

STARTING STRONG

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY

Country Note for AUSTRIA

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 Austrian authorities, the OECD or its Member countries.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The OECD Thematic Review

1. The *Country Note for Austria* 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/edu/earlychildhood>>. 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. Eight further countries joined the review at that moment: Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Korea, Mexico for full reviews; and France and Ireland 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.

The structure of the Austrian Country Note

7. Following the terms proposed by the sponsoring ministry, the Country Note for Austria seeks to place the issues around early childhood provision firmly within the Austrian context, and to review early care and educational policies and practices as they currently meet the needs of Austrian children and their families. In particular, the Ministry of Education requested the team a) to pay specific attention to the early years as the foundation stage of lifelong learning, in which basic competences and above all, the motivation to learn should be laid; and b) to provide benchmarks and comparisons with other countries to inspire quality improvements at all levels of the system.

8. In addition to the present introduction which forms Chapter 1, the structure of the Country Note is as follows: Chapter 2 provides a rapid overview of Austrian governance, socio-economic context, demographics and the family support system. After a brief introduction to the history of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Austria, Chapter 3 focuses on current policies and provision. In particular, approaches to administration and management, funding, regulation, staffing, and programme regulation are outlined. In Chapter 4, some of the main issues related to policy and practice in ECEC in Austria are explored. Four areas are chosen for comment: expanding the ECEC system, developing educational quality; professionalizing the early childhood sector; promoting research and evaluation in the pre-school sector. The conclusions, in Chapter 5 offer some reflections for consideration by Austrian stakeholders in four domains that have a bearing on the development of ECEC in Austria: the social context; governance and financing; the challenges of access; and means to improve quality. It should be noted that much of the data on which our analysis is based dates from 2004. New initiatives have been made since then, e.g. the expansion of *Hort* services.

Acknowledgements

9. The OECD wishes to thank the Austrian Ministry of Education and the participating Austrian Bundesländer 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 interviews with managers, providers, and early childhood professionals were most informative, and we thank them for responding to our questions so generously. The team is also grateful to the authors of the Background Report who provided us with a comprehensive introduction to early childhood services in Austria, including pertinent sociological analyses and statistics. In particular, we should like to thank warmly the Steering Committee, both for their efficient supervision of the Background Report and visit schedule, and for their ongoing support to the team during the visit, in particular: the OECD representative to the Education Committee, Dr; Josef Neumüller; Mag. Maria Dippelreiter of the Ministry of Education and Mag. Marisa Krenn-Wache, Bildunganstalt für Kindergartenpädagogik, Klagenfurt. We would like to emphasise that any weaknesses in the OECD report – and for the delay in its publication – are in no way their responsibility. A special word of thanks is due to Marisa Krenn-Wache for her superb organisation of the review team schedule, and for accompanying the team with great courtesy and efficiency during the ten-day visit.

10. 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 Austria, we wish to underline that they have no part in any shortcomings that 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 *Austrian Background Report*, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

11. 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 3-6 years covers children from 36 months to their sixth birthday, but does not include six 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.

Chapter 2

The Austrian Context of ECEC

Austria and its *Bundesländer*

12. Austria is located in south-eastern Europe. It borders on the countries Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, covers a surface area of 83 871 sq. km and in the year 2002 had 8.053 million inhabitants¹. It is a federal state that includes nine *Bundesländer* (federal provinces). Vienna is the federal capital² and also the political centre of the country, but the nine federal provinces play a leading role on ECEC policy.

13. The nine states of Austria, listed alphabetically by official English and German names, are:

Chart 1. The states of Austria

	English	German	
1.	<u>Burgenland</u>	<u>Burgenland</u>	
2.	<u>Carinthia</u>	<u>Kärnten</u>	
3.	<u>Lower Austria</u>	<u>Niederösterreich</u>	
4.	<u>Upper Austria</u>	<u>Oberösterreich</u>	
5.	<u>Salzburg</u>	<u>Salzburg</u>	
6.	<u>Styria</u>	<u>Steiermark</u>	
7.	<u>Tyrol</u>	<u>Tirol</u>	
8.	<u>Vorarlberg</u>	<u>Vorarlberg</u>	
9.	<u>Vienna</u>	<u>Wien</u>	

Source: Wikipedia, 2005

14. The states of Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Vienna, and Burgenland are situated in the Danube valley and consist of accessible and easily arable terrain. The other five states, in contrast, are part of the eastern foothills of the Alps and thus comparatively unsuitable for agriculture. Their terrain is also relatively unfavourable to heavy industry and long-distance trade. Accordingly, the population of what now is the Republic of Austria has been concentrated in the former four states since prehistoric

1. All data according to <http://www.statistik.at/jahrbuch/pdf/k02.pdf>, status 2002.

2. Source: <http://www.statistik.at/jahrbuch/deutsch/start.shtml>

times. Austria's most densely populated state is the city state of Vienna, the heart of what is Austria's only metropolitan area. Lower Austria only ranks fourth with regard to population density even though containing Vienna's suburbs; this is due to large areas of land remaining predominantly agricultural. The alpine state of Tyrol, the less alpine but geographically secluded state of Carinthia, and the eastern but near-exclusively agricultural state of Burgenland are Austria's least densely populated states. In contrast, the smallest and most westerly state of Vorarlberg is the most densely populated state outside Vienna.

State populations and capitals

15. The following table lists the Austrian states according to population:

Table 1. Austrian states and population

State	Capital	Population	Area	Density	Cities	Towns
<u>Vienna</u>	-	1,550,123	415	3735.2	1	0
<u>Lower Austria</u>	<u>Sankt Pölten</u>	1,545,804	19,178	80.6	74	499
<u>Upper Austria</u>	<u>Linz</u>	1,376,797	11,982	114.9	29	416
<u>Styria</u>	<u>Graz</u>	1,183,303	16,392	72.2	34	509
<u>Tyrol</u>	<u>Innsbruck</u>	673,504	12,648	53.2	11	268
<u>Carinthia</u>	<u>Klagenfurt</u>	559,404	9,536	58.7	17	115
<u>Salzburg</u>	<u>Salzburg</u>	515,327	7,154	72.0	10	109
<u>Vorarlberg</u>	<u>Bregenz</u>	372,791	2,601	143.3	5	91
<u>Burgenland</u>	<u>Eisenstadt</u>	227,569	3,965	70.0	13	158

Source: Wikipedia, 2005 (2001 Census)

Political and administrative context

16. Austria is a democratic republic, and a Member State of the European Union (EU) since 1 January 1995. Federal laws are passed by the National Council and the Federal Council. The Federal Council represents the interests of the provinces. There is a division of powers between legislative, executive and judicial branches. The Federal President (Head of State) and the legislative bodies are elected by the people for four-year terms. Based on the general election of 24 November 2002, the National Council has 183 members (members of parliament = national council members), who belong to four parties: Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP), Austrian Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ), Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) and the Greens. The number of seats in the order mentioned is: 79, 69, 18, 17. The Federal President appoints the Federal Chancellor, who heads the federal government, according to the majority obtained in the National Council. The Federal Council forms the second chamber of the Parliament and is composed of 'members of the Federal Council'. Its political influence is slight in comparison with the National Council. Members (currently 62 members with a free mandate) are elected, proportionate to the number of inhabitants in each province.

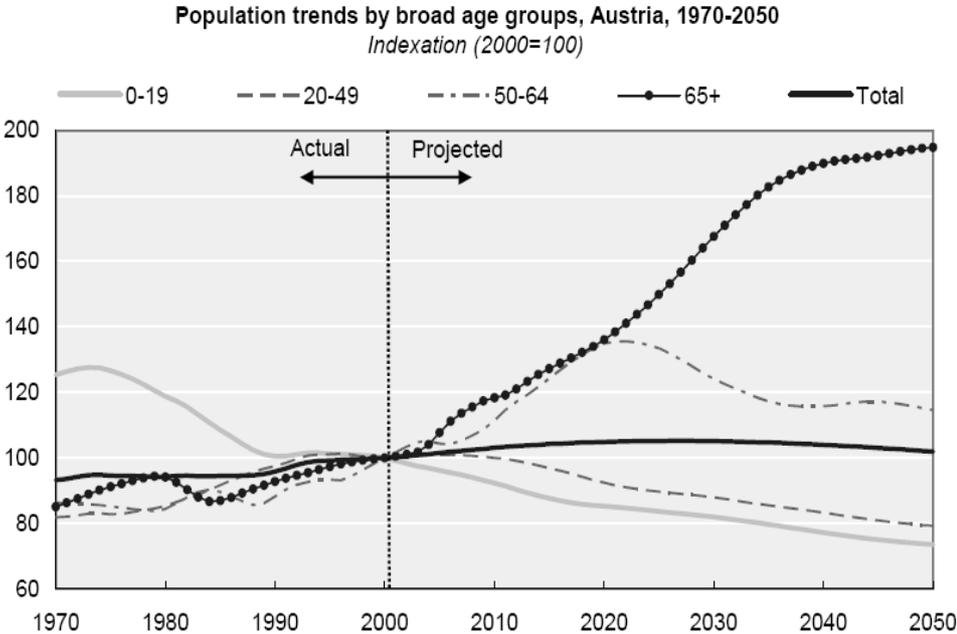
Economic context

17. Austria is a social market economy which has consistently, since the end of the 80s, been among Europe's top-performing economies. Its GDP per capita is just above \$30,000 GDP (3rd in the

European Union behind Luxembourg and Ireland), and its capital Vienna is reckoned to be the 6th richest conurbation in Europe with \$38,000 GDP per capita. Austrian business and industry have been able to take advantage of the city’s situation as a gateway to the new EU member states. Many of the large multinational companies have sited their European headquarters in Vienna, and the country’s trade with the new EU member states continues to expand.

18. According to the OECD report (Economic Survey of Austria, 2005), Austria faces major challenges in relation to population ageing and the employment of older workers. Because of declining mortality and persistently low fertility, the share of the population over age 65, is projected to double by 2050, and the working-age population could decline from 2018 onwards (Figure 1). The likely decline in labour supply will lower economic growth while public social expenditures continue to grow. The situation has an obvious link with early childhood policy: if women are to work, an expanded child care sector will be needed in Austria, which in turn will require not only greater state investment but also a change in mentality. Increasing levels of education and income are leading to changing attitudes, and greater social and geographical mobility. In addition, the country is adapting to the concept of the knowledge society and life-long learning, the foundations of which are laid in early childhood (Austrian Background Report). In sum, a turnaround in the general estimation of the importance of the early years is taking place. Early childhood education (and its family context) is currently being given the highest priority (Austrian Background Report on “Starting Strong”, p. 2).

Chart 2. Population trends in Austria 1970-2050: increase in proportion of older people and retirees



Source: Ageing and Employment Policies in Austria, OECD 2005

Demographics

19. Women make up 51.6% of the Austrian population and men 48.4%. The average population density is 96 inhabitants per square kilometre, but in reality, population densities vary greatly across the country. Almost two thirds of Austria lies in the Alps. This produces clearly marked settlement

areas with few large cities and their densely-populated surrounding areas. A large number of relatively small settlements exist. In fact, almost 97% of municipalities have less than 10,000 inhabitants. The relatively few areas with a high standard of living, high industrial density and developed technology contrast with more isolated parts of the country with clearly differing characteristics. Because of the flow of population toward the areas of high population density, competition for land exists between agricultural/industrial interests and building for residential purposes.

Table 2. Municipal sizes, 2001

Municipal sizes	Number	Proportion (%)
<i>Up to 1 000 inhabitants</i>	599	25.39
<i>1 001 – 5 000</i>	1 543	65.41
<i>5 001 – 10 000</i>	144	6.10
<i>10 001 – 50 000</i>	65	2.76
<i>50 001 – 100 000</i>	3	0.13
<i>100 001 – 500 000</i>	4	0.17
<i>more than 500 000</i>	1	0.04
Total	2 359	100.00

20. The longer-term population development in Austria has been characterised in the past by decreasing death rates and a falling birth rate. Currently there are 1.4 children per woman and the proportion of women and men who remain childless throughout life is growing. The proportion of children under six years old in the total population was 6.1% in 2002. This proportion has continued to decrease over the past decade.

Table 3. Child cohorts in Austria and comparative fertility rates, 2002

Age of children	Number in Austrian cohort		Country	Births per woman
0-1	77 224		Turkey	2.46
1-2	77 629		USA	2.06
2-3	79 290		France	1.88
3-4	80 992		Germany	1.40
4-5	84 146		Austria	1.40
5-6	87 812		Hungary	1.30
TOTAL	487 093		Czech Rep.	1.17

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistical Yearbook 2004

Ethnicity

21. Austria's ethnic structure is characterised by the breakdown of the multinational state after World War I and the economically and politically conditioned immigration movements in recent times. In 2001, 91.1% of the population held Austrian nationality. The most important ethnic groups are Yugoslavs (Serbs and Montenegrines), Turks, Bosnians and Herzegovinians as well as Germans (5.5% all together).

Table 4. Population according to nationality, 2001

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Austria	7 322 000	91.1		
Foreign	710 926	8.9		
<i>of which:</i>				
Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro)			132 975	1.7
Turkey			127 226	1.6
Bosnia-Herzegovina			108 047	1.3
Germany			72 218	0.9
Other			270 460	
Total	8 032 926	100.0		5.5

Source: Statistics Austria, Statistical Yearbook 2004:53, Table 2.14

22. The proportion of foreign-born population is the highest in Vienna, with 17.8%. In the other provinces, the proportion lies between 4.5% (Burgenland) and 13.6% (Vorarlberg). The majority of the foreign population (85.9%) comes from European non-EU countries. The language of the country, i.e. the official language, is German. In individual parts of the country, especially on the borders, Croatian, Slovenian and Hungarian are also spoken. The great majority of the population is of the Roman Catholic faith (73.6%); a further 12.4% belong to another identifiable religious orientation, among them a recognisably growing proportion (4.2%) of the Islamic faith. Christian-oriented religious denominations together form a share of slightly more than 80%.

23. Since the 1980s the immigration rate has exceeded the rate for emigration. Geographically the development varies greatly, with a distinctly stronger increase in population in the western provinces and a high concentration above all in the densely populated regions around Vienna and the provincial capitals. This positive immigration balance will also continue in the next 30 years, and will contribute to a growing population in spite of the further decrease in the birth rate and the increase in deaths. At the same time, immigration cannot halt the ageing process. For the year 2015 a ratio of 1:1.75 between the age groups '0 to 14 years old' and '60 and over' is estimated, and for 2050 the projected

ratio will approach 1:3. Currently life expectancy in Austria is 81.7 years for women and 75.8 years for men, and it will increase further.³

Family structures, family support and parental leave

24. Within the last decades, significant changes have emerged in family composition in Austria. Fewer legal marriages are taking place and births continue to decline as young couples defer having children until they complete their studies or become more securely established in their careers. Although the nuclear family is still the predominant family form, married couples with children now make up only 44% of all family constellations, which signifies a decline of 7%. On the other hand, long-term relationships (with and without children) have increased by 5%. The erosion of traditional family patterns is connected with a shift in values and changes in role models. Alongside the nuclear family model, more or less formal relationships of varying duration and composition are now accepted. An increase in the proportion of single parent and 'patchwork families' has occurred, with growing societal acceptance. With increasing life expectancy, relationships between generations are also changing. The age difference is becoming larger between generations as the birth of a first child is delayed increasingly to a higher age. At the same time children have fewer siblings and other relatives, and more and more they experience personally their grandparents' generation.

Table 5. Family types, 2001

Family type	% share	Change in % compared with 1991
Married couple with children	44	-7
Married couple without children	29	+1
Single parents	16	+1
Long-term relationship without children	6	+2
Long-term relationship with children	5	+3
Total	100	

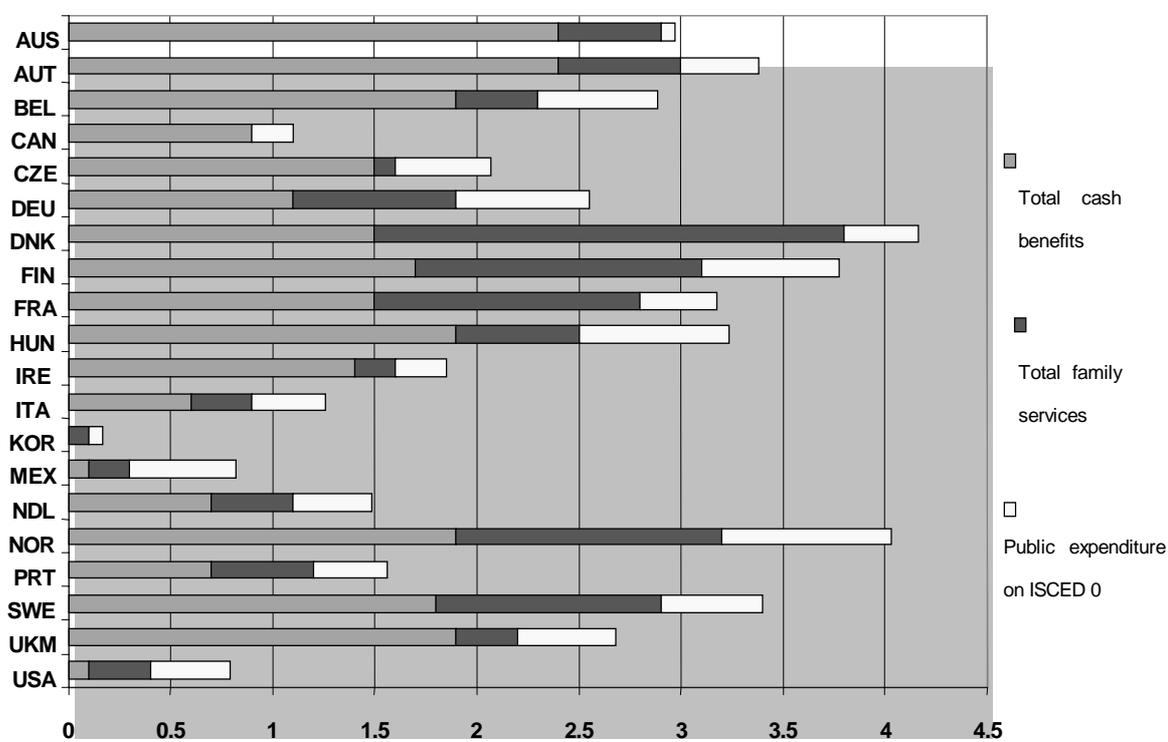
Source: Statistics Austria, Statistical Yearbook 2004

Family support

25. Generous income support measures to families with young children and parental leave entitlements are features of Austrian social policy. This includes a substantial childcare benefit and parental leave measure. Fully 3.3% of GDP is spent on families with young children, which places Austria immediately after the Nordic countries in support for young children and families: In contrast, Austrian governments spends less than 0.5% of GDP on ECEC services for children from birth to 6 years, compared to 1% recommended by the former European Commission Childcare Network, or the current 2% of GDP invested by Denmark and Sweden.

3. Source: ftp://www.statistik.at/pub/neuerscheinungen/bev21jhdt_web.pdf

**Chart 3. Public investment in services for families and young children
in percentages of GDP**



Source: OECD, 2005

The Childcare Benefit

26. Through significant tax concessions, the Austrian tax system gives strong support to dual-earner couples after children reach 3 years. When children are under 3 years, equally strong support - significantly stronger support than in most other countries - is given to a parent caring full-time for a child at home through a combined childcare benefit and parental leave benefit. In 2002, a new Childcare Benefit was introduced which unlike the parental leave benefit does not include employment protection. It is paid over a 30 month period (36 months if the other parent also claims) and targeted at families under a certain income level (€14,600 per annum). Benefit payments are generous and when added to other family allowances and child tax credits can reach \$557 per month, which is equivalent to 38% of APE (average production worker) earnings in Austria. Most parents receiving this benefit are from modest and low-income backgrounds. In addition, the Childcare Benefit beneficiary is covered for 18 months by public health insurance and a contributory retirement pension. The incentive to leave the labour market is particularly strong for women, who, in general, earn 20% to 30% less than men for similar work. Since the introduction of the benefit, employment rates for women with children under 30 months has fallen from 25% to 20% (OECD, 2003).

Parental leave policy

27. During the early 90s, remunerated, employment protected parental leave (based on previous record) was for 24 months with the possibility of part-time work, subject to employer consent, during

the child's second and third year, paid in this case with a partial leave benefit. In 1996, this leave was shortened to 18 months, with the residual six-month payment period being reserved to the other parent. Take-up of this supplementary six-month period by men is low, reaching only 2.5% for the whole country. This means, in fact, that a parent accepting Child Benefit for longer than 24 months is no longer under a job-protected regime. However, because the childcare benefit is generous, Austrian women are now tempted "to provide full-time maternal care for the full 30 month period of Childcare Benefit payments, thereby losing the right to return to their previous job." (OECD, 2003).

Understandings of women's status and family role

28. The status of women has steadily progressed in Austria in recent decades. Because of higher education levels and a strong economy, Austrian women have entered the salaried labour market in ever-greater numbers. Employment rates for women *with children over six years* are high by OECD standards, reaching 75% of women, although the gender wage gap between men and women is calculated to be somewhere between 20% to 30% (OECD, 2003). A raft of legislation, e.g. the 1990 *Family Package* legislation and the 1992/3 *Equality Package* (Österreichische Bundesregierung, 2003) considerably improved women's status and facilitated the compatibility of work and family (generally women's) responsibilities. Maternity regulations were improved, father participation promoted, options for choosing and arranging parental leave were expanded and the legal foundations of part-time work (as opposed to 'marginal' work)⁴ were established. From 1997 to 2000, almost €90 million euros were expended by the federal government to expand child care facilities, but as will be seen in our discussion of 'maternalism' below, with limited success. Although 32-35% of women with children below the age of 3 years, are at work (2003), either full-time or part-time, less than 9% of children below 3 years have access to licensed child care services in Austria (OECD, 2003). This access figure is significantly raised by the Viennese coverage of 24%, whereas in the Tyrol, the access rate is less than 3% for the age group and in Vorarlberg, 2%. The situation contrasts clearly with that pertaining in Norway, where government attention to making services available has led to high participation of women with young children in the labour market, despite strongly felt views about the role of families. If given the opportunity, women with young children will generally choose to work; when the opportunity is denied to them because of lack of services, the traditional male bread-winner family tends to predominate during the early years.

Maternalism and gender inequality

29. In the 1994/95 International Social Survey Programme (ZA, 1997), over 60% of Austrians felt that women with pre-school children should not work outside the home. Despite changing mentalities in the decade since the survey was made, *maternalism* remains strong in Austria (Randall, 2000), that is, the belief that the young child should be cared for in the family, and in particular by the mother. Employment rates for women with children under 3 (and even 6) years remain persistently low at under 35% although reaching 75% when children are between 6 and 16 years. The figure of 35% is boosted considerably by urban employment, which reaches, for this particular group of women, between 44-47% in the larger cities, such as Vienna, Salzburg, Linz, Graz, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck and their surrounding areas. In the rest of the country, children under 3 years are cared for predominantly

4. 'Marginal' employment is the term used in Austria to describe casual jobs earning up to €250 per month, equivalent to 15% of average earnings.

by parents, that is, by mothers. At the age of 3 years, children may be enrolled in kindergarten, but then often on a part-time basis, being collected by mothers for lunch at home. In this way of thinking, the kindergarten is a support to the essentially family-based upbringing of children. Even when children reached school age, *maternalism* is still the underlying assumption in many municipalities in Austria. School hours, at least in the first four grades, are short and children are expected to finish at midday, then go home for lunch and homework – both involving a central role for mothers who, it is assumed, are non-employed or else work part time.

30. The *maternalist* assumption is reinforced by the substantial wage gap between men and women, and by the difficulty for many mothers to have part-time work in their place of employment. Because of childbirth and parental leaves, some employers – not just in Austria - perceive women as less committed to work than men and are reluctant to allow protective part-time labour contracts. The Childcare Benefit package, introduced in 2002 may also reinforce gender assumptions. Unlike many other OECD countries, this benefit is not linked in any way to the use of licensed care facilities, but is cash-in-the-hand for stay-at-home parents, regardless of their work situation. Not surprisingly, shortly after its introduction, an increase in the withdrawal of young mothers from working life was observed: the proportion of women who returned to employment before their child reached 2 1/2 years old dropped from 54% to 35% (*Austrian Background Report*, 2004) or to 30% (OECD, 2003). There is reason to believe that the Childcare Benefit also sent out a signal to the *Bundesländer* not to be proactive in expanding their child care services as, through the benefit, many children will be looked after by mothers at home until they are ready to enter kindergarten.

A traditional division of labour persists

31. As in France or Korea (see the OECD Country Notes), the contribution of women's work to the household budget is welcomed by male partners, but financial partnership is not always accompanied by a partnership model with regard to child-rearing and housework. According to Statistics Austria (2003), taking care of the housework is overwhelmingly the business of women in Austria⁵. In 62% of families (that is, of couples with children) the woman is solely or prevailingly responsible for housekeeping. In only 24% of couples, is there a partnership division of household work. In a further 12% of couples, the woman does the housework jointly with a third person living in the household, while the male partner rarely takes part. Only in exceptional cases, namely in 0.7% of families, is the man prevailingly or solely responsible for the housekeeping, but it is noteworthy that the data of the micro-census of 2002 indicate that in younger couples, housekeeping in partnership is more widespread than among older couples. However, since there was no differentiation in the figures collected of family status, it remains unclear whether this is actually a cohort effect or whether it concerns an effect of family composition. At least in part, the greater distribution of a more egalitarian model in young couples could be attributed to the fact that the proportion of childless couples (who typically practise a more egalitarian division of tasks than couples with children) is higher in the younger cohorts than in the older ones.

5. The following statements on the division of work and family tasks have been taken from the publication "Household Management, Day Care and Nursing Care" (Statistics Austria, 2003) and relate to (married) couples living together, since reliable information exists only for them. For parents living apart, in contrast, patterns of task sharing can be identified only with difficulty.

32. Concerning the care and rearing of children, the division of work is somewhat more balanced. Since 1990, fathers have been eligible to receive parental leave of three months, and take-up has risen steadily to an average of 2.5% (in Vienna, 4.7%). There is also discussion of introducing ‘a use-it or lose-it’ paternal leave of one month. According to figures provided in the Background Report, 54% of all couples take care of their under 15-year-old children jointly. Nevertheless, every third woman is mostly responsible by herself for the care of the children. If the couple practises the traditional single-earner model, the share of women responsible alone rises to just under 50%. In couples in which both partners are employed, this proportion is still almost one third. The continuing gender-specific division of child care also manifests itself in the subjective experience of the parents. Thus, 97% of men who are involved in child care state that they are supported by their (marriage-) partner. Conversely, this is the case for only 57% of mothers. The employment of mothers therefore typically means a double burden through her occupational activity and her responsibility for family work. Since the support by the partner in child care also turns out to be rather moderate when the woman returns to work, the provision of child care plays an important role in the compatibility of family and work life, especially for women.

Prevailing understandings of young children

33. In keeping with maternalist beliefs, the young child in Austria is seen primarily as *an individual-to-be*, and in her present stage of development, as *a child in need of protection*. In many respects, this is a realistic view of childhood, but it can overlook the strengths of children, e.g. their resilience, intellectual capacity and creativity. This sense of the competent child comes through strongly in both the New Zealand and Swedish curricula, the former advocating that feedback to young children “should enhance their sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners” (Carr, 2005) and the latter advocating that “the pre-school should be a place for play, exploration and love of learning, with practice that has the image of a competent child and takes seriously listening to children and respecting their thoughts, theories and dreams. This should lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning.” (Korpi, 2005). In Austria, these strengths are insufficiently reflected in legal texts, educational approaches and beliefs about family roles. According to the *Austrian Background Report*, 2004, the following may be characteristic features of Austrian approaches to young children:

- Austrian legal texts still regard young children not primarily as individual citizens but as attached to family. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – which puts forward the goals of protection, provision and participation - explicitly mentions the importance of children as individuals and their participation in all matters that concern them. The Background Report notes that “participatory rights for children and adolescents appear to be least compatible with Austrian legislation”. The best interests of children are generally decided not in consultation with children, but primarily by adults;
- Education in Austria approaches the child not as an autonomous individual but as the student or adult s/he will become one day. This can lead to a deficit view of childhood, seeing the child as being incomplete intellectually or socially. Linked to this perspective is an educational psychology and practice that uses adult existence as a criterion, and builds learning content and pedagogical approaches to children on this basis.
- In contrast, the view of the child as vulnerable and in need of protection leads to excluding children from certain areas of society and to protecting them within the family until they are sufficiently

mature to enter public life. This view of the child has an influence on the public attitudes to when a child is of age to be taken in charge in child care, and on criteria of good parenting.

34. At the same time, the Background Report acknowledges that “a paradigm shift has been taking place. Children are now seen as persons in their own right, as subjects, in other words as fully-fledged members of society. Current problems involving children, their needs, desires and interests have moved into the spotlight.” This is a positive sign, and in the discussion on issues in Chapter 4, we shall try to show why understandings of children are important both for early childhood pedagogy and public policy.

Chapter 3

Overview of Current ECEC Policy and Provision

Auspices and public policy orientations

35. Austria is a federal country composed of nine provinces or *Bundesländer*, each with its own parliament and government. Because of its federal nature and Constitution, full responsibility for social welfare and early education and care is devolved to each province. Within the context of *social partnership* and the *social economy*, the allocation of public responsibilities is further governed by the principle of *subsidiarity*, namely, that societal tasks are best undertaken by the smallest possible social unit, which, in the case of infants and toddlers is deemed to be the family. Care by the family is interpreted in most of Austria as requiring a traditional division of labour on gender lines with the majority of mothers taking leave from work to care for children, or – if the option is available – to combine part-time care and part-time work. Family and social policy provides fiscal incentives (such as the Childcare Benefit - see paragraph 28 in Chapter 2) during this period to encourage the second family earner to remain at home to rear young children. For these reasons, the demand for crèches and other childcare services has remained weak, with these services catering for less than 10% of young children on a full-time basis.

36. Kindergarten has fared better in terms of government promotion, as public opinion regards it as a necessary social and pre-education service for young children from 3-6 years, to be provided by public or recognised education providers. For this reason, children with an unemployed parent (or parents) also attend. In parallel, the Austrian family benefit and tax system withdraws childcare benefit at the age of 3 years, but provides other fiscal incentives at this moment in order to encourage the dual earner family. In 1962, the kindergarten system was declared Landessache – a matter for the provinces. The Austrian ECEC system is, therefore, highly decentralised. The provincial (Länder) governments have full responsibility for the organisation, regulation and funding of ECEC services.

37. At central government level, the Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations defines the framework that governs maternal, infant and youth welfare. Hence, early education and care of young children at federal level falls within the competence of this department, and since 2003 there has been a commission for “External child care in accordance with needs”. A fundamental aspect of the work of the department is to maintain and strengthen family influence in child-rearing and to create a framework for child development within this orientation. The Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture is the competent authority for the legal foundation of the training institutes for kindergarten pedagogues (like school organisation, law on school instruction, the framework curriculum) for allocating resources to training as well as for the in-service training for teachers from the institutes. There is, however, “no compulsory nationwide ‘educational plan’ for early childhood

facilities.” (Austrian Background Report, 2004). In Austria, ECEC is firmly within the area of competence of the provinces, and each province has its own kindergarten law.

Basic conception and organisation of services

38. At first view, the basic organisation of children’s services in Austria seems split between child care and kindergarten, but this is an impression given more by the age at which kindergarten begins than by any administrative division or conception of services. Both crèches and kindergarten come under the same kindergarten laws in all provinces. Municipalities have the primary responsibility to provide both types of service and, with the exception of family day care and parent-toddler groups, most services are staffed by personnel with similar grades and trained in the same institutions. Conceptually, too, there is a fundamental unity of approach: the concept of pedagogy which brings together three important approaches to children – *Betreuung* (care), *Erziehung* (upbringing) and *Bildung* (education in the broad sense) – is shared across all children’s services in Austria. We shall return later to this concept of pedagogy in speaking of the training of kindergarten pedagogues (almost entirely feminine), but simply note here the fundamental unity of the approach to young children across services in Austria. In addition, a falling birth rate is also moving the field to greater integration along age lines. Fewer children has caused excess capacity to exist in many kindergartens, and hence the creation by municipalities and other providers of mixed-age services within the kindergartens. Child care services remain underdeveloped, however, in all provinces except Vienna,

39. Children’s services are perhaps more divided in terms of provision: 70% are provided directly by public authorities and 30% by private providers, in particular the Catholic parishes, but also by non-profit associations, family organisations, businesses and companies, and by the many private persons who operate family day care (childminder) services. These different providers bring their own emphases to the centre environment and learning programmes, e.g. the religious training provided in Catholic kindergartens or the partnership between children and adults practised in many parent-toddler groups. Provincial law and regulations govern the conduct of all services, and whoever the provider, all come under the same regulations and supervision. It was difficult for the OECD team to estimate how rigorously regulation and inspection processes are in fact applied, as significant differences in quality were noted across the services and centres visited. Certainly, some of the voluntary and private services visited in various parts of the country seemed to lack supervisory and pedagogical support, but this impression of poor quality in some services needs to be followed up by a proper national evaluation.

40. The major centre-based services are of three types: i) *Krippen*, that is centre-based crèche services for children under 3 years; ii) *Kindergarten* or socio-educational centres for children aged 3-6 years, open either full-day or half-day, with, in about 250 kindergartens, *mixed-age services* which include some children under 3 years; and iii) *Hort* services, which provide out-of-school provision (OSP) for children aged 6-10 years, generally on school premises. The other major service forms are *parent-toddler groups* run by parent associations and *family day care* (FDC), which is becoming a relatively popular choice for parents. These last two services fall outside kindergarten legislation and inspection, but in some provinces, e.g. Styria, are supervised by government inspectors.

Table 6. ECEC service types and provision in Austria

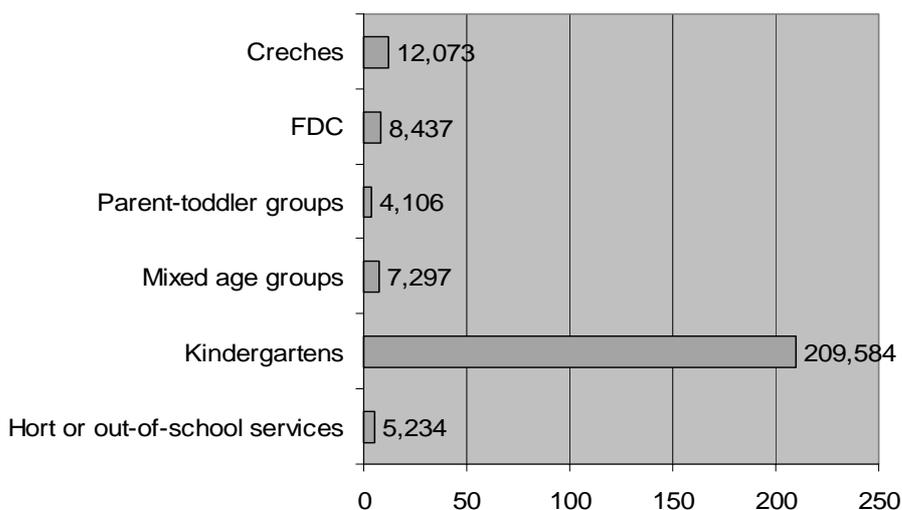
	Age group	% of age cohort	Location	Providers	Public subsidies	Opening hours
Crèches	0-3 years	Less than 5%	Centre-based	Mostly public	Yes, for public and non-profit	Full-day
FDC	0-3 years	Less than 3%	Home of carer	Mostly private but data is scarce	Yes, in licensed provision	Normally, full-day
Parent/play groups	0-4 years	Less than 2%	Centre-based	Parent groups	Depends on province and municipality	Generally sessional or half-day
Mixed-age groups Ks	Mostly 2-6 years	Less than 3% of under-3s	Centre-base (in Ks)	Kindergarten providers	Yes	Generally half-day for 2-3s
Kindergartens	3-6 years	84% (95% of 5-6 years)	Centre-based	70% public 30% private, mostly non profit	Yes	Mostly full-day
Hort and OSP	6-10 years	10.5% but possibly more	Centre-based (in school)	mostly public, School providers	Yes	Before and after school

Note: FDC = family day care; OSP = out-of-school provision

Access to ECEC services in Austria

41. According to the *Austrian Background Report*, there are currently 488.100 children under the age of 6 years in Austria, 232.300 children 0-3 years, and 255.800 children 3-6 years. In the following paragraphs, access rates will be provided for the various services and provinces. Readers should note that our references to ‘child care’ include crèches, family day care and parent groups. Figures for kindergarten attendance (in principle 3-6 years) will include some children under 3 years as about 5% of kindergartens now offer mixed-age services. In Austria, child care services are used by a small minority of families with only 9% of children being placed in child care outside the home. Families are therefore main carers of 91% of children 0-3 years. In contrast, over 87% of children 3-6 years attend kindergarten, either full-day (78%) or half-day (22%).

Chart 4. Numbers of children in different service types

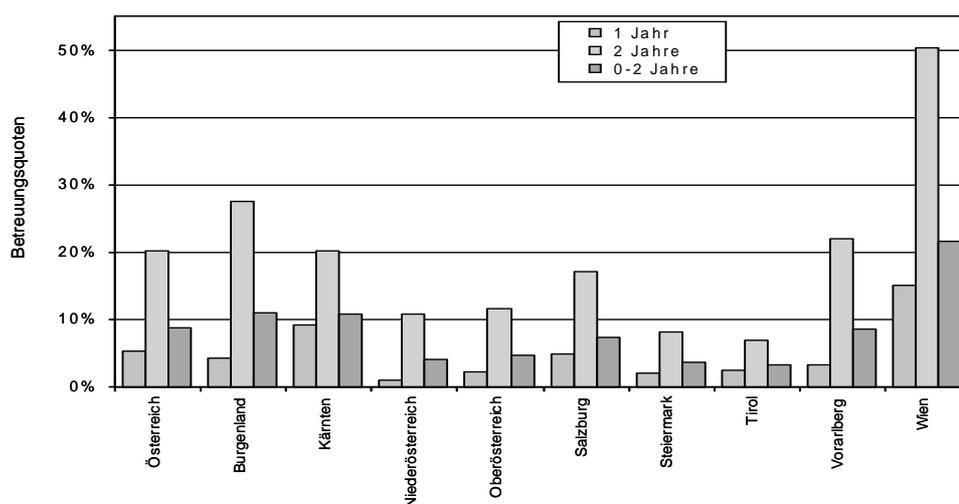


Source: Jugendforschung, 2004

The different service types

Creches (Krippen) are found most often in the larger Austrian urban centres, and cater for children less than 3 years old: The mothers of these children (8.9% of total) are generally employed (80%), and include many single mothers. According to the Austrian Background Report (2004), crèches are “specially geared toward meeting the needs of infants and toddlers, and are based on close co-operation with parents.” However, apart from Vienna, coverage by crèche services is low and reaches less than 5% of 0-3 children across the rest of the country.

Chart 5. Enrolments in formal childcare (0-3 years) across the Austrian provinces



42. *Family day care* (referred to as ‘child-minders’ in Austria) caters essentially for children 0-3 years, often on a half-day basis. Though providing a service for only 8,473 children (about 3% of the

0-3 cohort), it is becoming a popular choice among parents as it is more available in rural areas than crèches and, as a substitute family, may accord better with current Austrian conceptions of child care. Family day care also offers greater flexibility than crèches. Thanks to the efforts of the Childminders' Federation and the provincial associations of child-minders, family day care is also becoming more professional. These associations encourage their members to take initial and further training, e.g. the Austrian Federation of Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents and Childminders' Associations offers a two-year training course for childminders. A quarter of licensed family day carers have already taken this course, and another 22% are pedagogues with an official diploma from an Institute for Early Childhood Education and Care. Länder requirements for licensed providers vary greatly, ranging from 60 to 360 teaching units, including practical training. With regard to organisation, childminders can be divided into two groups: the first are employed by "private supporters", that is, they form part of a network which offers them various types of support. The others childminders are independent, and although they may benefit from salary levels and work conditions negotiated by the networks, they are not regulated and need not comply with network conditions.

43. *Parent-toddler and play groups*: The common thread across these forms of care is that parent associations organise and manage these structures. Depending on the province, different regulations apply with regard to hiring staff, but in all groups, parents also take on both organisational and pedagogical responsibilities. As a result of the associative structure, there is close cooperation between parents and educators, and a family-like environment is favoured for the children. The first parent-toddler groups were founded after the student protests in 1968, and at that time, they differentiated themselves from the pedagogical practice of kindergartens. Today, parent groups are found essentially in Tyrol (92), Vorarlberg (88) and Carinthia (39), and generally operate on a half-day basis. In the whole country, these groups cater for 4,106 children, that is, less than 2% of the 0-3 cohort, but they involve parents in a constructive and positive way in the early socialisation and education of their children.

44. *Mixed-age groups*: Another form of child care (and education) that is increasing in popularity is mixed-age grouping, now practised in a growing number of kindergartens. Again, convenience and lack of other child care options may be at the root of this choice, but it may also show a growing acceptance among Austrian parents of professional centre-based care for children under 3 years. In this choice, Austrian parents may be about to follow middle-class parents in France, Norway, Sweden and other countries, who prefer professional services to family day care. If the trend further develops, it could well bring further integration of services for children 0-6 years, and a greater stress on the developmental and education aspects of child care. 250 kindergartens cater for 7,297 children (less than 3% of the cohort) in this way. Children under the age of 3 years are allowed to make up a maximum of one third of the children in the group.

45. *Kindergartens*: Kindergarten is the predominant ECEC service type in Austria and serves almost 84% of children aged 3-6 years with 95% of 5-6 year olds in attendance (2003 figures). Fairly wide differences in coverage exist, however, according to region, with full coverage of 5-6 year olds in most provinces, but significantly lower figures in Vienna (87.5%) and Carinthia (90.6%). For 4-year-old children, coverage across the country averages 90.4%, with five provinces providing places for well over 90%, but in other provinces lack of demand or gaps in provision or exist, e.g. in Carinthia, only 77.4% of 4-year-olds attend a kindergarten facility.

46. More than half of kindergartens (58.9%) offer full-day (8 to 10 hours, depending on province, community or provider) opening times without a break at midday. A further 18.9% offer full-day care with a break during midday, while 22.2% are open only half days (Austrian Background Report, 2004). Similar to the situation in relation to coverage, differences also exist between the provinces with regard to operating times. In Vienna nearly all facilities (98.0%) are open full day without a break. In Tyrol and Vorarlberg, the proportions of full-day facilities with care at mid-day are respectively 13.8% and 7%, but full-day places with a break at mid-day are the rule (that is, someone must come to take charge of the child during the lunch break). In contrast, half-day facilities are the rule in Styria, with nearly two thirds of all care facilities offering only half-day places.

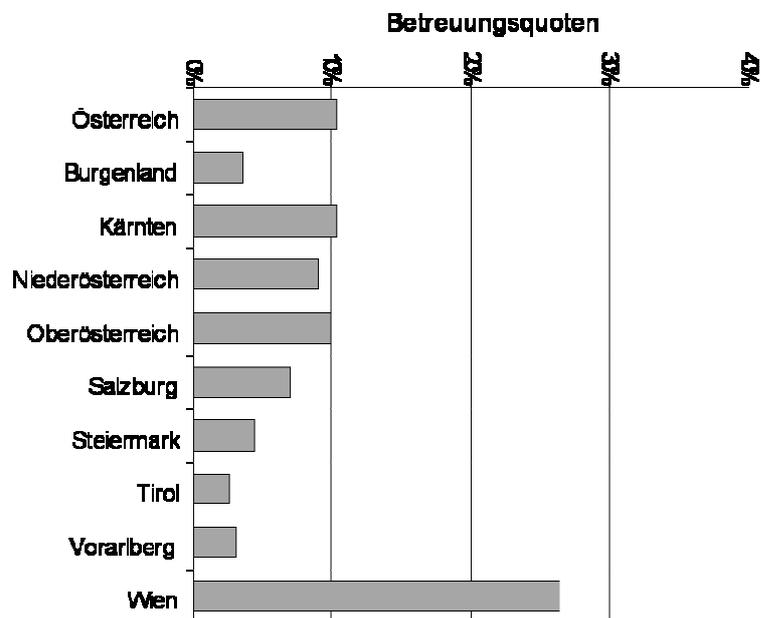
Table 7. Kindergartens listed according to opening hours (percentage)

Provinces	All-day with no midday break	All-day with break	Half-day
Burgenland	71.9	15.1	13.0
Carinthia	64.3	0.8	34.9
Lower Austria	68.1	31.7	0.2
Upper Austria	70.2	6.8	23.0
Salzburg	63.2	4.3	32.5
Styria	32.3	3.2	64.5
Tyrol	13.8	57.2	29.0
Vorarlberg	7.0	76.3	16.7
Vienna	98.0	-	2.0
Total	58.9	18.9	22.2

Source: Statistics Austria, Crèches, Kindergartens and After-School Childcare, 2002/03

47. *Hort* or *out-of-school provision* (OSP) for children 6-9 years: According to Statistics Austria (2004), institutional out-of-school provision for the age group 6-9 years amounts to 10.4% on average in Austria. However, the same source indicates that the percentage of children in this age group cared for outside the home in some kind of arrangement amounted to 17.5% in 2003/04. This indicates a significant shortfall in formal provision. Again, national averages hide differences between the individual provinces. In Vienna (2003), every fourth child (25%) attended an after-school day-care centre (or other care institution outside of school). In Carinthia, Upper Austria and Lower Austria only every tenth child had access. In Burgenland, Tyrol and Vorarlberg, OSP is even less extensive and reaches only 3% of children. In general, the availability of *Hort* and child care are more available in urban than in rural areas. In addition to regional availability, the respective family situation and the extent of the mother's employment determine whether out-of-school services will be used: 80% of children using *Hort* have employed mothers.

Chart 6. Out-of-school provision for children 6 - 9-years in 2003



Source: Statistics Austria, 2004

Special needs access, inter-cultural and diversity programming

48. The OECD Directorate for Education classifies special educational needs in the following manner:

- **Category A:** Refers to the educational needs of students suffering from organic disorders attributable to organic pathologies, related to sensory, motor or neurological defects, e.g. blind and partially sighted, deaf and partially hearing, severe and profound mental handicap, multiple handicaps, etc. These are conditions that affect students from all social classes and occupations, generally around 5% of any population. Typically, adequate measuring instruments and agreed criteria are available.
- **Category B:** Refers to educational needs of students who have difficulties in learning which do not appear to be directly or primarily attributable to factors which would lead to categorisation as 'A' or 'C'. For instance, students with learning disabilities, as defined in the USA, are classified here. These difficulties are often temporary in nature, and afflict a small percentage – around 1% - of any population.
- **Category C:** Refers to educational needs of students that are considered to arise primarily from socio-economic, cultural and/or linguistic factors. There is present some form of background, generally considered to be a disadvantage, for which education seeks to compensate. This is a large group ranging, in many OECD countries, from 15% to 25% of children in any given urban population.

49. In Austria, Category A children are generally cared for at home, in special kindergartens and in integrated groups in mainstream kindergartens. During the OECD visit, the team did not have the opportunity to visit a special needs kindergarten, but according to reports, these kindergartens are well

staffed and managed. The difficulty – as in many other countries – is that there are insufficient places for severely handicapped children. Special kindergartens cater for 0,9% of the child population 0-6 years, which according to the Associations is greatly insufficient for actual needs.

50. There is a growing desire on the part of the parents of children with handicaps or other organic disorders to place them in mainstream kindergartens. Again, according to representatives of Integration Austria, and despite the Austrian Law on Persons with Disabilities, parents encounter many difficulties in placing their children in integrated groups. Unlike the Nordic countries, children with disabilities in Austria do not have first call on services and municipalities can be reluctant to take on the extra costs involved, such as extra staff or renovations of kindergarten buildings and classrooms to facilitate access for these children. At the same time, as we witnessed in a kindergarten in Vienna, there can be much good will on the part of staff and parents to establish integrated groups. In integrated kindergartens, the staff ratio is higher, though this is regulated differently from province to province. Usually a kindergarten teacher for children with special needs (with an additional four semester training), a regular kindergarten pedagogue and a helper are employed. Overall, however, the OECD team did not encounter at federal level a clear and mandatory policy about the inclusion of children with special needs, which means in practice that some *Bundesländer* are pro-active, while in others, families and children with special needs do not receive the support that they need.

Box 1. Integrated community care in Carinthia

AVS (Working Association of Social Welfare) is a large non-profit social welfare association and the largest purveyor of social services in Carinthia. Financed by the Federal Province and by client fees, donations, and subsidies from its member associations, its task is the consultation, support, therapy and care of over 10,000 clients in the province. Its services for young children include:

- *The mobile early childhood support team*, that is, an ambulatory team of qualified special education pedagogues who visit families throughout the province to identify developmental delays. Most disabilities or delays are detected in the first year-and-a-half of children's lives, with some minor developmental delays appearing later in the kindergarten or early school years. Families are visited on a regular basis, and when children remain at home, the pedagogues guide and support parents in elaborating and implementing an individualised programme for their child.
- *The integrative, pedagogical early childhood support team*: This team of pedagogues is responsible for the integration and special support of special needs children in the kindergartens. Their work allows also mainstream children to experience everyday life with special needs children. The team promotes each child's possibilities for development, and consults, supports and accompanies the efforts of parents. About 85% of children with special needs are able to be integrated into the kindergartens.
- Four *special kindergartens* are also available in the province where children with special difficulties, e.g. cochlear implants, are supported and cared for individually.
- *Psycho-therapeutic services* for young children, both mobile and fixed, where troubled young children and their families can be counselled and supported.

Source: Arbeitsvereinigung der Sozialhilfe, Kärntens, 2004

Intercultural and diversity programming

51. Conscious of the growing diversity of young children in schools and the difficulties that children whose first language is not German can have in acquiring an effective mastery of German, the Austrian government has been seeking in recent years to promote the learning of German before children start school. In this regard, day care facilities and kindergarten play a key role as they

promote the acquisition of language in a playful and authentic way for children, in addition to performing an important integrative function. Sound learning theory and pedagogy also require that the child's mother tongue should be fostered in parallel, not only from a minority rights perspective but also in order to safeguard the child's socio-emotional development and facilitate her acquisition of basic concepts. Recently, the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture financed a project with the significant title *Vorschulische Integration durch Sprache(n)wissen* or *Preschool integration through knowledge of language(s)*. The results of the project have been published as a brochure, which presents the theoretical foundations and the pedagogical guidelines in a well-founded and clear way. The pedagogical orientation is intercultural and includes a high regard for and a fostering of the family languages of the children. This project and the brochure are only the first part of various measures planned throughout Austria. Among the further measures are: gathering materials, improved in-service training of kindergarten educators – on the basis of the VIS approach (*Vorschulische Integration durch Sprache(n)wissen*). Depending on the province, the standing of intercultural pedagogy in training varies. In the government institute for kindergarten teaching in Vienna, for example, intercultural education is integrated into the subjects, didactics and pedagogy, as well as being a part of the final examinations. (Vienna City Council, September 2004). In addition, as Vienna remains a highly multi-cultural city (see next paragraph), inter-cultural education is an elective subject for all students. With a view to the support and training of early education and care staff, the city of Vienna has also formed an “intercultural network”. Through the network, information is collected about further education and pedagogical materials in the field of intercultural work, and language promotion exchanged. As part of this network, a lending system for foreign-language and multilingual picture books is being developed (Vienna City Council, September, 2004).

52. With regard to staffing, the multicultural situation presents a significant challenge in Vienna, and presumably in other parts of Austria. In municipal kindergartens in Vienna, the proportion of foreign children (children with a non-Austrian passport) is about 23.6%. In comparison, the distribution in the staff is as follows: from a total corps of 5,500 kindergarten educators, 250 are bilingual educators (about 5%), assisted by 10 mother-tongue caregivers for a few hours a day (teacher training is not a prerequisite for this work), and one skilled worker for “start-up help” in institutions with a high proportion of foreign children. If there are more than 30% foreign children in their institution, kindergarten teachers in the city of Vienna receive “hardship pay”, i.e. a higher salary. The issue will be treated again in Chapters 4 and 5, but it is clear that centres and staff dealing with bilingual children need greater support and should not be obliged to see the situation as a ‘hardship’.

Box 2. A bilingual kindergarten in Carinthia

The Kindergarten Fund Law (2001) of the Government of Carinthia ensured the establishment of bi- and multi-lingual kindergartens in the Slovene ethnic groups settlement areas of Carinthia. These areas comprise, also, at least one elementary school with bi-lingual classes. Since the proclamation of this Law, the government provides funding for the operating costs of bi-lingual/multilingual kindergartens, advises the providers on questions regarding language teaching and child care, and evaluates annually, the language teaching concept (the program) offered to children in these settings.

The OECD Team visited a private bi-lingual kindergarten in Eberndorf, established for children aged 3-6 years by Slovenian organisations. The kindergarten facility was a home, privately owned by a community leader, that had been converted into an aesthetically interesting and effective two-level centre for young children. The children's language backgrounds were diverse – some spoke Slovenian dialects at home, others spoke a language close to standard Slovenian and still others did not use Slovenian at home. Prior to entry to the kindergarten the Slovenian children were, to some extent, already acquainted with German language through the media and German-speaking surroundings.

Pedagogues in the kindergarten, on appointment, met additional requirements related to their own language competences. Observations revealed that they had strategies in place to monitor the progress of the children as bi- multi-lingual language users. They designed language-teaching concepts that were sensitive to the specific language backgrounds of the children and maintained close liaison with the families and community surrounding the kindergarten. Children from the kindergarten move on to bi-lingual classes within the elementary school after completion of kindergarten. There was good evidence of fluency in both languages among the children attending the kindergarten.

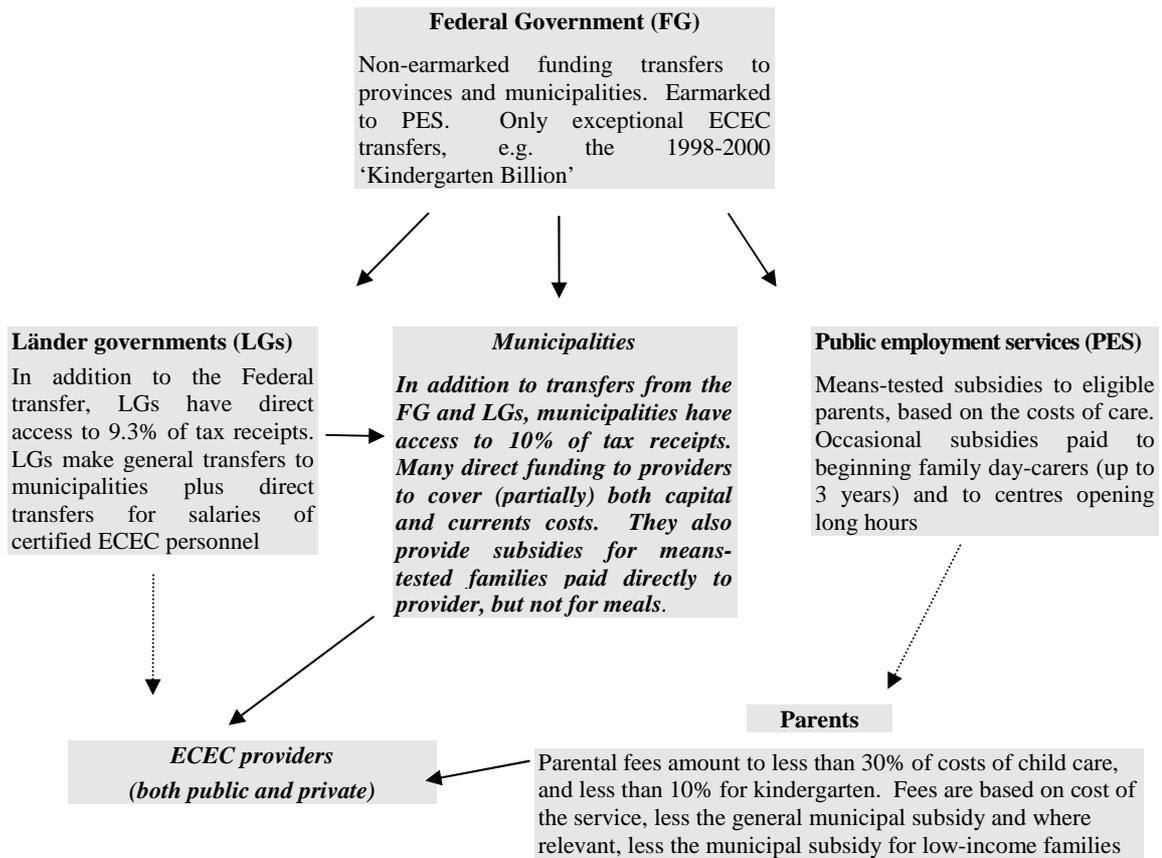
The local community were actively engaged in maintaining their kindergarten and the quality of the program offered to children. There was clear commitment to facilitate children's mastery of both Slovenian and German through play-based experience. The support of the local authorities for such kindergartens makes good educational and economic sense: the possession of two cultures and bilingualism are extremely enriching for young children, and in later years will contribute significantly to good cross-border relations and trade.

The funding of ECEC services in Austria

53. Since 1970, municipalities provide the greatest share of funding toward ECEC services in Austria: 60-70% of costs are taken in charge by municipal budgets; 15-25% by the *Bundesländer* governments, and some 15% (including child care) is provided by parental fees, with again a fairly wide variation across provinces (OECD, 2003), e.g. kindergartens in Lower Austria do not charge parental fees for the morning session, but parents contribute to lunch and the afternoon session. . A usual form of funding is for the municipality to pay the salaries of qualified kindergarten educators.

54. Considerable differences exist across provincial subsidies, in particular in the amounts paid to private day care facilities. As a rule, facilities run by for-profit providers do not receive any financial support. Facilities maintained by recognised non-profit associations, parent groups and church organisations receive municipal subsidies under certain conditions. Grants are made either according to discretion or when the corresponding requirements for receiving support in the province's laws are met. As taxes can only be collected by the federal government, municipalities receive the necessary money through financial transfers based on the principle of equalisation. The funding flows are as follows:

Chart 5. ECEC funding flows in Austria



Source: OECD 2003

55. Overall, public expenditure on kindergarten services in Austria amounts to 0.43% of GDP, that is, a public expenditure figure of approximately \$4,500 per child in an ECEC service. This figure compares poorly to expenditure on pupils in primary (\$6,571 per child), and lower secondary (\$8,316 per child) schools – in particular, as child-staff ratios need to be low in ECEC services if quality is to be ensured. In addition, ECEC services are generally full-day services in Austria, leading to higher costs. In sum, although slightly higher than the OECD average, the investment is much weaker than that made by leading European countries: both Denmark and Sweden spend around 2% of GDP on early childhood services (expenditure figures for these countries found in *Education at a Glance* (OECD, 2005) refer only to the pre-school class for children 6-7 years). Nordic investment per child is double that of Austria. In 1996, the European Childcare Network had already recommended a minimum investment - if quality were to be achieved – of at least 1% of GDP in early childhood services. The low investment in services in Austria inevitably impacts on the salaries and status of early childhood personnel, and the quality of services provided. The issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Table 8. Distribution of expenditure on kindergartens in Austria, 2001

Public expenditure			Private expenditure	
Share of total expenditure = 80.1%			Share of total expenditure = 19.9%	
Total public expenditure: 921.1 million euros Expenditure per child = €4,510 euros			Total private expenditure: €237.3 million euros	
Vienna	Provinces (without Vienna)	Municipalities (without Vienna)	Parents	Private funders
€221 million =24% of public expenditure	€148.2 million = 16% of public expenditure	€552.8 million euros = 60% of public expenditure	€112.4 million euros or 9.4% of total expenditure	€124.9 million euros = 10.5% of total expenditure

Source: Austrian Background Report, 2004

Contribution of parents to the operating costs

56. The majority of ECEC facilities in Austria require fees. In only a few facilities are no parent contributions levied, e.g. for the morning session in the provincial kindergartens of Lower Austria. The fees are usually on a sliding scale according to the net household income. For a place in a crèche, parents pay an average of €145 per child, and for a kindergarten place, they pay on average €60. The amount of the contribution varies between the provinces and depends on the extent of care, but overall, Austrian parents pay only around 9% of costs at kindergarten level. In some provinces, the levying of contributions occurs within the social welfare framework of a sliding scale according to the net household income of the family, e.g. in Lower Austria for afternoon facilities, Upper Austria, Tyrol.

57. Child care in play and parent-toddlers groups as well as care by a childminder are significantly more expensive than kindergarten costs as these services are outside the Kindergarten Act, and have not a right to the same level of subsidy. In 2003, parents paid €224 for a full-day place in a subsidised parent-toddler group and €128 for half-day care. The fees for childminders cannot be precisely specified because of different financial rules specific to the provinces, and the resulting wide variations in fees. Depending on the region and the extent of care, fees range from around €100 to €600 per month.

Quality and quality indicators

58. The quality of care and education in ECEC facilities depends both on structural inputs (level of funding, the licensing and quality standards defined, the size of groups and the staff-child ratios, the quality of the training of the ECEC workforce....) and other aspects of quality such as process aspects, orientation quality and management quality. For reasons of clarity and comparability, we have chosen to examine some of the more quantifiable aspects of the Austrian system and have selected the following five areas for comment:

- Licensing and regulatory regimes;
- Staffing, training and work conditions;
- Curriculum and pedagogy;
- Data collection, evaluation and research;
- Parent and community involvement.

59. We are conscious, however, that quality in ECEC depends also on *procedural aspects*, in particular, the quality of the *pedagogical* relationship between staff, parents and children⁶, on *orientation quality* by which is meant the level of attention and conceptualisation that governments bring to early childhood policy, e.g. the quality of the guiding national pedagogical framework; legislation, regulation, the building of consensus; the training and support given to educators, leading in turn to their pedagogical concepts and values, the promotion of the research context...; and on *management quality*, which consists not only in using effective and participatory management techniques, but connects also to the professional quality of providers and municipalities and their conceptualisation of education, in particular of its goals and links with wider society. An example of this kind of thinking was provided to the OECD team in their visit to Villach in Carinthia:

Box 3. The quality development process in Villach, Carinthia

Located in a border, tourist area in Carinthia, the municipality of Villach enjoys a history of stable support to its ECEC services. The municipality is sensitive to the surrounding economic and cultural contexts and seeks to ensure that Italian, Slovenian and English are encouraged in its schools, in addition to German. To facilitate adult participation in the paid workforce, places in ECEC services are guaranteed to children of employed parents. In addition, under a policy of inclusion, children with special needs are given priority to places in the services. The Municipal Council is committed to ensuring an effective ECEC system that supports young children's development, facilitates women's contribution to the economy and enables smooth progression into the education system beyond kindergarten.

Strong leadership and close co-operation between the Mayor's office, the head of the ECEC Department and the ECEC inspector/advisor has enabled a coherent quality development process to be established in Villach, which is evident in the wide range of local services on offer. In the ECEC field, access opportunities and the quality improvement process are based on both substantial financing and in-service education of the heads of services. The heads undertake detailed professional development work on managerial tasks, observation skills, staff support techniques and working with parents. The municipal ECEC department sees investment in these leaders as critical to the development of team skills among staff, which in turn ensures sensitive, responsive programs enacted according to the interests and needs of the children and families. In this leadership development, careful attention is given to content, to people and personalities. The talents that reside within the group are recognised and incorporated into the professional development process. This approach has been successful in changing the pedagogy to be more sensitive and responsive to the diverse families being supported by the services.

With heads of centres who are skilled as team workers and pedagogues who are linked across all centres, an integrated team approach to development, planning and collaboration has emerged. The pedagogues work together for a week at the beginning of each year. A conference phase includes seminars on key topics of interest and concern. This is followed by whole-group visits to local municipalities to explore context and build observation and evaluative skills, or participation in seminars on topics of concern or interest. For example, recent concerns about child fitness and physical development engendered a focus on gross motor skills and movement, resulting in a journey by the pedagogues to the mountains in nearby Italy. Such events not only build team cohesion, staff skills, knowledge, and values for life and work, but they also allow creative ideas to emerge that are subsequently built into the programmes and interactions with young children. Funding to support this development process and the 200 staff engaged in services is provided by the municipality. The funding is viewed as an investment in the learning and cultural development of the staff and children in the

6. We use the word *pedagogical* here not in the narrow sense normally reserved for this word in English (referring to effective techniques of instruction) but in the broader sense of pedagogy that derives from the German language tradition, in which *Betreuung*, *Erziehung* and *Bildung* are combined in the educational approach.

region. Each centre produces a pedagogical concept that guides the programme for a determined period until the next review.

The quality development process also places real importance on working with parents, among other aims to ensure the transparency of ECEC systems and processes. This focus enables a democratic and participatory atmosphere to flourish in the services. Parents are free to observe and/or take part look in ways that best suit their situations. The type of parental involvement achieved is flexible and responsive to family functioning, workplace commitments and child needs. Depending on their need or situation, parents take different roles as clients for family support services, participants in parent education programs and producers of materials and services that assist the centre programs. They are also viewed as co-educators and as information resources for staff, and they are surveyed periodically to obtain data about their needs as well as for feedback about service effectiveness and impact on their children.

The quality development process is grounded in evidence about what works for children – and stresses the need for transparency to parents. Feedback is analysed at municipality level and aspects of services needing attention are highlighted for further development. When the OECD team was in Villach, a survey addressing the broad development and progress of each child was in progress.

Licensing and regulatory regimes

60. In Austria, provincial laws specify the legal requirements for the major child care institutions to operate, such as operational schedules, the employment of qualified personnel, facility standards, etc. Requirements are more comprehensive and stringent for kindergartens and crèches than for other child care facilities not regulated by kindergarten laws. Child care institutions are visited by inspectors, on average, once per year. Non-routine inspections may also occur if parents complain about a service. Inspectors may access the building and review operational records, act as primary assessors of quality and indicate quality shortcomings. If problems are apparent, the agency receives written notification from the municipality and must initiate necessary improvements. In sum, regulation, enforcement and respect for licensing and quality benchmarks is generally of a good standard in Austria, although some services – in particular, non-public services - visited by the OECD team raised concern about basic safety standards.

Regulatory framework and quality assurance

61. As legislative competence for ECEC in Austria is a provincial responsibility, there are no nationwide standards on educational and teaching quality. Since each province regulates this area independently, it is difficult to make statements that are accurate for the whole of Austria. The Charlotte Bühler Institute (CBI) has drawn up a comparative synopsis of the provincial kindergarten laws, based on a selected catalogue of quality criteria.⁷ (Charlotte Bühler Institute “Mehr Qualität für Kinder. Qualitätsstandards und Zukunftsperspektiven für den Kindergarten” – CBI “More quality for children. Quality standards and perspectives for the future for kindergarten”, Vienna, 2004):

7. Hartmann, W. and Stoll, M. (2004). *Mehr Qualität für Kinder – Qualitätsstandards und Zukunftsperspektiven für den Kindergarten* (More quality for children - quality standards and future perspectives for kindergarten). Volume 1 of the series of the Charlotte Bühler Institute. Vienna: öbv&hpt.

Box 4. Comparison of provincial regulations - Charlotte Bühler Institute

1. Room requirements

- The number of square meters per child varies between 1.5 and 3 sq. m.
- A space for children to move, usually with a size of 60 sq.m., is regulated in the law on kindergartens in all the provinces (except Vienna). The regulations prescribe at least one movement room per kindergarten in Upper Austria and Vorarlberg; one room for multi-group kindergartens in Lower Austria, Burgenland and Tyrol; one for each two groups in Upper Austria, Salzburg and Carinthia; and one for every three groups in Steiermark.
- A piece of open ground or a play area outdoors is compulsory in the regulations of all the provinces with the exception of the provinces of Vienna and Tyrol.
- As far as staff rooms are concerned, a work room or an office is required in Upper Austria, Salzburg, Steiermark, Tirol, Kärnten and Vorarlberg for every kindergarten; in Lower Austria and Burgenland only for multi-group kindergartens. Upper Austria, Steiermark, Tyrol and Kärnten prescribe an (additional) staff room for multi-group kindergartens, and Vienna prescribes this for every kindergarten.
- Further legal regulations concern the cloakroom, the toilet facilities and storerooms.

2. *Material equipment.* The provincial laws do not provide any regulations for this.

3. *Maximum group size or staff-child ratio.* For kindergartens all the provinces regulate a maximum group size, which as a rule is around 25 to 28 children. With special permission and in exceptional cases, however, this maximum number can be exceeded by another three to five children in most of the provinces. According to the Austrian kindergarten study of 1994, almost every fifth kindergarten teacher had 28 and more children in her group; in practice, the special regulations for exceeding the maximum group size are employed in many cases.

- In integration groups in kindergartens, the maximum group size varies according to the province between 15-20 children, of whom no more than three to five may be children with a handicap.
- In crèches the staff-child ratio is 1:10; in self-governed parent-toddler groups, a group may not be larger than 15 children.

4. *Availability or preparation times for teaching staff.* Almost all the provinces (except Vienna) regulate the number of preparation hours per week or per day. Comparing the provinces, the weekly preparation time varies from 5 to 15 hours for a full-time staff member.

5. *Closing hours, holiday regulations.* The legal holiday regulation for child care facilities follows or is adapted to those of the compulsory schools in almost all the provinces. As a result, the closing hours or holiday times exceed the holiday entitlement of employed parents to a considerable extent. Providers can exercise some discretion in this regard, as their responsibility is to regulate the closing hours according to local needs.

6. *Further education of the professional staff.* Further education is regulated in all the provinces with the exception of Vienna. Most of the provinces oblige the supporters of facilities to grant the professional staff further education days annually. Comparing the provinces, the regulations differ in:

- the number of days (3 to 5 days per year),
- eligibility for training: whether only the faculty and group management receive further education, or the helpers as well,
- whether participation in further education is voluntary or compulsory. For example, Steiermark regulates compulsory further education.

7. *Supervision and professional consultation.* Child care facilities are under the supervision of the provincial government, or in Vienna the competent City Council department. They are thus inspected at regular intervals by inspectors.

- The supervisory bodies must ensure that inspectors fulfil certain professional requirements: training as graduate kindergarten teacher / management test / many years of professional experience / further education seminars or additional training (e.g. conflict management, leadership skills). However, there is no specific training for this inspection activity.

- Regular inspections take place at least once a year, in some cases more frequently. In specific circumstances (e.g. parent complaints), there can be special inspections.
- The tasks of the inspectors are defined differently in the different provinces. In some provinces quality inspections are also carried out by other offices (e.g. Lower Austria: regular checks by inspectors / inspections by building authorities / professional consultation by pedagogic specialist staff). At the same time, especially in agency provision, some inspectors may have to carry out all of these tasks alone, and across a wide number of settings.
- The investigation activity of the inspectors is related to the whole operation of the facility; in some provinces it is restricted to certain focal points. The inspectors must be granted access to the facility and a look at the operational records. The inspectors are in addition in principle the persons to go to for all people who determine lack of quality in child care facilities. If deficiencies are determined in inspections, a written report is made to the supporting agencies or to the superior office. Improvements are initiated and remedies are found. At the teaching level, depending on the problem, further education measures, supervision, personal or other measures are implemented.

8. *Measures for guaranteeing and improving quality.* The evaluation of the quality of the facilities currently takes place primarily through the *Träger* or supporting agencies. Until now, the use of quality assurance instruments (e.g. publication of a pedagogical design, parent participation in the development of the design, annual parent surveys) is not provided for in the legislation of the provinces. Neither is the carrying out of professional external evaluations - in the sense of a comprehensive quality audit – a requirement.

9. *Legal relationship between institutions, parents and ECEC facilities.* For all institutions, the dominant regulations seem to be the code of the ECEC facility, which is complemented by a registration form and some parent declarations. As an orientation aid for institutions, the provinces issue model codes. Through this way of regulating, the legal relationship to the parents who use a place for their child in a child care facility is given an official character.

Staffing, training and work conditions in Austria – an overview

62. With the exception of some males engaged in parent groups (over 4%), staff in children's services in Austria are overwhelmingly female (99% in 2003). The proportion of men among early childhood pedagogues amounts to 0.8%, although in the training institutes, 2.7% of candidates are young men. To our knowledge, there is no sustained government programme to ensure a better representation of men among kindergarten pedagogues. We shall discuss this issue again in Chapter 5. The following is a brief outline of staff profiles and training in the Austrian ECEC system:

Table 9. Austrian staffing and training at a glance

Title	Training	Field of work
<i>Kindergärtnerin</i> or kindergarten pedagogue	5-year training at an ECEC Training Institute (secondary education level), giving the qualification of kindergarten educator and matriculation (university entrance).	Kindergarten (3-6 years) and crèches (0-3 years): Those working in crèches have taken special modules to prepare them for work with infants and toddlers
<i>Sonderkindergärtnerin</i> or special needs educator	ECEC Institute 5-year training + 4 semesters specialised training in special needs	Special needs kindergarten and in mainstream kindergartens with integrated groups
<i>Hortezieherin</i> or after-school-care pedagogue	ECEC Institute 5-year training with a specialisation for work with school-age children	In after-school care centres
<i>Kindergartenhelferin</i> or kindergarten helper	Varies, but generally kindergarten helpers receive some training.	In kindergartens and crèches
<i>Tagesmutter</i> or family day carers	Ranges from 90 hours in the Tyrol to 500 hours with a professional examination in Styria...	Licensed family day care

Source: Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1996; Austrian Background Report, 2004

63. In kindergartens and crèches, every group must be led by a trained pedagogue (*Kindergärterin*). This seems to be a binding rule in all provinces and a welcome one. In principle, this person must have the official kindergarten diploma, which she obtains after 5 years training at secondary level in one of the recognised Institutes for Early Childhood Education and Care. Twenty-nine such institutes exist in Austria, of which sixteen are funded and managed by the Federal government, eleven by the Catholic dioceses or the *Stadtgemeinde*, and two by municipal boroughs (*Wiener Neustadt and the city of Vienna*). Although the final diploma is only a secondary level one, these young kindergarten pedagogues are well-trained, particularly in the practical aspects of early childhood pedagogy. In addition, according to our respondents, their recruitment level is quite high within the secondary school context: many idealistic and intelligent young women choose the profession at this early age. Kindergarten pedagogues form just over 60% of the personnel in kindergartens and crèches, and are sometimes helped by kindergarten assistants who make up most of the remaining staff in kindergartens. Again, regulations differ across the provinces of how many assistants should be employed. The situation in crèches differs as a further 13% of other specialised staff are also found in crèches, a situation that provides more acceptable standards of professionalism.

Box 5. A crèche in Vienna

The crèche formed part of a larger municipal centre including also, kindergarten and *Hort* facilities. The spacious, well-appointed facility served a mix of children aged from infancy to 10 years (from the neighbourhood). The staff:child ratio was high at the time of visit so individual children had easy access to adult carers. The Head of Centre was part of a wider network of leaders who determined, in collaboration with the local Inspector, the overall development focus of the Centre for the year. At the time of our visit, the focus was intercultural learning and language. On-going network meetings were in place to monitor the development of the centre programs.

The centre favoured a holistic approach to the well-being children. The development of artistic and musical abilities, and aesthetic awareness and appreciation, was seen as important. Because the children attended for a long day – several stayed 12 hours - staff noted the importance of the aesthetic space. Every child, at any given moment, was seen to have a particular focus of interest through which the pedagogue could further the child's learning, well being and engagement with the environment.

Pedagogues considered that one of their key functions was to reassure parents about the extended hours that their children had to stay in the centre. Parents from non-German language groups, such as Japanese, were afforded special attention and time was given to them to explain the rationale underlying the informal play-based approach in place. At the same time, pedagogues confronted dilemmas about optimum ways to cater for the changing needs of children over extended periods. Music and language, although not required offers in the crèche, were seen as important focuses, and as providing opportunities for movement and creativity.

The Head of Centre reviewed the programs of each pedagogue, providing feedback and advice, particularly if she observed areas of development that may be overlooked. The staff discussed matters of emotional and social well-being, values orientation, and creativity as key considerations in their care of the children. In addition, allowance for free, physical movement and the development of positive attitudes towards learning was seen as an important aspect of the program. This large, institutional style of building was transformed into an amenable environment for children of different ages, experiencing different programs, all of which shared a similar philosophy.

64. Staff requirements per kindergarten group are determined differently in the laws of the individual provinces, in particular the use of secondary staff (kindergarten assistants). One additional helper for each group is prescribed in Lower Austria and Steiermark, for every two groups in Vienna, Salzburg, Tyrol and Carinthia, and only from the fourth group on in Burgenland. In Upper Austria, a helper can be appointed – but is not a requirement - and often her assistance is planned only for half days. With the exception of Styria, the secondary staff member does not have to have any training; she only has to be suited for caring for children physically, mentally and psychologically. In some provinces, basic occupational training courses are offered for newly hired kindergarten helpers, e.g. in Salzburg, Tyrol, and Vienna.

65. Appointment to a management position is linked with professional capability and personal suitability. For most of the provinces, professional experience and some leadership training (not compulsory and of varying intensity) are the training requirements for appointment. Some provinces provide regulations for the release of facility directors from teaching service if numbers justify it. In larger child care facilities this can mean a full release. Thus, Styria releases directors starting with the fourth group, and Salzburg starting with the sixth group.

66. *Sonderkindergärtnerinnen* or special needs educators work in kindergartens, crèches and in specialised centers for handicapped children. This category of personnel must have the general kindergarten educator diploma, and also complete a four semester training in special needs education. Likewise, *Hortzieherinnen* are specialised to work with school-age children (such as doing the

homework and offering learning and leisure time activities). No data was available to the OECD team concerning the percentage of centre-based staff coming from minority backgrounds, although diversity and inter-culturality are important themes in Austrian education (see above, paragraphs 53ff).

67. As mentioned already, training for family day carers and parents working in self-organised parent groups varies greatly across the provinces, ranging from 30 training units in Lower Austria to 468 training units in Styria, (450 in Carinthia, 238 in Tyrol, 200 in Burgenland, 190 in Upper Austria, 180 in Salzburg, 120 in Vorarlberg and 60 in Vienna). The Austrian Federation of Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents and Childminders' Associations adds its supports to these efforts to professionalize family day care. Professional development and associative support are available to members of the provincial network of carers.

Box 6. Professionalising family day care in Austria

Most high quality ECEC systems channel investment toward centre-based care, as it is easier to prepare personnel and monitor quality standards in professional environments. Ongoing training of personnel, regulation and inspection and the provision of dedicated facilities and learning environments are also features of professional environments. At the same time, some parents prefer to place their child in a more family-like environment and choose family day care for the younger children: In countries with isolated populations, family day care may be the only feasible solution to the child care needs of parents. The challenge then is to raise the standards of family day care, and provide the carers with training, moral and financial support. Austria provides some excellent examples of what can be achieved:

In the *Bundesland* of Styria, family day carers - in order to practise - must follow preparatory courses, pass an examination and receive special authorisation to open a family day care. Training consists of 308 hours of theory and 160 hours of practice. The courses are financially supported by the provincial government. The aspirant has to have completed obligatory education and pass an aptitude-test before she can begin the courses. Candidates also must have an adequate living environment. There are three main themes during the training: the focus on the child (well-being, development); personal development, and communication. An emphasis is placed on teamwork, and the aspirant should know how to handle conflicts among children or with parents. The practical training is compulsory and is conducted through mentoring by a practising childminder. In exceptional cases, practical training can last for about six months. There is also a compulsory further training of eight days a year.

The Austrian Federal Organisation of Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents and Childminders' Associations was established in 1982 as an umbrella organisation for the family daycare associations in the different provinces. Its main task has been to militate for higher standards and better conditions on a national level for family daycarers, e.g. minimum standards for training and further training, equal treatment of private and public associations offering childcare in order to give parents a choice according to their needs, the standardization of parental fees for all forms of childcare; compulsory social security and decent living conditions for childminders...

Source: Bundesverbans der österreichischen Pflege-, Adoptiv_ und Tageselternvereine, 2004

Work conditions of ECEC staff

68. Staff working with children in ECEC programmes has a major impact on children's early development and learning. Research shows the links between strong training and support of staff – including appropriate pay and good working conditions – and the quality of ECEC services (Bowman et al., 2000; CQCO Study Team, 1995; EC Childcare Network, 1996a; Whitebook et al., 1998). While it can be affirmed that the training of kindergarten educators in Austria is thorough, and particularly strong in music and the practico-aesthetic skills (arts and crafts, drama, movement, painting...), professional development opportunities and work conditions are inadequate for this profession and

inferior to the conditions offered to teachers. A more complete analysis of the issue will be presented in Chapter 4, but already one may note that opportunities for professional development are limited. As the table below shows, professional development opportunities range from no entitlement in Carinthia, Lower Austria and Vienna to 5 days annual in the Tyrol. These courses are not part of a career lattice for staff (which seems singularly lacking) nor can they count as credits for further diplomas. In sum, the lack of openings to further education and other careers seems to be a critical issue of ECEC staffing in Austria. In principle, weekly preparation time is more generous than professional development opportunities, and varies for a full-time lead pedagogue from no entitlement in Vienna to 15 hours in Styria. In practice, however, according to staff and inspectors interviewed, staff are often unable to avail of preparation time because of work pressures and large group sizes.

Table 10. Regulations governing preparation time and professional development, 2004

Province	Qualification	Weekly working hours	Weekly preparation hours	Annual PD allowance in hours	
Salzburg	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	6	24 hours	optional
	Assistant kindergarten pedagogue	32	5		
	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	2		
		32	1		
Vorarlberg	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	10	4 days	obligatory
Tyrol	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	10	5 days	optional
		30	8		
Upper Austria	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	7	2 days	obligatory
				3 days	
Vienna	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	no regulation	no regulation	
Styria	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	10 – 15	4 days	obligatory
		30	10	4 days	
Burgenland	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	8	3 day	obligatory
Lower Austria	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	5	no regulation	
Carinthia	Lead kindergarten pedagogue	40	5	no regulation	

Source: Hartmann, W., Stoll, M.: 2004. *Mehr Qualität für Kinder*, volume 1 of series of the Charlotte Bühler Institute

69. Kindergarten educators in Austria earn about 20% less than elementary school teachers, although the work is highly skilled and most kindergarten educators work a 38 hour week. The sums earned by kindergarten pedagogues vary from province to province, with salaries ranging from about €1,300 euros monthly at the beginning of career to an upper limit of around €2000 euros (€2,600 euros in Styria) after 20 years of service. Private, for-profit services are reported to provide the lowest conditions of compensation and work conditions. In family day care, networked *Tagesmütter* receive according to the minimum wage scale a monthly salary of €319 per child for 40 hours of care, plus a further 20% if they have a professional training as a kindergarten or social pedagogue, or as a teacher

or nurse. The average child staff ratio practised in family day care in Austria is 3.4 children per carer, and this generally on a half-day basis – suggesting that earnings are not high. Apart from earnings, conditions of work in family day care in Austria seem to be superior to arrangements in many other countries, as labour legislation guarantees health, employment and retirement pension insurance.

Box 7. The Austrian Association of Kindergarten and After-School-Care Pedagogues (ÖDKH)

The umbrella organisation, the Austrian Association of Kindergarten and After-School-Care Pedagogues (ÖDKH), was founded in 1994. The ÖDKH seeks to represent kindergarten and *Hort* personnel at the national level, and to ensure safety and quality standards for young children in ECEC services. It has developed a framework for a federal law concerning child care, in cooperation with other organisations. Some of the requirements include: maximum group size of 15 children with two professionals (group sizes reported currently can be composed of 24-28 children per 1 or 2 carers); physical space of 4sq.m. per person (currently varying from 2-3 sq.m.); an age related child-staff ratio, university level training for pedagogues and the integration of ECEC within one ministry.

Despite the importance of this work, the Association is under-funded. Union participation by ECEC professionals is split across different unions. In addition, although many groups, including the larger Austrian Trade Union Federation, take up gender issues in Austria, sensitivity to gendering in the early childhood field (and its consequences on pay and bargaining power) does not seem to be a pressing issue for the larger Federation. There seems to be little knowledge or consensus among the collective bargainers about the necessary professional preparation of pedagogues, not least because ECEC pedagogues are not yet required to have university education. In addition, ECEC issues have little hold at national level in Austria, and there is the traditional view that this is 'women's work'. Even at provincial level, where the OECD team experienced keen interest in the ministries to promote quality services run by professionals, individual organisations determine the working conditions of staff and differences are clearly apparent according to service auspices.

Source: OECD review team, 2004

Child-staff ratios

70. In kindergartens, child-staff ratios differ considerably across the provinces. The maximum group size allowed is 28 children (in most provinces 25 children per group), but in fact, the average group size practised in 2002 was 21 children per group, with 16 children per kindergarten educator (Austrian Background Report, 2004). Particularly, in Vorarlberg, Burgenland and Tyrol, small groups of up to 20 children are often found. However, the 2004 study by the Charlotte Bühler Institute suggests that there are good reasons for concern about ratios. According to this study, the actual group sizes in Austrian kindergartens were near 25 children in two thirds of the groups and reached 28 or more children in 19% of the groups. Large groups with 28 or more children are found in those provinces, where special derogations for exceeding the legally determined group sizes are used in many instances. Kindergarten groups in village municipalities are typically smaller than those in cities.

71. With regard to staff structure, data are also available from the aforementioned study. Of the kindergarten teachers, 69% lead a group jointly with a non-qualified helper; and 14% of the kindergarten teachers lead a group completely alone. Only 7% of kindergarten teachers lead a paired group with a comparably qualified colleague, and only 3% of the kindergarten teachers are supported by a helper in addition to the paired group. In this study an overall teacher-child ratio of 1:23 was calculated. Only groups that were led by two qualified teachers jointly (therefore only 10% of all Austrian kindergarten groups), show a favourable care ratio of 1:12. One third of teachers fear

negative effects on the children because of an insufficient staff situation, and argue for increasing the staff and for the inclusion of trained teachers to support children with special needs. This unease was confirmed on several occasions by centre directors who informed the OECD team that child-staff ratios had become a critical issue.

72. By international standards, there is also room for concern, especially in services that are considered not as pre-primary classes but as kindergartens aiming at the holistic development of children. In countries that take this issue seriously, ratios are generally around 10 children or less per trained staff member (In Sweden, the national average is 5.6 children per trained staff). The OECD team was informed that group size and staffing are influenced by the extent of operating hours, and other circumstances. For example staffing may be better where there are children from non-Austrian backgrounds or with disabilities. In *mixed-age facilities*, the ratio, according to Statistics Austria, comes to 13:6 children to one educator; in parent organised groups, the average ratio is 6.5 children per carer, and in family day care, the average child:staff ratio is 3.4 children per carer. In crèches, for children under three years of age, the average ratio practised 8.7 children per trained staff member, again not an outstanding ratio by international standards. The maximum group size allowed is 10 children per educator.

Curriculum and pedagogy

73. There is no national curriculum framework for young children in Austria. As mentioned earlier, the federal level has never issued or co-constructed with the provinces a nationwide plan (curriculum) for crèches, kindergarten and *Hort* that would determine the values, philosophy, objectives and contents of early childhood education and upbringing. An analysis of provincial regulations on kindergarten and after-school day-care centres shows the following:

- In provincial laws concerning kindergartens and after-school day-care centres, definitions of the educational and upbringing tasks of day care facilities do exist. However, they are definitions subject to a broad interpretation at the level of supporting agencies and facilities. Every facility is free to choose how it designs the educational and upbringing work, which focal points it sets in content, and which pedagogical approaches it prefers. Thus, children do not find comparable educational offers in day care facilities.
- As an aid to planning and discussion, some provinces publish guidelines or brochures for kindergartens or after-school day-care centres, but these do not provide a systematic description of the processes of upbringing and education in the facilities, in the sense of an educational plan.

74. In 2000, a transactional approach as contribution to the educational quality in kindergartens was drawn up by the Charlotte Bühler Institute, which was updated in 2004. This approach is a synthesis of various approaches, but favours a transactional approach emphasising the interaction processes between the child and her environment. In relation to the child, factual skills, self skills and social skills are distinguished; in relation to the teachers, processes of reflection are especially emphasised – in terms of retrospective and critical reflection on the pedagogical work, and of one's own understanding of the different educator roles. The approach provides a good basis for the initiation and discussion of intercultural and multilingual work. The OECD team remained unsure of the status, if any, that this transactional approach has among the provincial governments and centres.

Data collection, evaluation and research

75. Statistics Austria is responsible for national monitoring and reporting at population level. Each year, it collects data on early childhood facilities throughout Austria. Uniform data collection forms are filled out by all crèches, kindergartens, after-school day-care facilities, mixed age day-care facilities and all other types of day-care facilities and submitted to Statistics Austria for processing via the competent inspectorate of the provincial governments. Information is collected on the day-care facilities (providers, opening hours, facilities, equipment, whether lunch is served, medical care, possibilities for using a playground area), on the children (length of stay, disabilities, age, employment of the mother, whether they eat lunch there, nationality) and on the staff (employment relationship, marital status, level of education/training, age, scope of employment). The statistics on day-care facilities primarily serve as a basis for decisions that affect early childhood education and care. After treatment and analysis, the results are made available for local policy and administrative purposes to the statistical offices and inspectorates of the provincial governments. In addition to this annual data collection, special data collections and surveys are also made. Micro-censuses in 1995 and 2002 included a special section entitled “Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care”. This micro-census contains items on day-care, including questions on the lack of available day-care and other reasons for not taking advantage of day-care facilities.

76. Statistics Austria has no uniform statistics on childminders and parent-toddler groups. The data are collected by the individual federations, but these do not include all childcare institutions, but only those who are members of the provincial associations. The provincial associations of childminders document the scope of childcare on a continual basis, as the remuneration for childminders and the parent contribution depends on data collected on the scope of care. Likewise, the Federation of Austrian Parent-Toddler Groups has collected data annually since 1995 on parent-toddler groups organised via the provincial associations, using a questionnaire that is filled out by the groups. The aims of this data collection are to determine: “the location of the parent-toddler groups and playgroups in each of the federal provinces, how the different framework conditions impact on these institutions (legislation and funding) compared among the provinces, identifying the needs and current situation of the parent-toddler groups and playgroups, current situation and needs assessment for initial and continued training programmes as the basis for planning BÖE training courses, statistical material for public relations work and funding agencies, documentation and development progress” (Naderer, 2000, 2).

77. With respect to evaluation and accountability, the provincial inspectors ensure pedagogical monitoring of provision (kindergartens, crèches and Hort) that come under the kindergarten laws. In provision outside this field, some provinces, provider agencies, professional federations and provincial associations undertake some quality control and professional in-service training, as mentioned above with regard to family day care. Some project evaluations and small investigations are funded by individual *Bundesländer* or by the *Träger*, but general access to such reports is said to be difficult. Based on the documents available, the subject of “observation and documentation” in Austrian kindergarten teaching seems to have had a rather subordinate significance and is hardly mentioned as an important concern.

ECEC research in Austria

78. A major weakness of the Austrian system appears in the area of early childhood research. With the notable exception of the Charlotte Bühler Institute, little ECEC research is funded or carried out. There are number of reasons for this lacuna, e.g. the lack of Federal responsibility for the field and/or the unusual positioning of early childhood professional education at secondary level, which precludes university involvement in training and research activities in this field. To our knowledge, no university chair for early childhood studies exists in Austria. The research report of the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture for the year 2000 lists only one project – from the University of Linz - on professional and employment outcomes for graduates of educational institutions for kindergarten teaching. Other than this study, no project with an early childhood teaching theme was carried out. In the research report for 2001, a study on the monitoring of schooling and education is mentioned, which explicitly excludes the elementary sector. A research project on language development in native and foreign children begins its longitudinal section in the first class in primary school. Even the Austrian background report on lifelong learning “Memorandum on Life-long Learning of the European Commission” limits itself to learning in youth and adults. A second educational psychology research project on fostering motivation for lifelong learning likewise handles only the school context. The pedagogical institutes that have been established at national and provincial level concern themselves, like the Austrian educational servers and educational networks, exclusively with school teaching subjects.

Box 8. The Charlotte Bühler Institute

The Austrian tradition of research in ECEC is sourced the work of Charlotte Bühler, a renowned child psychologist in the humanistic tradition who, with her husband, led the University of Vienna’s psychology department in the 1920s. Today, the Institute that bears the Bühler name operates, largely independently of government, to supply research and professional support services to the ECEC field. A small funding base from the Ministry of Education, and support from the National Bank, allows the Institute sufficient means to keep subsistence functions in place, while staff seek commissions for ECEC research and development projects. Staff in this institute developed the transactional approach to educational quality in kindergartens.

Other Institute projects include – as featured in Box 4 - a comparative synopsis of the provincial kindergarten laws, based on a selected catalogue of quality criteria. For this work, the Institute collated and analysed the structural elements of ECEC quality that are regulated in different *Länder*, such as caregiver education, professional development, group size, and adult-child ratios...According to the Institute, administrative attention to such key issues is gradually increasing in Austria but, as yet, has not met with sufficient awareness on the ground. The importance of quality to child development and learning are inadequately addressed because staff in the field remain too focused on daily survival, often in conditions where there were too many children and too few adults. Although Austrian parents express satisfaction with services, pedagogues on the contrary speak of weak preparation for work in contemporary contexts, the need for more time to engage sufficiently with parents and the lack of centres of excellence in Austria to inspire and support their practice – “people can’t imagine what they have never seen”.

Members of the Institute informed the OECD that current priorities in the work of the Institute included: improving praxis in early childhood learning contexts, the analysis of the social determinants of child health and development, and the collection of data reporting on child poverty were seen as. To grow research and praxis, a commitment to changing the initial levels of education of pedagogues was seen as a necessary first step.

To our knowledge, the Charlotte Bühler institute carries the entire responsibility for ECEC research ion Austria. The team was not informed of significant research activities at tertiary level in any of the universities or of any substantial commitment to research funding by the federal or *Länder* administrations in the fields of professional development, pedagogy or early childhood learning.

Parent and community involvement

79. *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001) outlined various steps in working with parents:

- *Marginal engagement*, when parents may be used as fund raisers but no real effort is made to engage in regular dialogue with parents;
- *Formal engagements*, when in compliance with official directives, parent-staff information meetings are held at regular intervals to inform parents about rules, programmes... and to facilitate making appointments to discuss children's progress;
- *Informal organised engagement*, when staff meet parents at drop-off and pick-up times in a purposeful, planned manner, or facilitate activities for parents. In this way, educators can inform parents about the child's experiences in the ECEC setting, and listen to the expectations and concerns of parents;
- *Participatory engagement*, when the community and representatives of local groups and services are invited to interact with staff, and take an active part in the programmes of the centre. As a matter of course, parents are consulted on all important decisions;
- *Managerial engagement*, when parents are engaged *statutorily* on the management board, and contribute alongside the director and staff in programme orientation, operational decisions, employment and budgetary decisions.

80. Formal ways of working with parents still predominate in Austria, e.g. through information evenings and presentations by specialists. Almost every province regulates the minimum number of parent evenings or parent gatherings that every kindergarten must hold annually (the number varies from one to three evenings, annually). Changes are taking place, however, in this top-down, formal manner of proceeding. In several centres visited by OECD teams in Austria, relations seemed cordial and trusting between parents and staff. Recognising the importance of parent and community involvement, some *Bundesländer* require parent committees or councils to be formed, so that parent voices can be part of the strategic decision-making process. These committees are still not an official requirement in law in most provinces. Only Lower Austria and Salzburg rule that at the demand of the parents a parent advisory board must be created.

Chapter 4

Issues Relating To Policy and Practice

81. Having described as objectively as possible key elements of the Austrian ECEC system in the previous chapters, we turn in Chapter 4 to examine four policy issues that were raised by our Austrian interlocutors and by our own observations of practice on the ground. These issues are as follows:

- The need to expand the ECEC system;
- Developing educational quality;
- Professionalising the early childhood pedagogues;
- Promoting research in the pre-school sector.

Our discussion of these issues should not be regarded as a gratuitous criticism of Austrian ECEC, but as a stimulus for further analysis of what is already a well-functioning system. Early childhood services in Austria are built on a long and proven tradition of social education. The local staff – both administrations and pedagogues – are highly committed and motivated, and the team detected across the *Länder* a strong interest in the early education of children.

The need to expand the ECEC system

Children 1-3 years

82. In contemporary economies and their labour markets, lack of services for young children limits labour market participation and, equally important, the life opportunities not only of young children but also of women. This is the case at present in Austria. The current supply of child care (5.3% coverage of 1- to 2-year-olds and 20.1% of 2- to 3-year-old children) does not meet either the needs of young children and families or of the current Austrian economy. In the absence of quality public services for the younger children, families are obliged to entrust children under 3 years to informal or private services, over which there is no quality control. Good support is given to families to care for their children during the first years of life, but it is also true that many Austrian mothers need or would wish to take up employment when their infants have reached their first year. If this is the case, the child care situation in Austria must be considered inadequate and in need of extension, as today licensed institutional care caters for only 11% of children under 3 years. The estimates as to how many places are necessary for children under three years old vary, but they range, according to the *Statistics Austria (2002)*, between 20% and 40% per cent.

83. In comparison, other European countries offer a considerably higher degree of provision for the age group 0-3 years. Denmark, for example, provides care for 64% of its children at 1-3 years, followed by Sweden with about 60%, Finland 36%, Belgium 30%, and France 29%. The link between parental leave and a return to work after a parental leave of about a year is secured in the Nordic countries through ensuring that quality childcare places are available to all families who need them.

The rationale is twofold: first there is the view that the care of children is not only a family task, but also a responsibility for society as a whole. Second, an important policy issue in these countries is equal opportunity for women, which cannot be achieved unless the compatibility of work and family responsibilities is ensured. Third, the belief that the continuous presence of the mother is a requirement for the optimum development of the child is balanced by the right to gender equality, and also by the economic argument that women's work contribution is important for the economy, for her family and for her own self-fulfilment. In addition, because public child care of high quality is available (thanks in no small part to women's tax contributions), there is sound evidence to show that the (integrated) kindergarten of the Nordic countries can be rated as a learning and development opportunity for small children.

The kindergarten situation

84. The situation for children 3-6 years is significantly better. The overall coverage rate is 65.5% for 3-year-old children, but again, the average figure occults the strong showing of some provinces (e.g. Burgenland with a 97 % coverage of 3-year-old children) and the weak showing of others (Tyrol with a coverage rate of 48%). The trend is favourable, however, as by the age of 5 years, 96% of 5-year-olds are enrolled. In spite of this encouraging development, it cannot be overlooked that there are provinces in which there are still deficits. The province of Carinthia, for example, supplies a kindergarten place for only 77.4% of 4-year-old children. In the future, it will be important to eliminate the lack of kindergarten places at regional level that still exists, in order to ensure that every child has an early education and care place for at least two years before entering school. In addition, kindergarten hours will need to be extended in several provinces if equal opportunity to work is to be guaranteed.

Out-of-school provision

85. From the same perspective, *Hort* provision for children also needs extension. Overall, Austria offers a care place for only 10.4% of children in the ages between 6 and 9. Every fourth child in Vienna attends an after-school day-care centre, but only every tenth child receives such a place in Carinthia, Upper Austria and Lower Austria. In the provinces of Burgenland, Tyrol and Vorarlberg the supply is even lower. This situation goes against research findings and the expressed needs of Austrian families, and in particular of working women. A longitudinal study by Pettit & Laird, 1997, controlling for social milieu and the previous experiences of children (e.g. kindergarten attendance), showed that a considerable proportion of children spend the time after school on the street or at home watching television. This pattern affects negatively both their school work and their social skills. Other studies document the fact that participation of children in low-income families in an offer of care outside of school leads to more interaction with children of the same age and to reduced television consumption. The extension of this offer of care is accordingly associated with individual benefits for children while in school, as well as with the reduction of (later) social costs. The impact on work-family reconciliation with regard to parents is also positive.

86. If *Hort* provision rates are examined across the OECD countries, it can be seen that compared to many other countries, Austria has a working system in place that is well-organised and publicly recognised. Yet, it is far from the coverage rates achieved by the Nordic countries. Denmark and Sweden have access rates of over 70% for children between 6 and 9 years old, in publicly financed after-school facilities. Similar proportions of children of 9 years and older attended recreational clubs

or take advantage of other forms of leisure activities. Both countries have achieved full coverage in this field. The lead pedagogues in both countries in charge of leisure-time activities are educated to university degree level, and are specialised in this type of pedagogy, which is seen as a necessary part of educational and social care.

Developing educational quality through a national pedagogical framework

87. Findings from developmental psychology, neuroscience and education research have led in the past decades to renewed attention to child development and education in the first years of life. In the 1990s, these findings gained acceptance at policy level in many countries. A start was therefore made toward viewing the care, upbringing and education of young children as the first stage in lifelong learning. Educational plans and framework curricula have been formulated for day care facilities, beginning with New Zealand and Norway in 1996. Since then, many countries have joined the movement, the most recent being Germany in 2004. In their view, the introduction of nationwide framework plans brings greater consensus about the goals and purposes of early childhood education and care; sets out minimal benchmarks (e.g. with regard to child:staff ratios; the training and deployment of pedagogues...); and shows the complexity and importance of pedagogical work to the outside world, thus leading to enhancing the status of the sector. In addition, an educational plan offers an orientation for the design of framework conditions and involves consequences for initial training, further training and continuing education of teaching staff.

88. In conversations with pedagogues as well as with political representatives in Austria, awareness of the significance of such educational plans could be detected, though not all were convinced that a new pedagogical framework for kindergartens was necessary. In any event, no concrete plans were found in the *Länder* to co-operate for the development and implementation of a new framework plan for Austria. For the moment, until discussions can take place, this position – in our view - is wise, as if the German model is followed, and the development of plans becomes the task of each province, further diversification of education and care standards could occur.⁸ It seemed to the OECD team that Austrian children and the ECEC system as a whole would benefit from a more unified approach, and that the *Bundesländer* could save time, investment and effort if a national agreement on essential goals and values could be reached. The formulation of nine different framework curricula for Austria would seem wasteful of effort and could lead to further disparities in quality standards. The time and effort needed by relatively small *Länder* to formulate curricula could better be used in underwriting training for a national curriculum framework and in providing support to pedagogues to implement a framework correctly.

89. Educational quality can be ensured if the framework conditions for pedagogical quality are fulfilled. A useful paradigm to follow is the procedural-structural model of pedagogical quality, which provides a focus on both pedagogical interaction and the structural features of quality programmes. Both emphases are today relevant in Austria. Certainly, with regard to structural features, further discussion of groups sizes and child-staff ratios would seem to merit attention. Current group size of

8. The educational plans developed by the individual German *Länder* vary considerably in their quality, and it hardly possible to reconcile a piecemeal procedure with the expectation of high quality education for *all* children in the country.

28 combined with high child-staff ratios makes it difficult for pedagogues to provide adequate care, upbringing and education in the kindergartens. A country, such as the US, which has not the advantage of a long and stable ECEC tradition as in Austria, manages in the large majority of its states to keep child-pedagogue ratios well below 15:1 in the public kindergartens, and is aiming for an overall 10-1 ratio (NIEER, 2004).

90. The procedural or process aspects of quality also deserve more attention in Austria. During its visits, the OECD team heard little discussion of process features and even when raised as an issue, process did not seem to be approached systematically. The ways in which educational processes can be moderated in the facilities, and what factors influence this, should be given more attention. Contextual dimensions of pedagogical quality are not reflected on sufficiently: the role of the supporters of day care facilities and their professionalisation, as well as issues of facility management and leadership, the remuneration and support provided to staff, the feminisation of the sector, the guidance of the system and the interlinking of child welfare offers with further educational offers. It would be helpful if a broadly structured debate could be carried out on pedagogical quality, which in addition to experts and political representatives should include participation by parents, teachers, associations, trade unions and the economy. The debate about appropriate framework conditions would offer at the same time a suitable platform for expressing public responsibility for the education and upbringing of children and for achieving better framework conditions for child care.

Box 9. A participatory approach to national curriculum development in Finland

In 2000, STAKES established an expert Steering Committee to prepare a curriculum for centre-based ECEC services in Finland. This framework would be based on the best research available and would focus on principles and process rather than on content areas. The opening document prepared by STAKES was intended to act as a stimulus for discussion with the various stakeholders, and in particular to institute dialogue with the municipalities, pedagogues and parents. Successive drafts of the strategic framework were published on the Web, while additional resources were made available to municipalities to train curriculum mentors and to begin dialogue with pedagogues, parents and elected officials at local level. Local perspectives on the framework were collected, analysed and made available across the country on a dedicated web site. The process provided a countrywide platform which generated comprehensive discussions about quality and how to achieve it were generated.

At local level, staff and parents have the further responsibility of elaborating each centre's more detailed curriculum and pedagogical plan, based on the national pedagogical frameworks and local municipality objectives. In addition, an individual development and learning plan is drawn up for each child, in collaboration with the child's parents. Staff are given support by municipalities to implement their pedagogical plan for the daycare centre and to assess their own performance regularly.

Source: Lindberg, 2004

Professionalising the early childhood pedagogues

91. After an intensive 12-country study undertaken from 1998 to 2000, the OECD study, *Starting Strong* named eight key elements of quality-oriented policy (OECD, 2001, p. 11). One of these key elements is *Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision*.

Quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector. Initial and in-service training needs to be broadened to take into account the growing educational and social responsibilities of the profession. There is a critical need to develop strategies to recruit and retain a

qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable.” Starting Strong, OECD, 2001

92. Austria faces a real challenge in this regard. Not only is the present secondary level training requirement among the lowest in Europe⁹ but it is also inadequate for future demands on the profession. The reasons for a reform relate basically to three lines of argument:

- Research findings about children’s development and learning show the complexity of development and learning in the early childhood phase, and its great potential. There is a need for well certified staff, versed in child psychology, project work, environmental knowledge, cultural transmission and language support;
- The growing diversity of urban societies requires mature, well-trained professionals in the early childhood centres which, like the child health clinics, are often in the front line of social support and preventive work;
- Given the continuing development of the European Union, professional mobility and employment placements abroad will become necessary in all professions. At the moment, the professional level of Austrian pedagogues will limit exchanges with their university-trained counterparts in other countries.

According to the job description proposed by the Austrian Public Employment Service (2004), the requirements to become a kindergarten pedagogue (a secondary, vocational level qualification in Austria) include: love of children; understanding of the child’s psychology; social and communications skills; ... musical talent, language and creativity; handicraft skills, design talent and creativity, knowledge of home economics, etc. The *Austrian Background Report* (2004, p. 69) further describes the emerging social requirements of ECEC staff in these words:

The responsibilities of the day-care staff working in institutional childcare are situated at many different levels. In addition to the educational work they perform with the children, their cooperation with the parents, as a team and on an institutional level (day-care facility providers) is gaining in importance. In order to better tackle these responsibilities, the staff must be able to draw on a broad spectrum of skills and acquired abilities. Increasingly pre-school teachers are expected to be competent in conducting meetings, communications training, conflict and stress management, public relations and quality management. The requirements for future early childhood educators are on three levels: the educational, human resources/leadership and organizational levels (cf. Hanifl 1999, 36).

Moreover, pre-school teachers are confronted with increased expectations from society and from parents. This is attributable to the changes in the family structure – single parents, both parents are gainfully employed, no caregiver available within the family (grandparents, etc.). On the other hand, parents have become more demanding, tending to view kindergarten increasingly as an educational institution.

New social education requirements

93. The social requirements for the profession of pedagogue, at whatever level, have become increasingly more complex and more demanding. The socio-cultural context of education and upbringing work has changed significantly, especially in the cities. The diverse conditions in which

9. According to new ISCED level 0 discussions, the German training requirement is now classified as ‘tertiary’.

children grow up require teaching staff to undertake increasingly individualised and preventive work with children and families. This assumes an understanding of the role that currently goes far beyond the professional profile common until now in training and in practice. Child orientation and family orientation, training tasks and service tasks, orientation to individual needs and to the community, belong now to the spectrum of tasks of day care facilities for children. In sum, the requirements for the professional profile of teaching staff are varied and complex. Among them are (cf. Oberhuemer, 2000; 2001):

- To perceive the individuality of children against the background of a growing diversity of developmental conditions and family cultures and stimulate, assist and reflect on appropriate education and learning processes;
- To work together in the development of an institutional conception (if applicable also with a view to governmental educational regulations) and present them self-confidently to the outside world;
- To build up a partnership relationship with parents, connected with a clear image of the respective different skills that the two sides bring into a co-constructive process of education and upbringing;
- To regularly involve mothers and fathers in planning and decision processes, and organise target group oriented family offers and support parent networks;
- To build up connections with professional and consultation services, training institutions, primary schools and other professionally related and cultural organisations in the region and develop appropriate forms of co-operation;
- To discuss various approaches to developing and evaluating quality (self-evaluation, individual and team peer consultation, external evaluation) and use these for one's own professionalisation and for the further development of the facility;
- To continually reflect upon and further develop the profile of the facility with the local participants (parents, supporting agencies, youth office, municipal politicians, interested citizens) and to critically reflect on one's own attitudes, pedagogical objectives and work forms;

The question of remuneration

94. Paragraph 70 in Chapter 3 describes the remuneration of early educators in Austria. Kindergarten pedagogues in Austria earn about 20% less than elementary school teachers, although the work is highly skilled and most kindergarten pedagogues work a 40 hour week. Again, this issue deserves to be further examined. The low compensation levels of pedagogues are linked to their level of qualifications, which we have suggested is unsatisfactory. They are also linked to two important contextual issues: gender equality in the present and labour market competition in the future. Where gender equality is concerned, the risk is run that if governments pay low wages and offer few possibilities for advancement in early childhood services, they may by inadvertence produce a segregated sector dominated by low-paid female labour. This tendency can be seen in many countries where education and the 'helping' professions have become highly gendered women. Wage segregation is avoided, however, in the Nordic countries, precisely by professional education opportunities opening up possibilities of advancement and higher qualification levels. Initially, it requires of governments to spend more money, but in the long-term governments receive more in return.

95. Future labour competition may be a harder challenge to resolve. A sector within the service economy that remunerates its personnel poorly risks losing experienced staff on a large scale. In the US, for example, where wages for many early childhood staff are low, staff turnover rates of 35% are common in child care. In any industry, this is poor economy, as recruitment and retraining costs are high. In early childhood care and education, high levels of staff turnover are disastrous: not only are the economic costs great but above all, children need stable relationships for their socio-emotional development and well-being, and turnover rates of such proportions undermine the quality of services. Centres are no longer able to carry out the long-term educational projects that are so important for children's learning and development.

An inconsistent professional development system and few professional perspectives

96. Just as important as remuneration, a quality system of further training and advancement is necessary for pedagogues. In a framework of lifelong learning, ministries of education have a responsibility to the educators to organise a high quality system of professional development that can provide opportunities to acquire up-to-date professional knowledge and open gates to further education. Neither feature is currently available to Austrian educators. Until now, the offer for the individual pedagogues has been a juxtaposition of various course offerings, often unrelated to each other and having little effect on professional careers when seen in terms of promotion and pay. In reference to the professional development offer, Becker (2002, p. 240) speaks of an "absurd particularisation and structural arbitrariness". A system of professional development organised in this way is ineffective in numerous respects (technical, economic) and will fail to motivate the pedagogues. Despite a brave face put on it by the Public Employment Service, opportunities for advancement in the crèche and kindergarten field are quite limited (see Austrian Background Report, 2004, p. 75f.). The new modules put forward by the Public Employment Service, such as social management, organisational consulting and public relations will be attractive, only if linked to actual professions, including professional opportunities within the early childhood field. Other countries, such as Sweden and the UK, are able to adopt a more open 'lattice' approach as educator training takes place at tertiary level. In consequence, credits can be transferred across diplomas and professional development courses and into other fields. The Austrian training system for early childhood pedagogues seems to need reform at this level.

Men in ECEC services

97. Owing to cultural attitudes, low remuneration levels and a lack of job perspectives, young male adults in the OECD countries tend to avoid the early education field. Issues such as gender-aware pedagogy and the right of children to interaction with both sexes still need to be resolved at the levels of policy and training. One of the 40 quality targets of the childcare network of the European Union (1996 - with a call for implementation by 2006) is that 20% of the staff in child care facilities should be men. In Norway and Denmark, for example, the assumption is made that children benefit from interaction with both sexes in the first years of life, that they need not only feminine but also masculine role models. In both countries measures supported by the government have been carried out in order to make young men aware of the profession and in order to support the few men who are in the profession. Relevant conferences, networks for male staff, and the publication of research on the issue contribute to stimulating an important discussion on the question. In Norway for example an "Action plan for recruiting and retaining men in day care facilities" was adopted. This initiative provides for actions at the national-governmental, the regional (state / district / province), the local

(municipalities) and the institutional levels (e.g. kindergartens – educational institutions), and sets targets (20% of men in ECEC services) to be achieved over the next 5 years.

The European dimension of low training requirements

98. With the adoption of the two Directives on the recognition of professional qualifications¹⁰ in 1988 and 1992, the foundation stone was laid for easier professional mobility within the European Union. Despite this, Austrian pedagogues have only limited opportunities for mobility. Opportunities to be employed in state preschool facilities in other countries are generally closed to them because in the EU Member States, teaching staff who lead groups of children from 3 years to school entry are trained at university level (Oberhuemer & Ulich, 1997). This considerably restricts the professional mobility of pedagogues from Austria and Germany, and denies them knowledge of and experience of other systems and other modes of thinking – a basic skill today for multiple perspectives and the implementation of a “pedagogy of diversity”.

The implications of secondary training for research

99. A final, but critical aspect of early childhood training in Austria is the divorce between training and research. Over the past 30 years, educational institutions in Austria, in comparison with other European countries, have been little included in research and development projects. In other European countries, professors in university institutions have generally a research assignment in addition to a teaching assignment, and their research is naturally connected to their field of practice. Because of the present pedagogue education system, this cannot happen in Austria. Professional ECEC research groups composed of experienced university teaching staff, who are active in training and research at the same time, are notably lacking in Austria. Yet, their presence is a prerequisite for critical thinking about Austrian ECEC and for innovation and renewal within the field. This void – and the raising of the issue by several ECEC experts in Austria - leads us to a further reflection on research in the pre-school sector.

Promoting research in the pre-school sector

100. Because of the attention that the education and upbringing of children deserves, the ECEC sector requires a scientific underpinning that is continuously updated. This can only happen if there is stable funding for regular empirical and evaluative research. Austria can look back with pride on the research tradition of the 1920s. The work of Charlotte Bühler in Vienna inspired developmental psychology and childhood research both in Vienna and later in the USA. In the post-war era until today, a small connection to this tradition has been maintained. Yet, while developmental psychology research is still present and of high quality in Austria, nothing similar can be claimed for early childhood education research in the broader sense. Rather, the latter seems almost non-existent in Austria, except for the work of the Charlotte Bühler Institute in Vienna, an impressive contribution made with extremely limited resources. The survival of the Institute is dependent on orders for research, which does not guarantee continuity of research or the creation of a research infrastructure.

10 89/48/EEC on the recognition of university qualifications and 92/51/EEC on the recognition of professional qualifications below university level

101. The further development of early childhood education as a scientific discipline is a task of science itself. However, the necessary attention to the field is unlikely to occur in Austria until training is brought firmly into the tertiary sector. This position is not put forward as a criticism of current training, which in many respects is admirable, and far more practical than many university courses that we have seen, e.g. the practico-aesthetic and musical training that the OECD team witnessed in one of the Institutes in Austria was excellent. The challenge will be to upgrade training so that these strengths are not lost while benefiting from tertiary education status and research possibilities.¹¹ This has been achieved in the Nordic countries and is a subject of intense debate in the UK.

102. Many areas of research are possible and necessary today in Austria. The Charlotte Bühler Institute continues its fine work on the quality of services (Charlotte Bühler Institute, 1994, 1999, 2000, 2004). The ministries and provincial governments will have ideas about what research and evaluations should be undertaken within a properly financed research framework. Research on the principles and promotion of child development in kindergartens in Austria, as well as aspects of cognitively oriented school readiness as children approach school age may merit attention. A reworking of the important notion of social pedagogy in the light of new needs in Austrian society would also help to focus and renew practice at centre level. But these are matters for Austrian governments and researchers, and can be safely left in their hands. It is important firstly to develop a research framework relevant to Austrian needs and to commit from governmental and private sources adequate and stable research funding. Thereafter, governments can build up a research infrastructure and capacity in the universities, and strengthen it further in the coming years.

11. In some countries, the bringing of pedagogue training into the tertiary sector has resulted in a loss of practico-aesthetic training, especially in poorly-funded universities that operate on a reading/public lecture model. This is not the case in the Nordic countries where emphasis is placed not only on educational philosophy, child development and pedagogy but also on the acquisition of the practico-aesthetic skills, teamwork, action research, first- and second language teaching, project work, group management skills...

Chapter 5

Conclusions

103. The review team wishes to commend the Austrian Ministry of Education for its excellent organisation of the OECD review visit and for facilitating visits to a wide range of regions, administrations, agencies and services across the country. During the visit, government officials in the different *Länder* encouraged the review team to interview freely and to report on the ECEC system from its own external perspective. This final chapter summarises the independent conclusions of the OECD review team. It is proposed to the line ministries, the provincial governments and the ECEC professional and research community not as a series of hard and fast conclusions, but rather in a spirit of professional dialogue for the consideration of Austrian specialists who are much more knowledgeable about realities on the ground 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.

1. The strengths of the Austrian ECEC system

104. Overall, the OECD evaluation of the Austrian ECEC system is very positive:

- First, the concept of social pedagogy, which pervades the Austrian approach to children in crèches, kindergartens and *Horts*, provides an admirably broad and integrative concept, that allows for both an educational and social approach to families and young children. Kindergartens in Austria see themselves not only as preparing children for school but also as responsible for the holistic development of young children, and as social institutions that complement family education and provide support to young children and their families.
- Second, the OECD team found that the concept of kindergarten pedagogy was well established in almost all the settings visited. There was a consciousness in most settings of the need to provide a suitable architecture for young children, and to organise space in a manner to stimulate active learning. Most centres practised an open partitioning of space, organised the day into different phases to suit the rhythms of the children, respected the learning strategies of the children (play, relationships, autonomous activity and authentic communication...) and implemented an educational project (if not always a clear educational concept). Despite the low level of the kindergarten diploma, the team found well-trained and motivated personnel. In particular, there was a good focus on children's interests and well-being; and excellent music pedagogy, arts and craft were in evidence in almost all centre.
- Third, despite the nine different administrations in charge and a resulting array in legislative frameworks and practices, the team had the sense of a systemic Austrian approach to early childhood policy: a seriousness about regulation and structural standards; a common workforce (pedagogues are trained in similar institutes and forming the majority of personnel at all levels of

the system); and a shared conception of ECEC based on a tradition of social education that views education and upbringing as integral components of the care of young children outside the family. In addition, it was evident from the participation at different meetings that the administrators and voluntary organisations in the *Bundesländer* are committed – whatever the political situation - to improving the provision and quality of ECEC services in their jurisdictions.

- Fourth, the system is almost fully public or non-profit. Services are highly subsidised and affordable to parents, who pay on average 15% of the costs (child care included). This compares well with other countries in the review, for example, Ireland, where parents pay well in excess of 50% of costs. Supply-side funding is allocated to licensed providers which gives the provincial governments greater control of expenditure, and more regulatory and inspection control over the system.

Box 10. A kindergarten in Graz

The Kindergarten Dornschneidergasse is housed in a striking glass and wood edifice, carefully planned by city architects working in co-operation with a team of pedagogues. Constructed in 2001, it is located near the centre of Graz with the purpose of offering to children from socially deprived backgrounds, a protected but stimulating environment for their further development. The rooms, full of light and sunshine, are constructed for multiple purposes, and the children know where to go if they wish to construct, read, play house, cook or paint...The materials at the disposal of the children were plentiful and varied. Some excellent children's work was on display. There were also larger assembly rooms for indoor gym, theatre and other purposes.

The glass front of each group room opens out on a covered wooden patio or terrace, which in turn leads onto a magnificent park-garden, with lawns and mature trees. This garden is fitted out with attractive adventure houses, climbing frames, swings etc, suitable especially for the older children. The rich natural environment of the park offered many opportunities for learning.

The kindergarten and its amenities are open 12 hours each day, but parents are requested not to leave their children in the institution any more than 10 hours. The morning reception and return home of children is flexible, according to parents wishes, but is fixed in advance.

In 2004, the kindergarten received a total of 101 children, divided into 5 groups: 3 mixed age groups with 25 children, 1 group with 16 children including 3 handicapped children, 1 crèche with 10 children. It was staffed by 9 trained kindergarten pedagogues, 8 assistants, and 1 special pedagogue for handicapped children. In addition, the kindergarten had the contribution of a paediatrician (6 hours per month), a psychologist (10 hours per week) and specialists to provide an additional 15 hours per week in speech and physiotherapy.

The visit of the OECD took place at lunch time, and as the morning was fine, the children were already leaving to go out to the park. For this reason, it is not possible to comment on the pedagogical processes at work in the kindergarten. Our conversations with the director and kindergarten pedagogues indicated that a clear pedagogical project was in place and that the team was motivated and experienced.

105. Despite these strengths, there can be little room for complacency in Austria or in other countries. The greater instability of family life today, the changing roles of women and parents, the challenges of bringing up children correctly in a world dominated by consumerism and unstable values, and the educational difficulties faced by children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds give an urgent impetus in all countries to initiate discussions as to how early childhood care and education should be conceived and funded in coming years. In Chapters 2 and 4, the OECD team identified some limitations in the present system that in our judgement may undermine system efficiency or quality. In what follows, we summarise briefly these discussions and make some tentative proposals for consideration by the Austrian authorities at central and provincial level. As our

visit made us aware of the high expertise of many Austrian administrators and researchers in early childhood policy, the comments of the team are put forward as observations, in a spirit of professional dialogue, and not as remedies or solutions to the issues raised.

2. The social context, including women's status and family role

2.1 Demography and fertility rates

106. *Summary:* In Chapter 2, attention was given to the current demographic situation in Austria and its impact on early childhood services and Austrian society in general. Fewer marriages take place than in the past while divorce rates are increasing. Fertility rates continue at a low level which raises concerns about the future labour market, particularly if women are expected to rear the children during the first three to six years of life.

Observations

- A causal link between early childhood service supply and fertility rates is far from certain. Demographic change is a complex phenomenon, and in the case of fertility decline, many causal factors are at work, e.g. the higher educational levels of populations; the pursuit of working careers by women; the length of the working day; the absence of family-friendly work practices; the costs of educating children and/or of first housing, in addition to other social and cultural factors. However, according to Philips (2004), a combination of employment, family and child care policies can bring a measure of job security to couples and lessen anxieties about child care issues - thus creating a more reassuring base from which to make important family decisions.
- With regard to concerns about Austria's shrinking labour market, the country has a significant pool of workers who are outside the labour market, namely, Austrian women. The experience of the Nordic and other countries clearly shows that the provision of quality child care in sufficient volume allows women to reconcile working careers and family responsibilities. In sum, more attention by government to providing and expanding child care may be a means of achieving higher female participation rates in the Austrian labour market. Seen from an economics perspective, the present situation of too few child care places and the withdrawal of well-educated women for long periods from the labour market may be wasteful of human capital investment, an inefficient use of labour force potential and dismissive of the equal rights of women.

2.2 Family supports and parental leave

107. *Summary:* At 3.3% of GDP, Austrian public social spending on families is one of the highest among OECD countries, and has proven to be extremely effective. Initiatives such as the Childcare Benefit have enabled mothers to rear their children at home, and have brought many families and their children out of poverty. In addition, the FLAF is active in promoting family welfare. However, the Childcare Benefit comes at a cost: it perpetuates a child-rearing model that assumes that women will withdraw from the labour market. For this reason, it adds to gender inequality and is costly to the exchequer. The prolonged Childcare Benefit scheme also means that children from low-income (and often immigrant) families may not have the benefit of a public education and care service until they approach school-entry age.

Observations: In a context of family change and greater opportunities for women, Austrian stakeholders may wish to consider the following actions:

- To consider other solutions to the child rearing challenge, such as parental leave and a return to work after one year – which also alleviates poverty, allows women to participate more fully in society and contributes to the economy. The best solutions are generally compromises that balance the interests of women, the economy, families and young children.
- To envisage some linking of the Childcare Benefit to work return and the use of childcare, e.g. to provide a higher rate of benefit to those women who return to work after their children have reached one year;
- To expand the child care system so that all women and young children have access to affordable, high quality services;
- To provide more information to women concerning the difference between the Child Benefit and the shorter parental leave package (only the latter guarantees a return to work with the same employer);
- To provide more research – both Austrian and international – concerning the various options open to a society in the matter of early childhood education and care.

2.3 Women's status and family role

108. **Summary:** Women have made strong progress in Austria since the 1980s. Their education levels have risen significantly, and after the child-rearing years they are to be found in large numbers in employment. Important legislation was introduced during the 90s, such as the *Equality Package*, which considerably improved women's status and facilitated the compatibility of work and family responsibilities. Yet, gender inequality and *maternalism* (a belief that the young child should be exclusively cared for in the family, and in particular by the mother) persist in all milieus. The *maternalist* assumption is reinforced by the substantial wage gap between men and women (between 20-30%), and by the difficulty for many mothers to have part-time work in their place of employment. The Childcare Benefit package, introduced in 2002, may also reinforce gender assumptions. This generous benefit is not linked in any way to the use of licensed care facilities, but is a cash-in-hand benefit for parents, regardless of their work situation. Not surprisingly, the proportion of women who returned to employment before their child reached 2 1/2 years old had dropped two years later from 54% to 35% (*Austrian Background Report*, 2004). The Childcare Benefit favours a male, bread-winner family model and may also be sending out a signal to the *Bundesländer* governments not to invest in child care services. If Federal benefits ensure that many children will be looked after by mothers at home until they are ready to enter kindergarten, then why should Länder governments, particularly with large rural populations, be proactive in expanding child care services?

Observations

- The government introduced a raft of legislation during the 90s in order to improve the status of women, e.g. the 1990 *Family Package* legislation and the 1992/3 *Equality Package* considerably improved women's status and facilitated the compatibility of work and family (generally women's) responsibilities. Maternity regulations were improved, father participation promoted, options for choosing and arranging parental leave were expanded and the legal foundations of part-time work

(as opposed to ‘marginal’ work)¹² were established. From 1997 to 2000, almost €90 million euros were expended by the federal government to expand child care facilities. These efforts are very commendable;

- There is also the necessity to take a balanced approach to the question of women’s status that respects the choice of many Austrian women to rear their children at home, but also does not close off the possibility for other Austrian women to work. For the moment, policy clearly favours maternal care for young children and a male bread-winner family solution. This option should not be disparaged – parenting and child care are not just questions of economic rationality but carry also deep social, moral and emotional constituents. The challenge for the ministries is to provide a balance and enact policies that both increase the number of quality child care services available and support women who wish to return to the labour market after one year of parental leave. In present circumstances, this is not the case and, in fact, it makes economic sense for modest and low-income families to accept the Child Benefit package rather than to work.
- Despite a conservative attitude toward family organisation and gender roles throughout the country, Austria, like the rest of the EU, is also changing very rapidly. Reliable and up-to-date information is available on the changes in family formation, on the multiple aspects of gender inequality and on the progress being made to counteract traditional discrimination. Greater dissemination of this information would be helpful.

3. Governance and financing

3.1 A more proactive role for central government

109. **Summary:** Despite having nine different ECEC policies and sets of regulations, Austria still preserves a sense of system across the early childhood field: The institutions are similar in each province, pedagogues are trained in the same way and there is fair consensus concerning the pedagogical goals and approaches to be adopted in the main services. However, a centripetal tendency can also be seen. Even during their short visit, the review team were able to identify significant differences in regulation and access that parents in a small and relatively mobile country should not have to undergo. This is not to say that the OECD review looked on decentralisation with disfavour: many of the provincial administrations are doing an excellent job, and experience from other countries tends to show that decentralisation in ECEC can lead to more responsiveness to parental wishes and needs.

Observations

- In all democratic countries there is an unavoidable tension between centralisation and decentralisation and sometimes, a strong resistance to central government ‘interference’. This seems an inevitable reaction, particularly in federal states. Although the legality of their eventual action in the ECEC field is outside our competence, it seemed to the review team that a more proactive implication of the two line ministries – the Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture – could be of great

12. ‘Marginal’ employment is the term used in Austria to describe casual jobs earning up to €250 per month, equivalent to 15% of average earnings.

assistance to the provincial governments. At least, this is the case in Canada and Germany, the other two decentralised, federal countries that were visited in this round. In Germany, for example, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has achieved much by its funding and promotion of a National Quality Initiative (*Nationale Qualitätsinitiative im System der Tageseinrichtungen für Kinder*). (This initiative, begun in 1999, included five projects each focused on the development of methods for assessing and improving quality in different parts of the ECEC field, e.g. children under 3, children from 3 to 6 and school-age childcare).

- The involvement of a central ministry can bring much needed direction to the system, including defining common entitlements and requirements; funding, and the promotion of ‘impulses’ or initiatives, which focus the attention of the stakeholders on important current issues. Naturally, the OECD team sees this as a matter for the provincial governments and ministries to decide, but the advantages of having a central ministry support the early childhood field in this way might be explored. How far should this co-operation go? Again, it is difficult for an external team to make a sound judgment on the matter, which is essentially one for negotiation between the parties based on constitutional limits. Our experience of other countries leads us to propose tentatively the following areas for co-operation, to be proposed by the ministries or the *Bundesländer* association :
 - i. *To align Bundesländer legislation on young children and codify it into a short national framework, binding on all parties at all levels of the system.* The rationale behind this suggestion is that it is disconcerting for parents if funding formulae, child-staff ratios, quality standards, eligibility and operational practices differ widely from municipality to municipality, and from province to province. In particular parents of children with special needs can suffer if a small and homogenous country like Austria fails to have common and binding admission criteria for these children across the provincial boundaries;
 - ii. *To formulate a national goals and learning framework for Austria.* Many countries are moving toward these ECEC frameworks which define the rights and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the early childhood field, and in co-operation with all the stakeholders, identify broad national developmental and educational goals for young children. A recent good example is the curriculum elaborated co-operatively by STAKES, the national agency for social science policy and research in Finland (see Box 8 above in Chapter 4);
 - iii. *To monitor the quantitative and qualitative development of ECEC services from the Federal level,* with special attention to children’s rights issues, e.g. the achievement of defined outcomes for special needs and low-income children, and when necessary, the funding of affirmative action on their behalf;
 - iv. *To build on present co-operation and augment it in suitable fields.* Already, the Ministry of Education has the responsibility for the training of pedagogues. Although we have critiqued the *level* of this training (and the resulting low professional status of the pedagogues), the actual preparation of the pedagogue corps seems to be one of the most uniform and professional elements of the Austrian ECEC system. The Institutes (at least from the example we saw) carry out their work with rigour, professionalism and seemingly with proper funding. To raise this training to tertiary level will require further the co-operation of the *Bundesländer*, and perhaps the identification of other fields where the expertise and funding of a federal ministry can raise quality standards across the system.

- v. *To create synergies across the Bundesländer and launch a common quality initiative or programme.* Here, there is a place for each *Land* to promote its strong points within a guiding national framework, and for other *Bundesländer* to reflect on these experiences. Much progress is being made across Austria in many areas of ECEC provision, but because of lack of co-ordination, these advances remain unknown and unreported. To facilitate information exchange and knowledge transfer, Canada, for example, has a standing committee for the chief ECEC administrators of the different provinces. Given the smaller size of the country, something more ambitious should be possible in Austria at different levels: at *Bundesländer* government level, at the level of the providers; at the level of stakeholders (including parents), and at the level of independent research, with perhaps an annual day to bring these different groups and perspectives together, which could then feed into a yearly national report.
- vi. *To encourage the emergence of a national research infrastructure in the ECEC field.* This question is further analysed in the passages below
- vii. *Improve the national data collection and information base,* for example, concerning the use of services and their funding (see below).

3.2 Building up critical mass and ECEC expertise in the ministries

110. **Summary:** During its visit, the OECD team noted that strong ECEC expertise existed in many of the provincial governments. In the judgement of the OECD review team, similar expertise, staff strength and budget will need to be built at central government level.

Observations

- We come to this conclusion for a number of reasons. First, because the development of ECEC, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is in the national interest of Austria. The effectiveness of *Krippe, Kindergarten* and *Hort* contributes strongly to the whole education system, to labour market efficiency, to equal opportunity and choice for women, and, not least, to the well-being and development of children. The provision of ECEC services also involves issues concerning children's rights, which are a Federal responsibility and require certain common entitlements across the country. In the decentralised Austrian system, it is helpful to have one player with an overview of national goals, and the ability to bring the *Bundesländer* together, collect national data and monitor progress in reaching those goals. This requires a dedicated unit with funding and critical mass. In England, about 300 administrators are involved in the Department for Education and Science in these tasks; in Massachusetts (population about 6 million), the central office for young children has approximately 170 staff and is, according to reports, building upwards to 200 personnel. Because of the federal nature of Austrian government and the long history of ECEC in the country, numbers of this proportion are perhaps not needed. At the same time, a greater investment by the central ministries in ECEC research, in quality initiatives and for liaison with the *Bundesländer* would seem necessary, if quality and other reform initiatives are to be initiated and maintained at country-wide level.

3.3 Increasing and stabilising the public funding of early childhood

111. **Summary:** The public funding of ECEC services in Austria is relatively low (0.43% of GDP), compared to investment in the education system (3.8% of GDP) and to the level of investment in early childhood services of other European countries, e.g. Belgium, France, Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, which supply at least a part-day early education services free to children, generally from the age of 3 years. Austrian investment is well below the target proposed by the EC Childcare Network (1996) of at least 1% of GDP for children aged 0-5 years (which comes to about a fifth of current public expenditure on education in most OECD member states). This is not surprising given the limited development of services for under-3s and the low level of training and pay in the workforce as a whole. In addition, funding strategies are not clear or uniform within and across the *Länder*. The team did not have enough information, however, to understand the complexities of the funding mechanisms at work in the municipalities. Interviewees informed us, however, that the neighbourhoods most likely to experience difficulties in access or a lowering of quality (due to larger groups with less experienced personnel) were low-income and immigrant districts.¹³ Such disparities need attention as children from poor neighbourhoods require not just equal but enhanced investment to pay for the special activities, individual learning plans and the extra staff that they need.

Observations:

- If the long-term development of the Austrian early childhood education and care system is to be ensured, particularly for children under 3 years, the level of expenditure will need to increase over a 10 to 15 year period. A real commitment from the Federal government is needed i) to bring additional resources into early childhood education and care; ii) to bring transparency and consistency into present funding arrangements; iii) to ensure equitable treatment for special needs and at-risk children across the country, and iv) to link funding to improved quality and access, for example, kindergarten hours that better match parents' work days; more transparent pedagogical aims...

112. A number of strategies used in other countries are as follows:

- *A pooling of resources and sharing of costs* across ministries and users;
- *A shifting of educational financing toward early childhood:* Overall, public expenditure on ECEC services in Austria amounts to 0.43% of GDP, that is, a public expenditure figure of approximately \$4,500 per child in an ECEC service. This figure compares poorly to expenditure on pupils in primary (\$6,571 per child), and lower secondary (\$8,316 per child) schools – in particular, as child-staff ratios need to be low in ECEC services if quality is to be ensured. In response, an increasing number of education economists¹⁴ are urging governments to channel more educational investment to the young children at the base and to poorer families. The argument is essentially one of equity and returns on investment. The personal economic returns from university education are such that

13. These children require not just equal staffing but more staffing and enhanced investment to pay for special pedagogy, individual learning plans and second-language learning.

14. For example, James Heckman, a labour market economist at the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, MA, joint winner of the Nobel Prize in economics in 1999, and a leading human capital policy expert.

it is in the interest of students and their families to invest. Subventions from the State at this level can be seen as “middle-class welfare” or, in economic terms, as *dead weight*, as student university enrolments continue to grow even when subsidies are abolished. In particular, analysts of the question point out that blanket subventions, such as free fees, are inefficient, as they take away the state’s power to subvention needy students or to orient students toward certain disciplines to meet the changing needs of the economy. In contrast, early education is grossly under-funded. Yet it serves all children, and is especially effective where children from disadvantaged or dysfunctional backgrounds are concerned. In addition, early childhood services deliver other externalities important for an economy and society.

- *The co-ordination of childcare and early education into integrated services.* This is a strategy particularly suited to Austria where spare capacity exists in the kindergartens, and extra staff are trained and available;
- *A sharing of tasks with the voluntary early education bodies.* Again, the Austrian kindergarten system already employs this strategy.
- *Support for publicly funded ECEC 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. 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.” The OECD team visited two examples of business run crèches/kindergartens in Austria. Whereas such services cannot replace public services at national level, there is an opportunity, particularly in Vienna which hosts several large administrations and the headquarters of large international companies, to enrol the assistance of such bodies in founding and funding on-site early childhood services.
- *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 some of the Nordic countries, local authorities have powers to raise taxes, much of which is devoted to supplementing the State allocation for health, social welfare and early education services.

4. The challenges of access

4.1 The quantitative expansion of ECEC in Austria

113. **Summary:** Access issue in Austria include weak access for children from 1-3 years; an underdeveloped *Hort* system providing out-of-school provision for only 10.4% of children between 6-9 years; operating hours and annual duration of services not always in line with parental working patterns, and a low level of integration of children with disabilities. Again, the OECD team was informed that the neighbourhoods most likely to experience difficulties in access or a lowering of quality (due to larger groups with less experienced personnel) were low-income and immigrant districts.

114. With an overall supply of licensed institutional care for only 11% of children under 3 years, the child care situation in Austria is in need of extension. The estimates as to how many places are

necessary for children under three years old vary: they range between 20 and 40% (Statistics Austria, 2002). In comparison, other European countries offer a considerably higher degree of provision for the age group 0-3 years. Denmark, for example, provides care for 64% of its children at 1-3 years, followed by Sweden with 60%, Finland 36%, Belgium 30%, and France 29%.

115. In Austria, the coverage situation for children 3-6 years is significantly better. The overall coverage rate is 65.5% for 3-year-old children, but again, the average figure obscures the strong showing of some provinces (e.g. Burgenland with a 97 % coverage of 3-year-old children) and the weak showing of others (Tyrol with a coverage rate of 48%). The trend is favourable, however, as by the age of 5 years, 96% of 5-year-olds are enrolled. In spite of this encouraging development, supply in some provinces continues to be inadequate: only 3 out of 4 children in Carinthia manage to have a kindergarten place before they enter school, and frequently, kindergarten access does not cover the full working day or year

116. Out-of-school provision for school children also needs extension. Overall, Austria offers a care place for only 10.4% of children in the ages between 6 and 9. Every fourth child in Vienna attends an after-school day-care centre, but only every tenth child receives such a place in Carinthia, Upper Austria and Lower Austria... Although Austria has a *Hort* system in place that is well-organised and publicly recognised, access rates are far from the coverage rates achieved by the Nordic countries. Denmark and Sweden have access rates of over 70% for children between 6 and 9 years old, in publicly financed care facilities. Similar proportions of children of 9 years and older attended recreational clubs or take advantage of other forms of leisure activities. Both countries have achieved full coverage in this field. The lead pedagogues in charge of leisure-time activities are educated to university degree level, and are specialised in this type of pedagogy, which is seen as a necessary part of educational and social care.

Observations

- Significant increases in access are needed for children under-3 years and in out-of-school provision if parents are to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Likewise, some gaps in kindergarten provision in the provinces need to be filled. This calls for a well-designed expansion plan stretching over several years. Although initially costly, the expansion is likely to pay for itself through the tax contributions of an extra 15% of women who are able to return to work a year earlier than at present.
- The following is a summary of the micro-survey conducted by Statistics Austria in 2002, with regard to parental needs:

Box 11. A needs assessment of Austrian parents

The micro-census survey of Austrian parents carried out September 2002¹⁵ provides valuable information for policy makers. Although the great majority of the 1.3 million children under 15 years in Austria required no care or no additional care outside the family, nonetheless the parents surveyed indicated that sufficient extra-domestic care was lacking for 89,400 children. For approximately half the children, the lack concerned additional care in existing provision, while for the other half it was question of providing new services as the children in question were not being cared institutionally at all. In sum, according to

15 Statistics Austria, 2002

65% of respondents, the supply of care facilities is entirely unsatisfactory, or that the extent or quality of care offered by existing provision is insufficient. In particular, 13% of respondents found fault with existing opening hours and with the lack of care during holidays. Major deficits were noted especially with regard to provision of care for children between the ages of 0 and 3. This is not surprising given the fact that coverage for the group is 12.9% of eligible children while in parallel, about 32% of mothers are in work after the parental leave period, which generally ends at 18 months.

Dissatisfaction was also expressed with regard to kindergarten services: 10% of kindergartens are criticised as insufficient in regard to opening hours; kindergarten groups are considered too large and lacking in care; opening hours are considered inflexible and insufficient; and an unmet demand of 25,4000 places was reported. With regard to children between 6 and 14 years of age, parents expressed a strong desire for additional *Hort* or out-of-school places, and deemed insufficient the extent of care provided in 15% of the existing facilities.

The greatest need for additional care in quantitative terms is for out-of-school provision for school children. For children aged between 6 and 14 there is an additional need of 20% of the existing supply on the part of the parents. For 15% of the existing places, the extent of care is classified as insufficient by parents. The most cited reasons for the lack of provision were: poor accessibility of the facility. This was the case above all for school children, for whom there are often neither full-day schools or after-school day-care centres in the rural areas. Costs are a further reason for not using facilities. This is true especially often for kindergartens, as well as for the midday and afternoon care of school children.

4.2 Appropriate access for children with special or additional educational needs

117. The OECD Directorate for Education classifies special educational needs into three categories (see para. 50 above). In Austria, Category A children (children with organic disabilities) are generally cared for at home, in special kindergartens and in integrated groups in mainstream kindergartens. During the OECD visit, the team did not have the opportunity to visit a special needs kindergarten, but according to reports, these kindergartens are well staffed and managed. The difficulty it seems – as in many other countries – is that places for severely handicapped children are insufficient in number, and that this shortage needs to be addressed.

118. There is a growing desire on the part of the parents of children with handicaps or other organic disorders to place them in mainstream, inclusive kindergartens. Again, according to representatives of Integration Austria, and despite the Austrian Law on Persons with Disabilities, there are insufficient places; parents still encounter many difficulties in placing their children in integrated groups. Unlike the Nordic countries, children with disabilities in Austria do not always have first call on services and municipalities can be reluctant to take on the extra costs involved, such as extra staff or renovations of kindergarten buildings and classrooms to facilitate access for these children. The Associations also point to a deficit approach on the part of municipalities: in order to gain admission to services, parents have to prove in a public hearing that their child has special needs. Even if successful, their child may be allowed to attend kindergarten only in the morning. Frequently, the staffing situation in the kindergartens is inadequate to receive a special needs child appropriately – many municipalities will employ special needs assistants (with no training) rather than fully trained special needs teachers. At the same time, home-visiting and home education is inadequate. In sum, the situation for many parents with a special needs child is one of insufficient information and support. Admission and taking in charge criteria differ significantly from province to province (see Box 1 above).

Observations

- Regrettably, the OECD team had insufficient time to explore in depth the special needs situation in Austria. However, this does not lessen the importance and urgency of addressing the needs of

these children and their families. From the insights gained during the visit, we would propose for consideration the following:

- i. *To provide a right to appropriate inclusion into crèches and kindergartens (special or mainstream) for children with special or additional learning needs;*
- ii. *To ensure that all formal services are sufficiently staffed.* Where special needs children are concerned, admission is not sufficient. Inclusion must be *appropriate* ;
- iii. *To align the provincial laws in this field,* notably concerning admission and reception criteria in crèches and kindergartens;
- iv. *To build up and support community networks in this field:* the efforts made in Carinthia seemed, *prima facie*, to merit further study (see Box 1 above)
- v. If not already in existence, *to create at each provincial level a special needs support office to work with the parents, associations, teachers and services.* If we understood correctly, the special needs office in Salzburg has a mandate both for a supportive and supervisory role vis-à-vis services. It is also charged with developing a needs assessment and an adequate statistical base for evidence-based policy-making with regard to these children. This seemed to the OECD team to be a helpful and effective way to proceed.

5. Strategies to improve quality

5.1 Quality issues

119. **Summary:** The major indicators of good quality are treated in detail below: licensing and regulatory regimes; staffing training and work conditions; curriculum and pedagogy; data collection, evaluation and research; parent and community involvement. Other related quality issues raised by Austrian interviewees on the ground included:

- The general looseness of the ECEC organisation at Federal level, combined with insufficient numbers of policy and supervisory personnel at *Bundesländer* level;
- Policy divisions between childcare, kindergarten and schools in most provinces, resulting in low co-operation between kindergarten and schools;
- Insufficient pedagogical monitoring and support to centres;
- Low (pre-tertiary level) certification of pedagogues, and their weak organisation at associative and union levels;
- The lack of appreciation that assistants can benefit from training;
- The status, salary and work conditions of kindergarten and out-of-school pedagogues (*Kindergarten- and Hort-Pädagoginnen*) and *Tagesmütter* (family daycare personnel);
- A lack of data in most *Bundesländer* on children with additional learning needs. Inequitable and inappropriate access for these children and insufficient support for their families;
- A general weakness in Austrian ECEC of research.

Observation

- Austria has built up over time a solid early childhood system, but frequently of uneven quality. Despite the existence of some innovative and excellent centres, it seemed to the review team that

the whole system could profit from a nationwide quality initiative, perhaps on the lines of the recent German example, but choosing themes that are of concern to Austria and aiming for a national perspective.

5.2 Licensing and regulatory regimes

120. **Summary:** In Austria, provincial laws specify the legal requirements for all types of child care institutions: such as, operational schedules, the employment of qualified personnel, facility standards, etc. Overall, a positive approach to licensing and regulations exists, but in several instances questions concerning the non-observance or derogations from regulations were raised. Another challenge is raised by the fact that there are no nationwide standards on educational and teaching quality. The Charlotte Bühler Institute (CBI) has drawn up a comparative synopsis of the provincial kindergarten laws, showing their convergences and contradictions (see Chapter 3, section on *Quality and quality indicators*).¹⁶ In general, requirements are more comprehensive and stringent for kindergartens and crèches than for the other child care facilities not regulated by kindergarten laws. Since each province regulates this area independently, it is difficult to make statements that are accurate for the whole of Austria.

Observations

- Devolution of powers to the provinces is a positive step toward local democracy and to creating more responsive local services, but it seems excessive to find wide divergences in the regulations in force in different parts of a small country. The provision of ECEC services involves issues of children and citizen rights that are a Federal responsibility and require common entitlements across the country. In sum, improved co-ordination seems to be needed between the centre and the provinces. If it is not already the case, it would seem useful to create a co-ordinating mechanism to agree on common, national standards across service types, in particular in those areas that concern equity between families, and the right of children to provision and quality. It seems inappropriate that the volume and quality of early services should be substantially uneven across the country, and that families in different *Bundesländer* cannot expect roughly equal support and similar socio-educational opportunities for their children.
- This issue is intimately linked to the role that the central ministries should play in the early childhood field. From what we have understood, the legal role assigned to the central ministries in Austria is minimal. In this administrative void at the Federal level, it would be useful if the *Bundesländer* could work out together some co-operative solutions. In the section of 'Governance and finance' above, we outlined some of the common ECEC tasks that if undertaken in common by the authorities could lead to savings and greater efficiency. For these reasons, the administrations may wish:
 - i. *To develop a common **Plan for Early Childhood Services Development in Austria**, rolled over on a three-year basis, with clearly spelt out goals, targets, time-lines, funding streams, responsibilities, and accountability measures from co-operating ministries and federal*

16. Hartmann, W. and Stoll, M. (2004). *Mehr Qualität für Kinder – Qualitätsstandards und Zukunftsperspektiven für den Kindergarten* (More quality for children - quality standards and future perspectives for kindergarten). Volume 1 of the series of the Charlotte Bühler Institute. Vienna.

bodies. While universal in intent, the plan could also include annual targets and specific funding for the important subsystems, such as disadvantaged children, immigrant children, and children with special needs.

- ii. *To include in this development plan inputs from the major stakeholders in the early childhood field:* such as, professional and parent groups, employers, researchers and the Federal government ministries. In many instances, regular annual consultations of stakeholders and expert groups can move policy making out of the political field toward a more research driven focus, and maintain objectivity and continuity in policy. In the review team's experience, policy agreements negotiated between experienced government officials, researchers and stakeholders are likely to be evidence-based, realistic and command public consent.
- iii. *To undertake discussions with Federal ministries regarding national social and labour market policies which, as we have discussed in Chapter 2, impact strongly on the organisation of early childhood services at provincial level .* Labour market policies, family benefits and gender equality measures are areas where inputs from the *Länder* administrations in charge of ECEC could contribute to sound policy and public consensus;
- iv. *To undertake annual discussions with the municipal authorities with regard to expansion, funding, quality improvement and data collection.* Disagreement with or incomprehension of *Länder* policies often arises at municipal level, in particular, if the provision and funding of early childhood services becomes politicised. It is in the interests of the *Länder* administrations to explain their policies to the municipal authorities and to support through professional development a significant cadre of early childhood administrators in each large urban centre. Early childhood service provision is a complex field, and managers at local level need complex skills to take on basic system responsibilities such as, long-term planning, consensus building, financial steering, standard setting, data collection, and the supportive evaluation of centres and staff.

5.3 Staffing, training and work conditions;

121. **Summary:** Chapter 3 of this report outlines the staffing situation in Austrian kindergartens and crèches. It examines the training and qualifications of staff: their compensation and career opportunities, the conditions of their work, such as hours of work, group sizes, child:staff ratios and professional development opportunities. It looks also at personnel outside the formal structures, such as the family day daycarers, and their particular qualifications and training. It noted the positive aspects of staffing in the Austrian kindergarten: the good recruitment levels of the young persons in secondary schools applying to become pedagogues; the excellent training they receive in music and practico-aesthetic skills; the fact that over 60% of staff in both crèches and kindergarten are trained pedagogues; the requirement (except for parent groups) that a trained pedagogue should lead each kindergarten group...The report notes also some of the less positive aspects: the low level of the final pedagogue qualification conferred on young women who are well capable of succeeding in tertiary studies; the difficult working conditions and high child:staff ratios, especially in kindergartens in poor urban areas; low compensation (20% less than a teacher's wage); relatively high rates of unemployment; the weak job perspectives for a pedagogue wishing to change her profession; the wide variations in training for family day carers...

Observations:

- *“Quality ECEC depends on strong staff training and fair working conditions across the sector. Initial and in-service training needs to be broadened to take into account the growing educational and social responsibilities of the profession. There is a critical need to develop strategies to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse, mixed-gender workforce and to ensure that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable.” Starting Strong I (OECD, 2001);*
- Secondary level training would seem insufficient as a preparation for early childhood pedagogues, who are increasingly challenged by the rapid changes in family formation and child upbringing. A complexification of the aims and responsibilities of early childhood services has taken place over the past decade. Pedagogues today are expected to respond to the greater instability of family life, to the changing roles of women and parents, to the challenges of supporting families in bringing up children correctly; in a world dominated by consumerism, to the educational difficulties faced by children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds. With regard to the preparation of children for school, the requirements on the profession are equally demanding. Pedagogues are expected to assist the language development of children; promote learning skills; communicate scientific knowledge, technical education, and media skills; implement educational plans and learning projects, practise child observation at a professional level, document and evaluate children’s learning processes across a wide range of activities...
- It appears that Austria is the sole EU country to train lead kindergarten educators only to Baccalaureat level (in many countries, the level of assistants). This seems a pity as the recruitment level – within the secondary context - of the young persons wishing to be trained as pedagogues seems to be higher than in many countries, and most of these young people are well capable of taking tertiary level studies. The consequences of this choice were outlined in Chapter 4, not least the non-compatibility of Austrian training with the rest of the EU and the potential exclusion of Austrian pedagogues from international and university exchanges. In addition, the implications for university research were drawn out. In comparison with other European countries, universities in Austria have been little involved over the past 30 years in ECEC research and development projects, as they have no training stake in this field. A reform of training could provide remedy this situation, and also provide Austria with an opportunity to rethink the profile of the early childhood pedagogue.¹⁷ The example of teacher reform in Sweden and the UK may merit the consideration of the Austrian authorities;
- With regard to the working conditions of staff, a CBI survey of pedagogues in 1994 indicated that although the majority of pedagogues were satisfied with their position and work (at that particular moment), many demands for improvements were made in the following areas: (1) the staff work situation; (2) group size; (3) preparation time; (4) pay; (5) regulation of in-service time; (6) professional image and societal recognition; (7) further and continuing education; (8) external experts; (9) working together with parents; (10) team work; (11) supervision and self-reflection;

17. This comment should not be read as a criticism of the formation given by the present training colleges, which, from our small experience of these institutes, seems excellent in many ways. What is at stake is the entry age of recruitment, the final qualifications received and the implication of the tertiary sector in professional education.. These issues have a bearing on the status of early childhood educators, which by all accounts is relatively low in Austria.

(12) extent of administration work; (13) co-determination and responsibility. The profession itself does not cause difficulty but, it seems, the less advantageous conditions of work. In the long run, a negative effect on recruitment. Several pedagogues interviewed by the OECD team spoke of the growing demands on centres, groups that are too large, few chances for advancement or transfer, low pay and low status...

- The work conditions and low wages of the pedagogues are linked also to two important external issues: gender equality in the present, and in the future, to labour market competitiveness. Where gender equality is concerned, the present arrangements serve to reinforce gender inequality. Through keeping qualifications and wages low, governments may through inadvertence produce a segregated sector dominated by low-paid female labour. Future labour competition may also make the profession less attractive. In the service economies where many jobs are available to women, any sector that remunerates its personnel poorly risks losing experienced staff on a large scale. In the US, for example, where wages for many early childhood staff are improperly low, staff turnover rates of 35% are not uncommon in childcare centres. In any industry, this is poor economy, as the costs of new recruitment and retraining are high. In early childhood care and education, the consequences are disastrous: young children need stable relationships for their socio-emotional development, and rapid turnover of staff undermines their trust and well-being. In addition, centres that lack staff continuity are no longer able to carry out the long-term educational projects that are so important for children's learning.
- Professional development opportunities for pedagogues in Austria are also incoherent and weak, and differ widely across the *Länder*. The authorities may wish to consider – as is the practice in other countries - a (national) qualifications profile with a coordinated modular system of initial, further and continuing training, valid in all the Austrian provinces and linked to university credits.
- Owing to poor pay and the lack of interesting job perspectives, young male Austrians tend to avoid the early education field. The proportion of men among early childhood teachers amounts to 0.8%, although in the training institutes, 2.7% of candidates are young men. Yet, it is generally admitted that children benefit from interaction with both sexes in the first years of life, that they need not only feminine but also masculine role models. In several European countries, including the Nordic countries and Belgium (Flanders), government have carried out information campaigns to make young men aware of the profession and to support the few male pedagogues that exercise their profession. Relevant conferences, networks for male staff, and the publication of research on the issue contribute to stimulating an important discussion on the question. It would be desirable that in any proposed reform of the professional profile in Austria, that the practical barriers to male entry should be examined carefully.

5.4 Curriculum and pedagogy

122. **Summary:** No national curriculum framework exists for the ECEC system in Austria. The federal level has not issued or co-constructed with the *Länder* a nationwide educational plan (curriculum framework) for crèches, kindergarten and *Hort* that would determine the values, philosophy, objectives and contents of early childhood education and upbringing. Yet, as we have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the conditions for adopting a national ECEC framework in Austria are very favourable. A shared pedagogical concept and approach can be seen across all the *Länder* and across the main service types: in theory and in practice, care, upbringing and education are seen to be the basis of work with young children. Though formed in different training institutes, the

pedagogues all share this educational philosophy. In our view, it would be useful to set out in a short curriculum framework the common values and common educational objectives that Austria wants of its young children.

Box 12. Extract from the Swedish National Curriculum Framework

Fundamental values

Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school. For this reason all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Each and everyone working in the pre-school should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as respect for our shared environment.

An important task of the pre-school is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall actively promote in its work with children.

The foundation on which these values rests expresses the ethical attitude which shall characterise all pre-school activity. Care and consideration towards other persons, as well as justice and equality, in addition to the rights of each individual shall be emphasised and made explicit in all pre-school activity. Children assimilate ethical values and norms primarily through their concrete experiences. The attitudes of adults influence the child's understanding and respect for the rights and obligations that apply in a democratic society. For this reason adults serve an important role as models. Upholding these fundamental values requires that the attitudes from which they are derived are clearly apparent in daily activity. The activities of the pre-school should be carried out democratically and thus provide the foundation for a growing responsibility and interest on the part of children to actively participate in society.

Understanding and compassion for others

The pre-school should take into account and develop children's ability to take responsibility and manage their social life in society so that solidarity and tolerance are established at an early stage. The pre-school should encourage and strengthen the child's compassion and empathy for others. All activities should be characterised by care for the individual and aim at developing a sense of empathy and consideration for others, as well as openness and respect for the differences in the way people think and live. Support should also be given to the child's need to be able to reflect over and share their thoughts on the issues life poses.

Increasing mobility across national borders creates cultural diversity in the pre-school, which provides children with the opportunity to build up respect and consideration for each individual, irrespective of background.

Source: Citation from Lpfö 98, page 5

123. The reasons often put forward in Starting Strong (OECD, 2001) for developing national curriculum frameworks were as follows: to clarify common values and objective for early childhood education and care; to promote an even level of quality across age groups and regional provision in a country; to facilitate communication between staff, parents, and children; to help guide and support professional staff in their practice; and to ensure pedagogical continuity across the country and between ECEC and school. State investment in a curricular framework also indicates that early childhood services are recognised as the foundation stage of lifelong learning, and as belonging to the sphere of public services. The position carries positive implications for funding, goal setting, training and monitoring;

Observations

- What is at question here is not a traditional curriculum (a plan of instructional activities or lesson plans to be carried out by staff in order to inculcate skills or pre-defined subject content) but rather a framework document setting out the values, goals, operational and programme standards, essential contents, pedagogical outlines, etc of what Austria wishes to achieve in its early childhood centres. The purpose of a framework is to orient rather than to define content or methodology. The latter are elements that may best be devolved to local and centre levels. Devolution of important tasks presupposes, however, that centre managers and staff are well-trained, and that the necessary networks are in place to support them in developing curricula and evaluation methods for their own centres.
- For a curriculum framework to receive consensus and the enthusiastic backing of parents and the teaching profession, its formulation should be highly participative and democratic. The process outlined in Box 8 on the formulation of the new Finnish curriculum is, to our mind, a good example of consensus-building.

5.5 Improved data collection, evaluation and research

124. **Summary:** The OECD team found it easier to access data in Austria than in many other countries.¹⁸ Statistics Austria is responsible for national monitoring and for the reporting of data pertinent to the ECEC field. Despite certain lacunae in data, it does an excellent job. Each year, it collects data on early childhood facilities throughout Austria. Uniform data collection forms are filled out by all crèches, kindergartens, after-school day-care facilities, mixed age day-care facilities and all other types of day-care facilities and submitted to Statistics Austria for processing via the competent inspectorate of the provincial governments. Information is collected on the day-care facilities (providers, opening hours, facilities, equipment, whether lunch is served, medical care, possibilities for using a playground area), on the children (length of stay, disabilities, age, employment of the mother, whether they eat lunch there, nationality) and on the staff (employment relationship, marital status, level of education/training, age, scope of employment). In addition to this annual data collection, special data collections and surveys are also made. Micro-censuses in 1995 and 2002 included a special section entitled “Household Management, Day-Care and Nursing Care”. This micro-census contains items on day-care, including questions on the lack of available day-care and other reasons for not taking advantage of day-care facilities. In sum, Statistics Austria provides some excellent data on which to build policy.

125. Research and evaluation are in a much weaker condition. As already mentioned, the secondary level status of early childhood professional education precludes university involvement in research. As a result, ECEC research in Austria remains extremely weak, with the exception of the Charlotte Bühler Institute, and the quinquennial efforts by the responsible ministry in Austria to respond to the demands of the UN Committee on the rights of the Child.¹⁹ This is untenable in the long run, as in

18. This was due also to the good work of the authors of the Austrian Background Report

19. The Committee requires of all countries to monitor the quantitative and qualitative development of early childhood services, with special attention to children’s rights issues, e.g. the achievement of defined outcomes

principle, policy based on evidence-based research is superior to decisions based on opinion. Evaluation is likewise weak, both in terms of inspection and of participatory evaluation, although this depends to some extent on the province and the sector in question. The inspectors that we did meet seemed to have extremely heavy workloads. It also seemed to the OECD team that a strong culture of quality improvement, staff support and professional development did not exist across the country.

Observations

Data:

- According to our correspondents, data collection could be improved by further work by the *Länder* governments and Statistics Austria on the following topics: contextual data on women and their situation, such as the number in part-time work, both licensed and informal; regular surveys on the real demand for child care services, the actual occupancy of childcare places, the real numbers of special needs and immigrant children in each province and in the major urban centres... Data on the socio-economic background of children in ECEC is important, and its lack prevents knowledge about which children are missing or delaying entry into ECEC, and about the factors that constitute impediments to access. These data are of particular importance if equitable access for all children to public ECEC is to be ensured.
- *Available data on childminders and parent-toddler groups* are also incomplete, as not all providers are members of the provincial associations. It can be assumed that many of these providers are not meeting the requirements of the associations with regard to initial and on-going training, facilities and programmes in use. Whether, as in other countries, a law – or a financial disincentive - is necessary to prevent the care of children by unlicensed providers is perhaps a matter for the Austrian authorities to consider

Evaluation

- *Federal surveys and initiatives to stimulate quality improvement:* Action by the Federal government could greatly help to improve quality standards across the country. Although Statistics Austria provides much valuable information, supplemented by the work of the Charlotte Bühler Institute, to our knowledge a regular national survey that provides an overview of the average structural and pedagogical quality of day-care facilities throughout Austria does not exist. Unless such surveys are undertaken and published regularly, the public and *Träger* services are working in the dark: they or the pedagogues they employ cannot know what is expected of them, which children are not attending kindergarten...²⁰ The Federal authorities may also wish to consider – as in Germany – the launching (and funding) of a national quality initiative that aims to support managers and staff at local level to put into place participatory quality mechanisms, that involve administrators, staff and parents. In the long run, continuous quality improvement has to be

for special needs and low-income children, and when necessary, the funding of affirmative action on their behalf.

20. Kind en Gezin, the child care agency of the Flemish community, Belgium, publishes every year a detailed statistical report of the state of young children in Flanders. This report, in Dutch and English, can be accessed on the web: http://www.kindengezin.be/KG/English_pages/default.jsp

ensured by local administrators, centre heads and staff. These key personnel need motivation and funding to undertake this responsibility, working democratically as a team (see Box 3 on Villach).

Research

- We recommend for the consideration of the Austrian authorities to revisit the issue of ECEC research, seen in the context of a reform of the pedagogue training system. If this can be achieved, other actions will follow, e.g.
 - o The setting up of chairs in early childhood education: the optimum would be one chair per province with the corresponding research infrastructure;
 - o The creation of research centres and the formulation of research agendas in connection with these chairs;
 - o The formulation of a programme for the promotion of the next scientific generation, for example, through establishing post-graduate colleges and eventually, doctorates and other research diplomas;
- Support for the current research institutes is also desirable. In a period of weak national research, at least one of these has contributed greatly to quality improvement in Austrian kindergartens and kept the international community informed of the in-depth strengths of the Austrian ECEC system. Obviously, such support requires substantial and regular financing, but this in turn creates highly regarded jobs (for women as well as for men!) and a greater status for early childhood professional education. It may also renew links with an older tradition of early childhood research that made Austria a leader in Europe.

5.6 Parent and community involvement

126. **Summary:** *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001) outlined various levels in working with parents:

- *Marginal engagement*, when parents may be used as fund raisers but no real effort is made to engage in regular dialogue with parents;
- *Formal engagements*, when in compliance with official directives, parent-staff information meetings are held at regular intervals to inform parents about rules, programmes... and to facilitate making appointments to discuss children's progress;
- *Informal organised engagement*, when staff meet parents at drop-off and pick-up times in a purposeful, planned manner, or facilitate activities for parents. In this way, pedagogues can inform parents about the child's experiences in the ECEC setting, and listen to the expectations and concerns of parents;
- *Participatory engagement*, when the community and representatives of local groups and services are invited to interact with staff, and take an active part in the programmes of the centre. As a matter of course, parents are consulted on all important decisions;
- *Managerial engagement*, when parents are engaged *statutorily* on the management board, and contribute alongside the director and staff in programme orientation, operational decisions, employment and budgetary decisions.

127. According to information provided to the team, formal ways of working with parents still predominate in most Austrian services, e.g. information evenings and presentations by specialists.

128. In particular circumstances – such as in high poverty or immigrant areas - early childhood centres are more effective when they function as a hub of interconnected community services for families, and act as a frontline mechanism for child well-being, screening and prevention. However, the team did not see in Austria any centre where comprehensive services²¹ were a priority. Health and screening services (vision, hearing and general health) were available in most centres, and meals are increasingly offered to young children, particularly in full-day services. No particular liaison with community services was noted, however, such as referral services, integration programmes, parent education classes, family counselling, job training, women’s clubs and the like, as is customary in many industrialised cities across Europe. No doubt, such initiatives also exist in the large Austrian cities but the review team did not have an opportunity to study them.

Observations

- Whatever type of parent involvement is envisaged, early childhood facilities today must encourage parent involvement in the education of young children. Research shows clearly, for example, that children whose parents talk and negotiate with them and who read aloud to their children, generally have little difficulty in expression, or and later in acquiring early literacy (EPPE, 2002). In sum, day care facilities need no longer limit themselves to a function of focusing on the children only when they are in the centre. They can also have as their focus an education and upbringing partnership between parents and teaching staff. A consequence of this partnership is to link children’s learning processes in the kindergarten more closely with family aspirations and processes, to encourage parental involvement in the decision-making processes of the centre, and through mutual collaboration, co-determine opportunities for the children. Such integrating functions can greatly strengthen parenting skills and the home education of children.
- An important way of working with parents is to set up multiple opportunities to speak with them and to listen to what they say. The summary of the Statistics Austria 2002 micro-survey of parental needs (see Box 8 above) is a basis to begin useful discussion with parents, while the outline below of comprehensive services in a children’s centre in Sheffield, England, may provide some ideas of what can be accomplished in high poverty areas:

Closing Comment

129. This *Country Note for Austria* represents the views of an OECD expert team after a ten-day visit, aided by a comprehensive *Background Report* contracted by the Austrian Ministry of Education. During the visit, the team members were impressed by the knowledge and 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 prepared for us. Despite the shortness of our visit, we managed to visit five of the *Länder*, and to speak with a wide range of providers and administrations at national, regional and local levels.

130. 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

21. By *comprehensive services* are meant services that offer in addition to child development and early education programmes, support services to families, often in liaison with local community services.

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 limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. For this reason, our comments and recommendations are offered to the Austrian authorities not as hard and fast conclusions, but in a spirit of professional dialogue for the consideration of their specialists who are more knowledgeable about Austrian 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.

131. We would like once more to congratulate the OECD liaison unit in the Ministry of Education, the national co-ordinator, the authors of the Background Report, the Steering Committee, the *Länder* ministries, and all who contributed to the project, on their professionalism and open approach. It should be noted, however, that while the team received every assistance from these persons, and from many researchers and practitioners in Austria, they have no part in any shortcomings that this document may present.

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Appendices

Appendix I: OECD Review Team

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Bibliography

Additional Internet Sources

Appendix III: Programme of the Review Visit, 26 September – 06 October 2004

Sunday 26 September

19h00 Vienna: Team meeting
Dinner

Monday 27 September

09h00 – 10h15 Welcome and meeting with the authors of the background report
10h30 – 12h30 Information on the Austrian financial system and financial equalization
13h00 – 14h30 Meeting and lunch with representatives of the Municipal Department of Vienna
15h00 – 16h30 Meeting with representatives: Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), Professional Association (ÖDKH), Siemens Company
17h00 – 18h30 Meeting with researchers from the Charlotte Bühler Institute
19h00 Dinner

Tuesday 28 September

08h30 – 09h30 Visit of a catholic kindergarten
10h00 – 11h30 Meeting with representatives of the archdiocese of Vienna “Kindergartenwerk der Erzdiözese Wien”
11h30 – 13h00 Invitation to lunch with representatives of the archdiocese
13h45 – 15h15 Visit of a municipal centre (kindergarten, crèche, “Hort”)
16h00 – 17h30 Meeting with NGO “Integration Österreich” – I.Ö;
Presentation of the project: “Eltern beraten Eltern” (“Parents advise Parents”)
17h00 Departure to Graz

Wednesday 29 September

09h00 – 10h15 Meeting with representatives of the provincial government of Styria
11h00 – 12h45 Visit of a municipal kindergarten
13h00 – 14h00 Invitation to lunch with the Executive Province Councillor
14h45 – 16h45 Visit of the centre “Kindergartenhaus St. Ulrich”
17h30 – 19h00 Meeting with stakeholders and Professional Association (ÖDHK)
19h00 Dinner with Experts
Overnight Stay in Graz

Thursday 30 September

08h15 Departure to Carinthia
10h00 – 11h15 Visit of a new centre in St. Veit “Bewegungskindergarten” – focus on physical education
12h00 – 14h30 Visit of a bilingual kindergarten (German/Slovenian)
17h00 – 19h00 Meeting with representatives of the Carinthian Provincial Government and stakeholder
19h00 Invitation to lunch: Prov. Government

Friday 01 October

- 08h30 – 09h30 Meeting at the municipality of Villach
- 10h00 – 11h00 Visit of a private Centre
- 11h30 – 13h00 Visit of a municipal centre
- 13h00 Departure to Salzburg
- 15h00 – 16h30 Visit of a centre (mixed age groups): MAK
- 17h00 – 18h30 Meeting with representatives of Salzburg Provincial Government
- 19h00 Invitation to lunch by provincial government

Saturday 02 October

- 09h30 – 11h00 Visit of the “Zentrum für Kindergartenpädagogik”, centre for professional/further training
- 11h00 – 12h00 Meeting with the provincial inspectors for ECEC of the *Bundesländer* Vorarlberg and Tirol
- 12h30 Lunch

Sunday 03 October

- 18h00 Sightseeing/walk through the city of Linz with the chief editor of the professional journal “Unsere Kinder” (“Our children”), invitation to lunch

Monday 04 October

- 09h00 – 09h30 Welcome at the Upper Austrian Provincial Government
- 10h00 – 11h00 Visit of a Catholic Centre
- 11h30 – 12h30 Meeting with the representatives of the Upper Austrian Provincial Government
- 12h30 – 13h30 Lunch with representatives of the Upper Austrian Provincial Government
- 14h00 – 15h00 Visit of the municipal kindergarten Gramtstetten/Pöstlingberg
- 16h00 – 18h00 Meeting with stakeholder, representatives of the Municipality of Linz and Union representative
- 19h30 Invitation to dinner by the Provincial Government

Tuesday 05 October

- 09h00 – 12h00 Visit of a Training College for Kindergarten Pedagogy in Steyr
- 14h00 – 16h30 Visit and expert meeting at editorial department of the journal “Unsere Kinder”
- 17h00 Departure to Vienna

Wednesday 06 October

- 10h00 – 11h00 Meeting with representatives of the Federal Ministry
- 11h00 – 12h00 Welcome, statement and discussion: Federal Minister of Education, Science and Culture
- 12h00 – 12h45 Informal presentation of results
- 13h00 Lunch