

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY

*Country Note*

*for*

*Hungary*

OECD Directorate for Education

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The views expressed in the document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Hungarian authorities, the OECD or its Member countries.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The OECD Thematic Review

1. The *Country Note for Hungary* is an output of the *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 to and quality in early childhood education and care, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998).

2. In March 1998, twelve countries volunteered to participate in the review: Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. Early in the review process, these countries reached agreement concerning the framework, scope and process of the review, and identified the major policy issues for investigation. Between 1998 and 2000, OECD review teams conducted visits to the 12 participating countries. Information on the visits and several reports from the review may be viewed on the project web site: <http://www.oecd.org/els/education/reviews>. A Comparative Report entitled *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*, was released at an international conference held in Stockholm, 13-15 June 2001.

3. At its meeting in November 2001, the OECD Education Committee authorised a second round of early childhood reviews. Countries were offered the choice of inviting either a *full review* of their policies and services over a ten-day period, or a *short review* of five days focussing on two or three challenges important for a country at a particular moment. To date, nine further countries have joined the second round: Canada, Germany, Hungary, Korea, Mexico and Spain for full reviews; France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom for shorter reviews. 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.

4. In scope, the reviews seek to cover children from birth to compulsory primary school age (between 5 to 7 years), as well as the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the reviews adopt a broad, holistic approach. In addition to an analysis of policy and services, consideration is given to national social policies and various environmental influences on children's early development and learning. More specifically, the reviews investigate 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.

## The review process

5. In preparation for the visit of the OECD review team, the national, sponsoring ministries commission *Background Reports* on ECEC policy and services in their countries. Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, *Background Reports* are intended to provide a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available quantitative and evaluation data. Preparation is a participative exercise at country level, and normally should provide a forum of debate for the different stakeholders in early childhood in each country. After the country visit, the OECD produces a short *Country Note* that draws together the national background materials and the review team's observations.

6. After analysis of the *Background Report* and other documents, review teams composed of OECD Secretariat members and experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visit each participating country. The visit is co-ordinated by the sponsoring ministries. In the course of the visit, the team interviews the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice, and are invited to observe a number of examples of early childhood programmes. The selection of particular sites reflects in general not only a concern for geographical diversity but also the desire to show the review team a representative selection of both typical and innovative services.

## Structure of the Hungarian Country Note

7. Following the terms proposed by the sponsoring ministries, the *Country Note for Hungary* seeks a) to place the issues around early childhood provision firmly within the Hungarian context, and in particular, the present economic and EU contexts; b) to review early care and educational policies and practices as they currently meet the needs of Hungarian children and their families. In particular, the Ministry of Education requested the team c) to pay specific attention to the access and progress of Roma children; d) to consider ongoing developments with a critical eye for sustainability and the capacity to go to scale; and e) to make tentative recommendations that would render success more likely, as well as to indicate areas for future effort and emphasis.

8. In addition to the present introduction, which forms *Chapter I*, the structure of the Country Note is as follows: *Chapter II* provides a rapid overview of Hungarian governance, socio-economic context, demographics and family support system. *Chapter III* focuses on the history of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Hungary, and examines current policies and provision. In particular, approaches to administration and management, funding, regulation, staffing, and programme regulation are outlined. In *Chapter IV*, some of the main issues related to policy and practice in ECEC in Hungary are explored. Four areas are chosen for comment: co-ordination and decentralisation issues; access and equity issues; weaknesses in quality issues; and general funding. The conclusions, in *Chapter V* offer some orientations and policy recommendations for consideration in these domains, with some thoughts for renewing investment in young children in Hungary.

## Acknowledgements

9. The OECD wishes to thank the Hungarian Ministry of Education and the Hungarian Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs for making the review possible and, in particular, for the comprehensive programme organised for the team review visit. The reviewers also wish to place on record their appreciation of the open and informative meetings that were held in the ministries and agencies with responsibility for young children. Our visits to the various early childhood services, and our talks with managers, providers, and early childhood professionals were also most informative, and we thank them for responding to our questions so graciously. In particular, we should like to thank warmly the inter-agency Steering Committee team, both for their efficient preparation of the Background Report and visit schedule,

and for their ongoing support to the team during the visit. A special word of thanks is due to the chief author of the Background Report, Dr. Marta Korintus of the National Institute for Family and Social Policy, and to Judit Villanyi of the National Institute of Public Education, both of whom accompanied the team with great courtesy and efficiency during the ten-day visit.

10. Throughout the *Country Note*, the suggestions offered by the review team are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a visiting team—no matter how well briefed—in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. Even when multiplied by the number of members of a team, a ten-day review is extremely limiting in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. For this reason, our recommendations are offered to the sponsoring ministries not as hard and fast conclusions, but in a spirit of professional dialogue for the consideration of Hungarian specialists who are much more knowledgeable about Hungarian realities than an external team. We trust, however, that our external perspective, based on many years' experience in the early childhood field, will prove to be a useful basis for discussion and progress.

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

### **Terminology**

12. The terminology used throughout the report follows in general the usage of *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001). Children aged 0-3 years covers children from birth up to their third birthday, but does not include 3 year olds. Children aged 3-7 years covers children from 36 months to their seventh birthday, but does not include seven year olds. *Infants* are children from birth to 12 months; *toddlers* from 12 months to 30 months. *Early childhood education and care* is often abbreviated throughout the text as ECEC. In the Hungarian Background Report, a different convention is used: the notation children 0-3 years means children from birth up to their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. At the time of writing, the Hungarian forint, HUF, exchanges at approximately the following rates: €1 = 256.00 HUF; \$1 = 235.00 HUF.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTEXT, BACKGROUND AND PERCEIVED VALUES<sup>1</sup>

#### General information and context

13. Hungary is located in heart of Central-Eastern Europe. This land locked country is bordered on the North by Slovakia, on the east by the Ukraine and Romania, on the south by Yugoslavia and Croatia and on the west by Slovenia and Austria. The form of government is a republic. The capital is Budapest that has a total of 22% of the total country population of 10,043,000. With a total area of 93,030 km<sup>2</sup>, the population density of Hungary is approximately 108 people per km<sup>2</sup>. Population density is greatest in Budapest

Figure 1. Map of Hungary showing Budapest and the Nineteen Counties



14. The nationality of the population is primarily Hungarian with approximately less than 10% of Roma, German, Slovak, Romanian, Serb, Croat, Bulgarian, Greek, Ruthenian, Slovenian, etc. However there are widely varying estimates of the Roma population in Hungary with some conservative estimates giving figures of 400,000 to 450,000 or some 4% of the total population as being Roma. A more recent source, the Hungarian National Plan 2003, gives a more authoritative estimate:

1. Chapters II and III rely heavily on the Background Report prepared by the Hungarian ministries. To the degree available, updated statistics are used to make this report as current as possible.

According to reliable professional estimations, the current number of the Roma population is 450-600,000. As opposed to the decreasing non-Roma population, the number of Roma people is growing, and according to demographic forecasts, their proportion within the population will grow in the next 50 years from the current 5% to 11%.

Such estimates are based on voluntary declaration of status, but we were informed that many Roma people do not declare in the census their affiliation to the Roma group.

15. The Roma population has a long history in Hungary, probably beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century under King Sigismund. There was a surge of immigration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century of both Beash and later Olah Roma initially from Romania. World War II brought with it much suffering for Roma throughout Europe, with many killed or deported to camps. After the war, little attention was paid to Roma issues. It was only when Hungarian-speaking Roma were included in population estimates that the size of the Roma population in Hungary began to be recognised. The issue continues to be problematic in Hungary today as the socio-economic status of the group is low, and the participation of Roma children in childcare, kindergarten and later education is weak compared to the mainstream population.

16. On October 23, 1989, Hungary's form of government shifted from a socialist one party system to a democratic republic. The democracy has since stabilised with four free elections having been held, resulting in largely balanced powers between the governing and opposition parties. The highest decision-making body is the single-chamber Parliament. The fourth general elections were held in 2002. Fifteen Ministries are currently in operation and the government has an additional two ministers without portfolio. There are 3,135 local governments in Hungary.

17. Significant features of demographic changes in Hungary have been the gradual decline in the total population over the past 20 years of some 6.6% from a high of some 10,709,000 in 1980 to the 2000 figure of 10,043,000. This shift has occurred through a substantial reduction in birth rates that by the late 1990's were approximately 1.3 well below the rate required to maintain the population. This low birth rate has had the effect of an aging of the population in Hungary in spite of the fact that Hungary has a somewhat lower life expectancy for women (about 76 years) and especially for men (67 years) compared to the EU average in 2000.

18. As shown in Table 1, there has been a marked decrease in the size of an age cohort for the youngest segment of the population. The 0-14 year old group (15 years) represents today only 17.1% of the population, while the 40-49 year old group (10 years) represents alone 15.4%. In most settlements, there are 6 to 7 times more elderly people than young children. If the low birth rates continue, this will have a quite substantial impact on the total population over the next few decades.

**Table 1: Age structure, per 1000 inhabitants**

Age group	Population	Proportion
0-14	1,717	17.1%
15-29	2,268	22.6%
30-39	1,279	12.7%
40-49	1,550	15.4%
50-59	1,259	12.5%
60-69	988	9.8%
70-79	741	7.4%
80-x	246	2.5%

Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal) figures, 2000.

19. Hungary is divided into 19 counties plus the capital city of Budapest. Budapest itself is divided into twenty-three districts. A significant feature of the change in the political system was the Local Government Act of 1990. This act provides much autonomy for local governments in the 3135 settlements in Hungary. While the national government places certain requirements on local authorities, for instance to provide for child care and education, it leaves much of the decision making about how to provide the services and the financing of these services up to the local officials.

20. While there are some 40 settlements with 30,000 or more inhabitants, the majority of people (57%) live in smaller towns and settlements. Table 2 shows the distribution of the population by size of settlement.

**Table 2: Hungarian settlements of Hungary and their populations (2000)**

Settlement Type	Number	% of all settlements	Average population	Total population	% of entire population
Less than 600 inhabitants	1,193	38.1	311	370,461	3.7
600 - 1,999 inhabitants	1,186	37.8	1,147	1,360,443	13.5
2,000 - 9,999 inhabitants	621	19.8	3,878	2,408,068	24.0
10,000-19,999 inhabitants	76	2.4	14,176	1,077,377	10.7
20,000-29,999 inhabitants	23	0.7	23,127	531,921	5.3
Over 30,000 inhabitants	38	1.2	113,025	4,294,954	42.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,135</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,204</b>	<b>10,043,224</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: National Area Development and Area Planning Information System (Országos Területfejlesztési és Területrendezési Információs Rendszer) (2000)

### **The economy, wealth and poverty**

21. With the change in the government in 1989 came significant changes in the economy of Hungary from a heavily state controlled economy to a market based economy. State ownership of industrial and agricultural assets decreased markedly during the 1990s, and the private sector grew substantially. In parallel, the service sector of the economy developed. Unemployment increased with the transition in the economy, and it is estimated that between 1989 and 1993, 1.3 million people lost their jobs. As large state owned industries privatised, many thousands of workers were let go. In the early 1990's the unemployment rate stood at about 12%, well above the EU rates. Beginning about 1997, the employment picture began to improve to a rate of 5.7% in 2001. The current rate is actually better than the EU average (7.6% in 2001) but higher than Japan or the US.

22. Unemployment varies substantially by region of the country and by sector of the workforce and economy. Unemployment has been lowest in Central Hungary (including Budapest) as well as Western Transdanubia, and highest in Northern Hungary and the Northern Great Plain. The unemployed are likely

to have lower levels of education. Unemployment changes affected women with the percent of all unemployed being female increasing slowly from 41.2% in 1993 to 46.1% in 2001. Employment has fallen most in agriculture. By 2001, the employment in the agriculture sector was 6.2% of all employment compared to 18.9% in 1980, although this figure is still higher than in other industrialised countries. On the other hand, employment increased substantially in the service sector, from 39.9% in 1980 to 59.6% in 2001.

23. With the changes in the economy have come changes in the distribution of wealth and poverty in the country. Overall real income dropped in the years immediately following the transition in 1989 and has only in 2000 returned to a level equal to that before the transition. During this time, a small elite with substantial wealth and property has emerged, while a larger proportion of the population is at or below the subsistence level. By 2001, the gross earnings ratio of the best and worst paid sectors was over 3.0 compared to about 2.5 in the mid 1990's.

24. While the economic situation of families with children is difficult to interpret because of simultaneous changes in the average size of family, age of parents at the birth of children, marital status of families and the fundamental changes in economy, it is clear that families with children were less well off in 2001 than in the early 1990's (Hungarian Background Report).

### **Family structure and support**

25. There have been surprisingly large shifts in the structure and nature of family life over the past decade in Hungary. Marriage is occurring later in life for both men and women. Compared to the early 1990's, one-quarter as many women, and one-fifth as many men under 25 got married in 2001. The average age of first marriage rose from 22 to 25 between 1990 and 2001, and for men from 24 to 27. Increasingly couples are living together on a common-law basis, as in much of Europe. Not surprisingly, childbirth is occurring later in the lives of women. Childbirth is now most common in the 25-29 year old group, with a substantial 25% for mothers in the 30-39 year old group. Childbirth outside marriage has risen from 7% in 1980 to 13% in 1990 to 30% in 2001. Again, this is comparable to changes in Europe and other parts of the world.

26. During the former socialist era, a strong family support system was developed. The system was developed in response to two separate and distinct needs. First was the desire to have full employment of women. The second was to support the maintenance of the population by encouraging childbirth. While these two goals may not be totally compatible, the government invested substantial resources toward achieving the goals simultaneously. In 1989 the government was spending the equivalent of nearly 4% of GDP on family support, but this was drastically reduced to a level of about 1.7% of GDP by 2000. While some tax relief was provided for families with young children beginning in 1999, the total value for families remains below the 1989 level. In sum, neither of the goals (employment for women / an increase in the fertility rate) was achieved, with countervailing forces in society and the economy defeating government efforts. The fertility rates (estimated births per female during her lifetime) declined precipitously from a high of 1.86 in 1991 to a low of 1.29 in 1999, rebounding slightly to 1.32 in 2001. Employment rates for women as for men dropped sharply immediately after the changes in 1989, but have more recently increased again. Still, there were 90,000 women seeking employment in 2001.

27. Family benefits may be divided into two primary types – cash benefits and child raising provision. The cash benefits (see Table 3) can be shown for families based on whether they were employed prior to birth of the child and thus are covered by the social insurance system or not. Some benefits are now means tested, that is, they are dependent on the income of the family with lower income families receiving greater benefits. Family allowance, maternity allowance, GYES and GYET are universal provisions tied to the age of the child. They are benefits by right and are due to all parents.

**Table 3: Cash Benefits**

Provision for insured parents	Provision for uninsured parents
Family tax benefit	
<b>Maternity allowances</b>	
Pregnancy and mothers' allowance	
Childcare leave and allowance (GYED)	
<b>Child allowances</b>	
Childcare leave and allowance (GYES)	
Child raising benefit (GYET)	
Family allowance	
Sick leave days for child's sickness	
<b>Provision dependent on income</b>	
Supplemental child protection allowance	
Occasional child protection allowance	

Source: Hungarian Background Report, 2002.

28. The changes in the child raising provision, childcare allowance and childcare benefit between 1999 and 2001 are shown in Table 4. As can be seen, large portions of the population receive some of these benefits, but the level of benefits is low by European standards. A more complete listing of benefits is provided in Appendix 1 of the Hungarian Background Report.

**Table 4: Child-rearing provision\*, childcare allowance and childcare benefit**

Type of benefit	1999	2000	2001
<b>Child-rearing provision – no. of children covered by (x1000)</b>	2,154	2,153	2,115
<i>As percentage of all children aged 0-18</i>	95.6	97.5	.
<i>Level of average provision per family, HUF/month</i>	8,463	8,496	8,714
<b>Childcare allowance (GYES)</b>			
<i>Average monthly number of recipients, thousand people</i>	245	193	183
<i>Average per capita, HUF/month</i>	15,134	16,602	17,820
<b>Childcare benefit (GYED)</b>			
<i>Average monthly number of recipients, thousand people</i>	a	54.0	62.9
<i>Average per capita, HUF/month</i>	a	31,448	39,279

Source: Hungarian Background Report, 2002.

**Notes:**

\* Child-rearing provision included family allowances until 1998, and from 1999 onwards, both family and schooling allowances.

a. The 1999 column for payment of Childcare benefit is blank, as payment of benefit ceased between 15<sup>th</sup> April 1998 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000.

## CHAPTER III

### OVERVIEW OF ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN HUNGARY

#### Ministerial responsibility

29. In terms of ministerial responsibility, the ECEC system in Hungary is split into childcare and early education. Policy responsibility in Hungary for children from birth up to approximately 3 years of age (childcare) falls under the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs.<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Education has responsibility for the early education and care of children 3-7 years, which is now seen as the first stage of public education (kindergarten). While the emphasis of the programmes available for all young children and their families has converged substantially over the years in Hungary, the division into these age groups is longstanding.

#### History of childcare in Hungary

30. Tied to both a new recognition of the period of childhood and spurred by the incorporation of women into its developing industry, Hungary began to develop a system of childcare centres during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, chiefly in the larger cities and settlements. The first Hungarian childcare centre opened in Budapest on April 21, 1852 to provide support to women when they were working. From the earliest days a strong emphasis on the health of young children was evident.

31. Following the Second World War, greatly increased numbers of women entered the workforce. While there was some alignment on socialist education, child-centred principles remained dominant. During this entire period, the vehicle for providing for childcare was the childcare centre. There was almost no emphasis on use of family childcare or other forms of child caring. This situation began to change slowly in the 1990s with the introduction of a small number of family childcare homes and home centres particularly in smaller settlements. Even to this day, family childcare plays a very small part in the provision of care in Hungary. However, there are beginnings of a wider array of services becoming available to families including playgroups, toy lending/rental libraries, short-term supervision, mother-baby groups, etc. Often these are provided in conjunction with a childcare centre in an entrepreneurial fashion.

32. Children with disabilities and other special needs have traditionally been supported either in families or through segregated facilities, often residential in nature. A number of central institutions emerged catering for specific conditions such as visual or hearing impairment, cerebral palsy or learning disability (mental handicap). These were treated primarily as medical conditions with health experts determining placement of children in the system.

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2. At certain moments, this task was seen primarily as responsibility for the primary healthcare for children. At other moments, childcare was considered to relate more to social welfare. Law 31 of 1997 currently places responsibility for the 0-3 year old children on the social welfare side, that is, with the Social and Family Ministry side of the larger ministry.

### *Current Status of Childcare and Child Welfare in Hungary*

33. In principle, childcare is available for all families in Hungary whose care cannot be ensured at home because both parents work or cannot take care of the child for any other reason. If a child has reached the third year and it is felt that the child is not mature enough for kindergarten education, then the child can remain in a childcare centre until August 31 following the 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. Quite often, kindergartens cannot admit children at any other time than at the beginning of the school year, in September. Families may receive the childcare service as long as they require the service and spaces are available. However, with the relative fall in investment in childcare services, sufficient places are no longer available in either urban or rural areas.

34. As of 2000, a total of 523 childcare centres served 29,561 children. These figures represent a dramatic reduction in provision since 1980, with under half as many centres and children for that year currently in the system. Table 5 provides a comprehensive view showing the steady reduction in recent years. Controlling for the reduction in population, the availability of child care for families in Hungary has fallen from 13.7 places per 100 children in 1990 to only 8.5 places per hundred in 1996. Since 1996, the number of places available has remained roughly constant to the present.

**Table 5: Childcare centre data**

Year	No. of Centres	No. of Places	% cohort served	No. of Children enrolled	Usage per enrolments	Usage per actual attendance	No. of Childcare workers	% trained workers
1970	1044	40010	9.0	40770	112.9	84.5	6626	75.4
1980	1305	64502	13.6	69768	119.9	81.6	12819	83.6
1990	1003	50250	13.7	40825	87.2	61.8	9929	88.2
1995	628	31020	9.0	37696	101.9	70.4	6368	89.1
1996	570	27826	8.5	31838	96.2	68.2	5681	90.7
1997	559	26956	8.4	30762	101.4	72.3	5580	91.3
1998	565	26947	8.8	33209	108.9	77.5	5678	92.3
1999	549	26071	8.8	31983	107.3	77.6	5548	90.9
2000	532	24965	8.7	29561	104.8	76.4	5335	90.9

Source: Hungarian Background Report, 2002.

35. Almost all childcare programmes are operated by local governments. Local authorities/governments have the duty by law to provide childcare for those children and families who need it. The great majority of childcare workers employed (exceeding 90% for the past few years) are trained staff. They serve on average some 6.1 children (the recommended ratio is 5:1), usually grouped into two groups per room (10-12 children per room) often with two rooms paired and sharing an additional staff member responsible for maintenance of the space and assistance with bringing in food from the kitchen, in these two rooms. Childcare centres generally operate for 8-10 hours per day.

36. Only eleven company-run child care centres and fifteen other (including those by the different Ministries) -maintained centres offer provision in addition to local government. Together they serve about 800 of the nearly 30,000 children in childcare centres in 2000. In addition to childcare centres, there are a few family day care homes for up to 5 children per centre. As of 2002, there were an estimated 38 such programmes operating across the country. However, as no official reporting is required of family day care programmes, these numbers should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 6: Children Enrolled at Childcare Centres by Age Group**

	1-11 MONTHS	12-23 MONTHS	24-35 MONTHS	+36 MONTHS
1998	451	5393	15294	12071
1999	359	5040	14110	12474
2000.	327	4600	13479	11115

Source: Hungarian Background Report, 2002

37. Table 7 provides an overview of the administration of the child welfare system in Hungary. As shown here, childcare services and similar family supports are provided primarily by the local authority. It is possible for local authorities to contract out the provision of childcare to the private sector, but this is rarely done. Local authorities still remain the primary maintainers of childcare services in the country, and provide nearly all of childcare. The county level provides some oversight of childcare operations. Financing for childcare is through local authorities. Local childcare centres have substantial autonomy making day-to-day financial and programmatic decisions within their budget.

38. The Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs has overall responsibility for childcare in Hungary at national level. Through the laws governing services for children and families and the ministerial regulations issued to enforce the laws, the ministry provides the overall framework for childcare across the country. In addition, the Ministry has established the National Institute for Family and Social Policy to provide professional guidance to local agencies. Its work is supported by the network of methodological centres. It is the responsibility of Public Administration Offices and local authorities to inspect the childcare centres, with involvement from the National Institute, the methodological centres or registered childcare experts to ensure compliance with the regulations.

39. The content of childcare in Hungary has been greatly influenced in the past by psycho-pedagogical approaches and an emphasis on health and hygiene. The national methodological publication entitled *Minimum criteria of centre-based childcare and education and detailed aspects of professional work*, published in 1999, contains the new basic programme for childcare centre education and care. It emphasises both high standards for care of children and increased support for cognitive development so that the full range of child development issues is covered. A close working relationship with parents is also stressed.

**Table 7: Tasks Related to the Administration of the Child Welfare System**

<b>PROVISION</b>	<b>PUBLIC GUARDIANSHIP AUTHORITY MEASURES</b>
<b>Local government</b>	<b>Notary of local government</b>
Supplemental child protection allowance	Placing children under protection
Occasional child protection allowance	Temporary placement of children
Child welfare services	Full statement of acknowledgement of paternity
Childcare services	Appointing a Curator ad litem, a Custodian
Respite care for children	

	<b>Local Guardianship Authority</b>
	Child allowance Advance Homemakers' allowance Temporary placement of children Taking children in care Children's contacts Guardianship, Custody Family placement Adoption After-care and after-care provision
<b>County government</b>	<b>County guardianship authority</b>
Child protection Regional child protection agency Residential care (foster parents, children's homes) After-care and after-care provision	Guidance and inspection of first level guardianship authorities Decisions of appeal Licensing and inspection of children's institutions Welfare officer supervision for minors
<b>Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs</b>	
Sectoral administration and professional supervision Maintenance of certain institutions	
National Institute for Family and Social Policy (Nemzeti Család- és Szociálpolitikai Intézet)	Family and Child Protection Council (Család és Gyermekvédelmi Tanács)

Source: Hungarian Background Report, 2002.

40. Infant care workers provide care and education to children at classroom level in childcare centres. Of the 5594 such workers in Hungary in 2000, some 91% were trained. This proportion is declining due to the low salaries of childcare workers. Infant care workers are divided into three categories. The *Infant Care Specialist* (*csecsemo es kisgyermeknevelo gondozo*) has a university or college degree specialising in early care and education with 1950 hours of training of which 68% is theory and 32% is practice. The second category is the *Infant Care Worker* (*csecsemo es kisgyermekgondozo*). While they generally do not have a tertiary degree, infant care workers have some 4612 hours of training equally split between theory and practice. It is possible for an infant care worker to obtain further training as a *Childcare Centre Specialist Care Worker* (*bolcsodei szakgondozo*) with 377 hours of training in direction and supervision of educational activities, the material conditions of the centre, working with families and administrative work. In 2000, only 20% of employed care workers had the specialist care workers diploma. Care workers are perceived as having much lower prestige than kindergarten teachers and their salary ranks them among the lowest paid in the economy.

41. The cost of childcare is born by a combination of funding from the state, local governments and parents. At the national level, the state provides normative support. per childcare place. The actual amount is set annually by the Budget Act and supports approximately 25-30% of the operational costs. Local governments are required by law to provide for childcare and thus must finance most of the rest of the cost. They provide for some 55-65% of the cost, with parents providing the remaining 10-15%, in the form of payment for meals and snacks for their child. From the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004, childcare centres will provide free meals to children from low-income families. Where family day care is concerned, normative grants from the central government have become available since 2003, but only for those family day care homes that are maintained by a local authority. However, local authorities rarely maintain family day care homes.

Since personal charges are restricted to no more than 15% of the total operational cost by law, little family day care is used in Hungary. Moreover, the recent severe budget shortfalls have left childcare centres with few options to maintain quality. Some programmes have resorted to money-making options to help supplement government support. The only reasonable possibility for improvement and expansion is seen as increasing government normative support for centre care as well as a combination of state and local normative support for family day care.

42. At about the middle of the 1980's, services for children with special needs and disabilities began a slow shift toward recognising the right of children with disabilities to be educated together with their non-disabled peers – in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, in 2001 only 578 children with special needs attended integrated child care centres of which less than half were in fully integrated centres. The picture for children in kindergarten is much the same where segregated services remain the norm.

### History of kindergarten in Hungary

43. Hungary developed early care and education at much the same time as the rest of Europe. As early as 1806 it was possible for children from the age of 6 years to attend school. The first official kindergarten was established in Hungary in 1828 and was the first kindergarten in Central Europe. Through the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century kindergartens were operated as pre-school institutions with a strong emphasis on education with only a secondary emphasis on play. In 1891, the Kindergarten Act (Kisdedővő törvény), shifted the emphasis more toward the development of the whole child with a lower emphasis on cognitive development in isolation from other aspects of development.

44. By 1938 already, more than a quarter of 3-6 year old children were in kindergarten. There was little expansion over the next decades with only a third of children in kindergartens in 1960.

**Table 8: Kindergarten data in school years 1938 and 1960**

Year	Number of kindergartens	Number of children	% eligible children in kindergartens
1938	1100	112 143	26.3 %
1960	2865	183 800	33.7 %

Source: Nagy Magyar Lexikon 1967.

45. In 1948, kindergartens were nationalised. They were increasingly seen as providing places for children as more women began work in the paid labour force. In curriculum, more emphasis was placed on preparing children for school. Substantial expansion of kindergartens followed during the late 1950's through the 1980's. By 1965 the number of children attending kindergarten had doubled with a total of 3227 kindergartens in operation. By 1975, two thirds of children were in kindergarten, and this figure increased to 92% for the 5-year olds by 1985. With the transition to democratic government after 1989, kindergarten operation and responsibility shifted to the local governments and most kindergartens operated formerly by industry were closed. In the 1993 Public Education Act, kindergarten was recognised as an official part of the education system and was given the same status as elementary and secondary education in Hungary. Attendance at kindergarten was made compulsory for all children beginning in the Fall of the calendar year in which they become 5 years of age.

### Current status of kindergarten

46. In 1999, a total of 4643 kindergartens were in operation in Hungary serving a total of 365,704 children in 15,336 groups. Since about 1990, the number of children served has remained relatively constant with some reduction reflecting the lowering birth rate in the country. Table 8 presents a historical picture of the overall provision of kindergarten in the past half-century. The vast majority of the

kindergartens operating in 1999 were local government maintained. A few kindergartens are operated by churches (74), by private foundations or individuals (142), the central government (33) or others (30). Of the total children in kindergarten in 1999, 23.1% were 6 years, 30.2% were 5 years, 26.9% were 4 years and 19.4% were 3 years of age. Compulsory primary education begins at age 6, but all 5-year olds must attend kindergarten for no less than 4 hours of instruction daily and need a kindergarten certificate before enrolling in a general school. Eligibility to enter mainstream primary education is therefore determined by prior kindergarten enrolment, by age (to have turned 6 years before 1<sup>st</sup> June of the year of enrolment) and by the level of development of the child. Because of these conditions, many 6-year-old children remain in kindergarten, while other 6 year olds will already be in primary school. In addition, some children are allowed to remain in kindergarten for an additional year for a variety of reasons.

**Table 9: Kindergarten data**

School Year	Number of kindergartens	Places	Number of children	Number of groups	Number of pedagogues	Attendance as % of age group <sup>3</sup>
1955	2503	129344	145948	4480	6120	28.0
1960	2865	165282	183766	5836	8538	33.7
1970	3457	208647	227279	7881	12481	51.1
1980	4690	385533	478100	15253	29437	77.9
1990	4718	385020	391129	16055	33635	87.1
1995	4720	373158	399339	15813	32320	90.9
1996	4708	371354	394327	15701	31891	91.0
1997	4682	370224	383486	15641	31848	90.9
1998	4701	369520	374867	15630	31986	91.4
1999/2000	4643	366245	365704	15336	31409	92.0

Source: OM Statisztika, (Pethó 2002).

47. The overall management of education in Hungary is shown in Table 9. The system has shifted from strong central government control to a highly decentralised system. The national responsibilities remaining are to set overall education policy, establish regulations, monitor compliance with the regulations, assess the overall performance level of students at various points in time, and provide financing to county and local government agencies to support education. Though the intermediate county role has tended to be less significant, it has gained in importance in recent years in view of EU membership and of a general move by small local governments to give control and operation of secondary schools to county governments.

48. At local level, the maintainers are responsible for administration. The maintainers – generally state agencies and local governments - have primary responsibility for the day-to-day operation of their schools, including kindergartens. In summary, these responsibilities include:

- To ensure the lawful operation of the kindergarten, including the supervision of financial decisions, admissions policies, disciplinary matters, especially if the law has been breached or individual rights infringed;
- To draft the deed of foundation of public education institutions, including kindergartens;
- To approve the organisational and operational regulations of each kindergarten;
- To determine the financial management powers of the institutions, to set the budget and to audit the financial management;
- To evaluate the implementation of the pedagogical programme of the kindergarten;

3. The percentage rate of attendance is inflated by significant numbers of six-year olds in the service, for the reasons given above.

- To appoint and exercise employer's rights over the headmistress/headmaster;
- To approve the pedagogical programme of the institution.

49. Yet, school level autonomy is still a major characteristic of education in Hungary. Much decision making, including the use of funds, remains at the individual school or kindergarten level. The head is responsible for lawful operation and efficient financial management. S/he also must draft the day-to-day regulations and submit them to her staff. The whole pedagogical team is expected:

- To elaborate the pedagogical programme a (in line with the National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education), and perform pedagogical work accordingly;
- To choose the teaching tools and aids that they need;
- To choose appropriate pedagogical methods and assessment tools.

50. The role of professional interest groups is still evolving given the major changes in the system in recent years. It is not clear how significant a force these organisations will be in the future. Finally, the churches and to a lesser extent, foundations and other entities, have re-emerged. In parallel, most, but not all, of the company maintained kindergartens have been closed.

**Table 10: Hungarian Education Administration: Levels, Functions and Actors**

	<b>POLITICAL DECISIONS, CONCILIATION OF INTERESTS, CONSULTATION FUNCTIONS</b>	<b>GOVERNMENT, ADMINISTRATION OR AUTHORITY FUNCTIONS</b>	<b>PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONS</b>
National level	Parliament and the Parliamentary Committee for Education, Science, Youth and Sports Affairs The National Public Education Council and its standing committees National Committee for Minorities Council of Public Education National Training Council	Ministry of Education Office of the Commissioner of Educational Rights National Public Evaluation and Examination Centre Other Ministries	National professional institutes involved in educational research and development (OKI, OI, OKSZI, NSZI, PTMIK, Comenius 2000 Programme Office)*
County level	County Governments and their Education Committees County-level bodies involved in regional development and educational planning County-level Training Committee Board of Trustees of Public Foundation for Public Education	Chief notary (county clerks) Public Administration Office Education Department of County-level Government	Public education institutions funded by central government, e.g. 8 Regional OKEV (Units of the National Public Education Evaluation and Examination Centre) Public education institutions financed by county governments, e.g. County Pedagogical and Service Institutes (MPIs)** Education Service Providers of Counties and Small Regions Service Associations)
Local level	Local governments and their public administration or Minority self-government (If it exists) Education Committees of Local and Minority Governments Decision-making Bodies of Task Forces	Town Clerks (Notary) Mayor's Office Administrative Bodies of School Control (if they exist)	City pedagogical service institutions Local Educational Service Providers (Maintainers)
Institution level	School Board Students' Union	Head teacher	School Staff

Source: National Institute of Public Education (2001). *Education in Hungary 2000*.

Notes: \* National institutes involved in educational research and development: OKI= Országos Közoktatási Intézet (National Institute for Public Education); OI= Oktatáskutató Intézet (Educational Research Institute); KÁOKSZI= Kiss Árpád Közoktatási Intézet (Árpád Kiss National Institute for Public Education Services); NSZI= Nemzeti Szakképzési Intézet (National Vocational Training Institute); PTMIK= Pedagógus-továbbképzési Módszertani és Információs Központ (Centre for In-service Teacher Training, Methodology and Information).

\*\* MPI= Megyei Pedagógiai Intézetek (County Pedagogical Institutes)

51. Detailed guidelines for the operation of kindergarten programmes exist in the National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education. Kindergartens are staffed by kindergarten pedagogues who are required to have a tertiary degree of at least 2500 hours, of which 30% is of a practical nature including observations of kindergarten practice, individual and group sessions, and practical courses. This requirement went into effect only in 1993 so personnel with a secondary school leaving certificate and additional training act as kindergarten pedagogues in a significant number of kindergartens. They are helped by kindergarten assistants who provide support to the kindergarten pedagogues in the operation of the kindergarten class. Classes are therefore organised into groups with two pedagogues, and the support of an assistant/cleaner. The assistants do not have to have a secondary education and are able, but not required, to take a specialist examination. Currently some 80% of kindergarten teachers have a tertiary degree and a total of 97% have specialised training. In general, however, pedagogues are at the lowest rank of professional teachers in Hungary, with both lower professional recognition in their schools and communities, as well as lower pay than teachers of older children and youth.

52. Kindergartens are financed through a combination of national and local funds. The state provides normative grants to cover the costs of kindergarten services, which are determined in the Act on Public Education as a core of basic tasks that need to be fulfilled. These grants reach a total national figure of nearly HUF 43 billion (normally between 50% to 60% of total costs) or about HUF 130,000 per child. The local governments supplement these funds to an estimated 37-38% of the total costs, from its tax returns or other government grants. In addition, individual kindergartens may raise funds through various means, but these funds may not offset the basic requirements of the local maintainers to support the program. The maintenance of facilities remains a major concern in the many smaller municipalities as there are quite limited local resources to pay for renovation or construction costs.

53. Twenty-five children per group is seen as the maximum desirable for kindergarten education in Hungary, but about two of every five kindergartens exceed this number. In recent years, with fewer numbers of children attending, the education authorities have chosen to reduce the number of kindergarten classes rather than to bring class size in line with recommended maximum size (see Table 8).

54. Significant features of kindergarten all over Hungary are local autonomy and responsiveness to parental needs. Local agencies and schools have the possibility to adapt to their local circumstances one of the 15 or so approved programmes from the national database, e.g. Waldorf, Freinet, Montessori and “Step by Step”, or to prepare for approval a local educational/pedagogical programme (introduced at institutional level). At the same time, the National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education is a regulatory document, and all other programmes must include the values, contents and approaches outlined there. Again, programmes are typically open for a full working day to make accommodations for families in which both parents (or a single parent) work. Parents are asked to pay for meals, but low-income families are exempted from this requirement. Those children in kindergarten who are eligible for supplemental child protection allowance receive free meals since September 2003, according to the regulation of the Ministry of Education.

### **Strengths of Hungarian ECEC**

55. From the perspective of the OECD review team, some of the outstanding strengths of Hungarian ECEC are the following:

#### *Tradition and culture*

56. The quality of an early years system is linked strongly to the historical development of childcare and early education within a country. Both the expectations of parents and the central values of early childhood stakeholders and professionals are formed over decades. Hungary has been fortunate in this

respect having had time over 150 years to build up a quality tradition in both childcare and early education. Professionals in both childcare and kindergartens understand well the main functions of early years services, viz. to ensure the well-being and global development of the child, including cognitive and social development according to age; to ensure daytime care provision for children whose parents are employed; and thirdly, to integrate children at risk as early as possible into full-day, tailored programmes based on family outreach and community building.

57. The kindergarten has had for years an active and child-centred methodology, with a strong grasp of how cognitive skills are developed in young children. A global approach to development and competencies is generally favoured. Professionals are conscious of the principle of keeping alive the children's real interests so that they will be confident in undertaking later in primary school the micro-skills of letter decoding and writing. Though, as in other countries, kindergarten pedagogues come under pressure from parents, they have strongly resisted the direct teaching of literacy and numeracy. At the same time, children who have learning disabilities, such as vision or hearing impairments or a tendency toward dyslexia, are identified early and special needs staff are placed at their disposal. Moreover, the social dimensions of kindergarten education have been long recognised. According to our Hungarian informants, early childhood services have consistently aimed at the balanced development of young children, placing an emphasis on the acquisition of social and learning skills rather than on rote learning and subject knowledge. In parallel, childcare services have moved away from a health/sanitary focus to a broader view of child development and care.

#### *In-service staff training*

58. Initial training for kindergarten teachers is generally recognised to be of good quality, and delivers a tertiary level degree to kindergarten pedagogues. Pre-service training is less satisfactory for childcare workers, an issue that we shall take up in Chapter IV. However, in-service training seems strong and regular in both sectors. Every childcare worker must receive at least 60 hours of accredited training. This must be further expanded by an in-service education cycle extended over seven years. Points are given only for the completion of accredited courses. If a course has been accredited since 2003, normative funding covering 100% of the cost of further training is available. The training courses are generally conducted by schools providing vocational training and the National Institute for Family and Social Policy, but points are also awarded for certified attendance at professional conferences and field trips.

59. In parallel, there is an obligation on kindergarten pedagogues to take on a further 120 training hours each 7 years. An additional per capita normative state grant from the state is earmarked for in-service training to cover the cost of training. The grant is allocated to kindergartens through local government budget but local government does not pay for in-service training. On average normative grant covers 80-100% of the costs. The additional grant covers the costs of training, substitution, and travel. The financial possibility of the institution determines its opportunity to cover the total expenses of training or just a part of it. Several institutional variations are found: one institution may cover the whole cost, while another pays only the training fee, leaving teachers to pay for travel and so on. The in-service training obligation of teachers is carried out on the basis of a 5 years institutional in-service training plan, which allows kindergarten to plan both the training budget and teacher substitutions as well.

60. The Pedagogical Centre for Further Education Methodology and Information, the county pedagogical institutes and other educational service providers, private as well as public, offer in-service courses for kindergarten teachers. Maintainers may also prescribe specialised in-service training sessions for their teachers, which are generally taken fully in charge. At the time of our visit, 750 persons were in in-service training and post-graduate training at one Kindergarten Teacher Training College that we visited. It seems that the interests of many different actors are being served by the present organisation of

in-service training. Hungary is in an enviable position in this domain - at least in the large cities - compared to many other countries.

#### *Strength of legislation, regulation and administrative structures*

61. Although the team perceived some weaknesses in the concrete implementation of policy at territorial and municipal levels, and some overlapping of functions within and between the childcare and kindergarten structures, there can be little doubt that the legislative, regulatory and administrative structures in both childcare and kindergarten are generally very comprehensive. Although normative funding is often insufficient, especially in the childcare sector in support of certain groups, service financing is regular and obligatory, making services affordable to the majority of families. Operating conditions for childcare centres (Government Decree 281/1997) and rules for minimum requirements are known and observed (contained in the 1999 National Family and Child Protection Institute publication: *Minimum criteria of centre-based childcare and education and detailed aspects of professional work*). Likewise in the kindergarten field, the Public Education Act of 1993 and the various framework agreements establish the funding and legal status of public education, while the amendments to the Act and the National Programme for Kindergarten Education provide guidelines for the operation of kindergartens and their evaluation.

62. Administrative structures are equally comprehensive. In the childcare field, in addition to the Ministry of Health, Social and Family affairs, several national bodies focus on childcare policies and the regulation of quality, e.g. the National Family and Social Policy Institute, the Family and Child Protection Council, and the National Child Protection Experts. For example, the National Family and Social Policy Institute initiated in 1998-99 an ITERS-ECERS evaluation of programme quality across a sample of Hungarian childcare centres. At the moment, is engaged in conceptualising and training a network of family daycarers.

63. A similar structuring exists in education. Along with the Ministry of Education, the Commissioner for Educational Rights, the National Evaluation Examination Centre (OKEV), the National Institute for Public Education (OKI), the Comenius Programme for Quality Development and the Pedagogical Centre for Further Education Methodology and Information and other bodies have significant functions at national level. Within the legal framework provided by government, most policy and supervisory functions at local level are carried out by local government and the kindergarten sponsors. At this level, the local governments are supported by the County Pedagogical Institutes, the National Education Experts (of which over 400 are kindergarten experts) and the supervisors and counsellors from the Comenius Programme Office for Quality Development. Although reliable procedures for assuring continuous quality monitoring of the institutions have still not entered into practice, and a national professional standard for the external evaluation of kindergartens has still not emerged, (the issues will be taken up in Chapter IV), there is *potentially* a strong monitoring and evaluation system in place. In addition, the principle of subsidiarity, that is, addressing local needs through proximal local management, is now a characteristic of Hungarian administration.

#### *Regulation and monitoring at local level*

64. From an external perspective, the monitoring of the childcare sector at county and local level also seems strong in the population centres that actually invest in childcare centres. The County Guardianship Authorities and 8 Regional Methodological Centres provide monitoring and support to the administrators, maintainers and services. The local authority issues a licence to operate only under strict conditions, and the County Guardianship Authority has the duty to inspect centres every four years. The authority also supervises the observance of the regulations and the adoption of professional standards, and if circumstances require, commissions the methodological centres and/or experts listed in the National

Register of Childcare Experts to undertake external evaluations. These childcare methodological centres were developed by the National Institute of Childcare Centres (BOMI) from the 1980s onwards. Their purpose is to develop professional work and evaluate the performance and programmes of childcare centres. Although it seems that methods and professional standards may sometimes be weak, methodological centres have been important in supporting childcare centres and in proposing improved methodology, training and reform. Because of their focus on the professional content of the regulations governing childcare centres and the shaping of principles and methods, Hungarian childcare has been able to maintain up to the moment a national unity of approach and practice despite the highly decentralised nature of the system.

65. At the local level, the Town Clerk has the right to examine centres each year to ensure conformity with the regulations, such as material and personal conditions, appropriate qualifications, minimum number of staff, access to in-service training... Each centre has also an interest group composed of parents, centre staff and representatives of the local authority which meets annually, to make proposals for the development of services and to offer advice concerning the use of revenues. The professional bodies such as the Association of Childcare Centres or the Pro Excellentia Foundation in family daycare also contribute significantly to maintaining quality in the sector.

66. In the kindergarten sector, quality assurance and assessment are equally comprehensive. Responsibility for quality assurance is assigned at three levels:

- *To the Ministry of Education and the education agencies.* Specialised units in formulate the national curriculum for kindergarten education and study its effectiveness (OKI PTK), elaborate quality indicators in the different fields covered by the curriculum (e.g. indicators for a healthy lifestyle, play, civic education, environmental education), conduct national surveys (e.g. on parental and maintainer expectations of kindergartens), organise national workshops, provide research (e.g. on the impact of the market economy or on the new institutional independence of the kindergarten), and set the general regulations for the external evaluation of public education institutions.

At local level, as mentioned above, the Ministry has in place a network of County Pedagogical Institutes, the National Register of Education Experts (of which over 400 are kindergarten experts) and the supervisors and counsellors from the Comenius Programme Office for Quality Development. The Education Act puts pedagogical assessment work in first place among the professional services carried out by county pedagogical institutes. The ministry has also established a national register of experts who are eligible to undertake a professional assessment of primary (including kindergarten) education. Once commissioned, these experts examine through a series of interviews and visits, the funding and administrative aspects of kindergarten management, and the conformity of their goals, methodology and programmes with national standards. They propose better regulation and management methods, examine programmes, provide individual professional guidance, and encourage action research, in-service training and documentation work...

- *To the maintainers* (in general local governments). The maintainers undertake quality and other assessments through the county or local pedagogical service or through national and other experts. The Ministry of Education encourages the maintainers to undertake regular assessments and evaluations. It has begun to propose tenders that cover the expenses of inspecting professional work, and has set aside 2-3 million HUF for this purpose. Although, as we shall point out in Chapter IV, the maintainers do not take up the offer sufficiently where kindergarten evaluation is concerned, potentially strong evaluation structures are in place with adequate funding attached.
- *To the local kindergarten.* The head and staff of each kindergarten are expected to provide comprehensive documentation on management, the programmes in use and on the progress of

each child. Again, the Ministry provides support to kindergartens and schools to engage in self-evaluation procedures and to determine for themselves what support, training and certification they need. The kindergartens are also helped by the Union of Kindergarten Teachers and several active kindergarten professional associations. These associations defend not only the employment rights and conditions of work of kindergarten teachers, but devote also much effort to improving kindergarten methodology, and to making their voice heard at local government level.

In sum, the quality assurance system in Hungary is well-conceived and comprehensive, and potentially one of the strongest in the countries that we have visited. Some weaknesses and gaps exist, however, which we shall discuss in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### ISSUES RELATING TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

67. There is much to be proud of and to protect in the early care and education system in Hungary. From our brief review and our reading of the documentation supplied, the Hungarian services for young children – if rather limited in the area of childcare - are among the most comprehensively supported, regulated and managed services in OECD countries. Culturally, there is a shared understanding of the functions of early childhood education and care, and over the years, in-depth national and local expertise has been created. In particular, the Hungarian kindergarten has a long tradition in pedagogical methodology, and its use of music, art, movement/motor activity and handicrafts has placed it among the more interesting kindergarten models in Europe.

68. Childcare centres also, although suffering from budget cuts and lesser frequentation since transition, have retained their strong child-centred approach and favourable child-staff ratios. Outreach to families from the centres seems natural and effective. Further, there has been an enormous effort and commitment that has kept much of the early care and education system in place through the difficult transition period from 1990. The financial strains on the country and the shift to a more market based economy could easily have devastated a weaker ECEC system. While signs of strain from reduced financial resources are evident, the basic system is still intact.

69. However, to discontinue the development of any human service is to watch it decay. Changes in the economy and the labour market, in the nature and structure of families, in our understanding of young children and their rights require constant adjustments to child and family services. With this in mind, the OECD *Country Note* will discuss some issues and opportunities in both the childcare and kindergarten sectors, viz.:

- Co-ordination and decentralisation: in this section, we shall discuss the division between childcare and early education in Hungary, and the consequences for ECEC in general of the new decentralisation;
- Access: we shall focus in particular here on access for children below the age of three years; access for children with disabilities; access for children in rural settlements, and access for children from the Roma community;
- Quality: here we shall discuss some aspects of quality maintenance: the management of quality and assessment; pedagogical quality for disadvantaged children; the status and training of staff; data collection and policy research;
- General funding issues: among these issues, we discuss the present state of funding in childcare and the kindergarten in Hungary, and the international research on the economic benefits of investing in early childhood services.

Some suggestions for the resolution of these issues will be outlined in Chapter V.

## 1. Co-ordination and decentralisation

### *Introduction*

70. In this section, we shall briefly outline some of the weaknesses that result from the split between childcare and early education, and secondly, the impacts of decentralisation – as perceived by the OECD review team - on the efficiency of early childhood policy and services in Hungary. These issues, it seems to us, come to a head in the smaller settlements (under 2000 persons), which account for some 17% of the Hungarian population. A reason for weaknesses in co-ordination is perhaps the newness of the reform of Hungarian administrative and finance structures, a process that has perhaps not quite yet ended. At the same, we would like to underline the difficulties for an external team to fully understand the complexities of the present Hungarian decentralised model, and its constitutional implications. Our discussion therefore is tentative and subject to the better judgment and knowledge of Hungarian experts in this field.

### *1.1. The division between early education and care*

71. The division between early education and care is longstanding in Hungary, and stems – as in many other countries - from a moment in history when children below the age of three years were considered to be passive, and not yet ready to learn. In contrast, compare the opening lines of the authoritative publication *Eager To Learn* (Bowman *et al.*, 2000), published by the American National Research Council:

Children come into the world eager to learn. The first five years of life are a time of enormous growth of linguistic, conceptual, social, emotional and motor competence. Right from birth, a healthy child is an active participant in that growth, exploring the environment, learning to communicate and, in relatively short order, beginning to construct ideas and theories about how things work in the surrounding world. The pace of learning, however, will depend on whether and to what extent the child's inclinations to learn encounter and engage supporting environments.

72. Historical understandings of children, and of the institutions that grow up around them, are difficult to change. In most countries, early education and care have stabilised over the generations into parallel institutions, one under a ministry responsible for social, family or health policy, the other under the ministry of education. In each, the early childhood strand has tended to remain an adjunct to what are considered to be more important concerns: kindergarten being seen as an appendage to schools (in many countries, kindergartens are known as "infant schools" or "pre"-schools) and daycare being developed within a welfare or health framework, predominantly for children of low-income families. Yet, today both childcare and early education seek to achieve similar aims: to ensure the well-being and global development of the child, including social and cognitive development according to age; to ensure high quality daytime care for children, when parents are employed or need special support; and thirdly, to integrate children at-risk *as early as possible* into full-day programmes based on family outreach and community building.

73. The division between care and education in early childhood services is still strongly entrenched in many countries. Several barriers still exist to seeing parental needs and the development of young children in a more unified way:

- First, it is relatively rare for national administrations to radically rethink zones of ministerial responsibility. The normal mode of functioning in public services is incremental action within traditional zones of responsibility, in accordance with the body of regulations already in place.

- Second, the dual service approach is attached to recognised ministerial responsibilities, budgets and posts. It is understandable that the employees involved may be less than enthusiastic toward any fusion of polices and services, fearing that it may lead to a loss of functions and fewer jobs. The experience of countries that have integrated their services does not support these fears. Integration of policy and services has generally meant that funds are spent more efficiently and that municipalities can do more for less. An expansion and strengthening of the system takes place, not a restriction.
- Third, there is often a real opposition within the education sector to taking on responsibility for the “non-academic care” of young children. This attitude is bound up with teachers' definition of their work, their hours, pay conditions and the like. There are no easy solutions to the issue, but promising initiatives exist in several countries (in general, the Nordic countries, New Zealand...) that are centred on the best interests of children and working parents, and can win the assent of the teaching profession.
- Fourth, underlying the present division of responsibilities is an acceptance of traditional social representations and attitudes to gender roles, family formation, child-rearing, and the education of young children (when it can effectively begin, how it should be conducted...). In sum, there is still a strong expectation in most societies that women will cease to work for a number of years to rear children until pre-school or school age. Linked to this traditional view of child-rearing is a lack of awareness of how much societies have changed in the space of generation: e.g. the new work responsibilities and rights of women; the opportunities missed by young children when high quality ECEC services are not available; the greater educational and social needs of minorities and at-risk families, and the need for their children to receive a fair and early start...

#### **Box 1 - New Zealand: a community/private provider system financed by government**

In New Zealand, the organisation of ECEC services at the national level has been a matter of discussion over the past three decades. ECEC services for young children are predominantly established by the voluntary/community and private sectors, with some developed and managed by employers or local bodies. The service programme may be 'teacher-led' or 'parent/whanau led'.<sup>4</sup> The government's role is financial and regulatory. In 1986, the whole sphere came under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

In its financing role, Government decided that funding (capitation grant) follows the child (not the family) to whichever ECEC service the parent chooses to use. There is no differentiation by age of children, except that children under two receive higher grants as child/staff ratios for this age of child must be lower than for older children. Government now covers over 50% of the operational costs of services. It also provides capital grants to develop not-for-profit services, and facilitates low-cost loans for caregivers or teachers who want to train as ECEC teachers. Fee subsidies are also provided by the Ministry of Social Welfare to assist low income families to pay for ECEC services.

In its regulatory role, the Ministry of Education sets standards, accredits and monitors services, and provides the curriculum (Te Whariki - a socio-cultural curriculum for infants, toddlers and pre-school children) and supporting materials. The Education Review Office, a government agency, carries out a programme of regular reviews of services. Most children in the ECEC sector are in Education and Care Centres (0-6 years) but there are also kindergartens (predominantly attended by 3 and 4 year olds), play centres, kohanga reo (Maori immersion centres), Pasifika language(s) ECEC centres and a flourishing family day care system (called "home based care" in NZ). Over 30 % of 0-3 year olds and 85 % of the 3-5 year olds are in regulated, publicly funded services.

In recent months, the government has agreed a quantified and time-referenced strategic plan for the development of the sector for the next ten years. It hopes to increase participation from disadvantaged groups, improve quality and promote collaborative relationships with other sectors. To achieve these aims, it is engaged in a complete revision of the funding and regulatory system; in the professional registration of co-ordinators of family day care and of contact personnel in teacher-led centres; and in better support for community-led initiatives.

*Source:* A 10-Year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education, Ministry of Education, Wellington (2002).

4. Kindergartens are an example of teacher led services; play centres and kohanga reo are parent/whanau led services.

74. In Hungary, the two responsible ministries expressed to the OECD team very similar aims with regard to the young children in their respective services. There is probably a greater focus on disadvantaged children and on parental needs in the childcare system, but this is quite usual, even in integrated systems, given the strong dependency of the young child on the family environment. The structuring of the two systems is likewise very similar – predominantly centre-based, with similar professional-pedagogical bodies at county level, and parallel policy bodies at central level. Differences exist primarily in the training, status and remuneration of staff (see para.s 110 *ff* below), but whether greater co-ordination occurs or not, this issue needs to be resolved, unless – as has happened in other countries – a low quality childcare system is allowed to emerge in Hungary, with high turn-over of staff and an inability to deliver quality programmes for the very young children.

### **1.2. Decentralisation and management issues**

75. A discussion of Hungarian decentralisation in education can be found in Balázs *et al.*, (1999), in which the authors explore the impact of decentralisation on the capacity of central government to ensure equity, quality assurance and the efficient use of resources. In sum, from 1990, both education and social welfare became highly decentralised in Hungary, with effective autonomy granted to local governments. Vertical responsibility for young children is now shared between four administrative levels: the line ministry; the region or county; the local municipal or ethnic government; and the childcare/kindergarten institutions. Successive pieces of legislation transferred the ownership of previously state-owned childcare and kindergarten centres to the politically autonomous local governments, and removed tight state control over budgets, employment, programmes and curricula.

76. According to political commentators, the competent line ministries in Hungary are more than usually subject to the central government as a whole, and at the same time are unable constitutionally, except on rare occasions, to issue executive directives to the autonomous local governments. Sectoral responsibility is therefore exercised “via indirect means, of which the most important ones are the determination of the basic curricular and other standards, the elaboration of the financing preferences and the launching of developmental programmes”. (Balázs *et al.*, 1999). In parallel, county level governments and state officials at county level, and the regional pedagogical-professional bodies (including the county methodological and pedagogical centres) have little constitutional hold over local governments, although the Act on Public Education does provide for influence.

77. The Act on Public Education requires county governments to develop plans for the maintenance, development, and administration of the educational institutions. These plans are required to include guidelines for the cooperation of local governments, and set conditions to safeguard the cohesion of the institutional system of education. In turn, each local government maintaining educational institution has to elaborate a local action plan of how to provide services. Since county development plans are only recommendations for local governments, the latter are not obliged to take them into consideration in the planning of local action plan. However in many instances, the local governments are only provided with access to the necessary funds for development allocated from the county level public education foundations if they accept the recommendation of the county development plan. This serves as a tool to harmonise local planning with that at county level.

78. What then are the challenges for the organisation of early childhood education and care that arise from the administrative situation? In general, it can be said, that the new situation brings many benefits, especially in urban contexts. There is greater freedom for both local governments and centres to be innovative, and respond better to the needs of parents. Collective participation both direct (parent councils) and indirect (interest groups) has been enhanced, and above all, proximal management and control – especially important in the early childhood and family field – has been achieved. However, challenges have also arisen from the modernisation of the administrative structures:

*Insufficient authority at ministerial and county levels to substitute for local authorities or even to guide ECEC polices in these constituencies*

79. Although we acknowledge that it is difficult for an external team to pronounce on the issue, the OECD team remained with a question mark concerning the expertise of the elected bodies and local administrations that have responsibility for education and childcare. Shortage of expert personnel in early childhood seemed a particular challenge in the rural and small municipalities – and we were informed, is characteristic also of other services. It is true that local governments can and do consult with the heads of centres and the early childhood interest groups. Yet, certain questions go beyond the scope of ECEC professionals, and need more authoritative information - even arbitration - from a higher level, e.g. objectively calculating the demographic features and trends in a district or settlement; whether and how a settlement can co-operate with neighbouring settlements to provide adequate care and education for the young children; the infrastructural, architectural and operational requirements for an effective early childhood service; establishing mechanisms to ensure that funds are allocated fairly and effectively...

80. No doubt, much of this expertise is present in the larger municipalities, but given that only 2400 of the 3100 Hungarian settlements have the capacity to run a primary school, the argument for greater ministerial and county guidance seems particularly strong, or at least, reinforced forms of district-level collaboration. It is generally recognised that the capacity and quality of local public administration (and within it, the administration of childcare and kindergartens) are greatly determined by the size and economic status of the settlement. The access figures for early childhood services in Hungary (serving less than 10% for children under 3 years; c. 60% of 3-year olds; c. 83% of 4 year olds; c. 98% of 5 year olds; c. 71% of 6 year olds<sup>5</sup>) suggest that many settlements may have no service available for the younger children under five years. Our analysis of rural settlements and access for Roma children points also to the same conclusion. Many small settlements in Hungary lack the capacity to finance or run - as the law encourages - a quality kindergarten or childcare service.

81. Fundamentally, this is an equity issue that requires consideration and eventual intervention from central government. It may be possible, for example, to enable the weak municipalities to opt out of maintaining certain services and have the State named as maintainer of integrated early childhood services in these areas. Another solution may be for the State to place a responsibility on the county authorities or other bodies to assist or substitute for the small municipalities that cannot realistically develop the necessary funding and competencies to create or maintain quality early childhood services. Yet another path to explore – perhaps in conjunction with one of the above – is to encourage smaller settlements to collaborate whenever economies of scale can be achieved, without having to bus very young children to services. In this respect, it may be useful to encourage these municipalities not to maintain lower secondary schools (often – we were informed - of poor quality) whose pupils can be bussed to larger centres, and thus concentrate more on the provision of early childhood services which, by their nature, need to be local.

*A divergence of interests between central and local governments, not least on important equity issues for Hungarian society as a whole*

82. To achieve fair outcomes for Roma and other vulnerable children is a major equity issue for Hungarian society. As such, it is the responsibility of central government, which today, is providing both leadership and funding to the issue. However, the implementation of social inclusion and anti-discrimination policy is left in the hands of local government. Our hypothesis – sustained by interviews with local officials and Roma representatives – is that many local governments, for electoral and practical reasons, do not make social inclusion a priority issue. An underlying reason may be that the rationale for

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5. The figure that one usually hears for kindergarten coverage is “over 90%”. According to our estimates, only 5-year olds achieve this enrolment. The figures that we provide for the other age groups are estimates based on the figures supplied in the Hungarian Background Report (2002).

investment in Roma children – e.g. conformity with European human rights instruments; integration of Roma children into mainstream education; their future employment and contribution to the public good through taxes; less dependency on social services, etc. – are more persuasive for central government than for local authorities. In addition, many of the local authorities are not in a position – with respect to human resources – to provide the leadership, employment opportunities and communication flows that are necessary to resolve this multi-dimensional challenge. Further, we were informed that there is no effective sanction to oblige local governments to do more than to observe the minimum legal requirements.

## 2. Access and equity

### *Introduction*

83. The countries attending the Barcelona European Council, 16-17 March 2002, agreed that European Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, in line with national patterns of provision, *to provide childcare<sup>6</sup> by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age*. Present coverage in Hungary is below the target for the 3-6 year olds,<sup>7</sup> (see note below), and a significant expansion of childcare places must be envisaged if Hungary is to approach the European benchmark of 33% coverage of the younger children in seven years time. The question of access to and participation in ECEC services remains, in fact *the* major challenge in Hungary. With the paucity of places for under-threes, women's entry into the labour market may be impeded, and the primary health and development of children below the poverty line is seriously compromised. In parallel, although kindergarten access is much better, the children that are not enrolled or enrol late are minority and disadvantaged, precisely the children who need the support of a good kindergarten to succeed in primary school.

*What does international experience have to say about early childhood programmes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds?*

84. A first conclusion from international research is that *early* intervention toward young children at-risk contributes greatly to putting these children on the path to development and success in school. Braithewaite, 1983, (Australia); McCain and Mustard, 1999 (Canada); Jarousse *et al*, 1992 (France); Kellaghan and Greaney, 1992, (Ireland); Kagitçibasi, 1996 (Turkey); Osborn and Milbank, 1987, (UK); Berrueta-Clement *et al* , 1984 (USA); McKey *et al*. 1985 (USA); and Schweinhart *et al.*, 1993 (USA) – all concur that well-funded, integrated socio-educational programmes improve the cognitive functioning of disadvantaged children, and almost always yield positive outcomes with regard to socio-emotional development and ability to live with other children. If properly linked to the labour, health and social services, they can also be expected to deliver additional outcomes, such as enhanced maternal employment, less poverty, better parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion: At a recent presentation to the US Congress, Professor Brooks-Gunn (2003), focussing on educational returns, confirmed that mainstream research across countries shows that:<sup>8</sup>

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6. In this context, the term *childcare* includes early education. Enrolment of 3-6 years olds in the greater part of Europe is through pre-school education provided by the education authorities, generally as part of or attached to the primary school.

7. The situation is not clear from the figures supplied in the Hungarian Background Report, where Tables 23 and 24 seem at odds. The former affirms that 92% of the age group attended kindergarten in 1999-2000, whereas the average for years 3, 4, 5 and 6, detailed in Table 24, comes to 81.4%.

8. More extensive summaries of the international research on the topic from other countries can be found in two issues of *OECD Education Policy Analysis* (OECD, 1999 and 2002) and in Leseman (OECD, 2002).

- High quality centre-based programmes enhance the school-related achievement and behaviour of vulnerable children;
- These effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education;
- Positive benefits continue into late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school;
- Programmes that are continued into primary school and that offer intensive early intervention have the most sustained long-term effects.

In this context, we can grasp more readily the loss to the certain groups of children – and eventually to Hungarian society and economy – when they are confronted by difficulties in accessing the excellent services that the country offers.

### ***2.1. Reduced access for children below the age of 3 years***

85. Within the childcare system there have been quite substantial decreases in the number of children served and in the allocation of financing. Even in the larger towns and cities the number of childcare places has decreased precipitously. Several centres that we visited had waiting lists of as many as one-third the number of children enrolled, and up to 18 months of delayed entry. Compared to 1980, only half as many facilities continue to exist, serving only half the number of children. Controlling for the reduction in the Hungarian birth-rate, the number of places has fallen from 13.7 places per hundred children in 1990 to about 7.5 places currently (giving about a 10% coverage for children from 18-36 months). Approximately 62% of children 0-3 years were cared for at home by their parents, supported by GYED or GYES grants, which leaves about 30% of children being looked after informally by other family members, babysitters or other services purchased on the market. For working women who avail of such services, informal arrangements and the resulting stress can influence their work negatively, leading in turn to reluctance to hire women with children.

#### *The impact of childcare shortage on equality for women and labour market flexibility*

86. From the perspective of the National Development Plan, the shortage of childcare places potentially undermines proposals for equality of opportunity for women and labour force supply. Women gain greatly, both at a personal and a professional level from remaining in work, supported by good services. Salaried work enables mothers to avoid long-term poverty damaging for themselves and for their children, an important consideration in situations of lone motherhood, separation and divorce, when children are normally left in the mother's custody.<sup>9</sup> Other research indicates that the lifelong effects of a woman's dropping out of work - or of downgrading to part-time work - for a number of years to care for young children, has considerable negative effects on professional development, lifelong earnings, pensions and career progression (Harkness and Waldfogel, 2002). According to Gunderson (1986), lessened professional activity among women may be a root cause of the differentials between male and female earnings, which today in Europe stand at an average ratio of 100:84.

87. The drop-out of women from the work force is also a significant loss to the economy, because it reduces the tax base and deskills a large and better educated part of the labour force. At the moment, the percentage of women employed in the Hungarian economy is 52.5% (*OECD in Figures*, 2002), compared with Canada, the Nordic countries and the USA which have rates in excess of 70%. In addition, the proportion of the retired and elderly is especially high. Can the Hungarian economy of the future afford to have so many dependants, in particular among young active women? A participation rate of 52.5% cannot

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9. In over 90% of instances, women are given custody of children in case of separation or divorce. Such situations affect over 40% of couples in some urban milieus.

be satisfactory from either a gender or economic perspective. As the Hungarian economy expands, it is to be expected that it will need a critical mass of educated young women in the workforce.

88. Despite the strong arguments for expanding childcare to meet both labour force and child development needs, it is clear that local governments in Hungary are still experiencing great difficulty in coping adequately with childcare demands. Because of the re-structuring of the economy, the proportion of the inactive population is extremely high in Hungary, with almost half the women and many operational persons over 50 years not working. This implies that the tax base is limited, and that the revenues received by (local) government are frequently devoted to urgent survival matters. It is estimated, for example, that as many as 40% of families with young children are in need. According to the staff we interviewed, most of the children in the services in districts with high unemployment cannot pay for meals that is, there is no cost recuperation through user fees for the childcare centres in these districts. In addition, the rent and refurbishment of buildings are almost entirely at the charge of the local authority. In the childcare sector, the normative government grant is provided only for children who are actually present, which allows the centres to cover only the minimal operational costs.<sup>10</sup>

## ***2.2. Access for children with disabilities***

89. Up to the early 90s, public policy encouraged - as in most countries - the segregated education of children with disabilities and other special needs. A number of central institutions (often residential) catered for specific conditions such as visual or hearing impairment, cerebral palsy or learning disability (mental handicap). Medical and educational experts determined the placement of the child in the system. In light of the UN Convention of the Right of the Child, 1989, public legislation (Public Education Act, 1993 and 1996; Law 31 of 1997; the Equal Opportunities Act, 1998) and policy papers (National Programme for Kindergarten Education, 1996) recognise and encourage the right of children with disabilities to be educated together with their non-disabled peers.

90. *Identification and assessment:* The identification of special needs in children under 3 depends largely on hospitals and birth clinics, referrals from parents, medical personnel and to some extent childcare centres (keeping in mind that less than 10% of children attend these centres). Committees of multi-disciplinary experts have been established, whose task is to assess children's learning ability and refer them to specialists and to different services such as childcare, early development and intervention centers, etc.). Children of all ages are referred to the committee by pediatricians, health visitors, nurses, childcare workers, etc. when the children are suspected to have some problems. However, smaller, rural settlements suffer from a shortage of specialist diagnosis, and children with special needs can be overlooked until they enter kindergarten. The team was informed that many children with disabilities under 3 years are cared for at home by their parents with varying levels of support. Again, it seems that young children with significant or multiple disabilities are frequently placed in segregated, residential institutions specialising in particular conditions.

91. Children attending childcare centres have a better chance of early identification and in some integrated mainstream settings, enjoy excellent screening and developmental opportunities. Likewise, in kindergartens, teachers are responsible for identifying special needs in children, and cooperate with parents, relevant authorities and committees so that children can undergo the necessary assessments. Assessments are carried out by the development and care services in centres, and an "Expert and Rehabilitation Committee" at county level, or when necessary, by a number of national committees for particular conditions.

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10. We were informed that the recent increase in the normative grant will barely cover the increase in the new salary scales for the childcare centre staff.

92. A privileged time for assessment is when children reach school age. If the kindergarten teacher considers that a child has not reached the maturity necessary for school life or s/he observes any kind of deficiencies s/he will ask parents to send their child for examination. Examination is carried out by county level Expert and Rehabilitation Committees and/or by local level Educational Counseling Services. Referrals to these committees can only happen and recommendations can only be implemented with the consent of the child's parents. However, the quality of that consent has at times been queried during our review. It appears doubtful whether parents are fully aware of the serious and long-term consequences of special education placement. Parental desire for treatment and inclusion is further limited by the Public Education Act since it allows any educational institution to refuse enrolment if they lack the necessary staff and resources. The situation is further compounded by the fact that most disability occurs among the children of disadvantaged, low education groups, and in particular, in Roma families. Without proactive support, these groups are unable to defend themselves adequately against the minimal observation of Hungarian law.

93. *Provision* - Much progress has been made with the integration of children with disabilities in childcare centres. 173 centres of a total of 532 provided services to children with special needs in an integrated or semi-integrated way. According to figures provided by the National Family and Welfare Institution (NcsSzI) in 2001, 578 children with special needs were enrolled in childcare centres in the year 2000, which is just under 2% of the 29,561 total enrolled children (NcsSzI, 2003). We have seen a number of centres providing high quality service to children with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. Specialist intervention, equipment and programmes were often excellent with very good outcomes. One centre was able to reduce placements in special education from 15 children to zero in only three years! Another crèche director in Budapest told us that 48% of the children entering have already incurred developmental delays, but after 6 months at the crèche, these children have generally caught up. However, only less than 10% of all under 3's attend childcare centres and many children of this age group are either at home with insufficient supports or in segregated institutions separated from their family and community. Obstacles to increased participation of children with disabilities in integrated childcare centres include traditional attitudes to disability, shortage of trained staff, lack of equipment and the high cost of provision (lower group sizes and adult/child ratios).

94. The picture is similar for the kindergarten system where segregation still remains the norm. Over 80% of all children between the ages of 3 and 7 attend kindergarten. Provision for children with special needs on kindergartens is improving, though more slowly than in childcare centres. The long tradition of segregated education in Hungary seems to be particularly difficult to overcome despite the expressed aims of public policy and committed practitioners. The 1996 revisions to the Public Education Act gave an impetus, however, to provision for children with special needs in kindergartens: each child with a speech-based or light mental disability should receive the normative grant equivalent to that for two healthy children, whereas, children with a physical or sensorial disability, autistic children and children with medium severity disabilities should receive a grant equivalent to three children.

95. Whether such grants are sufficient to reduce sufficiently the child/staff ratios in kindergarten groups (normally around 25:2) to enable the effective taking in charge of children with disabilities is questioned by some teachers. Yet, the pressure to receive children with disabilities is increasing, and their numbers in kindergartens have doubled in the past 5 years (Hungarian Background Report, p.21). The improvement has come, however, from a very low base and the education system as a whole remains highly segregated particularly in relation to more significant or multiple disabilities. In 1999 a total of 2091 children with disabilities attended kindergarten. This was less than 0.6% of the total kindergarten population of 365,704 (Hungarian Statistics Office). Given these figures, it is safe to assume that at least two thirds of children with disabilities do not attend kindergarten. A network of 8 large special residential kindergartens operates in major towns as well as 50 smaller kindergartens throughout the country. There

are also day and residential special kindergartens for children with visual and hearing impairments, severe speech and mobility disabilities.

96. Transition from both integrated and special kindergarten to primary education proves difficult for children with disabilities and most of them will continue in special education with the associated stigma and disadvantages. A system of early development and consulting services has been established, however, since 1992. There are presently 170 to 180 centres throughout the country employing 300 to 350 experts to help approximately 2000 families caring for a child with a disability at home. In sum, the situation is improving gradually, but still too few children with special needs are being served in an inclusive way with other children. Experts agree that reaching these children early is critical to their long-term well being. However, segregated programmes for children with disabilities have a long history in Hungary as in many other parts of the world. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and most of the major groups dealing with disabilities in the world now call for the urgent acceptance of children with disabilities in public settings with other children.

### ***2.3. Under-served rural settlements***

97. The most dramatic childcare and kindergarten shortages appear in the rural areas of Hungary.<sup>11</sup> In general, the settlements which provide neither a childcare centre nor a kindergarten are the small rural communities with less than 2000 inhabitants, representing about 17% of the population. Many of these settlements have too few children to support a centre, and/or do not have the expertise to conduct early childhood services. Moreover, parents are generally too poor to make voluntary contributions, and the alternative of bussing young children to larger settlements is expensive and unacceptable.

98. The team was informed also that many of the settlements of between 2000 and 9999 people in the northern and eastern parts of the country were also too poor to provide a service of quality for young children, as with the high unemployment levels in these areas, the tax base is very restricted, and local government budgets are focussed on social welfare. Because of the underlying economic situation, there is little demand for childcare. When kindergarten programmes exist, there is a tendency in these poorer areas to bring together schools and kindergartens. Local governments choose to integrate institutions under one leadership in order to solve maintenance problem caused by lack of sufficient resources. In such instances, the head of kindergarten generally becomes deputy head of the integrated institution, and the kindergarten retains independence only in professional matters.

99. On national average there is no shortage of qualified kindergarten teacher even in small settlements. However, in these settlements, there is a problem to substitute for teachers attending in-service training courses. In some counties, this phenomenon led to create a network of institutions in order to organise training courses locally and solve substitution problems, but the effectiveness of such co-operation depends largely on the aptitudes and attitudes of local maintainers. For this reason, a significant number of classes may lack a teacher, at least on a temporary basis. There is no obligation on the county authorities to substitute for the weakness of a local government, and so a situation of educational inequality for rural children persists.

100. What has international experience to teach us about the difficulties of providing services in rural areas? Firstly, that the provision of services is very necessary for young children in isolated settlements. Without at least one good service, these children can be denied adequate screening and prevention, and their socialisation and preparation for school can suffer. Second, the challenge should be seen in the wider perspective of territorial development. Economic development can bring to rural communities the

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11. In the whole country with 3153 local governments, only about 180 maintain childcare services, and just over 2000 maintain kindergartens.

motivation and funding to actively take in hand the education and care of the younger children. A third important finding is that the cost of providing separate services for dispersed populations is extremely high. For this reason, integration of health, social and educational services is becoming the norm, often around the local school or health centre.<sup>12</sup>

101. *Development of family daycare networks* - A likely option for rural communities is the development of family daycare networks, linked with and animated by an existing county childcare centre. This is a solution being adopted in both rural and urban areas in France and other countries, where family daycarers are recruited and supported from a professionally-run, childcare centre. The director and professionals in the childcare centre provide training once a week to local daycarers, allowing them to gain a diploma, an improved professional status and better earnings from their work.<sup>13</sup> The advantages for the local community and families are also significant - higher quality services for children, control of fees and subsidies to families most in need, better data on where children are, and the possibility of including in the official statistics for the county and country, children attending this family-type service. Large networks could be supported at the county level by the methodological centres. Though significantly less costly than building new childcare centres, it will be important to provide normative funding for such an initiative, so that proper regulation and quality standards can be maintained.

102. In settlements where no kindergartens exist, family daycare can be expanded to become *family kindergarten*, operated on the same principle but in contact also with the educational authorities. In countries with dispersed populations, such as Canada, Finland, Sweden, family kindergartens supply a necessary service to young children in remote settlements. The quality of a fully professional centre may not always be reached, but with training and support, family daycarers can contribute significantly to the development of young children and prepare them for entry into formal kindergarten and school. An early start is possible in this type of structure, which accords well with the research indicating that intensity of kindergarten experience (intensity in the number of years and duration throughout the week) is important for disadvantaged children. This type of service also provide modest but real employment to local women, and if in-service training is established, the isolation of rural communities can be broken and new ideas about children and their education introduced.

#### **2.4. Access for Roma children to childcare and kindergarten**

103. In Hungary, minority groups are well protected in principle. In fact, the Minorities Law of 1993 is considered to be one of Europe's most comprehensive charters of individual and collective minority rights. Through this law, Hungarian minorities have and implement rights to establish self-government in settlements and districts (including in the large cities) where they are gathered in significant numbers. Likewise, minority children are given in the law priority status and many advantages. Centres with minority children can claim special normative grants for language, or in the case of Roma, for the transmission of Roma culture, the fostering of traditions, or for compensatory Hungarian language activities.<sup>14</sup> They are also be in receipt of normative grants attached to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and can now claim grants for integrated education.

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12. In parallel, a multi-functional health or child worker profile may need to be considered for isolated populations, as in the in the Nordic countries, where pedagogues can be trained in early childhood care and education, in the care of the elderly, and in leisure-time activities for out-of-school children and youth.

13. In other countries, e.g. Belgium and Denmark, *family daycare providers* are part of the official municipal childcare networks, and receive training from municipal co-ordinators. These providers have been successful in providing education and care services for young children and families, particularly in rural areas.

14. Few Roma parents demand specific Roma language activities.

104. According to ACT 77/1993 on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, if the parents of 8 minority children so request, the local authority is required to organise a special minority class or study group. A total of almost 20,000 children are enrolled in ethnic kindergartens, which represents about 5.4% of the total group. Minority children may receive instruction in their mother tongue, in Hungarian or in their mother tongue and Hungarian. The regulations recommend that external evaluations carried out in kindergartens providing for national and ethnic minorities should be made in the language of the group, or at least include an expert speaking the language. The results must be communicated to the relevant minority local government and to the national minority government.

105. Politically also, the OECD team found a clearly expressed desire in government and throughout the ministries to discuss openly the issue of equality of opportunity, and in particular to redress the balance in favour of Roma children. Several governmental committees and institutions exist with a focus on minority issues, a State Secretary for Roma issues sits in the Prime Minister's cabinet and within the Ministry of Education, a Commissioner for Disadvantaged and Roma children has been appointed from the Roma community. Among the special measures introduced in recent years to allow better access of Roma children to kindergarten are:

- An additional normative grant from central government to maintainers who develop a plan for children needing special educational support or special teaching procedures was terminated in 2003. Since then the additional normative grant is allocated to kindergartens and schools, which develop a programme supporting inclusive education;
- An additional grant for kindergartens which transmit Roma culture, foster Roma traditions or propose compensatory classes in Hungarian...
- From 2003, a free meal policy in kindergarten for all disadvantaged children;
- Various initiatives funded through the EU PHARE programme, such as kindergarten assistant training, Roma cultural training...
- From 2003, the phasing out of compensation classes in which Roma children predominate (700 elementary schools currently run such classes which receive special funding). In addition, in the new integrated school envisaged, the mainstream children must learn about the culture of the local minority.

Many of our respondents testified to a real improvements now being recorded in Roma enrolment. However, there are serious barriers to be overcome - linked to history, employment and socio-economic status - both from within the Roma community and from without.

#### *Barriers to access*

106. From within the Roma community, it seems that there has been a reluctance to confide the care of younger children to extra-familial institutions. From the perspective of the OECD team, this is not just a Roma attitude but one found right across OECD countries. In rural societies in particular, women often consider themselves poor mothers if they cannot look after their young children at home. In addition, the Roma were a persecuted group during the 1930s and 40s, when in many instances, their children were taken from them to be placed in institutions. It is understandable that a lack of trust in state institutions has resulted. Today, the situation has evolved greatly, and according to many childcare and kindergarten personnel whom we interviewed, positive attitudes toward the early institutions are found among Roma families in Hungary today. Most parents would like to have their children placed in an early childhood institution of their choice. Moreover, they find segregation degrading and are very anxious to have full integration with mainstream children in childcare centres, kindergartens and schools. They are sensitive to discrimination, even positive discrimination, and do not want their children treated differently. The Roma parents and representatives whom we met were keen to have their children learn Hungarian and integrate successfully in the school system.

107. However, the desire of Roma families to successfully integrate Hungarian society and education has often met with disappointment. According to a recent study (OKI, 2003), a significant group of Roma children do not access kindergarten until the age of 5 years; more than a third of Roma children are segregated in primary and secondary education in a variety of ways, and that since 1990, educational segregation has actually increased; by the age of 15/16 years, over 50% of Roma children have already dropped out of education; and only about 24% complete their secondary studies. The authors conclude:

”...all available statistical data prove that the majority of Roma students cannot succeed in the present Hungarian education system, while the school age population of Roma children is increasing fast.”

108. A particular feature of Hungarian primary education – very relevant for the kindergarten - is the very high proportion of children from a Roma or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds who are directed into special education. No accurate figures are available but we were quoted ratios between 20% and 50% of Roma children in segregated special education institutions. Even at 20%, this represents a very disproportionate placement in special educational settings for any ethnic group, and raises serious questions about definition, assessment and intervention.<sup>15</sup> The outcome for the children so labelled is their effective exclusion from mainstream primary and secondary education, and the reinforcement of the marginalisation and social exclusion of the Roma ethnic group. The Hungarian authorities and education specialists are well aware of the shortfalls of ‘special education’, but its alternatives are insufficiently assessed and implemented yet. Moreover, special education is still attractive to the very poor Roma families as child-staff ratios are better in special schools, materials and food are free, and sometimes free room and board is offered.

109. Within the mainstream system, there is also a compensation programme for Roma and other children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of these children participate in so called “catch-up” programmes in primary and secondary schools. The initial aim of these programmes was generous, but the financial incentive given to schools to provide compensatory classes for Roma children and the methodology used (grouping together many children who have not mastered basic skills) seem highly questionable. The issue here is one not of Roma education alone but of quality education for all children, including the weakest. In a differentiated, individualised education system, there is no inherent reason why all children should not be educated together, and why every child should not leave school with the mastery of basic skills.

110. We heard strong criticism of these programmes from Roma representatives who argue that they compound marginalisation and rarely achieve their stated aim of re-integrating children into mainstream schooling. In fact, after five to ten years of state-funded education, many of the Roma children leave school without any employable skills. There is a strong case to be made therefore for abandoning this type of “compensation” approach<sup>16</sup> and for laying the foundations of learning as early as possible for all disadvantaged children. An “early start” approach would require diverting funding from compensatory programmes toward an active pedagogy model for kindergarten and primary education (as one of our respondents put it: “to kindergartenise primary education”),<sup>17</sup> ensuring that young Roma children have

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15. If the Roma community resembles disadvantaged groups in other countries, then Roma children will suffer more from infant mortality, disabilities, cognitive and language delays than mainstream children. However, the numbers being directed into special education are disproportionate by any standards.

16. The Ministry of Education is now moving away from the compensation approach and has introduced a “Coaching for Integration” approach to begin in September of this year.

17. The High/Scope Foundation in the US, the Soros Foundation in Central Europe and two of the models mentioned in the paragraphs above on returns from early childhood education have developed active pedagogies for the lower classes of primary school which seem very suitable for all children, and are able

prioritised access *at the age of 3 years* to appropriate childcare and early education. As we noted beginning of this section on access, research evidence from other countries concerning the benefits of early intervention is overwhelming, especially if this initial stage of education is followed up by equally well-planned primary education.

111. However, at kindergarten level, there are serious barriers to access. Among the causes of low participation given to the OECD team were:

- The inadequate supply of kindergarten places, which means that the kindergarten directors often have to refuse children. The supply is especially low in poor, rural municipalities, which at the same time often make great efforts to supply "primary" education to the age of 15.
- The costs of attendance, such as, meals, transport fares, small expenses... (The decision of the government to supply a free meal daily to children is a progressive step).
- The conditions and pedagogy are often not suitable for disadvantaged children.

112. We were informed by several representatives of the Roma community that the majority of Roma families today wish to enrol their children in kindergarten at three or four years, but cannot always do so. Sometimes, it is a question of space – about 5000 children annually are refused access to kindergarten in settlements because of lack of spaces. Among these children refused, a disproportionate number may be Roma children. When there is place, the fact that Roma mothers traditionally look after other younger children at home works against the early enrolment of their three-year olds, as enrolment priority is given to the children of dual-working parents. Even if the family is extremely poor and has not been able to access child-rearing and family benefits, their child is often refused, as the leading criteria for refusal of admission are: a) a mother looking after a younger sibling at home, and b) parents not working (Hungarian Background Report, 2002).

113. The challenge then is two-fold: to encourage Roma parents to enrol their children at three years and to give these children priority in enrolments, even in circumstances where there is competition for spaces. The present situation cannot be allowed to persist, as it underlies and acerbates educational equality. Many Roma children are barred, and do not enrol in kindergarten before the 5<sup>th</sup> year when enrolment becomes obligatory. This results in a blocking of Roma - and other disadvantaged children - at the age of 5 and 6 years in the kindergarten and their further retention there until they are considered mature enough for the first class in primary school. Nearly a quarter of all children in kindergarten in 2000 were 6 years or older, a large proportion of whom are Roma children. It is not clear whether parents or kindergarten administrations are responsible for this situation. Among teachers, there is the concern that the children are not ready for the transition at the normally expected time or that the programmes to which these children are transitioning are not appropriate for them.

114. Whatever the reasons given, the consequences of the delay are serious for the children, stereotyping them as slow or special needs learners, and denying them the chance of ever really catching up. Repetition of a year is also inefficient for the system as a whole, and adds significantly - and in many cases, unnecessarily - to the public education budget. In addition, tolerance of repetition is an invitation to management, teachers and parents to avoid responsibility, to continue to use weak management strategies and to repeat ineffective pedagogical methods.

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to include successfully, and without streaming, the slower learners. These approaches generally include a specialised teacher training programme. At country level, Finland's early primary classes resemble much more active kindergarten programming than the traditional primary school class.

115. In sum, Roma children have still real barriers to overcome in their access to childcare, kindergarten and early primary schooling. It is only at the compulsory entry age of 5 years that the majority of Roma children enter the ECEC system. Most do not attend childcare centres and few start kindergarten at 3 years of age as is true for most other children. Many begin primary schooling late, and are destined to move into compensatory classes and special education. Detailed information is lacking, however, on the specifics of Roma access. This is partly due to legislation limiting use of ethnic minority identification, designed to protect minorities from discrimination. Ironically, it appears also to provide a shield for officials who are not motivated to give priority to minority children.

### **3. Quality**

#### ***Introduction***

116. After visiting several examples of childcare and kindergarten in Hungary, the OECD review team agreed that general quality standards were good. We noted too at the end of Chapter 3 that the quality assurance system in Hungary is well-conceived and comprehensive, and potentially one of the strongest in the countries that we have visited. The challenges to be faced in this domain seemed to derive less from programmatic or methodological reasons (except where Roma and other children from disadvantaged backgrounds are concerned) than from the general funding and remuneration framework in the childcare sector, and from management dysfunctions in the kindergarten sector. Attention also needs to be given to two other areas with a strong bearing on quality, namely, the recruitment and training of staff; and data collection and policy research in Hungary.

#### ***3.1. The management of quality and assessment***

117. The management of quality and assessment in the early childhood field in Hungary seems both comprehensive and interlocking. There is a legally-based quality management infrastructure in place in both sectors, with a strong focus on regular in-service training. In particular, management training was given a strong impetus at local level in the kindergarten and primary school by Comenius 2000. A summary of the organisation of quality management is provided at the end of Chapter III. Yet, several challenges remain.

118. Hungarian research shows that many local governments no longer fulfil their regulatory responsibilities with regard to early childhood services. In particular, quality evaluations of kindergartens are rarely undertaken (*Education in Hungary 2000*, National Institute of Public Education). The overwhelming majority (92%) of surveys and quality assessments invited by maintainers focus on primary education. Moreover, about one-third of the county educational institutes have no kindergarten assessment specialist, and only about 20% of municipalities have in their employment a specialist pedagogical advisor for kindergartens. The custom in both instances is to use experts in primary education or persons with a lower qualification. In these conditions, the task of ensuring proper evaluation, not to mention professional development at managerial and staff levels, is rendered difficult. The impression was strong that the kindergarten sector did not receive sufficient attention in the overall organisation of quality assessment in Hungarian education. When evaluations are carried out, clarity and agreement about outputs are often absent, and no real obligation exists on the maintainer to follow the advice given.

119. To our knowledge, no central standards have been set for the assessment of kindergartens. In one sense, this may be a strength as assessments should focus on the effectiveness of the delivery of local programmes. However, it was suggested to the team that the content of kindergarten evaluation needs to be standardised, and in particular, broadened, when kindergartens are dealing with disadvantaged children. In this respect, a framework assessment document from the Ministry could help to focus attention on potential

weak points, such as, the low enrolment rates of disadvantaged children, the retention of Roma children in the kindergarten for an extra year or the lack of pedagogical continuity in the first year of primary school, where so many disadvantaged young children are assessed as having special needs.

120. Despite the strong regulatory framework, evaluation in the childcare sector may also be unsatisfactory. A network of 33 methodological centres had been built up during the 1980s, which in 2003 was reduced to 8 regional centres. With the shift in emphasis toward local government control of childcare, it is critical that the national government should ensure quality control, and continue to support the monitoring infrastructure, including these reinforced methodological centres. According to our respondents, small settlements, even counties, are unable to finance upstream monitoring supports of this nature.

### ***3.2. Pedagogical quality for disadvantaged children***

121. The national Hungarian curriculum for kindergartens is widely recognised widely as an excellent framework, and teachers are generally well-trained to deliver it satisfactorily to mainstream children. However, it was suggested to us that pedagogical methods for disadvantaged children need to be renewed. Children living in very poor, unemployed families across Europe are known to suffer from common disadvantages: poor health and nutrition with corresponding lack of concentration; weak socio-emotional development sometimes expressed in spoiled or aggressive behaviour; insufficient vocabulary and communications skills; conceptual knowledge that is often unusable in the context of the mainstream school; lower than average motivation to learn due to the low expectations of their parents, milieu and sometimes, of their teachers; little understanding of school rules (arriving late, attending irregularly...) and classroom procedures (lack of deference to teachers and weak co-operation with other children, poor use of equipment); low hygiene and cleanliness levels in their homes which incurs stereotyping and even segregation in schools...

122. The childcare centre and the kindergarten have an important role to play as the middle ground between the culture of poverty and mainstream society with its customs and values, and not least the value that mainstream society gives today to the formal education track. Unless outreach to poor families is practised and early entry to mainstream socio-educational services ensured for their children, they will enter school at a serious disadvantage and be condemned to low performance and marginalisation. For this reason, nursery education has been made compulsory in Hungary from the age of 5 years, but almost 30% of Roma children do not participate. For the 72% who are enrolled, it is not clear whether these children attend on a full-time basis: statistics suggest that only every second child is a real participant. There are probably many reasons why this is so.

123. It was suggested to the team on several occasions, however, that more sensitive management, greater pedagogical competence of teachers in this domain, more outreach to families and more individualised attention to each young child could improve the enrolment and progress of Roma children in the kindergarten. In the section below, we shall comment on teacher training for this area – especially the need to respect diversity in staffing, and to offer special training for teachers working with disadvantaged children. Here, we shall summarize briefly the international research identifying the broad approaches that need to be adopted in programming for disadvantaged groups. If kindergartens are to successfully lead disadvantaged children toward development and success in school, they need to have the following characteristics:

- *Programmes are multi-functional and engage families as well as children:* that is, programmes are strong on family engagement and support as well as providing high quality learning experiences to the children (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Some of our respondents in Hungary underlined the importance of communication and of building up trust at local level

between Roma families and local authority officials. We were encouraged also by the prospect of the Labour Ministry creating 3000 co-ordination posts in Roma settlements and districts to ensure liaison between families, childcare centres, schools and communities, and would recommend strong consultation and funding co-operation between ministries on social inclusion / education issues.

- *Programming is intensive:* research indicates that the effectiveness of programmes for young children is enhanced by intensity over a number of years (Leseman, 2002) and if possible, with year-long duration (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003). There is evidence to show that a structured, half-day, early learning programme on a term basis can be effective, and should be incorporated into all full-day services.<sup>18</sup>
- *Programmes are pedagogically sound and conducted by appropriately trained professionals.* A high quality programme in early childhood implies child-initiative, play and involvement, which in turn, presupposes reasonable child-staff ratios. In recent research (see DfES, London, 2002), an average ratio of 15 children to one adult is cited as maximum ratio, if individualised and small group learning strategies are to be supported in the early childhood classroom. Moreover, if a programme is over-focussed on formal skills, it is more likely to provide opportunities for children to fail, and to develop a higher dependency on adults, promoting in children negative perceptions of their own competencies (Stipek *et al.* 1995). Teachers in these programmes need special anti-bias training and preparation in dealing with families and disadvantage.
- *Depending on the degree of disadvantage, enriched health and nutrition inputs may be necessary* to ensure that young children can take full advantage of the early childhood service. In this respect, we welcome the proposal by the Hungarian government to provide a free meal for all disadvantaged children in kindergartens and childcare centres.
- In situations where disadvantage is linked to ethnicity, *inter-cultural training and the recruitment of bridging staff are important.* In the Netherlands, for example, ethnic personnel are increasingly recruited not only as support staff, but also as childcare workers and kindergarten teachers, as specialists (special needs, speech therapy...) and at managerial level (Netherlands Background Report, 1999). Government support is provided to endow scholarships for suitable young women to take bachelor and masters courses, with affirmative entry if necessary. In the USA, anti-bias and inter-cultural training is often obligatory for students training to serve young children and their families in inter-cultural settings.
- *High quality kindergarten should be followed up by high quality primary school.* The fade-out of the positive effects of early intervention became a critical issue in early childhood research during the 1980s. A common-sense solution was quickly found: for early intervention to retain its effects, high quality kindergarten needs to be followed up by high quality primary school classes, in which an emphasis is placed on fitting the school to the child and not vice versa. In many countries, close co-operation between the kindergarten and the lower primary school is initiated, and the best methods of both systems integrated so that children learn to read and write effectively, without placing undue pressure on the weaker children. In other countries, e.g. Denmark, a bridge class is created between kindergarten and primary school, where a kindergarten teacher and primary teacher work side by side. A pilot project with the objective of facilitating the transition between kindergarten and school was introduced in Hungary at the end of the 80's. During the last year of kindergarten and the

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18. The Dutch research conducted by Leseman indicates that five half-day, structured programmes per week produces more effective learning than shorter sessional programmes. Full-day programmes are even more effective especially in at-risk circumstances. The Chicago research underlines the efficacy of bridging programmes across the long summer holiday period.

first year of school, two teachers (one kindergarten and one primary school teacher) take care of the children across both years. A precondition for this work was that the teachers involved had to have both kindergarten and primary school teacher qualifications. The success of this project has encouraged several institutions to apply this method, one of which was visited by the review team.

124. It seemed to the OECD review team that the will and the expertise to put these principles into practice already exist among the majority of Hungarian kindergarten teachers. A wide consultation of teachers, with parent groups, civil organisations, local government managers and other interest could provide realistic standards and evaluation criteria for childcare and kindergarten programming for disadvantaged children. In sum, although language, social and cognitive development will be core goals for all children, the social inclusion and involvement of children and families should also figure strongly. These are the parts of the wider curriculum that are most difficult to measure, but are crucial in programming for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and should enter into quality assessment.

### **3.3. Recruitment and training of staff**

125. The sharp decline in the economy of the early 1990's is beginning to take a toll on the quality of staff in ECEC in Hungary. In particular, the low pay of workers in the childcare sector appears to be having a major impact on current recruitment. In the first decade after transition, this was not an issue. The drastic decline in the number of childcare spaces and thus of employment opportunities meant that trained childcare workers were in competition for jobs and could be recruited. However, as the decline in provision levelled out, a problem with recruiting new appropriately trained childcare workers has arisen. Pay levels are too low and hours are too long for the sector to compete with other services in the private sector. Through a reform in September 2002, childcare workers are now paid 60,000 HUF (minimum wage is 50,000 HUF) at the beginning of career going to 79,200 HUF after twenty years service, compared to a kindergarten teacher's salary of 127,00 HUF after 20 years service. As a result, the childcare workforce is ageing rapidly, which is not fully positive in a profession dealing with young children. The average length of time spent by childcare workers in the profession is now 27 years. In addition, the status of childcare workers is low in Hungary. Only 20% hold a specialist (*bolcsodei szakgondozo*) certificate. One may expect that the recruitment situation will be exacerbated in the coming years as the older childcare workers retire out of the system.

126. In this context, the case for redefining the profession of childcare worker seems urgent, both from a recruitment and professional perspective. The present mix of tertiary level specialists (20%) and childcare workers (80%, some without training) in the centres is a matter of concern. In Sweden, with hardly any untrained personnel in centres, the corresponding ratio is 60% pedagogical staff (*pedagogues*) with a four-year degree and about 40% support staff (*childminders*) with a three-year vocational qualification. At the moment, the Swedish ratio is rising rapidly to 70-30. One of the reasons for the good Swedish performance is the integration of all services for young children under one ministry, with a corresponding simplification and rationalisation of staffing profiles. In consequence early years' services, all of which are now assimilated to the kindergarten, have a higher profile and status. Though trained as kindergarten pedagogues, professional staff have the same status and pay as teachers, with correspondingly high professional standards to maintain.

127. There is, of course, no intention in Sweden to abolish the profile and specific training of the childcare worker. It is a profession that provides work for local women, often mothers themselves. They have often much to contribute to young children, even in highly professional systems. In terms of lifelong learning, what is needed for this staff is a recognised qualification and salary, with the possibility of taking further (tertiary) training and of having access to higher posts of responsibility once sufficient training credits are obtained. In sum, an integrated training and career lattice – based on experience as well as on

academic credits - is a critical mechanism to provide status and satisfaction to early childhood staff. In contrast, the present two-year vocational certificate of the Hungarian childcare worker seems low, and it offers few perspectives for horizontal or vertical advancement. Further, according to the heads of several centres, the pedagogical profile of the training needs to be improved in order to enhance the developmental and pedagogical contents of the formation and lessen the sanitary/medical influence.

128. The training situation in the kindergarten sector is more satisfactory, and like their primary colleagues, kindergarten teachers received a 50% salary increase in 2002. Yet, here also, there are imminent challenges on the horizon resulting from status and salary differentials. Kindergarten teachers are trained to tertiary degree level, and according to several of our respondents work at a higher methodological level than teachers in primary and secondary education. Yet, though they work significantly longer hours, their salaries are lower. According to the Hungarian Background Report (2002), “kindergarten pedagogues, as the lowest links in the institutional system of public education, have the lowest rank both in terms of salaries and professional recognition”. This may imply that the foundation level - a key level of education for disadvantaged groups – is still under-estimated in Hungary. In the situation, it is not unreasonable to foresee future recruitment problems or the flight of currently practising pedagogues into more remunerative activities. On the other hand, salary pressures may lead to reluctance among the maintainers to expand kindergarten access, and may even trigger a further wave of “rationalisations”.

129. A further challenge in staff recruitment and training in both sectors is to diversify the workforce. We met, for example, in the centres we visited, one Roma childcare specialist, two Roma childcare workers and several Roma cooking and cleaning staff. It would seem necessary that kindergartens and primary schools that receive significant numbers of Roma children should be encouraged to ensure that a growing number of Roma childcare specialists, pedagogues and teachers are recruited and trained. Having teachers from the Roma community can be expected to give a real motivation to the young Roma children, particularly to young girls.

130. In addition, it was suggested to the OECD team that further in-service training to meet the new challenges of Hungarian society may be needed. Family composition and child-rearing patterns have changed dramatically in contemporary societies, with many separated parents, and growing numbers of young children being reared in at-risk situations. According to several early childhood practitioners whom we interviewed, the numbers of young children coming into services with a lack of socialisation, language and cognitive delays, hyperactivity, autism and other symptoms seem to have increased. The pre-service training of the older professionals did not necessarily prepare them to meet these challenges or be effective in situations of entrenched disadvantage, where basic child development and child protection issues are a daily challenge. As one of our respondents remarked: “*These children are often cold, hungry and frightened. They and their mothers need all the affection and professional support that we can give them.*” In sum, child workers and kindergarten pedagogues need training to communicate effectively with children suffering developmental delay and to work with them in constructing knowledge and culture. In parallel, a new sensitivity to parental and community needs is necessary in the early childhood professions.

### ***Data collection and policy research***

131. In general, Hungary has good resources in research and evaluation, but these we felt have not been allocated sufficiently to address pressing issues in early childhood education and care. Some general statistics and data about young children were available but they lacked the disaggregation and analysis that allow fine-tuned, policy research. Two cases that we encountered during the visit will illustrate the difficulties of planning with inadequate tools.

132. First, we found the data available on the participation of Roma children in childcare and kindergarten to be limited. While there are legal restrictions on data gathering and use related to ethnic identity, it is possible - as is exemplified in many other systems sensitive to human rights - to collect the needed data without identifying individuals or families by name. In fact, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination repeatedly urges governments to provide demographic, economic, health, educational, employment and other data broken down by ethnicity in their reports. Because of the lack of data, we were unable to fully understand the socio-economic status of the Roma families, the extent of their participation in the ECEC services or their take-up of other benefits available to all disadvantaged families and children in Hungary.

133. Data protection laws are generally cited as the reason for having poor statistics on Roma. It is true that each citizen has a right to privacy, and to the non-revelation of personal data. Moreover, ethnic information has been abused in the past, and used to build a negative profile of a group, e.g. emphasising the over-representation of ethnic groups in the crime figures, without corresponding figures on their share in national wealth. However, other countries have found ways to protect the confidentiality of information and to keep negative profiling to a minimum. From the perspective of policy-making, governments need to have data in order to know the real dimensions of a problem. It is extremely difficult to design social and educational policies and join appropriate budgets to them if the number of children in the disadvantaged category is not accurately known.

134. A second example of lack of data for decision-making concerns the availability of services in rural areas, especially for children of childcare age. Children in rural areas are much less likely to have access to childcare centres and very few family day care opportunities exist anywhere in the country. Little is known, however, about the extent of the challenge or of the reasons for low access: is it because there is little demand for childcare in these locations or whether it is simply due to a lack of the availability of jobs and services? Perhaps the work settings in rural areas do not mesh well with typical childcare centre arrangements as they do in more urbanized areas?<sup>19</sup> Better data would enable officials at local settlements, county government, and national government level, as well as other interested groups, to develop viable responses to the needs of families in rural areas.

135. Adequate policy for young children requires a reasonable understanding of the social reality in which their families are immersed. Parental leave schemes need to be evaluated according to accessibility, length and payment, as well as comparable figures on take-up. Background indicators (e.g. demographic, employment, and social data) can also be investigated to shed light on variations in need and demand for early childhood services. Such information is invaluable for governments in national socio-economic planning. Access to data also gives the individual citizen and interest groups information about society, with the opportunity to respond to and influence the political process.

136. The collection of basic quantitative data on young children is a first step toward building up data sets for policy purposes. Such data would normally include: the number of children in each age cohort, both nationally and locally; the socio-economic, household and location profiles of the parents of children; the number and location of childcare and kindergarten services; the level of supply in each settlement; the number and grades of employees in each type of service, with age and other relevant profiles; the number and sizes of groups in each type of service; the operational conditions (opening hours; facility condition, salary conditions, parental fees, normative funding per child...) of services; the number of children with special learning needs (and type) in each service; global information on the progression of children annually through the education system, including numbers of children being held back, their socio-

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19. The situation in urban areas is not clear either in most OECD countries where an adequate response of services to the needs of parents who work atypical hours (almost 30% in some countries) has been slow in coming.

economic background, etc.; the costs to municipalities for each service... The availability of informal childcare arrangements should also be documented. No doubt, much of this data is available in Hungary, but it does not always circulate in a form that is readily exploitable.

137. With policy reforms in mind, government departments may wish also to collect qualitative data from municipalities and maintainers. We are aware that this is already taking place on Hungary. Surveys, questionnaires and research projects can be used to elicit information on a variety of subjects, e.g. the affordability of services across different income bands; surveys on the satisfaction of Roma and other parents with the services offered; the optimal age according to parents from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds for the entry of their children into early childhood services; the influence of age-flexible entry dates to schools; the interest of county authorities in services provision and quality improvement... There also is a need to develop a range of research and evaluation instruments. Developing research instruments and evaluation procedures that are sensitive to the complex dynamics of early childhood environments, to the interdependence between the beliefs and practices of families and a centre's response, would be an important step towards deepening understanding in these areas. Research based on self-evaluation procedures and action research would support critical reflection and team development and complement external evaluation. Cost-benefit analyses of different approaches and initiatives which are underway in some countries should be supported more widely.

138. Finally, there is a need for strategies to disseminate effectively to diverse audiences research findings and examples of good practice. Governments should support innovative local and community-based initiatives to make them durable and to disseminate lessons from these experiences within and across countries. National or international early childhood observatories or institutes, networks and technical working groups, as well as regular meetings and opportunities for cross-national dialogue and research could help monitor the impact of different policy initiatives and contribute to the improvement of policy development. Moreover, a country of Hungary's size and tradition has the capacity to undertake a policy-focused longitudinal study of a national cohort.

#### **4. General funding issues**

##### ***Introduction***

139. Several key funding challenges exist for early years services in Hungary. Among these are:

- To expand the childcare system so as to offer adequate support for women who wish to enter the labour market and to ensure them equality of opportunity;
- To expand access in both childcare and kindergarten for Roma children, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children from rural areas and special needs children;
- To improve pre-service training, particularly in the childcare sector, and provide adequate salaries and career prospects so as to retain qualified staff and maintain quality in the system;
- To maintain and improve kindergarten facilities and staffing levels;
- To maintain the infra-structure of quality performance that surrounds services in Hungary, e.g. strong in-service training or the administrative and monitoring structures mentioned above, including the professional county services.

140. All these items will require substantial investment in the system. Faced, however, with funding problems at the local level and with the constraints of an economy that has not yet reached its full potential, some voices are being raised to “rationalise the system.” The OECD team were informed of several options being considered or actually being used: decreased hours of opening; closing, or more

often, downsizing services; minimal observance of the legal requirements; merging kindergartens (in total 4700 in number) into primary schools and/or merging the training of kindergarten teachers with primary teachers; raising the obligatory age for entry into kindergarten.

141. From the perspective of the OECD team, system rationalisation is an ongoing process, as the opportunity costs of overspending in one area means less investment for other areas, which may be critical at a certain moment. However, rationalisation should be based on good information and wide consultation.<sup>20</sup> For example, shortening the hours of services can be merely an interest group solution, and have little to do with the best interests of young children. The possible impacts of rationalisations on the fundamental aims and values of a public service need first to be taken into account: e.g. impacts on the well-being of young children, on the quality of the service provided, on labour market flexibility or on equality of opportunity for women... An example in point is the merging of the training of kindergarten and primary teachers. In some countries, e.g. in France or Ireland, merging primary and infant school training has led almost to the disappearance of a specific early childhood formation, except for a few modules added on to the discipline-based (reading, writing, mathematics, civics...) primary teacher training. In these countries, an instructivist approach can dominate in kindergartens, which is unsuitable for young children, and especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A reform on the lines undertaken by Sweden seems more appropriate, e.g. a common core of about one year for all teachers (pedagogues, primary and lower secondary teachers), followed then by intense specialisation in the teacher's choice of area for 18 months, with a further nine months or so of field training.. Such a model presupposes, however, a certain measure of equality in salaries and conditions, as without it, recruitment shortages may be expected in the branch that offers the least attractive working conditions.<sup>21</sup>

142. More relevant rationalisations are perhaps possible in Hungary, e.g. to dispense and discourage the smaller municipalities from opening lower secondary education units for 10 – 14 year old children. Research suggests that small units of this nature are generally low in quality and are unable to offer a broad range of subjects to pupils. Yet, unlike very young children, pupils of lower secondary age can be bussed to larger centres where they are more likely to have qualified teachers and better working conditions. Significant savings could be made in this domain which, if devoted by the maintainers to ensuring quality kindergarten education for all children in their circumscriptions, could have a very positive impact on the access of disadvantaged children to first class in primary school.

### ***The present state of funding***

143. Normative funding from central government funds is the lifeblood of the Hungarian early childhood system, allowing it to survive and maintain its stability. Real improvements have taken place in the educational funding since 1998: childcare workers' and teachers' salaries were increased by 50% in 2002, as with all public employees; the minimal normative support to local governments was increased, increased funding was provided to weaker local governments maintaining schools and there was a marked increase in earmarked central funds to achieve government objectives, e.g. for quality improvement or to enhance the enrolment of disadvantaged groups. State support, both direct and indirect, is again gradually approaching the 1991 replacement rate of 58.5% of total local government expenditure on education.

144. In the childcare sector, however, central government grants underwrite only 25-30% of operational costs, with local government taking in charge 55-65% and parents contributing approximately

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20. The term rationalisation has come to have a negative connotation for teachers in many countries, as the term has often been used to justify downsizing and the laying off qualified workers with little or no compensation.

21. The issue has already arisen in Sweden where, although salary levels are fairly equal, kindergarten personnel work a much longer day and for 11 months of the year.

10-15%. As staff costs take up over 75% of the budget, the amount remaining secures only minimal operation of centres. In fact, because of their limited budgets and small numbers of children, most small settlements cannot afford to open or run a childcare centre. The situation has been further exacerbated by the 50% public employee pay rise of 2002, which increased the expenses of local government by almost 30%.

145. In the kindergarten sector, the overall picture seems to be that increased salary expenses significantly alter the financial position of public education in the budget of the local governments. The burden is greatest in smaller settlements (having few additional resources) and county governments (not entitled to levy their own taxes), due to their limited revenues. Additional (non-governmental) school maintainers, and those who are unable to significantly rely on parental contributions or other revenues have also experienced an impairment of their financial standing. Many maintainers – particularly in small settlements - find it extremely difficult to extend services, or even to maintain the buildings, facilities and equipment in place. In fact, without “voluntary” contributions from parents, either in cash or in kind, many services could not survive. It seems that the situation is quite serious in many settlements and districts, as lack of ongoing investment in facilities and equipment has the further consequence of denying access to children with special needs.<sup>22</sup> In consequence, relatively few childcare centres and kindergartens provide inclusive services.

146. Moreover, the OECD team was informed that compared to other parts of the education system, child/staff ratios in kindergartens are not particularly favourable. Group sizes are large, and child:staff ratios of 25:1 and over may be practised at certain hours of the day.<sup>23</sup> This was not our experience in the kindergartens selected for our visit, nor is it borne out by the financial figures provided by the Ministry of Education.<sup>24</sup> Several informants mentioned that in some primary and lower secondary schools, the ratio of teacher to pupils can be as low as 11 to 1 – a child-staff ratio at that level of education that few countries can afford. Perhaps what is needed is a more favourable ratio for the younger children on entry at three years into kindergartens, especially when a kindergarten serves a disadvantaged area. The ratio practised in childcare centres for the same age group is 5:1 or 6:1.

147. If weak funding of early childhood services – in particular childcare - is actually the case in some municipalities, it may indicate an underestimation of the value of early childhood services, not only for children and families but also in terms of the contribution to long-term economic and educational development that these services make. In the paragraphs that follow, we outline some of the international evidence showing that investment in early childhood services brings not only proven benefits to the children and families they serve, but also to governments and national economies (see, in addition, the OECD papers: Leseman, 2002, Cleveland and Krashinsky, 2003).

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22. In Hungary, only those childcare centres and kindergartens that are provided with special equipment and specialised staff are allowed to receive these children.

23. According to the Education Act, there are 2 kindergarten pedagogues to 25 children. Their work schedule allows two hours overlap, when they are both with the children. During that period, the ratio is 12.5 to 1. At other times, it is 25 to 1. Some local authorities are said to calculate differently, that is, they divide the number of children enrolled in the kindergarten with the number of adults working there, including pedagogues, cleaners, gardeners, etc.

24. According to *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2003) total expenditure for education in Hungary, as a % of GDP, is slightly below the OECD norm of 5.5. However, expenditure on the kindergarten at 0.7% is significantly above the OECD mean of 0.4% of GDP. Moreover, the spread of spending across the different parts of the education system in Hungary seems more equally distributed than in many other countries, that is the pre-primary child receives an investment almost equal to primary and secondary school pupils, and less than half of the tertiary level student.

### *Analyses showing social, economic and labour market returns from investment*

- The Müller Kucera-Bauer study: *Costs and benefits of childcare services in Switzerland – Empirical findings from Zurich*, (2001) shows that the city's public investment of 18 million SF annually in childcare services is offset by at least 29 million SF of additional tax revenues and reduced public spending on social aid (Müller Kucera and Bauer, 2001). Where affordable childcare was available, the rate of hours worked by mothers almost doubled, especially for single-headed households with one or more children. In sum, publicly funded childcare resulted in 1) Higher productivity and earnings due to maintaining productive workers in work. 2) Higher contributions to social security and savings; 3) Less dependency on social assistance during both the productive and retirement ages (without affordable childcare, many families would fall below the poverty line).<sup>25</sup>
- *The ongoing Perry Pre-school study*, Berrueta-Clement *et al.* (1984, 1995-6, 2001) evaluates the educational and economic returns of a high quality pre-school programme, High/Scope, on a sample of Afro-American children. Key findings were that the children from the Perry Pre-school programme had better school records, improved labour market entry and higher incomes than the control group of similar children. In a cost-benefit analysis of the data, Barnett (1995) estimated that the cost-benefit ratio for the investment in the programme was almost 1:7.
- *The North Carolina Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention* (Masse and Barnett, 2002), which began in 1972, has been subject to numerous studies. The various researches show positive cognitive and social results for the children (mostly disadvantaged) in the project, some of whom gained entry into four-year university programmes. A recent current cost-benefit study by the National Institute for Early Education Research has been produced. It finds that every dollar invested in high quality, full-day, year-round preschool generated a four dollar return to the children, their families and all taxpayers. Among the study's findings:
  - Participants are projected to earn about \$143,000 more over their lifetimes than those who did not take part in the programme.
  - Mothers of children who were enrolled can also expect greater earnings - about \$133,000 more over their lifetimes.
  - School districts can expect to save more than \$11,000 per child because participants are less likely to require special or remedial education.
  - The next generation (children of the children in the Abecedarian project) are projected to earn nearly \$48,000 more throughout their lifetimes.
- *The 2001 report issued by the National Economic Development and Law Center* in the US assesses the impact of the childcare industry on the economy of California. Apart from enabling parents to work and earn higher incomes, the childcare industry contributed \$65 billion to the total value of goods and services produced in California - just over four times as much as the motion picture industry. Licensed childcare directly employed 123,000 people, including teaching and non-teaching staff, and maintained a further 86,000 jobs in transportation, publishing, manufacturing, construction, financial services, real estate and insurance (S. Moss, 2001).
- *The Canadian cost-benefit analysis issued of 1998* by a team of economists at the University of Toronto estimates the costs and benefits of establishing a national quality childcare system

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25. An interesting conclusion of this paper is that as most of the returns on ECEC investments go back to the Federal Authority, the cantons and municipalities in Switzerland remain reluctant to invest in ECEC services. Some parallels may exist in Hungary.

for Canada (Cleveland and Krashinsky, 1998). Although the authors make conservative assumptions about the magnitude of positive externalities, they conclude that the substantial public investment envisaged would generate important net benefits for Canadian society.

- *Labour market/taxation studies*: The provision of education and care services has allowed most OECD countries in the last decades to maintain the labour market participation of women, with a corresponding widening of the tax base. In Norway, the increase has been from about 50 % female participation in 1972 to well over 80 % in 1997 (Kornstad and Thorensen, Statistics Norway, 2000). In particular, women of 25 to 40 years have greatly increased their participation.

### *Analyses showing educational returns from early childhood investment*

- In *France*, a national survey comparing children who had attended a kindergarten for one, two, or three years before beginning primary school found that performance in primary school is correlated with the length of time spent in pre-primary education, even after controlling for background characteristics (Jarousse, Mingat, and Richard, 1992). Every year of école maternelle (kindergarten) attended reduced children's likelihood of retention in the first grade of primary school, especially for children from the most disadvantaged homes.
- *Success For All: long-term effects and cost-effectiveness* (Borman, G. and Hewes G. 2002). Success For All is a comprehensive elementary school reform programme designed to promote early school success among at-risk children. It is widely replicated in the USA, and serves over 1 million children in 2000 schools. In addition to offering intensive, pre-K and K programmes, it provides mechanisms to promote stronger links between the home and the school; and to address social, behavioural and health issues. Relative to control groups, and at similar cost, Success For All children complete elementary school at an earlier age, achieve better learning outcomes, have fewer retentions or special education placements. The authors underline that for success to continue, similar programmes need to be used throughout primary and lower secondary schooling.
- *The Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers* (Reynolds *et al.* 2002) – Opened in 1967, the Centers are located in public schools and provide educational and family support to low-income children from ages 3 to 9 years. Using data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, and comparison group children born in 1980, Reynolds and his team show that participation in the Centers was significantly associated with greater school achievement, higher rates of school completion, with significantly lower rates of remedial education, juvenile delinquency and child maltreatment. Cost-benefit analyses indicate that in 1998 dollar values, the programme provided to society a return of \$7.14 per dollar invested by: increasing economic well-being and tax revenues; reduction of public expenditure on remedial education, criminal justice treatment and crime victims.

148. In sum, strong social, economic and education rationales exist in favour of establishing and maintaining national networks of early childhood services (ESO/Swedish Finance Ministry Report, 1999; Sen, 1999; Urrutia, 1999; Van der Gaag, 2002; Vandell and Wolfe, 2000; Verry, 2000). By establishing these services, significant employment is generated, tax revenues increased, and important savings made in later educational and social expenditure, if children – especially from at-risk backgrounds – are given appropriate developmental opportunities early enough in life. The consequences of not investing sufficiently in services can also be considered. Without strong state investment and steering of this field, the result is: an insufficient supply of services for those who need them most; increased numbers of children with special needs and learning difficulties; a lack of equity vis-à-vis poorer families; and overall poor quality of provision.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1. Addressing administration, co-ordination and decentralisation issues

149. Under the heading of co-ordination and decentralisation, two major issues were raised in Chapter IV: the division between early education and care, and second, difficulties in implementing policies because of the decentralised nature of Hungarian administration. These issues, it seems to the OECD team, come to a head in the smaller settlements in the more depressed regions in Hungary, many of which are Roma settlements.

##### *1.1. The division between early education and care*

150. The division between early education and care is longstanding in Hungary, and stems – as in many other countries - from traditional social representations of gender roles, family formation, child-rearing, and of the education of young children (when it can effectively begin, how it should be conducted...). There is still a strong expectation that women will cease to work for a number of years to rear children until pre-school or school age. Linked to this view of child-rearing is a tendency – especially among men – to remain aware of changed social realities, e.g. the structure of modern economies which need an educated workforce, whether male or female; the new work responsibilities and rights of women; the de-structuring of traditional family forms; the increased responsibilities of women for financing through their work the family budget; the positive effects on family poverty and standard of living when women work; the opportunities missed by young children when high quality ECEC services are not available; the greater educational and social needs of minorities, including screening and supports for their children; the need for disadvantaged children to receive an early start in childcare and kindergarten... All these elements contribute to making a new social reality, the challenges of which are made more acute by the high proportion of families with young children living at or below the poverty line.

151. At the same time, childcare and kindergarten today have greatly converged, and have very similar aims. Both sectors endeavour: to ensure the well-being and global development of the child, including social and cognitive development according to age; to provide high quality daytime care for children, when parents are employed or need special support; and thirdly, to integrate children at-risk as early as possible into full-day programmes based on family outreach and community building.

152. Against this background, we encourage the authorities to build bridges between childcare and early education:

- At central level, we encourage consideration of forming *a central unit for the development of early childhood policy and services*. Numerically, the early childhood responsibility in Hungary is already very significant, catering at the moment for almost 400,000 children, and potentially, - if one takes the European Union guidelines as a benchmark – for up to 500,000 young children in 10 years time. Policy for such a large group should not be made in a piecemeal way. This is a fact increasingly recognised in other OECD countries, where expert

directorates are being given responsibility to guide and organise this field. Early childhood policy is coming of age, either within Education Ministries (the case of New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom...) or in the charge of a Child/Family or Social Affairs Ministry (Denmark, Finland, Norway...). In all these countries, significant numbers of people are in charge of legal matters, policy, training, curriculum, financing, etc. for young children. *In sum, the Hungarian authorities may wish to consider the co-ordination of childcare and early education as an option for Hungary in the coming years.* The advantages could be considerable, and not least at local level, where the case for bringing together scarce administrative and financial resources for young children seems compelling. Adopting a more integrated approach to the early childhood field allows municipalities to organise common policies, and combine resources for early childhood services. In integrated systems, a common vision of education and care can be forged, with agreed health, social and pedagogical objectives. For example, where disadvantaged and Roma children are concerned, it seems critical that primary health for young mothers and infants, social welfare and the education authorities must co-ordinate their efforts. Within a partnerships framework, regulation, funding and staffing regimes, costs to parents, and opening hours can be made more consistent across the sectors, and at the same time strengthens the monitoring and evaluation of critical elements. In addition, the continuity of children's early childhood experiences is enhanced. Variations in access and quality can be lessened, and links at the services level – across age groups and settings – are more easily created. If the Hungarian authorities were to see some merit in improving co-ordination between the sectors, a number of approaches are possible:

- *First, to consider administrative integration at national level*, that is, the solution adopted by the countries named above where responsibility for the whole age-group 0-6 years is given to one ministry.
- *A parallel initiative would be to encourage practical integration at local level.* The synergies and economies of scale that can be achieved at local level through better co-ordination would allow a more cost-effective expansion of services. In the smaller settlements without services, co-ordination should facilitate the creation of at least one good quality family daycare / kindergarten to provide the screening, socialisation and cognitive development that young children need before entering centre-based kindergarten at 5 years.
- Third, if administrative integration is not envisaged, it may be possible – in order to make the most efficient use of resources – *to adopt a co-ordinated approach to early childhood services through establishing integrating structures at national, county and local levels*, e.g. consultative committees which meet regularly and bring together the policy managers for each sector.<sup>26</sup>

## **1.2. Decentralisation issues**

153. As outlined in Chapter IV, the competent line ministries can rarely issue executive orders to the autonomous local governments. Sectoral responsibility is exercised “via indirect means, of which the most important ones are the determination of the basic curricular and other standards, the elaboration of the financing preferences and the launching of developmental programmes”. (Balázs *et al.*, 1999). The new situation brings greater freedom for both local governments and centres to be innovative, and respond better to the needs of parents. However, serious challenges also arise:

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26. Experience for other countries shows that co-ordinating committees work most effectively when solving concrete problems together

154. *A major challenge, it would seem, is the weakness of many of the smaller decentralised local government units, of which Hungary has over three thousand.* A country such as Sweden, with a similar population, has currently 289 municipalities. It is generally recognised that the capacity for local public administration (and within it, the administration of childcare and kindergartens) is greatly determined by the size and economic status of the settlement. Over 17% of the Hungarian population lives in autonomous settlements of less than 2000 people. Many of these settlements (and even larger ones) lack the capacity to finance - as the law encourages - a quality kindergarten or childcare service. The situation is further aggravated in the Roma source villages, most of which are extremely poor and lack trained human resources. Fundamentally, this is an equity issue that would seem to require urgent intervention from central government.

155. *A second issue that became apparent during the review was the divergence of interests between central and local governments, not least on important equity issues for Hungarian society as a whole.* The rationale for social inclusion and investment in services for disadvantaged or Roma children is far more compelling for central government than for local governments. Conformity with European human rights instruments; integration of Roma children into mainstream education; their future employment and contribution to the public good through taxes; less dependency on social services, etc. – are recognised by central government as important goals, but for local authorities it is often not the case. In addition, many of the local authorities are not in a position – with respect to human resources – to provide the leadership, employment opportunities and communication flows that are necessary to resolve the multi-dimensional challenge of social inclusion.

156. *A third challenge was the lack of authority at ministerial and county levels to substitute for weak local authorities or even to guide ECEC policies at local level.* Given that only 2400 of the 3100 Hungarian settlements have the capacity to run a primary school – not to mention early childhood services - the argument for greater ministerial and county guidance seems particularly strong in the weaker municipalities. It may be possible, for example:

- a) To enable the weak municipalities to opt out of maintaining certain services and have the State named as maintainer of integrated early childhood services in these areas.
- b) Another solution may be for the State to place a responsibility on the county authorities or other bodies to assist or substitute for the small municipalities that cannot realistically develop the necessary funding and competencies to create or maintain quality early childhood services.
- c) Yet another path to explore – perhaps in conjunction with one of the above – is to encourage smaller settlements to collaborate whenever economies of scale can be achieved, without having to bus very young children to services. In this respect, it may be useful to encourage these municipalities not to maintain lower secondary schools (often – we were informed - of poor quality) and concentrate their efforts on maintaining quality early services and primary schools.

157. If our analysis is correct, the OECD team invites the competent authorities to study the Hungarian and international examples of excellence in this field, and to undertake a number of pilot initiatives. Among the options, we would recommend for consideration:

- *To fund a study on the impact of public administration structures on the provision, organisation and quality control of childcare and kindergarten, especially in the smaller settlements, with recommendations to improve efficiency;*
- *To consider for the weaker municipalities the solutions mentioned above such as opting-out, substitution, or district collaboration (regrouping of settlements).* This would mean in practice the strengthening of the authority of the line Ministries, county authorities or other agencies to

assist or substitute for the small local governments that cannot realistically develop the necessary funding and competencies to establish early childhood services or ensure their quality. A possible line of action might be direct government or county maintenance of village services and schools to ensure that country and/or Roma children are receiving adequate services – but programmed in such a manner that responsibility and leadership remains with local governments and families. Examples of this type of programming exist in Hungary, and could be brought to scale with government backing;

- Where disadvantaged and Roma children are concerned, *to recognise the limitations of the municipalities to act effectively in the field of social inclusion, and to take a strong central government initiative aimed at early services and the primary school.* It may be possible, for example, to establish a national agency or strategy to take on the responsibility for promoting the care and education of Roma and disadvantaged children, and for monitoring their progress through the education system. A useful support measure for such a policy would be to legally enhance the powers of the minority governments in (Roma) education, granting them real powers to intervene in situations where segregation is taking place or the quality of education offered to Roma children is insufficient. This question is again discussed below within the context of improving the access of Roma children to early childhood services.

## 2. Addressing challenges to access and equity

### 2.1. Reduced access for children below the age of 3 years

158. From the documentation supplied and the review investigation, the OECD review team became aware of quite substantial decreases in the number of children served and in the allocation of financing. Compared to 1980, only half as many facilities continue to exist, serving only half the number of children. Controlling for the reduction in the Hungarian birth-rate, the number of places has fallen from 13.7 places per hundred children in 1990 to about 7.5 places currently (giving about a 10% coverage for children from 18-36 months). From the perspective of the National Development Plan, this shortage potentially undermines proposals for equality of opportunity for women and labour force supply. At the moment, the percentage of women employed in the Hungarian economy is 52.5% (*OECD in Figures*, 2002), compared to rates in excess of 70% female employment found in Canada, the Nordic countries and the USA. The figure suggests a significant loss to the economy. Having so many women inactive reduces the tax base considerably and deskills a large and better educated part of the labour force.

159. In addition, there is a high demand for childcare places that is not being met, not least from families whose children need the professional support that centres can give. At the moment, fundamental difficulties exist for local governments to cope adequately with childcare demands. There are many poor districts and settlements with high unemployment and small tax returns. Many families cannot pay for meals or other charges, that is, there is little cost recuperation through user fees for the childcare centres in these districts. In addition, the rent and refurbishment of buildings are almost entirely at the charge of the local authority. In childcare, the normative government grant is provided only for children who are actually present, which allows the centres to cover only the minimal operational costs.<sup>27</sup>

160. Concretely, we recommend for consideration:

- *An increase in normative funding from both central and local governments toward maintaining and establishing childcare centres.* In areas with young families and high

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27. We were informed that the recent increase in the normative grant will barely cover the new salary scales for the childcare centre staff.

employment possibilities, and in densely populated disadvantaged districts, significant financial inducements should be offered to local governments to open new childcare centres. In other areas, an examination of lower cost, alternative services for the younger children and their parents could be undertaken.

- *The funding of experimentation with low-cost, alternative services* such as drop-in centres, combined family health/childcare centres, toy libraries, play houses, and especially, family daycare and (especially in rural settlements) family kindergarten. In cities and larger settlements, employment is likely to increase in sectors that do not operate on the normal workday basis, requiring care on nights, weekends and other non-traditional work schedules. At the root of resolving such issues lies the requirement of closer communication and co-ordination between families, government agencies and service delivery personnel. Light, multi-functional services should be piloted also in the smaller settlements, e.g. exploring how health and education visitors can be trained to support family daycarers, and links made with the local education and social welfare services.
- Because of the high number of small settlements in Hungary, we consider that expanding family daycare may have real potential. Given the careful work already devoted to its development in Hungary (regulation, recruitment, training...), it may be opportune now *to provide family daycare with normative funding and to stimulate the interest of the local governments in this type of service, especially in settlements which do not have a childcare centre or kindergarten class.*

## **2.2. Improving access for children with disabilities**

161. Up to the early 90s, public policy encouraged - as in most countries - the segregated education of children with disabilities and other special needs. Since then, much progress has been made in legislation and funding. Increasing numbers of children with disabilities are included in both childcare centres and kindergartens. In one inclusive childcare centre visited, specialist intervention, equipment and programmes were excellent. Staff were able to reduce forward placements of infants and toddlers into special education from 15 children to just one or two annually. In sum, most children who enter the centre with special needs are able to integrate mainstream kindergarten after two or three years. We commend the government, local authorities and particularly staff for such efforts.

### **Box 2 – An integrated childcare centre in Budapest**

This well-appointed centre catered for 80 children, divided into four groups or units. Each Unit had two rooms at its disposal, and staff and children moved freely between the rooms. 19 professional staff and 7 support staff were employed, with in general, two professionals in each room. The units had different target groups and different aims. In each group, parents were expected to attend a two-week induction course at the start of their child's attendance.

Unit 1 was a mixed childcare-kindergarten group of children 2-5 years. The children attended once or twice a week for sessions that included speech or other light therapy. Parents expressed their liking for this mixed group, as siblings could attend together.

Units 2 and 3 were composed of children 0-3 years without disabilities. Their sessions were conducted on normal Hungarian childcare lines with two staff per room. Children sleep outside for health reasons and great emphasis is placed on providing them with fresh food, four or five times a day. In addition to meals, toileting and sleep, the schedule is organised around free play, emotional development and communication, both one-to-one and in groups.

Unit 4 was for children with disabilities, mostly moderate, but with three children suffering from autism and genetic illnesses. Each child has an individual therapeutic programme to complete each day. Whether the disability is mental or physical, the individual programme includes a daily session in the gym, swimming pool or motor development room, as awareness of the body is considered critical to successful intervention. Staff included specialist nurses and occupational therapists. On the day we visited, a trained folk dancer was also present to conduct a movement session with the children.

The daily schedule for the children with disabilities begins with an hour-long individual session for each child, but during the day, group activities are common. Dance and music is a favourite group activity, and is seen as an effective

group therapy instrument. In the group activities, it was customary to include at all times three children without disabilities. In addition, parents were welcome and on the day we visited, several parents were present to help their children through the more difficult physical exercises. Staff formulate with parents and the children individualised learning plans that parents are expected to follow up in the home.

There was also a Baby-Mother Club attended by 12 mothers with their babies. Some “house-mothers” had been trained, and were given a small stipend by the centre to conduct stimulation activities for the babies and parenting education for the mothers. The demand for this type of service is very high.

Staff were proud of the progress “their” children were making. They recommended to the team better screening at birth for all children, especially in disadvantaged areas and in rural settlements, and improved co-ordination between the hospitals and the special education services

162. However this type of service is still uncommon, even in Budapest. Real barriers to inclusion persist in Hungary: traditional attitudes to disability; shortage of trained staff; lack of equipment and the high cost of provision (because of lower group sizes and adult/child ratios). From the figures provided, it is safe to assume that at least two thirds of the children with disabilities are still unable to attend mainstream kindergarten.

163. We recommend for consideration:

- *To continue the effort to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* which recognises the right of children with disabilities to be included in public settings with other children, and in particular, their right to inclusive education. A general policy of inclusive education for children from birth to six should be announced throughout the care and education system as national policy.
- *To move strongly toward prevention*, with the incentives and reallocation of resources that this policy implies, e.g. diverting investments, staff and resources from segregated institutions to integrated models of early childhood health, education and care. Prevention implies early screening, and early entry of disadvantaged, Roma and rural children into early childhood services, with a focus on the provision of services for disadvantaged districts and rural settlements.
- *To improve co-ordination between the hospitals, health clinics and educational services* in identifying and catering for disability. These key agencies can do much to improve the well-being and life opportunities for children with disabilities by directing them to the appropriate services, and catering for them – not just medically – but in a multi-dimensional and inclusive manner.
- *To improve current assessment definitions and instruments* so as to understand why so many children from disadvantaged backgrounds are assessed as having special needs, and to avoid labelling Roma and other children from disadvantaged backgrounds as children with learning difficulties.<sup>28.</sup>
- *To recognise childcare as a primary and most effective location for early intervention*; the number of children with disabilities in childcare centres should be increased and integration should attract substantially higher normative funding.
- *To further assist kindergartens to provide integrated education for children with disabilities, and to resource it accordingly*. The OECD team encourages consideration of phasing out the

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28. Many Roma children do have learning difficulties, but according to expert advice given to the team, these difficulties stem generally from external factors such as: extreme poverty, the difficult adaptation to mainstream culture, lack of contact with Hungarian language, lack of knowledge of the behaviours required by schools and institutional life.... All of which suggest the importance of an early start for these children in childcare centres and kindergartens, in which their parents are made welcome.

many special kindergartens and classes, and reintegrating as many children as possible into the mainstream system.

- *To give special attention to the transition from kindergarten to primary school.* Primary schools should be equipped to accommodate children with learning difficulties and/or special needs.
- *To initiate research in the area of educational disadvantage and children with special needs.* In particular, linking primary healthcare data with longitudinal and comparative outcome studies would be helpful.
- *To encourage “Anti-Bias” training throughout the system* to help administrators, early years practitioners and families to overcome traditional attitudes in relation to disability and disadvantage.

### **2.3. Improving access for children in under-served rural settlements**

164. The most dramatic childcare and kindergarten shortages appear in the rural areas of Hungary.<sup>29</sup> In general, the settlements which provide neither a childcare centre nor a kindergarten are the small rural communities with less than 2000 inhabitants, representing about 17% of the population. The team was informed also that many of the settlements of between 2000 and 10,000 people in the northern and eastern parts of the country were also too poor to provide a service of quality for young children, as with the high unemployment levels in these areas, the tax base is very restricted, and local government budget is focussed on social welfare. Because of the underlying economic situation, there is little demand for childcare. Many families are unaware also of how much high quality early childhood programmes could contribute to their children’s development. There is no obligation on the county authorities to substitute for the weakness of the small local governments, and so a situation of educational inequality for young rural children has arisen.

165. We recommend for consideration by the authorities:

- *To propose as national policy, the provision of at least one quality service for infants and toddlers in each settlement or group of settlements to ensure that rural children have organised developmental opportunities as well as screening and prevention.* We consider this of the utmost importance. The high number of Roma children from rural settlements in special education may indicate that pre- and post-natal care of mothers and infants need to be reviewed, and that early childhood development services are critical in these settlements.<sup>30</sup>
- *To encourage the creation of family daycare networks in rural settlements and encourage local governments to provide provision contracts.* Experience shows that services for young children, based on a family model, are often very acceptable to families in rural area. These types of service provide modest but real employment to local women, and if in-service training is established, they can break the isolation of rural communities and introduce new ideas about children and their education.
- *To integrate childcare and kindergarten in rural areas whenever efficiency requires it.* As the population of kindergarten and primary school age children declines over the next decade, excess capacity in kindergarten and school buildings will result. To develop childcare and

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29. In the whole country with 3153 local governments, only about 180 maintain childcare services, and just over 2000 maintain kindergartens.

30. Again, lack of statistics prevent us from coming to an informed opinion on the issue, but it is well documented that poor pre-and post-natal care, coupled with a high percentage of births at home (often resulting in oxygen shortage and unsafe births), is a particular source of mental handicap and special needs in young children.

after-school care in kindergarten and school buildings could offer to local authorities a method of expanding services in an economic and realistic way. A first step in such a plan would be to conduct a survey of representative rural areas to examine the perceived needs in these communities, their openness to such services, and the willingness of local officials to co-operatively support family services.

- *To pilot other low-cost, multi-functional models of early childhood care and education, especially in settlements without a school or kindergarten.* Drop-in centres, play houses, mobile toy libraries and information for parents; combined family health/childcare centres are all initiatives that help young parents...
- *To forego the financing of lower secondary education whenever conditions are unfavourable* (non-viable numbers of children, difficulties in recruiting well-qualified teachers across a broad range of subjects, suspected low quality of education...), but on the contrary, to invest strongly in prevention and high quality kindergartens and age-limited primary schools.

#### **2.4. Improving access for Roma children to childcare and kindergarten**

166. Compared to most other countries, Hungary is advanced in terms of anti-discrimination legislation. Minority groups are well protected in law and, in fact, the Hungarian Minorities Law of 1993 is considered to be one of Europe's most comprehensive charters of individual and collective minority rights. Moreover, many excellent policies for Roma children and families have been initiated in recent years, and good results are beginning to appear. Yet, much of what we have noted about under-served rural settlements above and, in general about disadvantaged children applies *a fortiori* to Roma children. Serious barriers still exist to prevent their access to appropriate services. Among these barriers, we have noted the following:

- The low socio-economic status of Roma families, and their predominant location either in poor city districts or in survival rural settlements.
- The administrative gap that exists between central government equity aims and the capacity and interest of local governments to implement them.
- The very high proportion of children from a Roma or otherwise disadvantaged background who are directed into special education.
- The high proportion of Roma and disadvantaged children in segregated “catch-up” programmes in primary schools.
- The relatively late entry of Roma children into kindergarten at the age of 5 years and their retention there until the age of 7.

167. Some these issues are addressed in the important study by the National Institute of Education, *Integration versus Segregation: Hungarian Roma Education Policy*, published in July 2003 (OKI, 2003), where a comprehensive account and analysis of the segregation of Roma children in the school system can be found. After careful consultation of children, parents, teachers, local governments, special schools, academics, civil organisations and ministry officials, the authors make a number of excellent recommendations.<sup>31</sup>

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31. The authors also include a proposal for market-type financing, such as vouchers, but we would introduce a note of caution in this regard. The history of vouchers in childcare and early education has generally been negative, as parents find it very difficult to assess quality in this field, and will often choose programmes that include ‘educational’ computer games, precocious literacy and low-intensive second language learning – all of which are secondary to the social development and active discovery aims of mainstream kindergarten. Generally, voucher systems are characterised by fragmentation of services with educated

168. The segregation of Roma children, however, is not a characteristic of either kindergarten or childcare in Hungary, unless there is question of spatial segregation due to the traditional Roma village structure or – as is becoming more common – the concentration of Roma families in the poorer neighbourhoods of the bigger towns and cities. In those instances, childcare centres and kindergartens can be found with predominantly Roma enrolments. Much greater challenges are a) the non-participation or late participation of Roma children in early childhood services – which later can lead to segregation, and b) the challenge of suitable curricula and programmes for disadvantaged children (this issue is discussed in the section on quality below). The OECD team was asked, and asked itself on several occasions: how can the enrolment and actual attendance figures for Roma children be improved? Among the answers provided, we have chosen the following for consideration by the Hungarian authorities:

- *To establish national criteria of access for Roma, through which priority enrolment in to early childhood services is granted to certain categories regardless of the employment status of their parents: special needs children, Roma children, and disadvantaged children.* Our analysis of the phenomenon in Chapter IV suggests that although some Roma families may prefer late entry, many Roma – and other disadvantaged families - are not be able to enrol their children at 3 years because of the criteria of entry used in most kindergartens. Whatever the cause, the ministry may wish to make the early entry of Roma children a high priority for the kindergarten system, and introduce the principle that such children should have first call on places in kindergartens. Much remedial work can be spared later on if the entry of Roma and disadvantaged children can be ensured at the age of 3 years for families who so wish it, regardless of the employment situation of the parents.
- *To address the administrative gap between equity aims and implementation:* We have already commented on this issue in the section above on decentralisation. The weakness of local government interest in achieving the equity aims of central government, e.g. to bring young Roma children into the kindergarten system as early as possible, is not necessarily culpable. Inaction in many instances stems from small size and lack of capacity. In particular, some of the ethnic Roma settlements seem to be too small and impoverished to establish the health and educational services that are necessary for the adequate screening and development of the young children. For this reason, without infringing the rights of local communities, some transfer of responsibility back to central government or county (territorial development) level may be necessary for a time to initiate the resolution of the issue, which ultimately is a national equity concern.
- *To encourage inclusive education from the start and prevent learning delays through early intervention:* The initial aim of compensatory education programmes for Roma children was generous, but the financial incentive given to schools to provide such classes, and the methodology used (grouping together many children who have not mastered basic competencies) are questionable. We welcome the Ministry of Education decree of September 2003 on “Coaching for Integration”, and encourage the ministry’s strong support for the initiative, particularly toward local governments, whose interest or capacity to put equity programmes into effect is often limited.  
*Prevention, however, is better than cure. There is a strong case to be made for abandoning the “compensation” approach, and for laying the foundations of health and learning as early as possible for all disadvantaged children.* If anti-poverty, primary health (in particular, pre- and post-natal care) and quality early intervention programmes are ensured to the Roma districts and settlements, disability and learning delays can be greatly reduced among the young children. The new approach would gradually divert funding from compensation toward

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parents being able to identify and pay for good kindergartens, and a general lack of access and lowering of quality for disadvantaged families.

improved primary health for Roma families, and toward an active pedagogy model for kindergarten and primary education (as one of our respondents put it: "to kindergartenise primary education" – see section on quality below)<sup>32</sup>. In this approach, young Roma children would have prioritised access at the age of 2 or 3 years to childcare and early education, with appropriate programmes. Research evidence from other countries concerning the benefits of early intervention is overwhelming, especially if this initial stage of education is followed by well-planned primary education.

169. Other supportive steps that we were privileged to see in Hungary or which were recommended to the team by specialists working closely with Roma families, are the following:

- *The provision of a specially trained nurse, child protection, social worker or liaison teacher to Roma districts or settlements* to work as an ethnic counsellor, liaise with the local school, and to stimulate parent interest in education, including courses that revisit literacy and help toward employment. The co-ordinator would seek to ensure that minority and disadvantaged parents were consulted by the centres and the local authority concerning services for their children;
- *Incentive grants or additional normative funds to areas with high concentrations of Roma children.* Funding can be tied to increased participation rates for Roma children in the programmes both at childcare and kindergarten level;
- *Funds to develop curricula and materials for Roma minority education, including textbooks and teaching aids,* as well as for the development of national standards as to what should be covered in Roma minority education;
- *The inclusion in the pre-service training of childcare workers and teachers obligatory modules on anti-bias, parental outreach and community development;*
- *Finally, special funding from the Ministry of Education to develop a cadre of teacher counsellors for Roma children,* who would monitor and ensure the progression of Roma children through primary and secondary education.

### **3. Addressing weaknesses in quality**

170. From the perspective of the OECD team, the challenges to be faced by Hungary in the domain of quality *for mainstream children* seem to derive more from the general co-ordination and funding frameworks than from programmatic or methodological reasons. An example is the smallness of settlements and their inability to build up expert administrations. Only about 600 (about 20%) of all the municipalities are able to employ a specific education counsellor. For the sake of stability and quality in childcare and education, this is a loss, as expert local administrations - like government departments at central level - provide the technical expertise and institutional memory to counterbalance the fluctuations of politically controlled committees. The issue has been discussed in Chapter IV and recommendations made above. In addition, the OECD team considers that attention should be given to four other issues in the quality area, over which the two line ministries have better control: namely, the overall management of quality; quality for disadvantaged and Roma children; the recruitment and training of staff; and data collection and policy research.

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32. The High/Scope Foundation in the US, the Soros Foundation in Central Europe and two of the models mentioned in Chapter IV on returns from early childhood education, have developed active pedagogies for the lower classes of primary school which seem very suitable for all children, and are able to include successfully, and without streaming, the slower learners. These approaches generally include a specialised teacher training programme. At country level, Finland's early primary classes resemble much more active kindergarten programming than the traditional primary school class.

### **3.1. The overall management of quality**

171. Hungarian research indicates that many local governments take a weak interest in the regulation of early childhood services, particularly in the area of quality assurance. The overwhelming majority (92%) of surveys and quality assessments invited by maintainers focus on primary education. Moreover, about one-third of the county educational institutes have no kindergarten assessment specialist, and only about 20% of municipalities have in their employment a specialist pedagogical advisor for kindergartens. The link between childcare/kindergarten quality and later education (especially of children from disadvantaged backgrounds) either is not understood or maintainers do not think it necessary to assess quality at kindergarten level. At the same time, many small municipalities feel it necessary to provide lower secondary education for the local children. The opportunity cost of keeping older children on in the primary school in lower secondary can be the relative neglect of childcare, the insufficiency of places in kindergartens, the low enrolment of disadvantaged children, and a neglect of quality assurance at the early ages.

172. With the shift toward local government control of early childhood services, it is critical that the national government should continue to support the monitoring infrastructure. We recommend for consideration:

- *To strengthen the role of the national experts, county authorities and the methodological and pedagogical centres in the domain of quality assurance and monitoring.* What this implies in practice is beyond the competence of the OECD team, but we suggest that some means be found:
  - a) To encourage the maintainers to engage in more regular assessments of kindergartens, using criteria defined by the Ministry, such as, the % of Roma and disadvantaged children enrolled at the age of three years, the outcomes for these children, such as rate of retention beyond the age of 6 years; the elaboration of active learning programmes; the intensity of family outreach, etc.
  - b) To assist the weaker local settlements and maintainers to provide access and to improve quality. Given the economies of scale and greater efficiency that such a move would bring, e.g. having the county professional services manage and ensure quality across several settlements, it seems a reasonable move to consider, particularly in a situation where local government resources are not increasing and the numbers of young children and families are declining.
- *To legally enhance the role of the interest groups (including parents) at local and institutional level vis-à-vis the political authorities.* Such a provision should ensure a stronger voice at local level for the representatives of the groups that central government policy designates as important, e.g. the parents of children with disabilities, Roma parents and women's groups....

### **3.2. Improved programming for Roma and other disadvantaged children**

173. An important point made by international research is that disadvantage is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, "resulting from the interactions of deep-seated economic, social and educational factors." (Kellaghan, 2002). Effective responses must also be multi-dimensional, and tailored to the needs of local children and families. It seemed to the OECD team that the difficulties of Roma families and children stemmed more from poverty and isolation than from ethnicity. In city districts and rural settlements where Roma families are found, early childhood services need to be intensive, multi-functional and co-ordinated with other services and agencies. To break the poverty cycle, attention to wider issues, such as settlement resources, employment opportunities, primary health issues, social support, income transfers and housing

policies will be critical. Because of their status as a minority, inter-cultural sensitivity and anti-bias policies are also needed.

### *Pedagogical quality in programmes for disadvantaged and Roma children*

174. In our discussion of pedagogical quality for disadvantaged children in Chapter IV, we outlined the common lines for such programmes identified in research from several countries. In sum, programming for such children should have the following characteristics:

- *Programmes are multi-functional and engage families as well as children:* that is, programmes are strong on family engagement and support as well as providing high quality learning experiences to the children (Bertram & Pascal, 2002).
- *Programming is intensive:* research indicates that the effectiveness of programmes for young children is enhanced by intensity over a number of years (Leseman, 2002) and if possible, with year-long duration (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003). There is evidence to show that a structured, half-day, early learning programme on a term basis can be effective, and should be incorporated into all full-day services.<sup>33</sup>
- *Programmes are pedagogically sound and conducted by appropriately trained professionals.* A high quality programme in early childhood implies child-initiative, play and involvement, which in turn, presupposes reasonable child-staff ratios.
- *Depending on the degree of disadvantage, enriched health and nutrition inputs may be necessary* to ensure that young children can take full advantage of the early childhood service.
- In situations where disadvantage is linked to ethnicity, *anti-bias training and the recruitment of bridging staff are important.*
- *High quality kindergarten should be followed up by high quality primary school.* High quality kindergarten needs to be followed up by high quality primary school classes, in which an emphasis is placed on fitting the school to the child and not vice versa.

175. In the Hungarian situation, more specific strategies that have been found helpful in other countries can be proposed for consideration, e.g.:

- *For each kindergarten to formulate an outreach plan toward the parents,* with responsibility given to a liaison teacher to ensure that parents come to the kindergarten and are enrolled in helping with their children's learning;
- *To continue the Hungarian tradition of long-day kindergarten,* with out-of-school recreational activities provided on site, including if possible during the long vacation;
- *To improve pedagogical conditions and method vis-à-vis disadvantaged children,* e.g. to provide a double capitation grant to maintainers for each Roma/disadvantaged child, with the proviso that each such child should count for two in the child:staff ratios. This would allow a more individualised and differentiated pedagogy in integrated classes. Another component of pedagogical method for disadvantaged children is project and communication work, that allows the interests and experiences of these children to be expressed and valued;
- *Recruitment of teachers from Roma community, and reinforced in-service training for all teachers who are involved in integrated classes,* with an eye to building up expertise and

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33. The Dutch research conducted by Leseman indicates that five half-day, structured programmes per week produces more effective learning than shorter sessional programmes. Full-day programmes are even more effective especially in at-risk circumstances. The Chicago research underlines the efficacy of bridging programmes across the long summer holiday period.

networking among these teachers, and to explore aspects of work, such as relations with local communities, that pre-service training cannot ensure;

- *Close attention to the transitions points in children's lives, especially the entry points into the kindergarten, and entry to primary school at 6 years.* From our conversations with teachers, it appears that a satisfactory bridging mechanism between kindergarten and primary school is not always available. Some countries have established a pre-school class in the primary school, staffed by a combined team of a kindergarten and primary teacher. It is important that the socio-emotional and family support begun in the childcare centres and kindergartens should continue into early primary school.

### **3.3. Recruitment and training of staff**

176. For the first time in decades, problems in recruiting appropriately trained childcare workers have arisen in Hungary. It appears that pay levels are too low and hours are too long for the sector to compete with other services in the private sector.<sup>34</sup> One may expect that the recruitment situation will be exacerbated in the coming years as the older childcare workers retire out of the system.

177. The case for reshaping the profession of childcare worker seems urgent, both from a recruitment and professional perspective. The present mix of tertiary level specialists (20%) and childcare workers (80%, some without training) in the centres is a matter of concern. In Sweden, with hardly any untrained personnel in centres, the corresponding ratio is 60% staff (*pedagogues*) with a four-year university degree, and just under 40% (*childminders*) with a three-year vocational qualification. One of the reasons for the strong Swedish performance is the integration of all services for young children under one ministry, with a corresponding simplification and rationalisation of staffing profiles. Childcare and kindergarten staff work together in all the services, bringing a higher status to early years' services, all of which are now assimilated to the kindergarten. Professional staff enjoy the same status and pay as primary teachers, with high professional standards to maintain.

178. We recommend for consideration by the Hungarian authorities:

- *To take a co-ordinated view of early childhood education and care,* and to begin the process of establishing clear and simple profiles for staff who serve children from 1 year to 7 years. Simplification of profiling should include technical and support staff as well the professional contact staff;
- *To upgrade the salaries and qualifications of childcare workers.* Present salaries of childcare workers are hardly equivalent to even the lowest-paid branches in the private sector. In addition, the three-year vocational certificate of the childcare worker seems too low for the quality of pedagogical work required, and offers few perspectives for horizontal or vertical advancement. A child pedagogue 3-year university degree would seem more suitable for the pedagogical personnel in childcare centres. Their training should focus on enhancing developmental/pedagogical formation and lessening the sanitary/medical influence. For this to be truly effective, attention to the low pay for child care staff must be addressed as well. The ideal would be to create a recognised qualification and salary level, with the possibility of taking further (tertiary) training and of having access to higher posts of responsibility once sufficient training credits are obtained. In sum, an integrated training and career lattice – based

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34. Through a reform in September 2002, childcare workers are now paid 60,000 HUF (minimum wage is 50,000 HUF) at the beginning of career going to 79,200 HUF after twenty years service, compared to a kindergarten teacher's salary of 127,00 HUF after 20 years service.

on experience as well as on academic credits – may be a crucial mechanism to provide status and satisfaction to early childhood staff;

- *When budgets allow, to address the salary and status of kindergarten teachers vis-à-vis other teachers within the school system.* In order to avoid future recruitment problems, kindergarten teachers need consideration with regard to their longer hours in direct contact with children. They are trained to tertiary degree level, and according to many of our respondents, they engage more in in-service training opportunities, and work at a high level of expertise, with sensitivity to disadvantage and more individualised pedagogical approaches;
- *To diversify recruitment and training so as to meet the new equity and social inclusion challenges faced by Hungarian society.* The ministries may wish to consider consultations with the unions, associations, training colleges and Roma representatives on the most appropriate means of assisting young Roma women to obtain qualifications, enabling them to hold mainstream posts in childcare centres and kindergartens. Likewise, pre-service training for all early childhood professionals will be directed to take into account the growing number of disadvantaged children entering the services, who bring new challenges, such as developmental delays and a need for differentiated teaching and community outreach... The pre-service training of the older professionals did not necessarily prepare them to be effective in situations of entrenched disadvantage, where basic child development and child protection issues are a daily challenge;
- *To provide special incentives for personnel posted to the most rural and/or disadvantaged areas in order to ensure a supply of trained personnel to fill the recruitment needs in these areas.* Incentives are not financial only, but should include enhanced support from methodological centres and from various health, social and educational networks.

### **3.4. Data collection and policy research**

179. In general, Hungary has good resources in research and evaluation, but these have not been allocated sufficiently to address issues in early childhood education and care. For example, as the discussion in Chapter IV indicates, the OECD team felt that it lacked sufficient data about Roma children and children in rural settlements. Some general statistics and data about young children were available but they lacked the disaggregation and analysis to allow fine-tuned, policy insights. Accurate, detailed data is necessary for governments in national socio-economic planning, and enables interest groups and officials in local settlements to develop appropriate responses to the needs of disadvantaged families. It is difficult, for example, to formulate realistic policies, with budgets attached, if the approximate number of disadvantaged or Roma children is not known.

180. We would encourage the authorities to consider:

- *Establishing a nationally-funded research infrastructure and agenda on young children and their families:* The experience of the OECD reviews tends to show that young children are generally overlooked in research when policies on their behalf are taken in charge by larger entities such as social policy or school education. Setting up a national infrastructure and agenda to focus on early childhood issues requires identification of the present interest groups, research institutes and universities; and long-term government funding combined with a planned research agenda. Again, co-ordination between the sponsoring ministries, the research institutes and the interest groups would enhance funding, and increase the relevance of the research topics.
- *Clarifying who should be responsible for the collation of basic data on young children at national level, and reaching agreement across ministries about the indicators to be used.* We encourage the nomination of a national body to ensure and supervise the collection of data on

young children. This body could support the county and local government administrations responsible for local data collection, and training to ensure that the data collected is relevant to both childcare and education concerns, collated and standardised across municipalities. It is clear for example that basic enrolment data is insufficient for policy purposes but needs to be linked to the community/household background of the child and to the changing parameters of the care and kindergarten environments. It would be extremely useful for the national planners (and for international researchers<sup>0</sup> if the responsible national body were to produce annually a publication on the situation of young children in Hungary, as is customary in Flanders and other countries.

- Once the question of the collection of basic raw data is resolved, *the sponsoring of evaluative and future oriented studies would seem necessary as tools for policy planning*. Developing research instruments and evaluation procedures that are sensitive to the complex dynamics of early childhood environments would be an important step towards deepening understanding in this field.
- A country of Hungary's size and tradition should also have the capacity to undertake *a policy-focussed, longitudinal study of a national cohort*.

#### **4. Strengthening general funding**

##### ***Financing***

181. A conclusion from the discussion in Chapter IV was the favourable investment by Hungary in kindergarten compared to other OECD countries. At the same time, the criteria for entry to kindergarten are keeping out disadvantaged and Roma children. The funding situation in the childcare sector differs significantly: central government grants underwrite only 25-30% of operational costs, with local government taking in charge 55-65% and parents contributing approximately 10-15%. As staff costs take up over 75% of the budget, the amount remaining secures, according to our respondents, only the minimal operation of centres. At the same time, the low-cost alternative, family daycare, although in receipt of a normative grant when maintained by a local authority, is currently not sufficiently widespread.

182. It present economic circumstances, containing costs to reasonable levels will be aimed at by both ministries, but experience in other countries calls for caution in cutting back funding to early childhood services. American experience in reducing staffing levels as a money-saving strategy led to a dramatic lowering of the quality of care and education provided to children. With this in mind, we encourage the funding authorities:

- *To consider the international research on investment in early childhood services*. A summary of this research is provided in Chapter IV of this Note, and Appendix 2 contains a recent communication from the American Business Roundtable on the issue. In summary, funding of early childhood services is seen, not only as a response to labour market needs but also as a long-term investment in a nation's health, education and future human resources.<sup>35</sup> There are also significant equity issues involved, such as equal opportunities for women and a fair start in life for children from disadvantaged or dysfunctional families. To lessen the possibility of ill-conceived rationalisation measures in poorly advised local governments, *a strong state policy to defend early childhood services and preserve their professional profile would be both welcome and useful*.

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35. In Hungary, because of the regulations in place, lack of investment in facilities and equipment has the further consequence of denying access to children with disabilities, as only those childcare centres and kindergartens that are provided with special equipment and specialised staff are allowed to receive these children

- *Second, to be mindful of present challenges and commitments in the early childhood field that need urgent attention and funding.* Four priorities have been stressed throughout this Note:
  - Expansion of services for children under 3 years. In particular, European Union funding should be explored to enable significant expansion of childcare services (see below);
  - Ensuring access in both childcare and kindergarten *from the earliest age* for Roma children, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children from rural areas and special needs children;
  - The provision of adequate salaries and career prospects, particularly in the childcare field, in order to retain qualified staff;
  - Support to the quality infrastructure that early childhood services need, including administration, training regimes, professional centres and monitoring mechanisms.
  
- *Through integrated programming, to bring extra funding – for example, through national anti-poverty and local development measures - toward early childhood services for Roma and disadvantaged children, addressing group and social exclusion issues.* Poverty is a multi-dimensional problem, and its reduction requires multi-dimensional solutions. To break the poverty cycle endemic in Roma communities, we recommend attention to wider issues, such as territorial development, community resources, employment opportunities, primary health care, social support, income transfers and housing policies. In sum, rigorous co-ordination between government departments is necessary, perhaps guided by a strong, permanent agency, to ensure that early learning programmes for Roma children – not least in the Roma settlements – take place within a general framework of anti-poverty, primary health and community development policies. Experience shows too that community development is most successful when taken in charge by community members. Hence, the need to consult continually and employ Roma personnel at all levels of management and service delivery.
  
- *To consider rationalisation measures that would free up funds for early childhood and increase efficiency in the school system as a whole.* Tradition, constitutional rights and the high number of settlements in Hungary constitute some barriers to rationalisation and economies of scale. Yet we believe that some initiatives in this sense are possible, which would also improve access and quality in the Hungarian system. In particular:
  - To encourage greater co-ordination between the childcare and kindergarten sectors – at least at municipal level – should be considered, especially where planning, in-service training, quality assurance and external evaluation are concerned. If municipal integration were achieved, economies of scale on buildings would also be possible. It seemed to us that a promising place to pilot integrated services may be in the rural settlements that have no childcare centres;
  - To bring to an end to the practice of children remaining in kindergarten after their 6<sup>th</sup> year. The practice is both costly to the public exchequer and unfair to children. Ensuring an early start for Roma and at-risk children can resolve the challenge, but we are aware, as our analyses in Chapter IV indicates, that such a policy involves changing cultural attitudes, sectional interests and, not least, administrative and financial considerations at local level;
  - To discourage the provision of primary education to 15 years in the smaller communities whenever the circumstances are not favourable. These classes, we were informed, are often of mediocre quality and their maintenance can sorely stretch the finances of the smaller maintainers. At the same time, there is under-investment in providing an early start for disadvantaged children;

- To encourage greater collaboration at district level among the smaller municipalities, aided by the county or governmental authorities. Economies of scale are surely possible, while retaining the principle of local services for young children.
- *To fully explore EU funding sources:* With accession to the EU, further sources of funding will be available to Hungary to stimulate childcare in particular. The conclusions of the Barcelona European Council meeting in March 2002 stated that Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force and strive, in line with national patterns of provision, *to provide childcare<sup>1</sup> by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.* No doubt, the Hungarian authorities will be negotiating with the EU concerning the use of social funds to establish new early childhood services in Hungary as an instrument both of social inclusion for Roma and disadvantaged children (PHARE) and of equal opportunities for women (EOCP). This is what has occurred in Ireland and has released significant funding toward childcare in particular. The authorities may wish to explore this avenue in depth, and to consider the inclusion of these elements in the preparation of the next National Development Plan.
- *To pilot cost-efficient means to bring childcare and kindergarten to the children (mainly in rural settlements) who are currently without services.*<sup>36</sup> In the rural settlements, integrated childcare and kindergarten could be explored, either through using available buildings, or establishing family daycare and family kindergartens. It is a solution widely adopted in other countries with dispersed rural populations, e.g. Canada, Finland, Sweden... The women volunteering to provide care and early education for local young children in the remoter settlements receive initial training, and then ongoing support from the nearest certified childcare or educational centre. Such services are normatively supported, but the initial outlay on premises and staff is avoided. In addition, familial early education programmes can provide local jobs at minimal cost.
- *To explore alternative funding sources:* Among the alternative funding sources that OECD review teams have noted in other countries are the following:
  - User charges for specific services - A source of funding for child care, particularly in areas in which parents have dual employment, is the delivery of a more diverse array of services, some of which can be paid for directly by beneficiaries. We visited programmes that provided services such as short term care for non working mothers, rental of space for one time events, care in the home of parents for short term needs - all on a fee-paying basis for those using the services. These programmes have the advantage of meeting the specific needs of the local community where the centres are located, as well as generating revenue to help maintain the basic services. However, care must be taken to be ensure that the core public services survive, and become even more integral to the local community in a cost effective manner.
  - A sharing of tasks with the voluntary non-profit sector: Attracting voluntary providers into the regulated network will require subvention, but this seems reasonable when the voluntary or private bodies provide expertise and share costs. Their participation is particularly welcome when voluntary early education bodies are willing to accept a quota of children from disadvantaged or special needs backgrounds, and keep fees at a level within a range defined by the public authorities.

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36. From the figures provided in the Hungarian Background Report, we estimate that almost 90% of children under three years, and a significant proportion – perhaps 25% - of children between three and five years do not attend publicly recognised services.

- Support from the corporate and business sector: In many countries, as for example in the US, employers are one of the main supporters of early childhood services. Their reasons for so doing are outlined by the American Business Round Table. In summary, business leaders are conscious that high-quality early childhood education is important for the development of young children and their future success in school. In addition, “employers increasingly find that the availability of good early childhood programs is critical to the recruitment and retention of parent employees.” (American Business Roundtable, 2003). For these reasons, businesses in a wide range of countries supply workplace crèches and early education at the place of work, or purchase places in centres accredited by the public authorities.
- Special funding initiatives: By special funding initiatives are meant, the raising of funds for early education through special taxes, national lotteries and the like. In Belgium and Italy, a significant part (about 1%) of social security and/or corporate tax is channelled toward childcare. In Finland, the alcohol tax has been used for many years to subvention early childhood services, in particular, out-of-school care. In the state of Georgia in the US, the state lottery proceeds are used to fund early childhood services.

### ***Closing Comment***

183. This *Country Note for Hungary* represents the views of the OECD team after an intense two-week visit, aided by a comprehensive *Background Report* contracted by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs. The analysis of the OECD team is offered to the ministries in a spirit of professional dialogue, basing our judgements on our reading, discussions and observations. During the visit, the team members were impressed by the approachability of the people we met at all levels within the system and their willingness to engage in a critical debate. We especially commend the manner in which the visit was organised by our hosts, the open access we enjoyed to all levels of the system and the richness and variety of the programme. Despite the shortness of our visit, we spoke to a wide range of providers and sectors at national, regional and local levels.

184. The OECD link persons, the national co-ordinators, the authors of the Background Report, the Steering Committee and all who contributed to the project are to be congratulated on their approach and professionalism. It should be noted, however, that the facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received every help from the ministries, the persons referred to above, and from many researchers and practitioners in Hungary, they have no part in any shortcomings which this document may present.

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## APPENDIX 1 - THE OECD REVIEW TEAM

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## APPENDIX 2 - THE SCHEDULE OF VISITS

### *Monday 2 December 2002*

- 9.00 – 12.00 Meeting with the Working group members, who prepared the background report: Ms. Marta Korintus, Ms. Judit Villányi, Ms. Katalin Mátyai, Ms. Elisabeth Badics
- Meeting with Mr. Károly Czibere, General Director, and colleagues of the National Institute for Family and Social Policy
- 14.00 – 14.30 Meeting with Mr. István Hiller Political State-Secretary, Ministry of Education
- 14.30 – 15.30 Meeting with the Steering group members  
Meeting with Ministry of Education officials
- 16.00 – 17.00 Meeting with Mr. J. Sípos Vice State-Secretary for Education
- Meeting with Ms. Ágnes E. Vámos, Mr. Sándor Brassói, Ms. Ágnes Pethő, Mrs. Csabáné Csonka, Ministry of Education

### *Tuesday 3 December*

- 9.00 – 13.30 Visit to childcare centers for children under 3 (bölcsőde), where Roma children attend (Budapest District VIII)  
Visit to the Bölcsőde Museum, meeting with local government's officials
- 14.00 – 15.30 Meeting with Mr. Gábor Halász General Director, National Institute of Public Education, Budapest
- 15.30 – 16.30 Meeting with members of National Public Educational Council, researchers from National Institute of Public Education, Institute of Education-research, Examination Center

### *Wednesday 4 December*

- 8.30. – 9.30 Meeting with Mrs. Éva Bajtainé Mayer, President of Budapest's German self government, Ms. Róza Mammel from National German self government, Mrs. Ferencné Láng from KÁOKSZI
- 10.00 – 12.00 Meeting with Mrs. Viktória Bernáthné Mohácsi, Commissioner for the integration of disadvantaged and Roma youth, and other experts, Ministry of Education
- 14.00 – 16.00 Meeting with Mr. Ferenc Csillag Vice director, Mrs. Gabriella Pázsikné Szilágyi and other experts, Budapest Institute of Pedagogy

***Thursday 5 December***

- 9.30 – 10.30 Meeting with Ms. Kinga Göncz political state-secretary, Mrs. Sándorné Szabó vice State-secretary and Mr. László Csókay, Head of child protection department, Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs
- 10.30 – 12.00 Visit to a kindergarten-school integrated programme in Kossuth ter
- 13.30 – 14.30 Meeting with dr. István Hortobágyi, General-director for education and Ms. Judit Kolozsvári, Vice director, ELTE School- and Kindergarten Teachers' College
- 15.30 – 16.30 Meeting with Mr. Gábor Pertl Managing-director, Mr. Lajos Orosz, Quality development program director, Mr. Tamás Vekerdy, Alternative director, Ms. Erika Kovács, Kindergarten expert, Pedagogical Further Education Methodology and Information Centre, Pilisborosjenő

***Friday 6 December***

- Morning Travel to Hajdúböszörmény (Hajdú-Bihar county, East Hungary)  
En route visit to a childcare center for children under 3
- 14.30 – 15.30 Meeting with Mr. Gyula Varga, Director, and teachers of University of Debrecen, College of Pedagogy, Hajdúböszörmény
- 15.30 – 17.00 Visit to the Training Kindergarten, Hajdúböszörmény

***Saturday 7 December***

- 10.00 – 12.00 Meeting with the Director and Ms. Ágnes Szatmáriné Nagy, Hajdú-Bihar County Institute of Pedagogy, Debrecen
- Afternoon Sightseeing in Debrecen

***Sunday 8 December***

Return to Budapest

***Monday 9 December***

- 8.30 – 10.30 Visit to the childcare center of the National Institute for Family and Social Policy.
- 11.00 – 12.30 Meeting with experts for special needs children's early development, including an expert from the International Pető Institute
- 14.00 – 15.30 Meeting with representatives of trade unions and professional associations for childcare centre and kindergarten workers, National Institute for Family and Social Policy
- 16.30 – 17.30 Visit to kindergarten and meeting with local government officials

***Tuesday 10 December***

- 9.00 – 11.00 Meeting with experts of the Central Statistical Office
- 13.30 Meeting with Mr Péter Posfai general director, Ms. Mária Polonkai and Mrs. Aranka Marekné Pintér, Directors, National Evaluation Examination Center
- 15.00 – 17.00 Meeting with Ms. Ágnes E. Vámos and colleagues, Ministry of Education

***Wednesday 11 December***

- 8.30 a.m. Travel to Székesfehérvár
- 10.00 – 11.00 Meeting with the Mayor and local government representatives
- 11.30 – 12.30 Visit to Csemete Gyermekcentrum, looking at childcare services
- 14.30 Travel to Budapest.