay for these services, usually on a sliding-scale.

14. There are a range of home-based options. *Assistantes maternelles* are family day care providers (literally “maternal assistants”) who care for one to three children in the provider’s home on a regular basis for payment. Providers must be approved in order to work in the profession. About 90% of family day care providers are employed directly by parents, while the rest are part of a family crèche (*crèche familiale*). Family day care providers may take advantage of training and support offered by a family day care network (*Relais Assistantes Maternelles - RAM*). In-home caregivers (*garde à domicile*) work in the child’s home and are not subject to the same regulations as family day care.

CHAPTER 2 – CONTEXTUAL ISSUES SHAPING ECEC POLICY IN FRANCE

15. French policies to support children and families need to be understood within the current social, economic, demographic, and political contexts. In particular, ECEC policies have been shaped by concerns about the birth rate, the economic situation of lone-parent and large families, the changing demands of the labour market and equal opportunity goals, and social exclusion related to the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of the population. These contextual trends are explored below.

Geography and demography

16. France is a country of 58 892 million people (2000) and 549 square kilometres. In 2000, the population density was 108 per square kilometre (similar to Portugal and Hungary). In 2002, there were 4.2 million children aged 4 months to six years of age (4 494 293 children under six or 7.3% of the population in 1999) (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2002). The fertility rate in France has been an ongoing political concern since the origins of family policy during the post-WW II period. The fertility rate in France is currently among the highest in Europe—1.89 compared to the EU average of 1.57. After a period of decline, the birth rate increased markedly in the late 1990s. In 1999, the number of births reached the same level as it had been in 1992. There was also a mini baby boom in 2000 which has had implications for demand for child care. As in other European countries, French parents are waiting longer to have their first child than in the past. The average age at first birth for women has increased in France from 25 years in 1980 to 29.4 years in 2000, which means that childbirth often coincides with an important period in women's professional careers. An explicit goal of the new family policy measures introduced in early 2003 (see Chapter 3) is to help increase the birth rate.

17. Most families with young children are two-parent households. More than 90% of children under six live in two-parent households, while 8.9% of children under live in lone-parent households. Lone-parent families are predominantly (95%) headed by women (DREES, 2001). Lone-parents tend to be younger and less educated than their two-parent counterparts and more likely to be employed in lesser-paid, and unstable jobs. According to UNICEF, the likelihood of living in poverty is approximately four times greater for French children living in lone-parent families than children living in two-parent families. In France, 26.1% of children in single-parent families are poor compared with 6.4% of other families (UNICEF, 2000).

Political and administrative organisation

18. France is a unitary state with three levels of decentralised government, each with elected officials and unique financial and legal responsibilities. There are 22 *régions*, 100 *départements*, and 36 000 *communes* (local authorities). The latter may collaborate to fulfil certain legal responsibilities (known as *intercommunalité*). There are key differences in the administration of the care and education sectors for young children. The *école maternelle* is part of the national education system, and responsibilities are shared between the State and the local authorities. Other early childhood policies in the child care sector are decentralised and vary based on the efforts of various partners. For example, policies may be linked to the mayor's political priorities, the efforts of the CAF (*Caisses d'allocations familiales*) family allowance funds (via the *contrats enfance*), the PMI (*protection maternelle et infantile*) which controls the quality of ECEC settings, and actions by non-profit groups.

L'État

19. At the national level, three ministries are involved in ECEC. The *ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité* (Ministry of Social Affairs, Employment, and Solidarity) and the *ministère de la santé, de la famille et des personnes handicapées* (Ministry of Health, Family, and Handicapped Persons) develop the regulations for the different forms of non-school ECEC and defines, with the national family allowance fund (*Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales - CNAF*), the goals and resources of the regional family allowance funds over a four-year period. The *Direction Générale de l'Action Sociale* (Direction General for Social Affairs) is the administrative unit responsible for ECEC and is jointly affiliated with both ministries. The DGAS develops the diplomas and training requirements, licenses training institutions, and helps finance initial training for the early childhood professionals (except the teaching staff).

20. The *ministère de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche* (Ministry of Youth, National Education, and Research) defines the curriculum, opening hours, and operations of the *école maternelle*. The ministry recruits, trains, and remunerates the teaching staff and inspectorate. A sub-ministry focused on youth affairs, *ministère chargé de la jeunesse*, works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs in regulating and monitoring leisure-time centres and staff that serve children under six.

Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (CNAF)

21. Family policy is overseen by a public agency, the *Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (CNAF)*. The CNAF or National Family Allowance Fund is governed by representatives of the social partners and family associations under the auspices of the State. The CNAF has given the major impulse to the development of the system of child care and leisure-time services (i.e., ECEC services outside the school system) over the past 30 years. In particular, in order to provide financial incentives for the municipalities to develop the supply of ECEC for children under six and to increase the quality of existing services, the CNAF created the *contrats-crèches* for crèches in 1982 and the broader *contrats-enfance* in 1988. These contracts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

22. In each *département*, the family allowance fund (*caisse d'allocation familiale - CAF*) carries out the social policy decisions adopted by the CNAF. The CAF distributes family allowances and subsidies for ECEC, including those which offset the costs of hiring a family day care (*Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle - AFEAMA*) or in-home provider (*allocation de garde d'enfants à domicile - AGED*) and the partial wage replacement affiliated with extended parental leave (*Allocation parentale d'éducation - APE*). Over the past 30 years, one of the CAF's priorities has been the development of ECEC settings in partnership with the *communes* and non-profit associations, and sometimes *départements*. The CAFs are key actors in supporting local policy development. They offer technical assistance in conducting needs assessments, develop innovative projects, and provide financial support for capital investment and operating costs. The CAFs are quite autonomous in defining policies that address the local economic and social situation, such as the distribution of centre-based or family day care options. When municipalities are unwilling or unable to manage services, the *département* can sign a CAF agreement to run ECEC services directly.

Conseils Généraux

23. At the *département* level, the president of the *Conseil Général* is responsible for authorising and regulating individual and group forms of child care, as well as for supervising and monitoring services. These responsibilities are primarily carried out through the child and maternal health services (*Protection Maternelle et Infantile - PMI*) which have been decentralised since 1989. The *départements* are also responsible for organising and financing training for *assistantes maternelles*. The PMI is involved in

authorising leisure-time centres and delivering school health services for children under the age of four. Above and beyond these legal requirements, the *départements* may initiate more innovative and progressive policies, for example, by providing financial incentives for the development of ECEC services, reserving places in *crèches* for children from families in difficulty, or supporting family child care networks. The president of the *Conseil Général* is the director of the department level early childhood commissions, created in 2002.

Local authorities

24. The *communes* often partner with the CAFs to organise and/or deliver both centre-based and home-based arrangements. While the *communes* do not have any legal obligation to provide child care for children under three, they are encouraged to do so by CNAF subsidy system and the local actions of the CAFs. In addition to managing and financing institutions, the *communes* can develop a co-ordinated ECEC policy via a *contrat enfance* with the CAF or an early childhood co-ordinator. In the education sector, the *communes* are responsible for financing the construction and maintenance of school buildings and for the operating costs and supplies of the *écoles maternelles* and elementary schools. They also hire and pay non-teaching aides (ATSEM). Aside from these requirements, the *communes* play an important role in subsidising and operating school cafeterias and leisure-time activities during non-school hours.

Non-profit associations

25. Over the past 20 years, the proportion of ECEC settings run by non-profit associations has expanded from 10% to more than 40%. The sector has contributed to the creation of two out of three settings over the past ten years, leading to a total of 3 700 services and 87 000 places. The non-profit sector frequently responds to under-met or under-recognised needs in local communities and often involves community and parent participation either as paid professionals or volunteers. Non-profits have contributed to the expansion of innovative and flexible forms of ECEC such as the *haltes-garderies* (47%), *mini-crèches* (55%) and parent-child centres (70%) Generally, these non-profits are small and focus only on ECEC. They often belong to national networks or umbrella organisations.

Co-ordination mechanisms

26. Given the many actors involved in ECEC at various levels of government administration, several mechanisms have been created to co-ordinate policies and services for young children and their families. At the local level, early childhood co-ordinators (there were 300 early childhood co-ordinators in 1989) are most often employed by *communes* to facilitate linkages across services, offer in-service training, and provide support to individual services. The professional background and responsibilities of these co-ordinators vary greatly. For example, they may be a former *crèche* director, a *puéricultrice* or an *éducatrice de jeunes enfants* (Baudelot & Rayna, 2000).

27. In 1998, a local educational contract (*contrat éducatif local* – CEL), was created with the collaboration of four ministries at that time (education, culture and communication, and youth/sports, and the cities), in order to integrate the existing measures focused on children. The local educational contract takes into account children's holistic needs and interests, as well as his or her environment, neighbourhood, and city. After a detailed needs assessment, the CEL sets out the organisation of leisure-time activities which take place outside of school hours. These contracts are most common in disadvantaged urban and rural areas. The content of the activities proposed are intended to reduce inequalities in access to information and knowledge, culture, and sports.

28. In 2002, early childhood commissions (*la commission départementale de l'accueil des jeunes enfants*) were created at the *département* level. Under the leadership of the president of the *Conseil Général*

(president) and the CAF (vice-president), the commission brings together all the relevant actors (e.g., representatives of the ministry of education, communes, associations, employers and employees) to promote coherence, develop ECEC adapted to family needs, provide information, and increase equality of access to, and quality of, services. About a year ago, the CNAF began experimenting with contracts signed with about 20 *départements* to improve quality to family day care and in-home caregivers, help co-ordinate services (via the early childhood commissions), provide information to families, and support innovation in the field.

Maternal employment and gender roles in the home

29. Another trend in France is the increase in labour force participation among mothers with young children. Women's employment increased from 58.9% to 79.6% between 1975 and 2001, yet women are less likely to be employed than men. The employment rate for women 25 to 49 years of age is 15 points below that for men. More than 70% of employed women work full-time. The increase in female labour force participation has been consistent for all family types, except for mothers with at least two children, including one child under three. The introduction of an extended parental leave in 1985 and the expansion of eligibility from three to two children in 1994 (*Allocation Parentale d'Éducation*) led to a drop in labour force participation among this group of mothers.

30. The majority of children under six have both parents or their lone parent in the labour force. Female labour force participation is linked to the presence and number of children. Between 1990 and 2001, the percentage of married/cohabiting mothers in the labour market with two children over the age of three increased from 73% to 81%, but the labour force participation of those with at least one child under three decreased from 63% to 55%. About 15% of families with children are single-parent households. France has highest labour force participation rate of lone parents in the European Union. In 1996, 76% of lone parents worked compared to the EU average of 59%. Moreover, 88% of employed lone-parents worked full-time.

31. While women work more and more, they continue to carry the responsibility for both domestic and family tasks in the home. For example, 83% of domestic tasks are carried out by women. Overall, mothers with children under 15 years of age devote 1h35 to parenting, while fathers devote only 31 minutes. This imbalance in gender roles in the home is linked to inequities in the labour market: the higher proportion of women in part-time work, higher female unemployment rates, lower salaries among women (87% of men), and lower representation of women in high-level corporate positions. For example, women represent only a third of high-skilled employment (*cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures*) and a meagre 7% of the management (*cadres dirigeants*) of large companies. As discussed below, working women are concentrated in lower-skilled professions where atypical hours are more common. These trends have consequences for work-family reconciliation.

Employment patterns and working hours

32. Over the past several years, there have been trends toward longer working hours, more irregular hours, and more atypical hours in France. Between 1986 and 1999, the average work week of full-time employees—particularly higher-income workers—increased more than an hour to 42h36. During the 1980s, the working hours of employees became more irregular as companies turned to new ways of organising labour. Women, who tend to be overrepresented in commerce, services, health sectors, and as non-qualified workers, are increasingly likely to work weekends on a regular basis—14% of women and 15% of men report working irregular work weeks. A recent study (Boisard & Fermanian, 1999) found that 30% of workers worked cyclical or irregular working hours. Changing employment patterns have implications for ECEC services, the latter which have been slow to accommodate the increase in non-standard working hours.

33. The Aubry law allows workers to request to work part time (less than 35 hours per week) for family reasons. In France, 16.2% of workers work part time – 5.1% of men and 29.7% of women. Part-time work is more common among white-collar workers, especially those who work in the public sector. Among those who choose part-time work to take care of their children, the hours are often selected accordingly; for example, 36% never work on Wednesdays when schools are closed. There also has been an increase in “imposed” part-time work. About a third of those who currently work part-time did not choose this form of work and would like to work more hours. In addition, part-time work is often correlated with irregular hours. In sectors like retail, part-time work means working very early in the morning, late at night, Saturdays, or with several breaks during the day. The latest volume of *OECD Employment Outlook* (2002) highlighted the gender implications of these employments including the ways that part-time work—imposed and voluntary—explain the lower professional attainment of women, in terms of salaries and leadership positions.

34. In 1998 and 2000, France reduced the legal work week for full-time employees working in companies with more than 10 employees to 35 hours. The implementation of the 35 hour work week precipitated the reorganisation of working hours. Employers have responded to the “reduced work time” policy (*réduction du temps de travail* – RTT) by giving employees time off, shorter work days, more vacation days, or some combination of these approaches. A recent study of the new policy revealed that it is most common for workers to work half-days or take days off on a regular basis. However, there is variation by income groups. White collar workers (*cadres*) and other high-level professionals tend to have more flexibility and options than factory workers and other blue collar workers. The proportion of salaried workers with working hours that are more variable after the RTT also is higher among factory and low-skilled workers, especially among women. About 8% of employees overall—but 23% of low-skilled and female workers—report that their working hours are less predictable since the RTT. In some sectors, companies introduced a modulated work week to avoid paying overtime to staff during busy periods and to turn to partial unemployment during less busy periods.²

35. Despite the increase in unpredictable and imposed working hours for some workers, early results suggest that the RTT may have improved work-family reconciliation. Workers who were the most satisfied with the reduced working hours policy were parents, especially mothers, who had young children. In addition, 52% of men and 63% of women with children under age 12 reported spending more time with their children since the RTT. For example, parents reported spending more time on outings, accompanying children to activities, and playing and discussing with their children. About 29% of workers reported spending more time on their children’s schoolwork. Parents say they spend more time with their children during vacations and weekdays when their children are in school (Estrade, Méda, & Orain, 2001).

36. The Background Report notes that the growing unpredictability and irregularity of working hours, and especially the increase in atypical hours, aggravates the difficulties for reconciling work and family life. Families face the challenge of juggling their working hours with the somewhat inflexible opening hours of ECEC settings and the needs and rhythms of their children.

Immigration, poverty, and social exclusion

37. The demographic diversity of children in France has increased with immigration from former colonies, along with arrivals of refugees from other parts of the world. In France, one in five people has at least one parent or grandparent who was born in another country. Throughout the 19th century, immigrants arrived in small numbers primarily from the neighbouring countries of Spain, Italy, and Belgium. By the 1880s newcomers also arrived from farther distances and in greater numbers. During the 1920s and the decades following World War II, new arrivals came from Poland and Portugal to meet labour shortages,

2 This policy is expected to change with the Fillon law of 2003.

and later from former French colonies in North Africa, West Africa, and Asia. Today, immigrants represent about 7.5% of the French population. About 6% of preschoolers and elementary school children in France are non-French nationals, most commonly from Morocco, Algeria, other African countries, Turkey, and Portugal (see Neuman & Peer, 2002).

38. Children from (non-European) immigrant backgrounds often have difficulties mastering the French language and integrating into French schools. In addition, they may face challenges outside of school, including overcrowded living conditions and violence in their neighbourhoods. In response to these concerns about poverty and social exclusion, public policy has highlighted the importance of reducing disparities in educational achievement by providing children with equality of educational opportunity and community supports. In the education sector, the government created policies of positive discrimination toward children who live in areas of concentrated disadvantage (*zones d'éducation prioritaire*) in 1981. The proportion of immigrant or foreign children in preschools in ZEPs—20% on average—is five times higher than the proportion in non-ZEPs. It is a policy priority to enrol two-year-olds in preschools in these areas (Neuman & Peer, 2002).

39. French family policy seeks to promote horizontal equity by redistributing income to compensate for the costs of raising children (e.g., taking account of the number of children, the presence of very young children, etc.). About 40% of family policy transfers are universal (not income-tested). All families with two or more children receive cash allowances to help defray childrearing costs. In addition to these subsidies, lower-income families in France benefit from other forms of support, including housing allowances and cash grants for children's schoolbooks and vacations. These policies are complemented by a set of more targeted social assistance measures which are income-tested and serve as a safety net for families. Together, these policies protect a large proportion of French children from poverty (Jeandidier *et al.*, 2000). According to a recent UNICEF analysis, these family policies, along with a progressive tax structure, reduce the percentage of French children living in poverty by more than 20 percentage points from 29% (based only on family wage income) to 8% (after taking into account taxes and benefits) (UNICEF, 2000).

40. The impact of transfer policies varies by subgroup, however. Research has found that French family policy successfully reduces poverty among large families (three or more children). Transfers also significantly reduce the high pre-transfer poverty rates of immigrant families of non-European nationality, though their after-transfer poverty rates are still higher than French nationals or other European nationals living in France. Transfers are less effective in reducing the poverty of lone-parent families and families where at least one parent is unemployed, which suggests that family policy is not well targeted to these vulnerable groups. In addition, family policies are more effective in reducing poverty among children under three than children from three to five (Jeandidier *et al.*, 2000).

CHAPTER 3 – OVERVIEW OF ECEC IN FRANCE

41. Preschool education has a long tradition in France. As early as 1771, “knitting schools” (*écoles à tricoter*) existed in parts of France for four- to seven-year-olds. New institutions known as “salles d’asile” appeared beginning in 1825 and developed throughout the 19th century. These asylums were primarily intended for children from poor families who were perceived as being in danger in their homes. Starting in 1828, the State began to organise this private charity work. In the 1830s an official programme and regulations were established for these free, full-day (8h-19h) services for children from two- to six-years-old. The goals were to teach children order, cleanliness, and respect to prepare them for an “honest, decent, Christian life.”

42. The first Republican government passed several school laws related to the separation of Church and state, which would lead to the integration of formerly charitable institutions into the public sector. A law of 16 June 1881 defined the *école maternelle publique* as voluntary, but free and non-confessional, and integrated with the primary school. The State assumed responsibility for the organisation and the financing of education for two to six-years under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Instruction. In 1921, the status and working conditions of preschool teachers were aligned with their elementary school counterparts and an assistant was attached to every preschool or *classe enfantine*. During the 20th century, more advantaged families began to enrol their young children in the *jardins d’enfants* and classes in *lycées bourgeois*. After WWII, the middle-class began to support the *école maternelle* for its intellectual and cultural benefits. Enrolment rapidly increased in the 1960s and 1970s and became close to universal for the three- to six-year-olds by the beginning of the 1990s.

43. The history of the care sector followed a different path. In 1844, the society of *crèches* opened the first charitable *crèche* to « secourir à peu de frais l’enfant, sa mère et sa famille par le travail sans l’humiliation et moraliser en secourant ». Monitored by the prefects starting in 1862, the *crèches* were eligible to receive public subsidies. Even though they were recognized as “utilité publique” in 1869, the *crèches* remained in the domain of private charity and did not receive the same recognition and financing as the *salles d’asile*. They were considered welfare institutions with primarily a health mission. A few workplace *crèches* were created at the end of the 19th century, but the first public *crèches* did not appear until the 20th century.

44. Important policy developments occurred after WWII in order to fight infant mortality and to increase the birth rate. During this period, the child and maternal health service (PMI) was created, along with regulations for the *crèches* and the *puéricultrice* diploma. With a labour shortage in the 1960s, the number of *crèches collectives* increased and the *crèches familiales*, and soon after the first *halte-garderie*, appeared. Despite the greater role of government in the domain of child care, efforts were fragmented and focused more on health concerns than on a holistic early childhood policy. At the end of the 1960s, the CAFs created new subsidies to expand various forms of *crèches* as well as other forms of ECEC. Policy accorded more attention to the socio-educational role of ECEC and shifted to a more neutral position regarding working women. The diversification of options continued in the 1980s and 1990s with a number of new subsidies to help offset the costs either of employing a child care provider or of taking parental leave. At the same time, the CNAF began to develop contracts with local authorities to expand services and develop more coherent ECEC policies.³

45. Today, ECEC provision in France is dominated by the world-renown preschools or *écoles maternelles* which enrol almost all preschoolers from the age of three to six, and about a third of two-year-

3 For a more detailed history, see the French Background Report (2003), Dajez (1994), and Mozère (1992).

olds. For children under three, a diverse and decentralised ECEC system has evolved with a combination of publicly-subsidized centre-based and home-based arrangements. Access is far from universal. Drawing on the detailed information outlined in the French Background Report, this Chapter provides a brief overview of the different types of ECEC provision and the staffing, regulation, and financing policies in place (see Tables 3 and 4 for summary tables on the types of ECEC services and professionals). At the end of the Chapter, several recent family policy initiatives are profiled.

Forms of ECEC provision for 2 to 6 year olds

46. Table 1 below provides an overview of early childhood provision in France

Table 1: Characteristics of the main forms of ECEC

Type	GROUP ECEC ARRANGEMENTS		INDIVIDUAL ECEC ARRANGEMENTS	
	<i>Crèche</i>	<i>École maternelle</i>	<i>Assistantes maternelles</i>	<i>Garde à domicile</i>
% children enrolled Under age 3 to 6 years	220 000 (10 %) Marginal	255 000 (34,7% of two-year-olds) 2 360 000 (almost 100%)	415 000 (20%) 240 000	31 000 (1,5%) 49 000
Supervision	Licensing and supervision by the département (child and maternal health - PMI)	Inspecteur de l'Éducation Nationale (IEN)	Licensing and supervision by the département (PMI service)	None
Regulations	Décret of 1/8/2000 and arrêté of 26/12 Education and social project, maximum capacity, facility requirements, role of parents, adult-child ratio, group size, staff qualifications, affiliation with a doctor	Code de l'éducation Décret of 6 September 1990 regarding the organisation and operations of the écoles maternelles and elementary schools. Arrêtés of 25 January 2002: schedule et curriculum for primary education (Official Bulletin for Education BOEN of 14 February 2002).	Loi of 17/7/1992 and décrets of 1992 Licensing for 1 to 3 children for a period of 5 years; provider must be healthy, capable of assuring the child's well-being, safety of home	No regulation
Staff qualifications	Director : puéricultrice or éducatrice de jeunes enfants (bac + 4 or 3 yrs) Staff who work with children (auxiliaire de puériculture : brevet + 1 yr of training)	Recruitment by public exam Instituteur (bac + 2 yrs) Professeur des écoles : licence (3 yr college degree) + professional training at an IUFM 36 weeks of professional development over the teacher's career	60 hours of training within 5 years of receiving a license	No required training; possibility for voluntary training (with the agreement of employer)
Employer	Communes : 70 % Non-profit assoc. : 28 %	State (national gov't)	Parents	Parents
Global cost	# 2 billion euros (including haltes-garderies)	4 040 euros	1,7 billion euros (including 3-6 year olds)	€135 billion €, including 3-6 year olds
Unit cost per child per year	12 700 euros		6 600 euros	17 200 euros
Cost sharing (financing)	CNAF, Communes Families	Staff : State Facilities and maintenance: communes	CNAF Families	CNAF Families
Methods of financing	Prestation de service CNAF Subsidies from communes	State Communes	AFEAMA allowance	AGED allowance
Fees	12 % of monthly income	N/A	Cost – AFEAMA At least 222 euros/month	Cost – AGED 750 euros/month

Source: French Background Report, 2003

Écoles maternelles

47. French preschools are fully integrated into the primary school of the national education system, with the same guiding principles, opening hours, and administration as elementary schools. Since 1989, every child from the age of three has a right to a place in a neighbourhood *école maternelle*. Almost 100% of three- four- and five-year olds attend (see Table 1). These preschools do not charge fees and are generally located in a separate building, often adjacent to an elementary school. In rural areas, preschool classes may be located within elementary schools. Preschools typically operate 26 hours per week from 8h30 to 12h00 and from 14h00 to 16h30 on weekdays during the school year. It is common for French preschools to have a canteen on the premises where children may eat a hot lunch for a small fee (on a sliding-scale according to income). In general, there is no school on Wednesdays and a half-day on Saturdays which presents certain challenges for working parents. About 20% of students attend private *écoles maternelles*, and the vast majority of these are run by religious institutions which receive public subsidies via a contract with the Ministry of Education.

48. Enrolment of two-year-olds is more diverse across the country and has been the subject of much national debate. Nationally, the rate is around 35%, and has decreased since 1999 due to increasing demographic pressure to enrol three- to five-year-olds. There is still strong variation across the *départements*, ranging from less than 25.5% to over 57%. Traditionally strong in Brittany, in the Nord, and in the southeast of the Massif central, the rate is much lower in Paris and the surrounding areas, in Alsace, and in the southeast (MJNER, 2003). In light of research showing the benefits of early schooling for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the *loi d'orientation* of 1989 established a national priority to enrol two-year-olds in the *école maternelle* from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in urban, rural or mountain areas. About 40% of two-year-olds living in priority education areas or ZEPs (*zones d'éducation prioritaire* – see Chapter 2) attend *école maternelle*, but attendance is still more widespread among more wealthy families.

49. While voluntary, the *école maternelle* is considered the foundation of the education system. There are usually three levels of preschool: *petite section* (little section) for three-year-olds, *moyenne section* (middle section) for four-year-olds and *grande section* (large section) for five-year-olds. The *grande section* often is seen as both part of the *école maternelle* and the *école élémentaire*. Mixed-age grouping is relatively uncommon. In schools with many two-year-olds, there may be a *toute petite section* (very little section) or children may be integrated with the three-to-five year olds.

50. In order to facilitate the transition of children from home to school, experimental programmes known as “bridging activities” (*actions passerelles*) have developed, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods where children may not have had the opportunity to take part in other early childhood settings. The goal of these activities is to give children an opportunity to socialise with other children, to ease children’s separation from their families, and to support parents. *Classes passerelles* may take place in an *école maternelle* under the responsibility of a teacher working with an early childhood professional (*éducateur de jeunes enfants*). Alternatively, a *passerelle* may be located in a setting that resembles an *halte-garderie* or *jardin d'enfants* or simply a formalised partnership between *écoles maternelles* and another early childhood setting (*crèches* or *haltes-garderies*). The decision to develop these activities is made locally through an agreement between the *inspection académique* and the *commune*, after consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

Table 2a: Trends in the percentage of children in the école maternelle by age

	1960-61	1970-71	1980-81	1990-91	2001-02
2 years	9,9	17,9	35,7	35,2	34,7
3 years	36,0	61,1	89,9	98,2	100,0
4 years	62,6	87,3	100,0	100,0	100,0
5 years	91,4	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: French Background Report, 2003.

Table 2b: Trends in the enrolment and institutional data

Year	1960-61	1970-71	1980-81	1990-91	2001-02 (incomplete data)
Number écoles maternelles	5 920	9 336	15 721	18 436	18 177
Number classes maternelles	20 478	36 861	58 402	68 301	
Number children enrolled in pre-elementary school	1 177 900		2 070 500	2 241 000	2 146 900
Average number of students per class	42,9	40,3	30,0	27,9	25,5

Source: French Background Report, 2003.

Leisure-time services

51. When the preschools are not in operation—on Wednesdays, after-school, and during short vacations—leisure-time centres (out-of-school services) or *Centres de Loisir Sans Hébergement* (CLSH) serve about 280 000 of the 2.2 million children aged three to six. About 53% of CLSH are operated by non-profit associations and 42% by the communes, and 5% by businesses, the CAF or individuals. They are open about 100 days per year.

52. Recent legislation (2001) sought to strengthen the safety and educational dimensions of these services. Centres enrolling more than eight children are required to be registered with the *préfet*, and for those serving children under six, approval from the PMI is mandatory. Each CLSH must develop an educational project (*projet éducatif*) which specifies educational objectives, operating procedures, and a pedagogical project (proposed activities, use of the space, and collaboration with other professionals). CLSH are staffed by a qualified director and *animateurs* who sometimes are students or young adults, especially during the summer months. Required staff-child ratios are one adult for every eight children under six and one adult for every 12 children over six. The CLSH are financed 45% by communes and departments, 25% by families, and 14.5% by the CAF at a cost of about 23 Euros per day per child.

53. Alongside the leisure-time centres, many children attend *garderies périscolaires* immediately before and/or after school. These *garderies* are run by municipalities or parents' associations and often operate on school premises such as in the gymnasium or other common spaces (but not in the classrooms). They generally charge fees based on a sliding-scale. The facilities, organisation, staffing, and content of these programmes vary greatly. If registered as CLSH, these services must follow the above-specified requirements. If not, they may operate without any monitoring or registration. The exact numbers of *garderies* and children who attend them are not known by national authorities.

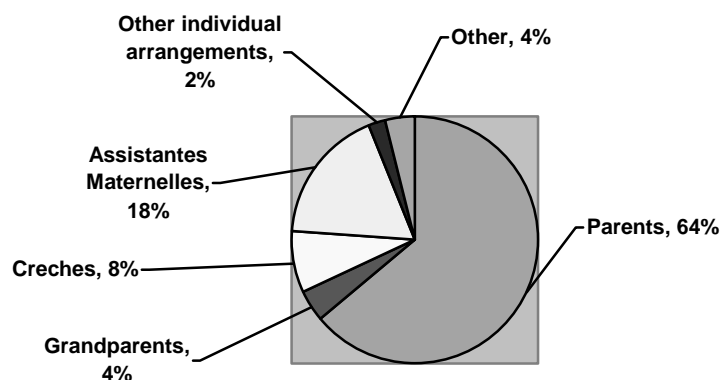
54. In addition, about 250 000 children are cared for by a family day carer (*assistante maternelle*) during out-of-school hours and another 43 200 by an in-home caregiver.

ECEC arrangements for children under 3 years

55. Children under age three who are not yet enrolled in the *école maternelle* may be cared for by a parent on leave, by an individual such as a family day care provider or in-home caregiver, or in a centre-based setting. Some families also turn to unlicensed, unregistered child care arrangements, which are illegal in France. These forms of ECEC are discussed in more detail below. The demand for services far exceeds the supply, particularly for centre-based arrangements such as the *crèches*. In 2002, the DREES, a research arm of the Ministry of Social Affairs, conducted a new survey which, for the first time, provides detailed data on the ways in which children under six are cared for during the different days of the week, including week-ends, Wednesdays, and school vacations. The study also allows for information on the number and situation of families that use different arrangements, rather than basing estimates on the number of places in different organised settings.

56. The results show that most common primary arrangement for children under three is parental care (64%), followed by licensed family child care (*assistantes maternelles* 18%), *crèches* (8%), grandparents (4%), other individual arrangements (2%) and other (4%). The latter three categories may include unregulated arrangements known as “*garde au noir*.” The study also found that many children are cared for by multiple arrangements on a given day or week (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Primary ECEC arrangement for children under 3



Source: DREES, Enquête Modes de garde et d'accueil des enfants de moins de 7 ans, mai 2002

Individual arrangements

Assistante Maternelle

57. The most common non-parental ECEC are the *assistantes maternelles*, family day care providers who care for children under six (usually under age three) in the provider's home. *Assistantes maternelles* are required to be licensed (*agrées*). In 2001, there were 366 000 family child care providers licensed to care for up to 939 000 children. In practice, there are about 720 000 children in this form of ECEC.

58. Salaries for licensed *assistantes maternelles* are regulated by law at a rate of 2.25 times the national minimum wage (SMIC) per child per day. They are entitled to overtime after 10 hours. Families negotiate directly with the provider with regard to meals, vacation time, and procedures if the child is absent. Providers also benefit from a special tax situation worth about 200 million Euros. In 2002, *assistantes maternelles* earned a monthly net salary of 542 Euros regardless of working hours and the

number of children in care, and 631 Euros for those who reported working full time. These salaries represent about 45% of the average wage for a full-time worker in the private sector and 70% of the minimum income for 169 hours. Wages for family day carers have increased faster than the minimum wage and faster than the average salary for full-time employed women.

59. About 38% of *assistantes maternelles* report working more than 45 hours per week and 62% had the same working hours every day. About a third work part time, that is less than 35 hours per week. For those who work full time, the average working week was about 46 hours. Increasingly, family day care providers report working irregular schedules to accommodate the needs of working parents.

Crèches familiales

60. About 90% of *assistantes maternelles* are employed directly by parents who benefit from a special subsidy to offset the costs of this form of ECEC (*Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle* - AFEAMA) and a tax reduction (these subsidies are explained later in the chapter). The remaining 10% are organised in family crèches, commonly referred to as *crèches familiales* (officially called "services d'accueil familial" since 2000). Family crèches provide an intermediate option for families between the centre-based crèche and employing an *assistante maternelle* directly. In these arrangements, individual *assistantes maternelles* work under the direction of a *puéricultrice*, a doctor, or an *éducateur de jeunes enfants*. The directors recruit and remunerate the *assistantes maternelles*, as well as provide training and professional support. Each *family crèche* is based in a setting with space where family day carers can meet with parents and an activity area where children can play with other children and engage in developmental activities. Family crèches may be co-located with *crèches collectives*.

61. Created in 1959, the number of family crèches expanded in the 1970s, but have been declining since 1993. Existing services cite recruitment difficulties as a barrier to expanding this type of arrangement. Between 1985 and 2001, the number of places in *crèches familiales* increased from 45 000 to 60 200 in 1 092 arrangements. For the most part, family crèches are managed by the communes (82%) and occasionally by associations (12%). They are open an average of 251 days per year.

Relais Assistantes Maternelles

62. There are about 1 000 family day care networks (*relais assistantes maternelles* – RAM) in France. Created in 1989 by the CNAF, the networks complement individual ECEC arrangements by providing support and quality assurance for children cared for by a licensed *assistante maternelle* or other individual. The networks can help match families to providers and inform both parties of their rights and responsibilities. The RAM also provide a common space where family day care providers can meet one another and organise group activities for children and sometimes parents. The initial goal of the networks was to help reduce the isolation of *assistantes maternelles*. Over the past ten years, the activities of the networks have evolved and diversified, as well as expanded to include other workers who care for children in their parents' homes. An agreement between the State and the CNAF includes plans to double the number of networks over the next couple of years and ensure that they are more evenly distributed across the country.

Garde à domicile

63. Another alternative for families is to hire an in-home caregiver to care for children in a family's home. Most often, these workers are paid directly by parents and are not required to be licensed or monitored in any way by public entities. There are no training requirements and the exact numbers of these employees are not known. However, there are 30 600 children under age three and 43 200 children from three to six who are cared for by an in-home caregiver and whose parents benefit from both the *allocation de garde d'enfants à domicile* (AGED) and a special tax reduction (*emplois familiaux*).

64. A small number of in-home caregivers are employed by a service managed often by associations called “services aux personnes.” These services, which are licensed by the *préfet*, help connect families with in-home providers, monitor the services, and take care of other administrative tasks, such as arranging for a replacement if the worker is absent.

Centre-based arrangements

Crèches collectives

65. About 170 000 children—about 7.5% of children under three—attend a *crèche collective* (now known as “établissements d’accueil collectif régulier”), a subsidised child care centre for children from about four months to age three. Between 1985 and 2001, the number of places in *crèches collectives* increased from 83 600 to 142 800 places as a result of the *contrats-crèches*, and primarily the *contrats-enfance*. The largest increase was in *multi-accueil* settings that offer both regular and occasional care. 64% of *crèches* are run by the municipalities and 29% by associations, including parent co-operatives (see below). Two *départements* near Paris operate a substantial number of *crèches collectives*. There are very few private settings (which are not currently eligible to receive public subsidies). On average, the *crèches* are open about 11 hours per day, 235 days per year. Due to a limited number of places compared to the demand, eligibility is often restricted to children with working parents or with special educational or social needs.

Crèches parentales

66. *Crèches parentales* or parent co-operatives (“établissements à gestion parentale”) are ECEC settings run by parents. Parent co-operatives have supported a variety of new educational practices, and, in particular, have raised awareness of possible contributions of parents to ECEC. Created in the 1970s, parent co-operatives were first officially recognized in 1980. Their legal status was further recognised and clarified by the decree of 1 August 2000. Parent involvement may take many forms including participating in pedagogical and daily activities of the *crèche*, practical tasks (handiwork, cleaning), management, and representation. Parent co-operatives are small structures that are limited to serving 20 children. A trained professional must be present alongside parents. There are currently 684 parent co-operatives in France. The number of places increased from 6 400 in 1990 to 8 700 in 2000.

Crèches d’entreprise

67. While the vast majority of *crèches* are located in the neighbourhoods where families live, a few employers have created child care centres called *crèches d’entreprise* for their staff. There are about 224 workplace *crèches* (15 300 places), mostly affiliated with hospitals and public institutions. 40% of the places are in the Paris region of Ile-de-France. The new family policies announced in 2003 seek to increase the role of employers in operating and subsidising ECEC arrangements.

Haltes-garderies

68. Families with children under six who need temporary or occasional care may use an *halte-garderie* (now known as “établissement d’accueil occasionnel”). Originally geared toward providing respite care for children whose mothers were not employed, *haltes-garderies* have adapted to the changing needs of working families. These settings increasingly care for children whose parents work part-time, occasional, and irregular hours and for preschoolers during non-school hours (i.e., on Wednesdays when the preschools are closed). 49% of *haltes-garderies* are managed by municipalities and 45% by associations. This form of ECEC has expanded faster than the *crèches*. The number of places almost tripled over the past 20 years (71 500 in 2001 – each place can be occupied by several children). About 600 000 children under six (mostly children under 3-4) attend one of the 3 230 settings, 235 of which are run as parent co-operatives. About a third of these services have waiting lists.

Etablissements “multi-accueil”

69. In recent years, more flexible arrangements known as *multi-accueil* (multi-care) have developed to serve the diverse needs of families within the same setting. Often located in small towns, these services respond to occasional, part-time, and regular care needs within the same setting. Staff in *multi-accueil* settings seek to develop personalised responses that respect the rhythm of the child and his or her family, practices that in the past were difficult for professionals to integrate into traditional services. More than half of towns with more than 30 000 residents in the provinces have developed this type of ECEC compared to less than a third in the Paris region. Today, about a third of *crèches collectives* and *haltes-garderies*, and 70% of *crèches parentales* offer multi-care. Even in the *haltes-garderies* about 20% of the places are in *multi-accueil*. Recent reforms are intended to facilitate this type of flexible care, by providing standard funding for *crèches* and *haltes-garderies* for all children under age four regardless of parent employment status and the number of hours the child attends.

Jardins d'enfants

70. The *jardins d'enfants* (kindergartens) are open to children from age three to six (and occasionally two-year-olds). Staffed by *éducatrices de jeunes enfants*, the *jardins d'enfants* may be considered a transitional setting between the *crèche*, the family, and school. Opening hours may resemble either those of the *école maternelle* or those of the *crèches*. Families contribute to the operating costs and fees may be similar to those of private schools or of the *crèches*. With almost universal access to the *école maternelle*, coverage by this form of ECEC is marginal. There are currently about 270 *jardins d'enfants* serving 10 000 children in France.

Other settings for children and families

71. There are two other key arrangements that contribute to ECEC and family support. First, the *lieux d'accueil parents-enfants* (LAEP) or parent-child centres offer a place where parents can talk, meet and exchange with other parents and children. Also known as “maison ouvertes” or open houses, these settings emerged in the early 1980s with the influence of the “Maison Verte” created by psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto (Neyrand, 1995). Many LAEP were created also by local initiatives of social workers (*travailleurs sociaux*) (Eme, 1993). The LAEP aim to support parent-child relationships, strengthen social links, foster children’s autonomy, reduce parent isolation, and prevent child abuse and neglect. A parent or responsible adult must accompany the child, and attendance is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. About 400 of these parent-child settings are recognized and supported by the CAF; 62% are run by associations and 31% by municipalities. Since 1995, settings that sign an agreement with the CAF to develop a project and hire qualified staff are eligible to receive a public subsidy.

72. *Ludothèques* (toy libraries) are intergenerational settings which provide organised play activities, games and toys, and sometimes include a toy lending library. *Ludothèques* provide opportunities for children and adults to meet, learn to respect others, and take part in cultural activities. Children of all ages may attend, but the younger ones must be accompanied by a parent or other caregiver. The government is developing a Quality Charter for these settings in co-operation with the *Association des Ludothèques Française* (ALF). There are about 1000 *ludothèques*, including some mobile services in rural areas. More than half (60%) of these settings are run by communes and 40% by associations.

Leave arrangements for parents

73. At the birth of a first child, mothers in France have a right to 16 weeks of paid, job-protected *congé de maternité* (maternity leave), six of which is generally taken before the birth and ten weeks taken after the birth. From the second or later child, the maternity leave is 26 weeks, with eight weeks to be taken before the birth and 18 weeks taken post-partum. The leave is also extended by at least eight weeks for multiple births. There is an unpaid parental leave until the child’s third birthday, known as the *congé*

parental d'éducation. Since 2002, fathers are entitled to 11 days of paid, job-protected leave (*congé de paternité*), an increase from the three days that existed before.

74. The *Allocation Parentale d'Éducation* (APE) is a three-year, paid parental leave. It was originally limited to parents with at least three children who had worked two of the three previous years (in 1986 it was extended to those who had worked two of the past 10 years). In 1994, the APE was extended to families with two children who have worked two of the past five years. It can also be received by parents who work part time. There is concern that women who have taken the APE have difficulty rejoining the work force after the leave. Since 2001, in order to facilitate women's transition back to employment, it is possible to receive both the APE and an income for a limited period starting at least six months before the end of the APE. The current level of the allowance is 484,97 Euros.

Staff training and working conditions

75. As shown in Table 3 below, staff training and working conditions vary greatly depending on the type of ECEC.

Table 3: ECEC Professionals: Summary table

Type of personnel	Initial training	Age group targeted	Professional domain	Employer	% of men	In-service training	Remuneration and status
Instituteurs	Bac + 2 yrs	2-6 yrs	Ecole maternelle	State	<i>No national data on maternelle</i>	Professional development: 36 weeks over career	Cat. B State public employee
Professeurs des écoles	Licence (3 yr college degree) + training at IUFM						Cat. A State public employee
ATSEM	Early childhood CAP	2-6 yrs	Ecole maternelle	Communes or groups of communes	(unknown-very low)		Cat. C local public employee
Puéricultrices	Nurse or midwife + 1 yr of specialisation	Children at all ages, especially those under 3	Crèches, haltes-garderies (and PMI services, hospitals)	Collectivités locales (communes, départements) Non-profit associations	2,1 %	Right to professional development training; sometimes management training to become a director of an ECEC setting	Catégorie B local public employees (soon Cat. A)
Educateurs de jeunes enfants	27 months post-bac in a training centre	Children under 7	All settings serving children under 6 (crèches, haltes, etc)	Collectivités locales (communes, départements) Non-profit associations	4,6 %	Right to professional development training; sometimes management training to become a director of an ECEC setting	Catégorie B local public employees
Auxiliaires de puériculture	1 year post-BEPC	Children of all ages, especially those under 3		Collectivités locales (communes, départements) Associations	0,7 %		Catégorie C local public employees
Assistantes maternelles					Marginal		

Source: French Background Report, 2003

Écoles maternelles

76. Until the early 1990s, preschool teachers (*instituteurs*) completed two years of post-baccalaureate training at the École Normale which included specialised training in early childhood education. Today, the level of training required is significantly higher, but the content has changed. In order to teach in the *écoles maternelles* or in elementary schools, candidates must pass a national exam which is open to those who have received a *license* (a three-year college degree). Candidates have the option of either preparing for the exam at a teacher training institute (*Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres* - IUFM) or independently. The exam, which has a high failure rate, includes written papers in French, math, science and art, a practical exam in sport, and an oral exam on workplace experiences.

77. Those who pass the exam enrol in the IUFM for a year of professional training (about 450 hours) in order to become a *professeur des écoles* qualified to teach 2 to 11 year olds. The IUFM have flexibility in organising the teacher training, but the curricula must be approved by the Ministry of Education. It generally includes: studies in education; philosophy; history of education; sociology; psychology; subject study (e.g., French, math, science and technology, sport, art, music); preparation for administrative tasks; specialised courses (e.g., work in the *école maternelle*); and optional subjects (Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997). The emphasis on young children varies and may be offered in separate modules or, more typically, integrated with coursework focused on older children. The second year of training includes about 8 to 12 weeks of supervised practice teaching in schools.

78. Teachers are public employees who are part of the national civil service and are paid on a national salary scale. All teachers in the *école primaire*, including those who work in the *écoles maternelles*, are entitled to 36 weeks of in-service training during their careers (most of this training is to be spent in the first years). Teachers may request the type of training they would like to attend. Inspectors and pedagogical counsellors also offer four half-days of mandatory professional development during the school year. A well-established professional association for teachers in the *école maternelle* (*Association générale des institutrices et instituteurs des écoles maternelles publiques* – AGIEM) organises an annual conference and other forms of training and support for its members.

79. ATSEM (*agent territorial spécialisé des écoles maternelles*) are municipal employees who work in the *écoles maternelles*. Since 1992, ATSEM are required to hold a CAP or certificate in early childhood. They work with teachers to help with daily activities such as clean-up and toileting as well as in carrying out pedagogical activities with children. These aides are appointed by the mayor and work under the supervision of the director of the school. In more disadvantaged areas, the ATSEM are more likely than teachers to come from the local community and reflect the socio-economic backgrounds of the children served.

Leisure-time activities

80. Directors and leisure-time staff working in CLSH may have a non-professional qualification related to out-of-school activities, known as the *brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions de directeur* (BAFD) or the *brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateurs* (BAFA).

Other early childhood settings

81. *Puéricultrices* (child nurses) are nurses or midwives who have completed a year of specialisation in children's development, health, and well-being. The profession dates back to 1947. Child nurses may work in hospital or child care settings. The training takes 12 months and includes 1 440 hours of training including: theoretical and practical work (650h); field placement (650h); directed study and evaluation (140h). The theoretical work includes a focus on health policy; administrative, health, and social

organisation (140h); law (20h), educational and relationship training (70h); the profession (25h); sociology (55h); child physiology (23h); child pathology (117h); diet and nutrition (60h); psychology and psychosociology (50h); psycho-pedagogy (40h); management and organisation (50h). By the end of the training, each student must have had practical experience working in a maternity ward, neonatal unit, paediatrics, as well as in a sector of PMI (e.g., monitoring *assistantes maternelles*), and in the *crèches collectives*. The *Comité d'entente des écoles de puéricultrices* (CEEP) is updating the training programme to submit to the Ministry of Health. The new programme will take into account new health concerns such as high-risk births linked to premature births and the vulnerability of mothers; the difficulties in accessing health services for certain families; high-risk behaviour among adolescents; the persistence of accidents among young children, etc.

82. *Éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (early childhood educators), a profession created in 1973, are qualified to work with children from birth to seven years old. The training is open to those with a high school diploma, as well as to *auxiliaires de puériculture* with three years of professional experience. The programme includes 27 months of both theoretical training and practical field experience. The 1 200 hours of theoretical training are composed of seven units: pedagogy and human relations (160h); pedagogy and educational techniques (160h); knowledge of young children from birth to seven (240h); group life (160h); health, health education, medical-social prevention (160h); law, economics, and society (180h); professional culture, methodology, and techniques (140h). Candidates complete nine months of field work. In addition to working directly with young children in *crèches* and *jardins d'enfants*, an EJE can direct a setting, lead a team of staff, develop educational projects, and foster partnerships with families, schools, and other social and cultural settings.

83. *Auxiliaires de puériculture* (assistant child nurses) hold a professional diploma obtained in a school approved by the regional prefect. The diploma prepares *auxiliaires* to care and to organise developmental activities for healthy, sick, or disabled children in hospital and ECEC settings. Training is open to candidates who pass the entry exams, are at least 17 years of age, and have either a professional certificate (e.g., CAP *Petite Enfance*) or have completed four years of secondary education. The training takes place over a period of 12 months and lasts 1 575 hours (630 of theoretical work and 845 of practical fieldwork). The first part of the training takes place with another group of professionals (*aides-soignants*) and includes modules on hygiene, care, relationships, communication, ergonomics, and public health, along with four field placements in hospital, medical, and maternity wards. The second part of the training is specific to the *auxiliaires* and includes six modules (9 weeks) focused on the healthy child, the sick child, the handicapped child, palliative care, and six field placements (17 weeks) in a variety of health sectors (paediatrics, maternity ward, child psychiatry, bottle feeding, diet), and ECEC settings.

84. No initial training is required of family day care providers (*assistantes maternelles*). In 2002, 21% of staff employed by parents had no diplomas, 29% had a CEP or BEPC; 37% had a BEP or CAP (pre-baccalaureate); and 13% had at least a high school diploma. The law requires 60 hours of mandatory training within five years of being licensed, including 20 hours in the first two years. The training is expected to focus on four domains: the development, rhythm, and needs of the child; relationships with parents regarding their child; educational aspects of child care and the role of the caregiver; and the institutional and social frameworks for early childhood. Family day care providers are required to participate in ongoing in-service training in order to renew their licenses.

85. Similarly, there are no initial training requirements for caregivers who work in families' homes. The AGED was initially created to subsidise services in families' homes in order to reduce the prevalence of undeclared caregiving and to fight unemployment. As the Background Report notes, there is a long tradition in France going back to the 19th century of limiting public intervention in individuals' homes. As noted earlier, *services aux personnes* that oversee home workers are subject to some regulations but these are relatively uncommon compared to use of the AGED. Recently, these workers received the right to 40

hours of in-service training. In addition, about 450 people between 1999 and 2001 pursued a certificate of professional qualification (300-400 hours of training). In 2001, as part of a quality improvement initiative, the CNAF extended the RAM networks to include these caregivers.

86. Professional development for staff working with children under three may be organised by public agencies or non-profit associations. For example, the association of parent co-operatives (*Association des collectifs enfants-parents professionnels - ACEPP*) offers workshops focusing on how to strengthen parent participation, including outreach to low-income, immigrant parents. Professional organisations also organise annual conferences on current issues in the field, disseminate publications, and provide professional development for their members.

Programme content and pedagogy

Écoles maternelles

87. All preschools follow the same national curriculum, which structures children's learning around five domains of activities: (1) developing oral language and an introduction to writing; (2) learning how to work together; (3) acting and expressing emotions and thoughts with one's body; (4) discovering the world; and (5) imagining, feeling, and creating. The most recent curriculum was released in 2002 and includes more precise references to the organisation of language development in the *maternelle*.

88. The curriculum is organised around three overlapping cycles that bridge children's learning from preschool to primary school, and it defines competencies that children are expected to meet by the end of the *école maternelle*. The first "cycle of early learning" (*cycles des apprentissages premiers*) covers the three years of *école maternelle* and the second "cycle of foundation learning" (*cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux*) bridges the last year of *maternelle* (*grande section*) and the first two years of elementary school and tends to focus on more concrete results in the areas of reading and writing. Teachers and administrators from the two schools are expected to meet regularly to discuss children's learning, identify areas of difficulty, and plan strategies to smooth transitions from one stage of education to the next. Educational inspectors monitor schools' progress toward meeting these pedagogical objectives. In addition, in each *école maternelle*, the teaching staff and administrators develop an annual *projet d'école* or "school project" that guides the educational activities.

89. The Ministry of Education has developed evaluation tools (including a CD-ROM) for teachers to use at the end of the *maternelle* and the first year of elementary school. The evaluation has two purposes: (1) to evaluate children at school entry and (2) to support their learning e.g., so that teachers and other specialists can provide additional support in identified areas of need. For preschool, suggested exercises for children in the last year of preschool (*grande section*) and beginning of compulsory schooling (*cours préparatoire*) are defined in five areas: language proficiencies, math/writing, space and time, writing, and gross motor development. Another evaluation tool is the *Livret d'évaluation*—a notebook which contains teachers' assessments of children's learning and can be used to identify special educational needs.

Educational projects for the crèches

90. There is no curriculum for child care settings, but since 2000, services are required to develop a *projet d'établissement*, in order to encourage these settings to reflect upon and formalise the values, pedagogical activities, and the functions that they would like to achieve in their social environment, along with the resources implemented to achieve these objectives. According to the draft Guide d'Accompagnement which is currently being finalised, the *projet d'établissement* needs to include: a *projet éducatif* for the care, development, and well-being of children; a *projet social*; a description of services offered by the setting; special measures provided for children with handicaps or chronic illness; and the

competences and backgrounds of the professionals on staff. For family *crèches*, the project must outline the training plans for the *assistantes maternelles*, professional support provided, and the monitoring of children in their care. All projects must define the place of families and their participation in the daily life of the setting as well as efforts to partner with other organisations. These different *projets* are described in more detail below.

91. According to the Background Report, educational and pedagogical projects are intended to specify the objectives and means to implement children's care and well-being, while taking into account their individual rhythms, and physiological, psychological, and emotional needs. Specifically, the educational project translates a global vision of education and a child's development into goals for how staff will help child feel safe; and develop his/her autonomy, personality, and creativity; establish relations with adults and children; and live in a group. The *projet pédagogique* translates the goals of the *projet éducatif* into practical daily activities in terms of the organisation and use of spaces, the organisation of groups of children, and the organisation of activities, as well as the ways of working with children in terms of their needs and development. Some children will have an individual *projet d'accueil personnalisé/individualisé*, which takes into account the educational practices, parent requests, and the personality of the child.

92. The *projet social* situates the ECEC setting in a political, economic, social, and co-operative framework. It reinforces that in addition to providing a service to parents, the settings serve a social role in promoting social integration, and fighting and preventing other forms of exclusion and inequality, and civic education, etc. It spells out the objectives and resources to improve access and adapt to different populations. Finally, the *projet d'établissement* addresses how the setting intends to work with other partners including with stakeholders involved in defining early childhood policy as well as co-ordination with other early childhood settings, and education, cultural, health, social, and family agencies. At this point, it is unknown what proportion of ECEC settings have developed a project, what is the content of these projects, etc.

Inspection, monitoring, and quality control

Écoles maternelles

93. In the *école maternelle*, there are no national regulations for staff-child ratios though in general the number of children per class has decreased over the years: from 42.9 children per class on average in 1960 to 30 in 1980, and 25.5 in 2001-2002. In ZEPs (*zones d'éducation prioritaire*), schools receive additional funds in order to reduce the child-staff ratios. There is a long tradition of an inspectorate within the education system. Within the framework of national policy objectives, the *inspecteur d'académie* has the mission of defining educational policy for primary schools, including the *écoles maternelles*. An inspector in charge of the primary schools evaluates each teacher through observations and discussions about once every three to four years. As noted above, inspectors also organise professional development opportunities.

Other early childhood settings

94. The child and maternal health services (*protection maternelle et infantile* – PMI) under the auspices of the *Conseil Général*, are responsible for licensing and monitoring services for young children outside the school system (including *crèches*, *assistantes maternelles*, *haltes-garderies*, CLSH, etc.).

95. The decree of 1 August 2000 updated and harmonised requirements for ECEC services. All child care settings are required to meet the same staff qualification requirements, whereas before there were no rules for parent co-operatives and *haltes-garderies*. At least of half of the personnel are required to have a

diploma of *puéricultrice*, *infirmière*, *éducateur de jeunes enfants*, or *auxiliaire de puériculture*. A quarter of the staff need to have qualifications related to health, social work, or leisure, and a quarter of the staff is exempted from any qualification, as long as the employer provides support for them to perform their work. In practice, mostly auxiliaries work with children, especially with infants. *Puéricultrices* and to a lesser extent *éducateurs* are more likely to hold administrative positions within child care settings. There are not accurate statistics on the current staffing situation, but there is evidence that some affluent larger cities hire more qualified staff, whereas rural areas and settings run by non-profits face more difficulties recruiting and paying qualified staff.

96. In the *crèches*, the required staff-child ratio is one adult for five infants (children who do not walk), and one adult for eight toddlers (children who walk). In the *jardins d'enfants*, the ratio for children over three is one to fifteen children. In *crèches* with more than 40 places, the director must be a *puéricultrice*, while in *crèches* with less than 40 places and *haltes-garderies* the director can be a *puéricultrice* or an *éducateur de jeunes enfants*. *Jardins d'enfants* must be directed by an *éducateur de jeunes enfants*. If these staffing requirements cannot be met, exemptions are possible to hire other social services professionals. Settings are required to work with a doctor, and may also partner with psychologists, physical therapists, social workers, artists, etc.

97. All *assistantes maternelles* are required to be licensed by the PMI. The creation of the AFEAMA in 1992 helped regulate a large number of *nourrices* or caregivers who had been previously operating underground. Licensing provides caregivers with social security benefits as well as a minimal assurance of safety and quality for children in this form of ECEC. In order to be licensed, the candidate needs to present the necessary guarantees that she can care for children under conditions that assure their physical, intellectual and socio-emotional development. She must pass a medical exam, have a residence of certain size, and offer conditions that fosters the well-being and safety of young children. The license must be renewed every five years and it can be suspended by the *département* if the health and safety conditions are no longer satisfactory. Family day care providers are allowed to care for up to 3 children, and on average care for 2.6 children in each home.

Family engagement and support

98. In the *école maternelles*, the *loi d'orientation* of 1989 recognised parents as members of the education community and encouraged their participation in school life. Parents are formally represented in the elected school council (*Conseil d'école*), but they are not involved in decisions about pedagogy, which are made by the teaching team. Some parents have regular contact with teachers at the beginning and end of the day. Formal parent-teacher conferences take place about once a year. The new curriculum (2002) stresses the importance of building a relationship of “co-education” and the role of teachers in sharing information with parents about their ways of working, as well as in listening to families, and keeping them informed of their children’s progress and challenges. Many preschools use a *cahier de vie* which is a “life notebook” containing examples of children’s life at school and at home (e.g., art projects, songs, writing samples, photos, etc.), messages from teachers and parents, and general announcements. The notebook is exchanged between parents and teachers on a regular basis to facilitate parental involvement in children’s education.

99. The role of parents in the *crèche* sector has greatly evolved in recent years. In the first part of the century, parents were prohibited from the *crèches* for health reasons and were generally treated as having an inferior role compared to the professionals. The creation of parent co-operatives in the 1970s brought to the fore the value and possible contributions of parent participation in ECEC services, but it was not until the 1980s that the *crèches* opened their doors to parents. The decree of 1 August 2000 officially recognised the place of families in the operation of ECEC settings as well as the legal status of parent co-operatives. For example, staff in ECEC are expected to work on strengthening non-hierarchical relationships with

parents, adapt to diverse family needs and circumstances, and generally make parents feel welcome. This approach is still new, and in practice, outreach to parents beyond transitional periods and social occasions, is difficult to implement. Nonetheless, most of the interviewees in the care sector pointed out the relevance of this approach.

Funding and financing

100. The funding of the ECEC system (outside the school system) in France is relatively complex and includes direct subsidies to families and settings as well as tax benefits for families.

Subsidies to families

101. There are currently five types of allowances to help offset the costs of ECEC (figures from French Background Report, 2003):

102. *Allocation parentale d'éducation* (APE): Parents with at least two children who are not working or are working part time are eligible for the APE. For those with two children, the parent must have worked two of the past five years, and for those with three children or more, the parent must have worked two of the past ten years. The full rate is 484,97 Euros and can be received by eligible families until the child's third birthday. It cannot be cumulated with the APJE (described below) and is not included in the calculation of housing allowances.

103. *Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle* (AFEAMA): Families with children under six who employ an *assistante maternelle* or family day care provider are eligible for this allowance which covers social contributions. An additional allowance which varies according to the age of the child and family income helps offset other costs. For a child under three, the allowance was 203 Euros for those with annual incomes under 12 912 Euros, 160 Euros for incomes between 12 912 and 17 754 Euros, and 133 Euros for those with incomes greater than 17 754 Euros. For children between the ages of three and six, the subsidies are divided in half.

104. *Allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile* (AGED): Families who use an in-home caregiver to care for one or more children under age six in their homes which they are at work may benefit from a subsidy which is given directly to the social insurance agency (URSSAF). The subsidy varies according to the age of the child and family income. For a child under three and a family income less than 34 744, the subsidy covers 75% of social contribution expenses up to 1 548 Euros per trimester.

105. *Allocation pour jeune enfant* (APJE): This allowance is considered both an income subsidy and a child care allowance. As noted earlier, the APJE may not be received at the same time as the APE. This income-tested benefit may be received from the fifth month of pregnancy until the child's third birthday. Currently, 80% of families with children under three receive the benefit (156,31 Euros).

106. *Tax benefits*: Parents also can benefit from tax reductions to offset costs of ECEC. Specifically, parents can be reimbursed up to 25% of out-of-pocket expenses up to 2 300 Euros per year. The maximum tax reduction is 575 Euros per year. To offset the costs of hiring an in-home caregiver, parents can receive a tax reduction equivalent to 50% of out-of-pocket expenditures up to 6 900 Euros. Thus, the maximum tax reduction is 3 450 per year.

107. ECEC services across France are required to follow the same parental fee scale (*barème*)—which is adjusted according to family income and size—regardless of whether they are run by the *commune* or a non-profit agency. On average, families with children under age three spend about 2 100 Euros per year on ECEC after deducting allowances but before taking into account tax reductions. There is a large range in

family expenditures: 40% of households spend less than 1 000 Euros, 25% between 1 000 and 2 000 Euros, 25% between 2 000 and 5 000 Euros, and 10% more than 5 000 Euros (Leprince, 2003).

Subsidies to ECEC settings

108. The system of public subsidies to ECEC settings has been undergoing a progressive reform since 2001 in order to simplify existing aid, adapt to changing family needs, and support families more equitably. Since January 2003, this reform provides for a common subsidy scale to services according to family income and a more equitable and transparent system for all families regardless of the settings that benefit from this new subsidy. In other words, *crèches* that enrol children from lower-income families will not suffer financially because the level of public support will be stable over time.

109. Since January 2002, the CAFs have been phasing in a “prestation de service unique” or single benefit for both the full-time *crèches* and the part-time *halte-garderies* serving children under four. With this new subsidy system, the *haltes-garderies* will receive an increase in support from the CAF as long as they develop a “quality project.” The CAFs will guide those who manage services to monitor the management, fees, and the quality of the projects and services provided. This benefit will also support the development of *multi-accueil* and other forms of flexible arrangements to meet the diverse needs of families. There will soon be a single parental fee calculated according to income—12% of declared income for families with one child, 10% for families with two children, and 7.5% for families with three children—for all subsidised services across the country.

110. In order to provide financial incentives for the municipalities to develop the supply of ECEC for children under six and to increase the quality of existing services, the CNAF created the *contrats-enfance* (preceded by the *contrats-crèches* for *crèches* in 1982) in 1988. Based on a needs assessment, the CAF works with the *commune* and its partners to develop a plan for expanding services over a renewable 3-5 year period. Recently, the CAFs have signed contracts with groups of *communes* to help meet the ECEC needs in more rural areas. The CAF subsidies cover up to 50-70% of new planned expenses for *crèches*, *haltes-garderies*, and CLSH, as well as for innovative settings (*ludothèques*, child-parent centres) if they follow certain quality criteria. The contracts also support initiatives to co-ordinate settings, provide information to families, and train professionals. In 2001, close to 3 500 contracts were signed, involving 9 400 *communes* and 68% of children under six.

111. In both 2001 and 2002, special early childhood grants were funded—a *fonds d'investissement exceptionnel pour la petite enfance* (FIPE) and *l'aide exceptionnelle à l'investissement* (AEI) at—228 million Euros each in order to increase the number of children who could be accommodated in *crèches*, *halte-garderie*, and *multi-accueil*. At the end of 2002, 294 million Euros were committed to 2000 projects toward financially supporting 46 000 places, including 26 000 new places.

Costs and public investment in ECEC

112. The average cost of a child in the *école maternelle* is 4 040 Euros, which is almost the same cost as for an elementary school student (4 320 Euros). The gap between pre-elementary and elementary education expenditures has narrowed over the past twenty years, however the investment per child in secondary school and college are two to three times more than for the younger children. The bulk of the costs (i.e., teacher salaries) for both pre-school and elementary school are covered by the national government under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

113. For other forms of ECEC, the CNAF contributes 9.6 billion Euros to ECEC (including the APJE and the old-age insurance for stay-at-home parents linked to the APE and the APJE). These funds are covered by social contributions and taxes. The cost of in-home care is estimated at 1 671 Euros in 2001

compared with 1 166 Euros for a child in a *crèche collective* and 707 to 900 Euros for an *assistante maternelle* (Leprince, 2003). The CAFs contribute about a billion Euros to social policies for families, with about half devoted to subsidising facilities and operating costs of the *crèches*. In 1999, the costs for *crèches collectives* and *familiales* were shared as follows: communes/departments (42.7%), CAF (27.7%), families (27.3%). Local authorities support ECEC by financing non-school services such as the *crèches*, *haltes-garderies*, *CLSH*, and *garderies périscolaires*) at an estimated cost of one billion Euros.

114. The cost of the tax reductions or exemptions related to ECEC is an estimated 545 million Euros. The following is an overview of public investment in ECEC—excluding the *école maternelle* and investment by local authorities (see Table 2):

Table 4: Public Investment in ECEC in 2001 (in millions of Euros)

Ape	2 900 M. €
AVPF* linked to the APE	563 m. €
AGED	152 m. €
AFEAMA	1 023 m. €
AFEAMA Complement	840 m. €
Total family transfers (except APJE)	5 478 m. €
APJE	2 700 m. €
AVPF linked to the APJE	1 427 m. €
Total family transfers with APJE	9 605 m. €
Social transfers to crèches services	485 m €
Contrat crèche and contrat enfance	350 m €
Other expenditures/services for children under age 6	147 m €
Total action sociale CAF/children under age six	982 m €
Tax reductions for child care costs	183 m €
Of which half for crèche and assistante maternelle	
Tax reductions for family workers	162 m €
Tax exemptions/salaries for assistantes maternelles/income-tested housing allowances and family transfers	200 m €
Total fiscal benefits	545 m €

Source: French Background Report, 2003 (acronyms explained in the text)

Note: The national health insurance system funds benefits related to maternity and paternity leave.

Recent initiatives in child and family policy

115. Since the family law of 1994, a high-level family conference (*Conférence de la famille*) is required to take place annually. During the most recent conference in April 2003, the Government introduced ten new measures with the goal of improving ECEC in France. The reforms include a simplification of cash benefits as well as initiatives to expand and improve the supply of providers and services for young children. The bulk of these measures will go into effect in January 2004.

116. The most significant change is the introduction of a unified early childhood benefit known as the *Prestation d'Accueil du Jeune Enfant* (PAJE) which will replace the APJE, AGED, AFEAMA, and part of the APE. The PAJE will include a basic benefit of 800 Euros received at the 7th month of pregnancy plus 160 Euros a month from the birth of the child until three years of age. Although the basic benefit is income tested, 90% of parents, including an estimated 200 000 new families, will be eligible for the PAJE.

117. There are two complementary benefits to the PAJE. A first benefit (*complément mode de garde*) will replace the AFEAMA and AGED and is intended to support working parents by helping to offset the costs of ECEC for children from birth to six years of age. This income-tested benefit is targeted to low- and middle-income families (200 000 families) to support their “free choice” (*libre choix*) of ECEC arrangements, in particular, by making family day care more affordable. Estimates show that for families in the lowest-income group, the costs of an *assistante maternelle* will be reduced from 28% to 12% of family income.

118. A second complement to the PAJE (*complément rétrai d'activité*) will replace the APE to support parents who choose to take up to three years off of work to care for their young child. Eligible parents include those with two children who have worked two of the past four years and those with three or more children who have worked two of the past five years. The benefit is 334 Euros per month (in addition to the basic benefit of 160 Euros). Those who work part-time will receive a larger allowance than they would have with the APE. A major change is that families with one child soon will be eligible for the 340 Euros/month benefit for the first six months following maternity leave (with the condition of having worked the two prior years).

119. To complement these benefits, the Government is supporting efforts to expand the types and supply of ECEC. The Government has planned to commit 200 million Euros and to create 20 000 places in *crèches*, especially innovative and flexible arrangements. It is also in the process of creating special supports for the expansion of *crèches d'entreprise* in partnership with the CAF and local authorities. A new provision may allow for public support for *crèches* run by private companies (including those for profit). The fact that the PAJE can be paid either directly to provider or indirectly via an agency, will create an incentive for private agencies that wish to hire family day care or in-home providers for families. A new tax credit seeks to encourage employer contributions to ECEC and other supports for employees with children.

120. Family day care providers will now be able to fill three full-time equivalent places, a more flexible alternative to the prior regulation which limited them to three children. The Government also introduced new measures to improve the status and working conditions of *assistantes maternelles*, including a salary increase, vacation provisions, and a fund for professional development. New efforts are underway to recognise competency-based qualifications and to create a new diploma that will help providers access certain higher-level early childhood professions. A national working group is also studying the early childhood workforce more broadly, including options to address recruitment and retention concerns and to facilitate the articulation of training programmes and career paths.

121. Finally, to help parents navigate the complex ECEC system, there are plans to create “family information points” that will bring together all the public and private actors involved in ECEC and to develop an internet portal.

CHAPTER 4 – ISSUES ARISING FROM THE VISIT

122. From an international perspective, the investment in, and support for, ECEC in France is impressive. The *école maternelle* has achieved universal access and enrolment for three-, four-, and five-year-olds, as well as for a large proportion of two-year-olds. The role of the *école maternelle* in promoting equality of educational opportunity by expanding access to two-year-olds in the ZEPs is an important development. For the under threes, the new family policy efforts to help families balance work and family responsibilities seek to respond to the needs of both parents and children. The review team wishes to recognise the strong public investment in delivering services, but also in supporting an infrastructure of training, inspection, and evaluation in France. Acknowledging these substantial achievements, the review team noted eight issues that seemed to warrant further consideration:

- Views of children and families and the goals of ECEC
- Co-ordination of care and education
- Decentralisation and local autonomy
- Reconciliation of work and family responsibilities
- Training and working conditions of early childhood professionals
- Pedagogy and pedagogical frameworks
- Inspection and evaluation
- Data collection, research, and monitoring.

Views of children and families and the goals of ECEC

123. From our interviews and document analyses, it is clear that the education and care of young children in France is viewed as a shared public and private responsibility. The investment in the *école maternelle* for three- to six-year-olds is impressive and the system is strongly rooted in the national culture and in an institutional system. There is widespread policy concern also about ECEC for children under three and a remarkable number and variety of public and private actors are involved in expanding and improving the system. However, in our discussions with policymakers, professional associations, and other stakeholder groups, the goals of ECEC for children at different ages often seemed ambiguous and contradictory. For example, in the care sector, access to ECEC is not viewed as a right for children but as a fee-based service for working parents or children deemed in need of support for social reasons. In the education sector, access is a legal right and equality of educational opportunities is a strong theme. The images of children in the two sectors also differ: children in the *maternelles* are viewed as students who are responsible for achieving pre-determined outcomes. In the care sector, health, safety, well-being, and the development of the child are the primary goals, and the inputs of quality (ratios, qualifications, etc.) are stressed more than the content and outcomes for children (see discussion of pedagogy below).

124. Another tension exists between the interests of the child and those of his/her parents. Although many interviewees expressed the view that that ECEC policies ought to take in charge both parents' needs and children's well-being, in reality the needs of working parents seemed to be privileged. For example, instead of focusing on more flexible working hours and leave arrangements, new policies seek to adapt to the increasingly complex and demanding schedules of employed parents. Many interviewees from the care

sector and documents prepared by the Ministry of Health and the Family promote “relationships with family” as a crucial issue and discuss “the need for support in parenting” but an articulate thinking about the role of ECEC in providing quality support seems to be missing. The issue of strengthening school-family relationships is addressed differently within *écoles maternelles* system, where exchanges between teachers and parents seem to focus primarily on children’s academic learning. Parents do not seem to be treated as equal partners in supporting their children’s education.

125. The review team was surprised that there was limited attention in our discussions to the role of ECEC in promoting social cohesion—relations among individuals or groups within society. ECEC services (including *école maternelle*) can be viewed as social agents. Given their existence across the country and across diverse communities, they can become places for social exchange and in which communities, groups and individuals can discuss values and expectations about young children’s education. While the important social role of ECEC seemed to be recognised and addressed by practitioners we met in the field, it could receive more policy attention. A more detailed analysis of the links among social cohesion and individuals’ quality of life would be helpful in re-designing the role and function of early education (c.f., van Oers, 2003).

126. Indeed, ECEC provision can provide important supports for reducing the isolation of children from recently-arrived immigrant families and other families at risk of exclusion, including children with special educational needs. This concern underlies the debate about the function of *école maternelle*. Most of the interviewees from the Ministry of Education and the inspectorate expressed concern for equal opportunities, primarily with regard to children from immigrant backgrounds. In the *écoles maternelles*, however, promoting social cohesion is challenged by two characteristics of the system: the evaluation of children’s achievements and the emphasis on children’s learning of French. The stress on children’s achievements and on French language learning contrasts both with a real sharing of the educational process among families and teachers, and with a cultural exchange focused on valuing diversity. We understand that the French approach is not to “stress differences” in order to preserve the *égalité* and *laïcité* of the public educational system, as well as the privacy of families. In addition, the mastery of French language and culture is regarded as a major tool of social inclusion. However, there may need to be more attention in the education system to addressing linguistic, cultural, and other differences to truly value diversity and promote equal opportunities for all children.

Co-ordination between care and education

127. In France, there are two very distinct systems of “education” and “care,” with different cultures, institutions, staff training, and financing. On the one hand, the care system for children under three provides full-day services of diverse forms primarily for working parents or children in need of special support, with a strong health and social orientation. On the other hand, the education system provides part-day early education services for three- to six-year-olds with an emphasis on teaching and learning skills and competences that will prepare youngsters for the next stage of education. Given the deep structural and attitudinal divisions between “care” and “education” it is not surprising that it is difficult for both policymakers and practitioners to bring these perspectives closer together to provide a more coherent ECEC policy and practices for young children and their families.

128. The lively debates about the care and education of two-year-olds and the appropriate ECEC setting for this age group seem to accentuate the gap in approaches between the two systems. Yet, this issue also provides an opportunity for representatives of the two sectors to exchange perspectives and strategies. From the perspective of the review team, it seems that regardless of whether the two-year-olds are in the school system or the *crèches*, more attention is needed by both sectors to seek to provide the most appropriate environment for these youngsters’ early development and learning. This would require real reflection on the structural and pedagogical characteristics of various settings, the cost implications for

parents and government, and above all the developmental and learning needs of individual children. The *actions-passerelles* may be one approach to bridge home and school, though there does not seem to be much support for expanding these potentially costly initiatives. We also are concerned that this age group may be treated as a *variable d'ajustement*. For example, we learned that two-year-olds are sometimes accepted in the *école maternelle* to prevent classes from closing when the preschool population decreases and then are excluded when the number of children increases.

129. In addition to the transition to the *école maternelle*, another key moment requiring co-ordination is the transition to the *école élémentaire* at age six. The intention of the cycles introduced in the *loi d'orientation* of 1989 was to help smooth children's transition from one phase of education to the other, while accommodating children's individual rhythms in learning and acquiring certain skills and competencies. It was hoped that there would be a cross-fertilisation of ideas and strategies between the pre-school and elementary schools. Instead, we learned that many teachers have resisted implementing these cycles. Co-operation between the *maternelle* and elementary schools has been limited, even though institutionally they are both integrated within the *école primaire*. Where the cycles have been implemented, often the last year of *maternelle* has transformed to resemble the first year of elementary school (i.e. with less emphasis on free play and more focus on reading and writing related skills). In contrast, the pre-school system has had less effect on informing the practices used in the elementary school years. This "elementarisation" of the early years also has accentuated the gap between the *école maternelle* and the diverse ECEC services (*crèches, haltes-garderies, assistantes maternelles*) that precede it and raises important concerns about the continuity in approaches for young children—particularly the most vulnerable ones—during important transition periods.

130. Despite the challenges of co-ordinating across and within two very independent systems, there have been important efforts to improve the coherence of policies and services at the municipal and *départemental* levels. For example, many municipalities employ early childhood co-ordinators who can offer opportunities for exchanges across staff working in different forms of centre-based and home-based ECEC (e.g., through common in-service training) and provide more transparency for parents trying to navigate the system. We learned, however, that these early childhood co-ordinators do not necessarily work with the *écoles maternelles*. Similarly, the CAF's *contrats-enfance* which can financially support local co-ordination efforts do not necessarily include the education sector among its partners. The new department-wide early childhood commissions are a promising mechanism to facilitate linkages among the various ECEC policies and services. Another hopeful sign is that the 2002 programme for the *écoles maternelles* calls for co-ordination with early childhood, health, and social services. The few cities and *départements* that have developed a *politique globale de petite enfance* (e.g., Nantes, Sarcelles) could serve as models for other interested policy officials and practitioners.

131. We were encouraged by efforts in the field to smooth children's transitions from home to out-of-home services, from *crèche* to *école maternelle* and from the *école maternelle* to elementary school, as well as by linkages created between preschool and leisure-time activities. It was difficult for us to ascertain to what extent these initiatives were common across France, however. According to several informants, efforts to co-ordinate across different early care services as well as between these services and the *école maternelle* seemed to be driven primarily by local initiatives rather than by any broader policy objectives or incentives for services to co-ordinate. Again, stronger linkages at the national level between the key ministries involved in the field, as well as more incentives to offer joint in-service training and opportunities to exchange ideas on current issues could help soften the major institutional and attitudinal barriers separating the two sectors. An important protocol was signed between the two key ministries in 1990. It would be important to review this document and to see how it could be better implemented both at the level of policy and practice. Certainly, the involvement of the key ministries and a variety of other actors in this OECD review is an encouraging step as well.

Decentralisation and local autonomy

132. The review team recognises that a potential strength, but also a risk, of the French system is the division of administrative responsibilities among the national, regional, and local authorities. Most prominent in the development of services for children under three, this form of decentralisation requires a delicate balance between the national authorities—which define general objectives—and the local authorities which have the autonomy to implement policies in ways that best meet the needs of their local constituents. This approach to decentralisation favours decision-making at the level that is closest to the families served, within a common framework of national goals and guidelines. The idea of *gestion proximale des services* (local governance) underlies the 2000 Decree for children under three and is further emphasised in the *Guide d'accompagnement* that will support the decree's implementation. Several stakeholder groups expressed the importance of local-level decision-making to better respond to family needs and circumstances, as well as the necessity of national guidelines to ensure equity goals.

133. The interrelationship between the ministries and decentralised authorities highlights the importance of negotiation and discussion among various stakeholders to reconcile national policies with local needs. In this process, the financial support from the state, complemented by other funds, is essential to support the implementation of policy objectives. Other partners play important roles as well. The *Association de Départements de France* (ADF) and the *Association de Maires de France* (AMF) contribute by developing position statements about ECEC for their members and in negotiating these policies with the national government. In addition, the family allowance funds (CAFs) are critical in disseminating information to local and regional authorities on the needs in their communities as well as providing technical support and financial resources to better address these needs. Indeed, during several interviews, the technical support and the financial incentives (*contrat-enfance*) provided by the CAFs were mentioned as vital in expanding and improving policies for ECEC at the local level.

134. In the education system, which is still quite centralised, interviewees also pointed out the importance of planning and adapting educational policies at a local level (“*pilotage par objectifs sur la base de l'analyse des situations locales*”). In particular, the *communes* provide buildings, furniture and personnel (ATSEM) for *écoles maternelles*. The municipalities also play a central role in providing leisure-time services (CLSH, *périscolaire*), often with other partners via the *Contrat éducatif local*. Moreover, national authorities give municipalities a central position in the system and provide them with funding and responsibilities. The quality certificate developed in Val de Marne was a very good example of this dynamic (see Box 1).

135. Decentralisation also can facilitate collaboration across ECEC services (e.g., *crèches*, *haltes-garderies*) and between services for children under three and those for children in the *école maternelle*. In addition to overseeing the PMI services which monitor much of the child care sector, the *départements* may support more coherent policies across a broader geographical area. In particular, the *départements* are expected to produce *schémas diagnostiques* which assess needs across the territory. However, several interviewees pointed out that more cohesion among the policies directed to young children by different agencies is needed at the local level with the support and guidance of national agencies. As noted above, local co-ordination often is challenging given the multiple administrative boundaries and different modes of operating across the different sectors (David, 1999).

136. A further risk of this decentralised approach is that the diversity of implementation may lead to inequalities at the local level in terms of what kinds of services are available to which families. Given that there is no obligation for the *communes* to provide ECEC services (aside from the *écoles maternelles*), the development of different forms of ECEC may vary based on the local political priorities and resources, as well as by parental preferences and cultural attitudes toward ECEC. A recent CNAF study shows strong regional disparities in access. For example, while nationally 11% of children under three are cared for by

the *crèches*, the rate varies from 2% to 41%. Most *crèches* concentrated in large cities and urban areas which tend to have more financial resources.⁴ Some small villages working together to pool resources (*intercommunalité*), but the gap between urban and rural areas is not subsiding (Leprince, 2003). The supply and use of different forms of ECEC is also influenced by the proportion of two-year-olds in the *écoles maternelles* (Clément & Nicolas, 2003).

137. In sum, while ECEC policy can serve as an exemplar for other fields for how to achieve a balance among different levels of government, provisions are necessary to ensure that this division of responsibilities does not lead to inequities in supply, affordability, and quality. Currently, young children may have vastly different early childhood experiences depending on where they live.

Box 1: Quality Conditions for Two-Year-Olds in the Val-de-Marne Department

The Val-de-Marne, southeast of Paris, currently enrolls about 24% of its two-year-olds in the *école maternelle*. As part of an effort to promote the quality of care and education, the *académie* of the Val-de-Marne has developed 9 conditions for welcoming two-year-olds in the *écoles maternelles*:

- A large and bright classroom located on the ground floor with direct access to the playground.
- Classroom furniture/materials adapted to the size and developmental needs of two-year-olds (e.g., sensory activities, painting, book corners, etc.) And which can change during the year.
- A bathroom nearby with adapted toilets and sinks, as well as a shower.
- A designated dormitory, with a bed for each child, and attention to their emotional comfort.
- Access to a washing service/machine for soiled clothing and sheets.
- A specific relaxation and gross motor room near the classroom.
- Regular access to a playground with games/equipment that meet the safety of two-year-olds.
- A cafeteria with a separate section for two-year-olds, and adapted dishes, cutlery, and menu.
- An ATSEM, with early childhood training, assigned to each section with two-year-olds who works in partnership with the teacher on specified tasks and functions.

As part of this effort, education inspectors conducted an assessment of the existing conditions for two-year-olds in schools. The report was presented to a multi-stakeholder working group in 2002. Subsequently, the group developed a quality certificate, based on the above nine conditions, for all schools enrolling, or likely to enrol, two-year-olds. The certificate is pre-condition for opening any new classrooms for two-year-olds. The *académie* also has engaged in discussions with mayors of towns with ZEPs about how to ensure appropriate conditions for two-year-olds in *maternelles* in these disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

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Reconciliation of work and family responsibilities

138. One of the key issues in employment and social policy in France—and one of the themes of this review—is the extent to which policies help parents to balance employment and family responsibilities. In France, parental employment is characterised predominantly by a pattern in which both parents work full time. Compared with other European countries, the gap between male and female employment hours

4 There are other regional differences. In areas which have fewer *crèches*, the *assistantes maternelles* are more common (Brittany, Lower-Normandy, and Loire Valley). In areas where family incomes are higher, there is a higher take-up rate of the AGED (i.e., in and around Paris). In Rhones-Alpes, family day care and the use of the extended parental leave (APE) are most common. In Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Picardie, care by parents and grandparents is the predominant form of ECEC.

within two-parent families is small and related to both the relatively short work-week (due to the RTT) and the long part-time hours in France. Nonetheless, mothers spend more time on parenting than fathers (c.f., Fagnani & Letablier, 2003) and the issue of work-family reconciliation is primarily viewed as an issue for mothers (see Background Report, p. 87). The labour force participation rate for women is lower for those who live in a couple with children, while for men it is the same regardless of family situation (full-time is 96-97%; c.f., Flipo & Régnier-Loilier, 2003). It is important to point out that having children disrupts women's professional activity, but not that of men's in terms of employment rates, activity rates, work-time, etc. This suggests that more attention is needed to reduce the gender inequalities in the workforce (e.g., salary and career progression).

139. Despite national attention to improving gender equality by reducing barriers to women's employment, during our discussions with high-level civil servants, researchers, and political appointees, the issue of involving men and fathers in household tasks as well as in the care of young children was often dismissed as a "non issue" in French society. Cultural values and power relationships in the home were cited as reasons that this issue has not been addressed by public policy. Gender imbalances in the home have implications for women, but also for children who may be missing out on parenting offered by both parents. Moreover, we were surprised that there was little discussion or concern raised regarding the small number of men who are involved in the early childhood profession.

140. In general, policymakers have developed three options for facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life tasks: ECEC services, modified working hours (RTT), and leave arrangements for parents (Chauffaut, David, & Vallet, 2003; Daniel, 2003). These conciliation measures seek to address a variety of goals, e.g., equal opportunities, child and family well-being, free choice, pro-natalism, etc. The most explicit goal of French family policy in this domain is to provide parents with a free choice or "libre choix" among ECEC services, parental leave or a combination of these. The government has financially supported a variety of home-based and centre-based ECEC for children under six without officially promoting one arrangement. In theory, this approach seeks to recognise that needs and preferences for different conciliation measures will vary according to local circumstances and the situation of each family. To that end, the new family policy measures announced in 2003 seek to expand the supply and improve the quality of arrangements for young children. Recent changes will also make certain services more accessible. The official recognition and more equitable funding of the *crèches parentales* and other non-profit providers will help improve the accessibility of these services. Also, the new PAJE aims to make *assistantes maternelles* more affordable for lower-income families.

141. In reality, however, choice is an illusion for many families. Family income, the number of children, the presence of one or two parents, and mother's employment status tend to determine the type of arrangement and type of subsidy the family receives. Families receiving the AGED for in-home care are more affluent than families who use *assistantes maternelles* or *crèches*. The average income of parent recipients of the AGED is 213% of those who receive the AFEAMA and 272% of those who use *crèches* (Leprince, 2003). Households with low-incomes have limited options aside from the *crèche*, because an *assistante maternelle* or other individual caregiver is often too expensive. If these families do not have access to a *crèche*, choices are further limited to either one parent dropping out of the labour force or turning to unregulated care (*garde au noir*). In general, parent fees increase with family income for the *crèches* and decrease with income for the use of an *assistante maternelle*. The choices of parents are constrained by income and the nature of the subsidy system, but also by the availability of options. As noted earlier, the supply and range ECEC services are very diverse and unequal across geographical areas (Clement & Nicolas, 2003; Ruault & Daniel, 2003).

142. Whether by choice or by limited alternative options, working class families (*classes ouvrières* and *employées*) represent 84% of the recipients of the APE (long parental leave) (Leprince, 2003). This means that lower-income families are more likely to take advantage of the long-term parental leave than to

remain in the workforce while their children are young. The gender, economic, and employment implications of this policy will need to be studied. In addition, the implications for child development need to be examined, as a potential implication of the new measures is that children from lower-income families may not benefit from quality early childhood experiences to the same extent as their more advantaged counterparts who attend a *crèche*. For this reason, the halte-garderie and similar networks need to be expanded for all parents, so as to support at-home mothers in their rearing and education of children. Such a development would also allow infants and toddlers from low-income families to have regular opportunities to socialise and learn with other children, in environments conducted by professionals.

143. In spite of a discourse in favour of “libre choix,” there seems to be a policy trend toward expanding family day care options in lieu of opening *crèches*. The argument is that *assistantes maternelles* seem to be able to respond better to more flexible and irregular employment hours. Another reason that family child care is preferred by policymakers and planners is that more places can be created rapidly (unlike centres which take up to five years to be up and running) and are less expensive to operate. However, this trend is not necessarily consistent with what parents really want for their child. According to recent research, the majority of families consider the *assistante maternelle* as the best ECEC arrangement to meet their professional needs (ahead of the *crèche collective* and grandparent care). Yet, parents consider the *crèche collective*—though inconvenient for their needs—as the most beneficial form of care for their children. In the Paris region, where the supply of *crèches* is the most developed, parents are the most supportive of this form of ECEC for their children (CREDOC, 2003). Parents recognise that the quality of provision may be very different between an individual caregiver with limited training and monitoring and the trained staff working in a *crèche*. This suggests a need to balance the interests of children along with other stakeholders (parents, government, employers, etc.). Even if individual arrangements predominate, centres can provide critical support and training for family day care providers and in-home carers via family day care networks (RAM) and family *crèches*.

144. In sum, there is a need for additional reforms to provide a real choice for parents. As Leprince (2003) notes, the cost for ECEC does not vary rationally according to family income or by type of arrangement. Only more advantaged families have a real choice. There is a need for better local planning and investment to ensure that the development of services responds to parent needs and preferences and the interests of their children. The new family policy measures seek to provide access to quality ECEC for all families, including those with low-incomes, as well as to offer a real “free choice” and to reduce unregulated arrangements. From the review team’s perspective, the new PAJE does not seem to offer substantial changes to the existing system (e.g., supply of ECEC) though it will raise the allowance and expand the number of eligible families. It also has the potential to simplify the complexity of existing allowances for parents, but the effects will need to be closely monitored.

Training and working conditions of early childhood professionals

145. An asset of ECEC in France, especially for infants and toddlers, is that there are a variety of professionals working side by side in the different services. In addition to the range of early childhood professionals (*puéricultrices, auxiliaires de puériculture, éducateurs de jeunes enfants*), there are doctors, psychologists, and other specialists affiliated with these settings. This diversity of professional backgrounds and areas of expertise can provide a rich set of skills and competences with which to support children’s early development, health, and learning. However, several interviewees noted that the professional training tracks are rather rigid, meaning that it is difficult or impossible to transition from one role to another even with additional training. The lack of an integrated training and career lattice can provide barriers to improving the overall professionalisation of the early childhood workforce. There also is some concern that these professions have not adapted to the changing realities of families in France (e.g., unemployment, single-parenthood, poverty, disabilities and illness) and that the current training course do not emphasise the teamwork necessary to work in interdisciplinary staffing patterns. The government

seems to be recognising some of the limitations of the current training system, and we were impressed by the work initiated during the *Conférence de la Famille* to rethink the roles, status, training, and working conditions of different professionals.

146. With regard to the content of the existing training in the care sector, the orientation in the *crèche* is still grounded in a health and hygiene framework. The new training of the *puéricultrices* under development represents an important effort for the profession to adapt to changing demographic and social needs of families (e.g., children from immigrant backgrounds, unemployed families, substance abuse, etc.). While there seems to be increasing attention to child development and learning within this new training, we heard resistance to using terms such as “pedagogy” and “education” (which remain the purview of the schools) to describe their work with young children. Beyond semantics, the view that the time children spend in these ECEC settings is not for learning may have a detrimental effect on the types of activities and stimulation provided and the overall quality of these services. The *projet d'établissement* in the *crèches* may help address this concern (see discussion below).

147. Along these lines, the team felt that the more value could be accorded to the roles of the *éducatrices des jeunes enfants* who have a more developmental and play-oriented training than other ECEC professionals. These competencies could complement the health orientation that has dominated early care in France. However, many *crèches* only employ the minimum number of EJE required by the regulations. While we recognise the cost implications, we feel that it would be important for the *crèches* to include more EJE on their staff teams to balance the range of expertise and professional knowledge. The EJE also could be better integrated into other forms of ECEC, including the RAM but also the *écoles maternelles*, where they might work alongside teachers with the youngest children. Increased employment opportunities in the ECEC sector may also help recruit new students into the training programmes for EJE where the numbers of candidates has dropped in recent years.

148. The level of training of those who care for infants and toddlers is another concern. First, in the *crèches*, the *auxilières de puériculture*, who currently spend the most time in direct contact with children, have a very low level of training. It is crucial for these staff to have access to ongoing in-service training and other forms of professional support. In Paris, for example, staff working in child care centres who pursue additional training may receive paid leave with the condition that they will return to their former workplace for five more years after their training. Less wealthy communities may need support from the CAFs to implement similar policies.

149. Second, the team was concerned that staff in the most common form of regulated ECEC—*assistantes maternelles*—have the most limited training. The team acknowledges the attention accorded to improving the training and working conditions of the *assistantes maternelles* during the *Conférence de la famille* and the promising strategies to attract providers and improve the quality of care. If this form of provision is to be considered of equivalent quality as the *crèches*, however, it seems clear that 60 hours of training is insufficient. The team also was surprised to learn that there are no regulations or training requirements for providers who work in families' homes under the AGED regime even though parents who chose this form of provision receive public subsidies. In fact, we were told that this topic was not even discussed during the *Conférence de la Famille*.

150. Thus, given that current policy encourages the development of individual forms of ECEC, and that in most areas all eligible children do not have access to a place in a *crèche*, the lack of pre-service training and limited professional development opportunities for both the *assistantes maternelles* and those engaged in *garde à domicile* need to be addressed urgently. Providing incentives for individual providers to join family day care networks (RAM), a *crèche familiale*, or establish forms of linkages with other centre-based settings (*crèches*, *multi-accueil*, *halte-garderie*), could be an important step toward reducing the isolation of providers and improving the quality of this form of provision. In addition, it is important

for children in these home-based settings to have the opportunity to socialise with other children of various ages, as well as to have access to the range of learning and play materials available on a regular basis to other children their age in the *crèches*.

151. At the same time as their roles and training are being reconsidered, the early childhood professions are experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties. In the *crèches*, the increased need for qualified staff has corresponded with the reduction of working hours (RTT) and massive retirement anticipated in the coming years. The recruitment difficulties affect all categories of child care personnel (*puéricultrices*, EJE, *auxilières de puériculture*) and increase with the level of education required. Shortages seem to be particularly problematic in the non-profit settings, which often lose qualified staff to the public sector which pays better, and in rural areas where there is a smaller pool of potential employees. Even though the level of qualification is much lower for family day carers, there are also recruitment difficulties (e.g., in more affluent areas where providers cannot afford to live because of the high rents). These personnel shortages make it difficult not only to meet the more strict staffing requirements in the Décret 2000, but also to expand the supply of ECEC to cover the increasing demand (Leprince, 2003). It seems wise to study whether there is a mismatch between the number of students accepted to train in the various schools and the staffing needs in the field. Other recruitment and retention strategies such as public information campaigns, bonuses in areas of greatest need, as well as opening the field to professionals outside the socio-medical field might be options to explore.

152. In the education sector, we can offer some general reflections though we were limited in our exploration of this area by the cancellation of several meetings (including those with the IUFM). The first is that the State greatly values the importance of teacher competence as the basis for quality. This is expressed by the fact that the total training takes five years at university level—the highest of any OECD country (OECD, 2001). Teaching children of two or of 11 years of age is seen as equally important; for example, the wages and working conditions are similar. A second reflection is about the content of the training. The key question is: to what degree does the training provide expertise essential to work with the children enrolled in the *école maternelle*? Of the five years of university required of candidates, a maximum of two years is devoted to teacher training. Several informants (e.g., the AGIEM and the IGEN) explained that there is little time within the current initial training structure to devote to the child-centred pedagogy suitable for younger children. Moreover, the content of the IUFM training tends to be discipline-based (e.g., math, science, French) which is common in elementary education, but less appropriate in pre-school settings where children learn through activities that cross disciplinary boundaries. Another concern was that candidates have few practical opportunities to learn how to organise activities for young children.

153. The fact that initial training focuses on the preparation primary school teachers seems to influence the formal academic orientation of the *école maternelle*. Teachers are no longer early childhood specialists, and the new staff that enter the field may have limited knowledge of how young children learn and develop. One asset of the high level of training is that these new teachers may have a strong capacity to assimilate new information and reflect on their own practice, which enhances the chances that in-service training can be effective. Nonetheless, our analysis suggests that in the *écoles maternelles*, there is a need for more specificity in the early childhood years in both initial and in-service training. Other training needs that emerged from our meetings with inspectors, researchers, and others include a focus on the two-year-olds, children with special educational needs and disabilities, outreach to families, and the variety of contexts (e.g., poverty, violence) in which children live. In-service training may need to be extended to address these needs. The team also wondered whether the Ministry of Education might explore the possibility of explicitly recruiting teaching staff that represent the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the children served, as well as strategies to attract more men into the profession.

Pedagogy and pedagogical frameworks

154. There are important efforts within the early care system to improve the quality of the services available to families with children under three. An emerging strength of the *crèches* and other services is that children are considered increasingly within their social and familial contexts, an orientation which seems less present in the *écoles maternelles*. The more flexible forms of provisions (e.g., *multi-accueil*) seek to move away from rigid opening hours and structures in order to adapt to the working hours of parents as well as the varying rhythms of very young children. There seems to be real concern with children's well-being, as well with as their parents' need for support in parenting—two crucial quality issues. Also, there is evidence that these services are contributing to building social networking and cohesion. For example, one *crèche* that we visited had converted the entry foyer into a place where parents could meet and discuss with one another and the staff at the beginning and end of the day. The Décret de 2000 encourages parent support and involvement and also requires each setting to develop a *projet d'établissement* with educational and social projects, which are additional steps toward quality improvement. The *Guide d'accompagnement* for the decree should help promote and improve quality of ECEC services by defining various terms (e.g., *projet associatif* and *d'établissement, éducatif* and *pédagogique*) and supporting the implementation of these projects. Yet, as noted above, given the separation of these services from the educational system, there is still resistance to approaching them as educational, even in the broadest sense of the term. It would be worthwhile to rethink the role of these services not only for their social benefits, but also for strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning.

155. When analysing the educational content of the *école maternelle*, the recent redraft of the curriculum guidelines is a crucial document. We were encouraged by the support shown in the document for a play-oriented approach in the *école maternelle*: « C'est par le jeu, l'action, la recherche autonome, l'expérience sensible que l'enfant, selon un cheminement qui lui est propre, construit ses acquisitions » (Programme 2002, p. 56). Also, the programme supports « les jeux d'exploration et de tâtonnement propices à l'étonnement et à l'émerveillement » (p. 143). The programme is clearly broken into domains of activities and not into separate disciplines, and it recognises the specificity of pedagogy for young children: « la première étape des 'apprentissages fondamentaux' suppose, pour être menée à bien, le cadre spécifique de la pédagogie de l'Ecole maternelle » (p. 57). It will be important to ensure that the local inspectors and other organisers of in-service training familiarise themselves with the principles and content embodied in the new programme so that they can support teachers with their implementation.

156. The selection of language development as key focus of the new curriculum is based on the conviction that poor language development is a main cause for school failure. In particular, we were impressed by the video and manual developed by the Ministry of Education to address this concern. Given the difficulty in implementing such practices, it would be important to explore how the principles underlying the programme are successfully interpreted by the teachers—e.g., a less predominant place of writing in favour of oral language or a shift to less achievement-oriented and more competence-based learning.

157. When we put together the information collected in the meetings, documents and school visits one general theme emerges: compared to international developments, the French system for early years tends to be rather “elementary school oriented.” A series of observations support this conclusion. When looking at the recent curriculum the general idea is that the *école maternelle* does not have its own specific goals, but focuses on preparing children for the next cycle in the primary school system. Consequently, concern about putting the child's needs first and explicit reference to the concept of children's “well-being” are scarce—which contrasts with the way the care sector approaches its work with children.

158. The practices we observed and certain discussions we had during the visit reinforced our concern that the approaches in the *école maternelle* may be driven too much by the teacher, rather than by

children's strengths, needs, and interests. Children's rights is not a topic we encountered in our study. Even when taking on board the wide variety of practices observed, we found several indications of the predominance of an achievement-oriented approach. From early on the introduction of written language is noticeable; labels on the walls, names of children are sometimes written in two or three different fonts (capitals, small printing letters and cursive writing). In addition, the *classe de grande section* is formally seen as a transition to the *école élémentaire*—sometimes physically attached to that school and isolated from the other classes in *maternelle*. Further, the arrangement of the classroom in a variety of areas or corners is less common in the *moyenne* and *grande* section.

159. The pedagogical approach in the *maternelle* may be influenced by practical and structural constraints. For example, one of the tradeoffs in providing free early childhood education, staffed with highly-educated teachers, is that the child-staff ratios are very high in the *écoles maternelles* by international standards. It seemed difficult for teachers to accord individual attention to each child in the classes of 25-30 children we visited. We also wondered whether the needs of certain children would be lost in the shuffle, particularly during whole group activities. This issue is even more acute for the two-year-olds who may find themselves in classrooms with more than 20 other youngsters and in facilities that are not adapted to children their age. The presence of an ATSEM or even an EJE in every *maternelle* classes could help reduce this ratio. The current reality is that not all municipalities fund enough ATSEM, especially with the older children, and the relationships between ATSEM and teachers seem to vary greatly—the differences in training and status are sometimes a barrier to real teamwork.

160. The identity of the *école maternelle* is said to be expressed in a non-formal, play-like approach, but in practice it seems that “play” is used as a form to deliver clearly-stated curriculum goals. Overall, the place of “free play” in the schedule of the day seemed rather limited. For example, in the *grandes sections* for five-year-olds that we visited, we did not find a role-play area, sand and water, a construction area, an art area (broader than painting), or recycled materials. One researcher remarked that teachers do not understand how to support children's play: « L'école ne sait pas donner aux enfants du temps au jeu libre. » The pedagogy observed did not seem very focused on trying to support children's initiative and build activities around their ideas and theories, especially when children are expected to reproduce a model work produced by the teacher. Nor did the pedagogy seem to be evolving towards an “open framework” approach in which children have a great impact on the themes and kinds of activities offered. We wonder if the *école maternelle* might be too demanding and even a cause of stress for children, especially for those from less advantaged backgrounds. These concerns were shared by several experts we met. To quote one of them: « être enfant en France, c'est difficile ». Another lamented, « nous n'avons pas le droit d'enlever aux enfants leur enfance... ».

Inspection and evaluation

161. Evaluation is a very important tool to assess teachers' practices, children's learning, and the functioning of the system as a whole. This general pattern in the *école maternelle* that we perceived as “teacher oriented” is also apparent in the approach of the assessment of children's progress. The rationale behind the evaluation tools in use in the *écoles maternelles* is very much focused on the attainment of specific skills and less on children's general competences and dispositions. In the topics emphasised, the adaptation of the child to the world of adults and the school system is dominant and topics referring to the child's interest and social-emotional well-being are limited.

162. While the new curriculum speaks about the *école maternelle* as a “first successful educational experience,” we were concerned that certain evaluation practices stress children's deficits rather than their strengths which could lead to labelling and stigmatising children. While we appreciated greatly the attention paid to observing each individual child's development, the review team noticed that on several occasions this attention tended toward a school-like evaluation of children's achievements. This system of

evaluation does not seem to correspond to most recent research on children's non-linear rhythms of development and learning in early years and on the role of intrinsic motivation in learning at any age.

163. In the evaluation of teachers, the *inspecteurs de circonscription* are key players. Although they only visit teachers once every three years, they have the opportunity to provide important support and guidance as well as ongoing in-service training to the staff as a whole. We learned, however, that since the integration of the inspectorate for the *écoles maternelles* with that of the elementary schools in the early 1990s, there has been a loss of expertise in the early years. Inspection integration has meant in practice, the gradual retirement of the highly professional early childhood inspectors, increasingly replaced by primary inspectors trained in primary school subjects and methods. Some of the interviewees suggested that the limited knowledge about children's early development and learning within the primary school inspectorate may have led to the encouragement of a more formal approach in the *école maternelle* than in the past. However, there are no studies to prove or invalidate this opinion. Given the importance of the inspectorate to quality assurance, the Ministry of Education may wish to consider requiring some specialised training to support teaching staff who work with two- to six-year-olds.

164. While there is a very developed inspection system for the *écoles primaires*, there is no equivalent for the child care sector. Several researchers and administrators pointed out that social services for young children do not have a strong evaluation culture (e.g., Leprince, 2003). Yet, an informal evaluation system is emerging by making explicit the goals, functioning, and methods of ECEC settings through the *projet d'établissement*. This process could become the basis of a system of monitoring quality found in other countries, as in Australian national accreditation system (see OECD, 2001). The review team encourages the expansion of these efforts toward development of a more formalised evaluation system for ensuring the quality of ECEC services. For example, early childhood co-ordinators at the *commune* or *département* can play an important role in supporting early childhood providers in their work with children and families. This would involve going beyond health and safety criteria monitored by the PMI toward evaluating the content and approaches developed by early childhood professionals in both centre-based and home-based settings.

165. Finally, we were concerned that there is currently little regulation or monitoring of the *garderies périscolaires* for preschoolers. Indeed, there are limited data on who attends, as well as on the staff and the content of the activities. Given that many children with working parents spend several hours a day in such settings, it would be important to study the conditions of these *garderies*. The regulations and projects in place for other the CLSH leisure-time centres could be a model for quality assurance.

Data collection, research, and monitoring

166. There have been important research initiatives related to ECEC, including large-scale surveys and additions to the census to gather information on where children under six spend their days. The research on the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities conducted by the Ministry of Employment has given insight on the availability, take-up, and effects of different leave measures. Efforts by the CNAF to map the supply of and demand for ECEC across geographic areas are also important to guide policy decisions and the allocation of resources. The review team feels that it will be very important to continue this research and to assess the effects of the new family benefit (PAJE) and leave measures on work and family issues.

167. From what we learned, the research commissioned by the Ministry of Education seems to have focused on school failure and the way in which a more formal approach could help prevent it. Again, no research was mentioned regarding analyses of children's social-emotional development and of how they experience their life at school. We are aware of important action-research that has been conducted by the CRESAS in partnership with professionals working in the field of ECEC. The IUFM may be able to train

students for undertaking action research in co-operation with researchers. The team suggests that supporting further such a research programme would help develop and evaluate innovative practices. The Ministry also can play an important role in supporting and disseminating examples of good practice in the early childhood field through its website and other information strategies.

CHAPTER 5 – POLICY SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

168. The ECEC system in France has many strengths that we have attempted to highlight in this report. In the course of our review, we also identified several issues that, from our perspectives, require additional policy attention to ensure that young children have access to quality early childhood services. We also focused our review on strategies to help parents reconcile their work and family responsibilities. Based on our discussions, readings, and site visits, we have identified the following eight policy suggestions—which are strongly interrelated—for the consideration of the key ministry officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in the ECEC sector in France.

1. Focus more on quality from the child’s perspective

169. Although there is a strong history of ECEC in France, the review team believes that there is a need to refocus policy debates on the rights and interests of young children. In the education sector, the current pedagogical and evaluation approaches could be strengthened with more attention to children’s holistic development, rather than primarily targeting cognitive skills and school outcomes. In particular, there is a need for teachers to adapt their practices to support the diverse learning styles and approaches of individual children (including those with special educational needs and disabilities), and to value the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of today’s pre-schoolers. As one interviewee stated, « L’école maternelle est centré sur les acquis, l’intellectuel au lieu du développement harmonieux et réponses individualisées. » This would mean making efforts to protect the *école maternelle* from the downward pressure of elementary school methods and goals that are inappropriate to the early years. At the same time, we feel that it is important to encourage opportunities for teachers from preschool and elementary school to exchange ideas and information as originally intended in the pedagogical cycles. Indeed, the implementation of the new curriculum provides an opportunity to infuse a more child-oriented approach throughout the early years of schooling.

170. In the care sector, we would like to see more national attention to, and discussion of, quality. Building on the *Guide d’accompagnement* to the Decree of 2000, we recommend the development of a *referentiel de qualité* that would include definitions of quality and strategies to improve it. The discussions of quality could be part of a broader effort among policymakers and other stakeholders in the field to reflect on the role of children and families in society. In this process, it would be important to better understand the tension that may exist between the needs of working parents and those of their young children.

171. With regard to this issue of the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, a challenge that calls for more attention is the role of men in parenting and in the ECEC field as professionals. As part of taking a more child-oriented perspective, it also is important to explore the extent to which employers can be encouraged to recognise their role in supporting the reconciliation of work and family life, e.g., by allowing parents to adapt their working hours in ways that meet the needs of their young children and by directly supporting the development of diverse forms of ECEC.

2. Rethink the needs of two-year olds

172. The care and education of two-years old is a delicate issue which deserves careful attention in future policy development. The key question is: How can one guarantee a developmentally-appropriate

context for two-year-olds regardless of the setting in which they are welcomed? Given that more than a third of two-year-olds attend the *écoles maternelles*, the review team would recommend special attention to the conditions and practices in place in schools. Representatives from the social, educational, and health spheres, as well as parents and policymakers, could contribute to these discussions of the goals and reception conditions for the two-year-olds. Among the possibilities to explore are:

- According more attention to the under threes in pre-service and in-service training;
- Adapting school facilities and classrooms for toddlers;
- Bringing in additional support from trained staff (e.g., *éducateurs de jeunes enfants*) to help provide youngsters with more individual attention;
- Making links with other ecec services in the area;
- Sharing in-service training with ECEC personnel, etc.

Special consideration is needed to ensure that preschools provide quality care and education to the two-year-olds from low-income and immigrant backgrounds living in ZEPs.

3. Ensure a real choice among quality ECEC arrangements

173. While the review team praises the legal right that exists for children from the age of three to attend an *école maternelle*, we are concerned that access to, and quality of, ECEC for the under threes is uneven and inequitable. If the government is committed to providing families with a “libre choix,” there needs to be more attention to the distribution of services across France. We suggest providing incentives for departments and *communes*—in co-operation with the CAFs—to more consistently create and evaluate plans (*schéma départemental et local*) for the development of ECEC. These local and department plans, if used on a more consistent basis, could help meet family needs and preferences by identifying and addressing some of the geographical gaps in services.

174. In terms of the diversity of provision, the review team questions the policy preference accorded to expanding individual care arrangements in national and often local policy (for both financial and ideological reasons). Given the difference in staff qualifications and the known benefits of quality child care centres to children’s early development and learning, it is important for places in *crèches* to be supported along with other forms of ECEC in all areas. Even if individual arrangements predominate in the options available to families, the team contends that centres can provide critical quality support and training for family day care providers and in-home carers via family day care networks (RAM) and *crèches familiales*.

4. Support stable investment in ECEC and a comprehensive system of monitoring

175. As part of the effort to ensure equitable access to quality ECEC, there is a need for more stable investment in ECEC. One step that would help toward this goal would be to make the *fonds d’investissement* for facilities a permanent source of funding (rather than reauthorised on a yearly basis) in order to allow local authorities to plan more than a year at a time. This ongoing source of funding would help increase the stability of services provided by associations which rely heavily on public funding. The review team welcomes the recent changes in financing of different forms of ECEC which will allow settings to accept families regardless of their financial circumstances and also will allow more equitable financing of non-profit providers, such as parent co-operatives. What is needed in addition are strategies to help account for the differences in local resources of the *communes*. In order to ensure more efficient and better targeting of resources to areas of most need, it would be important to develop a comprehensive system to monitor the availability and quality of all forms of ECEC (including unsubsidised and

unregulated providers) as well as take-up of various leave arrangements across France. The CNAF, in cooperation with the CAFs, may be in a unique position to undertake this responsibility.

5. Strengthen the training of early childhood professionals

176. As noted in our earlier analysis, the training for staff in early care settings would benefit from more emphasis on early childhood development and pedagogy to balance the health orientation of the current preparation programmes. In addition, the lack of pre-service training and limited professional development opportunities for both the *assistantes maternelles* and those engaged in *garde à domicile* need to be addressed urgently. We would encourage public authorities (national, departmental, local) to provide incentives for individual providers to join family day care networks (RAM), a *crèche familiale*, or establish forms of linkages with other centre-based settings (*crèches, multi-accueil, halte-garderie*), in order to reduce the isolation of providers and children and improve the quality of this form of provision. We have two policy suggestions in the area of training for teachers in the *écoles maternelles*: First, *increase the emphasis on early childhood in pre-service and in-service training*. Training for inspectors assigned to primary schools should be enhanced with an early childhood module. Second, *focus professional development on meeting gaps in initial training*—in particular, a focus on the two-year-olds, children with special educational needs and disabilities, outreach to families, and intercultural issues.

6. Build a career lattice for early childhood professionals

177. Another key staffing challenge is to address recruitment and retention in the care sector. First, we feel it is important to examine the possible mismatch between the numbers of students allowed to enter training programmes and the staffing needs of the field. Second, in order for ECEC to be attractive to potential candidates, it must be viewed as a viable profession, with opportunities for salary and career advancement. Therefore, the review team believes that it is important to create articulation agreements across training courses which would help *auxiliaires de puériculture* eventually become *éducatrices de jeunes enfants* or even *puéricultrices*. This reform would help provide opportunities to improve the overall qualifications of those who work directly with children.

178. Similarly, it is critical to create mechanisms for unqualified family day care providers to receive in-service training that could be applied to degree programmes. Given that two current barriers to recruitment and retention are the high rents in many urban neighbourhoods and the long commutes from the suburbs to the *crèches* where jobs are located, one option to explore may be to provide rent and/or transportation subsidies for *assistantes maternelles* and *crèche* workers. We also encourage the development of public engagement campaigns to recruit potential ECEC providers.

179. In the current staffing practices, the potential of the *éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (EJE) to improve the quality of ECEC services is not fully realised. While we recognise the cost implications, we feel that it would be important for the *crèches* to include more EJE to balance the range of expertise and professional knowledge of the staff. The review team also believes that the EJE also could be better integrated into other forms of ECEC, including the RAM but also the *écoles maternelles*, where they might work alongside teachers with the youngest children. In the education sector, *école maternelle* teachers currently are less likely to become directors, *conseillères pédagogiques*, and inspectors than their elementary school counterparts. The review team recommends that the government actively seek to increase the representation of teachers with experience in the *école maternelle* in these positions. The team believes that this form of career progression is critical in order to retain strong expertise in early childhood in the management, guidance, and monitoring of the field.

7. Encourage mechanisms for coherence and co-ordination at various levels of responsibility

180. The number of actors involved in ECEC in France supports initiative and creativity, leading to a « jeu institutionnel complexe qui borne ses fruit, » according to one leader in the non-profit sector. However, the review team has found that more cohesion among the ECEC policies of different agencies is needed at the local level with the support and guidance of national agencies. In particular, it will be challenging to co-ordinate services within the care sector, between the care sector and the education sector, and between the *écoles maternelles* and the *écoles élémentaires*.

181. We also are concerned about articulation between *école maternelle* and leisure-time services, especially since quality of the latter is often unregulated. The *contrats éducatifs locaux* are a promising effort to strengthen coordination and quality, as are the new early childhood commissions at the department level. We recommend more financial incentives for local partners to offer joint in-service training and opportunities to exchange concerns and ideas that could help bridge the institutional and attitudinal gaps that exist in the field.

182. Stronger linkages at the national level are also needed between the key ministries involved in ECEC. As noted earlier, it would be important to review the joint protocol signed between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs to see how it could be better implemented both at the level of policy and practice. The review team also encourages the relevant ministries to participate in future international studies where they may have the opportunity to gain a broader perspective on ECEC issues, including coherence and co-ordination.

8. Develop a co-ordinated research programme

183. In order to strengthen policymaking for young children and their families, it is critical to ensure public support for a co-ordinated research programme, which would assess the effects of current measures and services related to ECEC, as well as of those announced at the *Conférence de la Famille* of 2003. Based on our review, some of the topics that warrant further study include:

- Children's socio-emotional development in the *école maternelle*;
- The implementation of the new early childhood curriculum;
- Approaches to evaluation, and their effects, for children in the *école maternelle*;
- Children's cognitive and social development in different *modes d'accueil*;
- The quality of, and access to, ecec for children from immigrant backgrounds and for children with special educational needs;
- The prevalence and characteristics of informal and unregulated (*garde au noir*) provision across france; and
- The implications of the new parental leave measures introduced (e.g., the APE for parents with one child).

In fact, several of these topics could be usefully included in the training of teachers opting for the *école maternelle*.

184. In addition to the important cohort studies underway, and ongoing longitudinal analyses, the team feels that more nuanced, qualitative studies, including those conducted through action-research partnerships with early childhood practitioners in the field could help build a culture of reflection and self-evaluation among staff in ECEC settings, as well as inform future policy decisions.

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185. Based on our review, we are confident that there is strong interest within education and social policy circles in France to take stock of the current policies in order to shape a strong future ECEC policy agenda. We hope that our analyses and policy suggestions will take advantage of this momentum and will help contribute to efforts to improve ECEC policies and provision for young children and families in France. In particular, we encourage the involvement of multiple perspectives in the development of comprehensive, consistent and sustained family policy measures. For many years, the French early childhood system has attracted international attention for its universal preschools and extensive network of publicly-subsidised child care programmes. Given both the complexity and comprehensiveness of the French system, policy responses to the issues at stake are likely to continue to inform international debates about ECEC.

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ANNEX 3 – PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF VISITS

	Monday 2 nd June	Tuesday 3 rd June	Wednesday 4 th June	Thursday 5 th June	Friday 6 th June
Morning	9h30 : comité de rédaction du rapport (DRIC – 4 rue Danton) <i>Déjeuner offert par la DRIC à 12h30</i>	Sarcelles (Sous réserve – grève persistante des enseignants et climat très tendu à ce jour)	FNEJE 9 heures 11 heures Dominique Méda et Jeanne Fagnani	Dans la matinée Visite d'une crèche parentale à Paris ou 10 heures Ville de Paris Mme Trostiansky, adjointe petite enfance + visite crèche et crèche familiale	9h : inspecteur d'Académie Val de Marne + Ecole maternelle MONGE 12h30 : Rencontre avec le directeur de l'enseignement scolaire M. de Gaudemar (107 rue de Grenelle)
Afternoon	14h30 : F Leprince Directrice /CNF/Action sociale 16h : M Elbaum Directrice /DREES 17h30 : Cabinet S Milano, L Machard	Début d'après midi 14h CAF de sarcelles Près du centre commercial les flanades 16h30 – 17h30 : ADF (Paris 6 ^{ème})	Rencontres 14h30 : Responsables de l'association AGIEM Inspection générale de l'éducation nationale (107 rue de Grenelle)	Visite - Ecole maternelle 3 rue Louis Vierne – 75017- (Métro Louise Michel) <u>Cette école n'est pas en grève à ce jour.</u> 16h : rencontre avec Agnès Florin (107 rue de Grenelle)	Comité de rédaction du rapport (DRIC – rue Danton)

GLOSSARY

ACEPP : Association des collectifs enfants-parents professionnels
ADF : Assemblée des départements de France
AEI : Aide exceptionnelle à l'investissement
AFEAMA : Aide à la famille pour l'emploi d'une assistante maternelle agréée
AGED : Allocation de garde d'enfants à domicile
AGIEM : Association générale des institutrices et instituteurs des écoles maternelles
ALF : Association des ludothèques françaises
AMF : Association des maires de France
APE : Allocation parentale d'éducation
APJE : Allocation pour jeune enfant
ATSEM : Agents territoriaux spécialisés des écoles maternelles
AVPF : Assurance vieillesse des parents au foyer
BAFA : Brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur
BAFD : Brevet d'aptitude aux fonctions de directeur
BEP : Brevet d'étude professionnelle
BEPC : Brevet d'études du premier cycle (remplacé par le Brevet des collèges)
BOEN : Bulletin officiel de l'éducation nationale
CAF : Caisses d'allocations familiales
CAP : Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle
CEEP : Comité d'entente des écoles de puéricultrices
CEL : Contrat éducatif local
CLSH : Centre de loisirs sans hébergement
CNAF : Caisse nationale d'allocations familiales
CREDOC : Centre de recherche pour l'étude et l'observation des conditions de vie
CRESAS : Centre de recherche de l'éducation spécialisée et de l'adaptation scolaire
DGAS : Direction générale de l'action sociale
DREES : Direction de la recherche des études de l'évaluation et des statistiques
EAJE : Education et accueil des jeunes enfants
EJE : Educateurs de jeunes enfants

EPCI : Etablissement public de coopération intercommunale
FIPE : Fonds d'investissement pour la petite enfance
IEN : Inspecteur de l'éducation nationale
IGEN : Inspection générale de l'éducation nationale
IUFM : Institut universitaire de formation des maîtres
LAPE : Lieu d'accueil parents-enfants
MJENR : Ministère de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche
OCDE : Organisation de coopération et développement économiques
PAJE : Prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant
PMI : Protection maternelle et infantile
RAM : Relais assistantes maternelles
RTT : Réduction du temps de travail
SMIC : Salaire minimum interprofessionnel de croissance
UE : Union européenne
UNICEF : Fonds des Nations Unies pour l'enfance
URSSAF : Union de recouvrement des cotisations de sécurité sociale et d'allocations familiales
ZEP : Zones d'éducation prioritaires