

## Italy

**Population:** 58 145 360 (source ISTAT) **Fertility rate:** 1.30. **GDP per capita:** USD 26 347 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). **Children under 6 years:** 3 842 256 (source ISTAT – central estimate 1-1-2004).

**Female labour force participation:** 50.6% of women aged 15-64, 28.8% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 5.9%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

**Employment rates for mothers with children:** For mothers with children 0-3: 45.2% (EUROSTAT), for mothers with children under 6: 53%.

**Maternity and parental leave:** 5 months of compulsory maternity leave usually paid at 100% of earnings. Both parents are entitled to leave in the first year of the child, and either parent can take up to 10 months parental leave until the child is eight years old.

**Average duration of parental leave:** Data currently not available.

**Compulsory school age:** 6 years.

**Social expenditure:** 24.4% of GDP. **Child poverty rate:** 16.6% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

**Major service types and duration:** The *nidi d'infanzia*<sup>1</sup> for children 3 months to 3 years, open for 8 to 12 hours daily. The *scuole dell'infanzia* (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003, art. 2, letter e) for the 3- to 6-year-olds open during the academic year with a flexible timetable, ranging from a minimum of 875 to a maximum of 1 700 annual hours (in most cases open from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.). *Integrated services* – play areas, centres for children and families, in-home services – that supplement ECEC services. Besides 732 integrated services,<sup>2</sup> a growing number of recent pilot schemes (“in-home” and “company” services) enrich and diversify the provision.

**Major providers of ECEC services:** The State runs 55.2% of schools, the remaining 44.8% are run by non-state providers (non-state schools include schools run by municipalities, confessional providers, and private individuals). The recent reform aims at ensuring the generalisation of education provision and the possibility to attend *scuola dell'infanzia* and provides for diversification of providers to meet the diverse needs of families, with a view to progressively overcoming the rigidity of service provision (Government decree 19 February 2004, No. 59, art. 1, item 2). Continuing expansion, rather than balance distribution, has confirmed diversification at national level between areas and regions (Aldo Fortunati, *op. cit.*, p. 19).

1. Aldo Fortunati, “I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia come risorsa ed opportunità per bambini e genitori: tendenze e prospettive”, in *Cittadini in Crescita*, 2004, pp. 18-29.
2. “I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia. Indagine sui nidi d'infanzia e sui servizi educativi 0-3 anni integrativi al nido al 30 settembre 2000”, Florence, Istituto degli innocenti, 2002.

**Funding of pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0):** 0.44% of GDP (0.39% public and 0.05% private); 8.5% of the education budget is devoted to the education of 3- to 6-year-olds, who comprise 12% of education enrolments. Salary costs in the municipal and confessional *scuole dell'infanzia* are supported by state funding (data currently not available).

**Unit cost per child** (in USD converted using PPP): USD 5 445 (public institutions only) (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005).

**Average costs to parents:** Children 0-3 years: fees are charged according to parental income level, but they are capped at a maximum of 18% of costs. Children 3-6 years: attendance is free in state and municipal services, except for meals and extra services.

**Legal entitlement to a free service:** At the age of 3 years in state and municipal *scuole dell'infanzia*; for all children at the beginning of obligatory schooling.

**Rate of access to regulated services:** Children 0-3 years: 18.7%\*\*\*. Children 3-4 years: 98.1%. 5-6 years: 100%. (\*\*\*) source: Istat-Census 2001).

**Designation and professional qualifications of key staff:** *Insegnante* (teacher) in *scuola dell'infanzia* with a 4-year university education; *educatrice* (educator) in *asilo nido* with a secondary vocational education.

**Child-staff ratios:** For child-minding inside the home: 3:1. In *asilo nido* 7:1. In *scuola dell'infanzia* per 2 teachers: 20 children (if there are children with disabilities), 25 children (generally), 28 children (in exceptional cases), plus a teacher assistant (special needs teacher) and a religion teacher.

**Maximum group size:** *Asilo nido*: 10 children; *scuola dell'infanzia*: group size is a maximum of 25 children. Since at some points of the day there are several teachers in one section, it is possible to create groups with a variable number of children for lab activities, exploring, researching and playing outdoor.

## Auspices

Policy responsibility for ECEC in Italy is separated according to governmental level, the type of service being offered and the age of focus. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the *scuola dell'infanzia*, catering for the 3- to 6-year-olds. This Ministry oversees the educational orientation, quality inspection and evaluation of the *scuola dell'infanzia* system.

Law No. 62 of 10 March 2000 introduced fundamental changes into the ECEC legislative framework. After the entry into force of the law, most non-state *scuole dell'infanzia* successfully applied for the recognition of equal status (*parità scolastica*). *Scuole paritarie* are non-state schools, including those run by local authorities, which, starting from the *scuola dell'infanzia*, follow the general education guidelines and meet families' educational demand, as well as observing quality and effectiveness requirements (Law No. 62 of 10 March 2000, art. 1, par. 2). In particular, they must: have an educational project in line with the principles of the Italian Constitution; have an educational plan (POF) consistent with regulations and provisions in force; have collective bodies based on democratic participation; guarantee access to all children whose parents apply for a place; implement current regulations for disabled or disadvantaged children; employ fully qualified teaching staff, with individual contracts in accordance with the national collective contracts for the sector.

The regions and municipalities are responsible for the *asili nido*, catering for the 3 month-3-year-olds. At local level, in response to community demand, municipalities may provide and operate services, using part of their own funding. Maternal and child health services, infant and toddler care, child welfare, and related social services are largely the responsibility of regional and local governments. The region supplements municipal budgets, through the distribution of the employer's 1% contribution to social funds (devoted, in principle, to infants and toddlers). Local authorities are also responsible for financing buildings. The bodies directly responsible for the *scuole dell'infanzia* organise in-service training activities for the staff:

- The State, through the Regional Institute for Educational Research (IRRE) and the National Documentation Institute for Educational Innovation and Research (INDIRE).
- The municipalities, confessional providers and private individuals (also through initiatives carried out by their associations).

### Context

*Labour force rates:* In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 50.6%, increasing from 44.0% in 1990. Of those, 28.8% work part-time, while 5.9% of men work part-time (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). Mothers with a youngest child under 6 years had an employment rate of 53% in 2002, and constituted 29% of part-time employment (OECD *Society at a Glance*). In 2004, mothers with a youngest child under 3 had an employment rate of 45.2% (EUROSTAT).

*Parental leave:* Italy offers 5 months of job-protected maternity mandatory leave paid through the social security fund, paid at 80% of salary. Civil servants receive their full pay while on maternity leave and many collective bargaining agreements require employers to top-up the social insurance benefit and pay an additional benefit covering the remaining 20% of wage. Full-time working mothers are also entitled to two hours/day of rest time during the first year after birth, which if taken together, can effectively shorten their workday by two hours. Since 2000, either parent may take up to 10 months' leave at any time until the child is eight years old. Employers receive state incentives to offer part-time employment opportunities to parents following leave. Small firms, which have to replace workers, may receive a tax concession.

### Access and provision

Three main types of provision are found in Italy, in which children are generally grouped according to age:

*Nidi d'infanzia* (child care centres) cater essentially for children from 3 months to 3 years, and are open from September to the following June/July. In recent years, they have increased in number (from 2 180 in 1992 to 3 008 in 2000 – a 27.5% increase) and provision (from 5.8% in 1992 to 7.4% in 2000). The potential of active services with respect to potential users was estimated at 6.75% in 1992; in 2000 the estimate increased to 8.6%.<sup>1</sup> Non-state providers have increased: from 146 centres in 1992 (6.7% of the total 2 180) to 604 centres in 2000 (20.1% of the total 3 008). The distribution of *nidi* is not homogeneous on the national territory and availability of places varies: northern regions provide 59.3% of places, central regions 25.4%, southern regions plus the islands 15.3% (*op. cit.*, p. 41). These centres may operate from 1st September to 31st August, but most (36%) are open 45-48 weeks, 34% are open 40-44 weeks, around 20% are open 49 weeks or more, and 105 are open

39 weeks (*op. cit.*, p. 72). They are open from Monday to Friday with variable daily working hours: the majority of them (36%) operate 11-12 hours, 34% operate 9-10 hours, 27% operate 7-8 hours, only about 3% operate 7 hours (*op. cit.*, p. 73). There are 2 404 (79.9%) public *nidi d'infanzia*, and 604 (20.1%) private ones (*op. cit.*, p. 127).

*Scuole dell'infanzia* cater for the 3- to 6-year-olds. The recent reform law of the school system (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003 and Government decree No. 59 of 19 February 2004) provides for the possibility to enrol – on a gradual and experimental basis – children who will be 3 years old before 30 April of the academic year. This implies the introduction of new professional profiles and new organisational aspects. Presently only children who are 3 years old by 28 February are admitted to *scuola dell'infanzia* (C.M. No. 90 of 30 December 2004). About 55.2% of *scuole dell'infanzia* are now under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education, University and Research. *Scuola dell'infanzia* offers a full day programme, from 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. from September to June, with municipal services generally offering summer programmes. Attendance at state and municipal *scuola dell'infanzia* is free, except for meals. Modest fees are charged in confessional *scuola dell'infanzia*, as these services receive some regional and state funds. Other private providers may charge higher fees, but many private services are, in fact, non-profit.

*Integrated services*: Typically, these services cater for children from 1-6 years, and combine care and education. On 30 September 2000, besides 2 404 public *nidi d'infanzia* and 604 private ones, 504 public integrated services for 0- to 3-year-olds and at least 228 private ones were calculated (31% of total).<sup>2</sup> The survey on public integrated services for 0- to 3-year-olds is a proper census, but for private ones the estimate may reflect only a small part of the actual provision. The so-called “new service typologies” of integrated services respond to the demand for differentiation of the *asili nido* provision and meet the diverse needs of families, women and children (*op. cit.*, p. 79). There are three types of integrated services (*op. cit.*, p. 79): *Centres for children and families*, catering for 0- to 3-year-olds not in an exclusive way, where children can be accompanied by their parents or other adults. The location for service provision is fixed and appropriate, but not necessarily exclusive. The activities are carried out on a regular and permanent basis. *Play areas* for children aged between 18 and 36 months: children are admitted either in the morning or in the afternoon for a maximum of 5 hours daily. Regulation provides for a diversified attendance according to users' needs. Extra services, like meals and afternoon rest, are not provided. *Educational services* for small groups of children younger than 3 years: These are typically provided by qualified staff, either in the home of one of the users' families or in the educator's home (*op. cit.*, p. 80). Among the best known are the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, which combine infant, toddler and kindergarten care under the auspices of the municipal education system. Because the demand for places is greater than supply, Reggio Emilia programmes are part-day and part-week. Municipal services may also include new service typologies that are characterised by integrated, inter-generational approaches, with outreach to families and children who normally would not have opportunities to interact and socialise with others.

### Rates of provision

**0-1 years**: Most care for infants is parental – linked to the parental leave system. Parental care is supplemented by informal (unregulated) family care, or *asilo nido* provision.

1-3 years: Children are cared for in the following ways: 27% in-home care; 48% relatives or informal care; 15% by a child minder in the home; 7.5% in *asili nido* (open full day for 11 months); and 2% father's and family care (Background Report for Italy, 1998).

4-6 years: 98% of children (depending on region) attend *scuola dell'infanzia* from the age of 3 years, reaching a national coverage of over 100% of children aged 5-6 years (the rate of access is slightly higher than 100%, since it includes children of non-registered foreigners).

### *Children with diverse needs*

*Children with disabilities:* In Italy, general inclusion of children with disabilities into ECEC and schools is the rule, with reduced group sizes and special needs teachers at their disposal. In the academic year 2004-05,<sup>3</sup> 10 084 children with disabilities enrolled in state *scuole dell'infanzia*, that is 1.04% of the total number of students (968 399). They have different types of disabilities: mental and physical: 9 270 children; sight: 299 children; and hearing: 515 children. There are 4 898 posts for special needs teachers, not including extra teachers recruited in exceptional cases. Posts for general teachers are 79 370 (*ibid.*):

*Children from low-income families:* The child poverty level in Italy is 16.6% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%), but the national figure covers wide regional variations. Children of low-income families and of single parents have priority of access to *nidi d'infanzia*.

*Ethnic and bilingual children:* The 2003-04 rate of attendance at state and non-state *scuole dell'infanzia* of foreign children is 3.83% of the total number of enrolled children.<sup>4</sup> Compared to 2002-03 the rate has increased by 0.43%, thus confirming a long-standing trend. Of the 54 947 foreign children enrolled in *scuole dell'infanzia*, more than six children out of ten are enrolled in state schools (64.61%). The national rate of foreign enrolments in the *scuole* is not homogeneous, ranging from: 6.19% in north-western regions; 6.24% in north-eastern regions; 5.4% in southern regions; 0.76% in the islands (*op. cit.*, p. 35): In origin, the 54 947 foreign children attending *scuola dell'infanzia* in the academic year 2003-04 come from diverse backgrounds: 1 547 come from EU countries, 20 435 from European countries outside the EU, 19 584 from Africa, 5 084 from America, 8 216 from Asia and 81 from Oceania or are stateless (*op. cit.*, p. 42):

## **Quality**

*Licensing and regulatory regimes:* Because of a strong regional tradition in ECEC provision in Italy, compliance with national standards and regulations differs across regions. In principle, the State, primary school, head-teachers are responsible for monitoring the state system, as well as municipal and private schools in specific localities. A small group of inspectors visit state *scuola dell'infanzia* to regulate as necessary.

*Funding:* Expenditure on pre-primary educational institutions as a percentage of GDP is 0.44% of GDP. Almost 88.8% of this expenditure comes from public sources and 11.2% from private (household) sources. In the public sector, 9% of the total expenditure on educational institutions is allocated to pre-primary whereas 12% of the child/student population is enrolled at this level (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). The *scuola dell'infanzia* (pre-school for 3- to 6-year-olds) is universally provided. Attendance at state-run *scuole dell'infanzia* is free by law.<sup>5</sup> Fees are income-related to a maximum of 20% of the cost of provision. *Asili nido* (child care centres for children 3 months to 3 years) are also publicly funded, although a proportion of costs are funded by parents. Fees differ according to municipality and the ability of parents to pay, and range from EUR 90-460 monthly.

*Staffing:* Initial training for all teachers – from *scuola dell’infanzia* to upper secondary school – is provided by universities in second degree courses (*corsi di laurea specialistica*). Access to these courses is regulated by Law No. 264 of 2 August 1999 (art. 1, par. 1), and its successive amendments. The programming of access to courses is regulated by art. 3 of the above law, on the basis of the estimate of places available in schools in each region (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003, art. 5, item 1, letter a). The university course in “sciences of primary education”, set up under art. 3, par. 2 of Law No. 341 of 19 November 1990, ends with a state exam which includes the assessment of a teaching practice period to be carried out as part of the training. This state exam gives Qualified Teacher Status to candidates for *scuola dell’infanzia* or primary school. It also entitles teacher trainees to be placed in the permanent lists of the school system (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003, art. 5, item 1, letter g).

*Training requirements:* The current reform of the training system is a major national initiative. Two laws were enacted in 1997/1998 with the aim of raising the qualifications of pre-school and primary teachers to university level. Prior to this law, teacher training was undertaken in largely Catholic training institutes – *scuole magistrali* – or in state training institutes. This training was designed as mid-secondary level education. In future, co-ordinators of the *asili nido* will have a 4-year university degree, and other contact staff will require a 3-year tertiary diploma. Staff-training reform is still underway: teachers of the *scuola dell’infanzia* will have in the future a university degree.

The reform law contains a delegation of power to the government to define the general rules on education and the basic levels of performance in the field of vocational education and training (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003, item 3). The law confirms that teacher training has to be undertaken in universities (second degree courses), and that the university degree obtained – which includes the assessment of the teaching practice – gives Qualified Teacher Status. Special needs teachers (teacher assistants) can be admitted to the university course in “sciences of primary education” (art. 3, par. 2, of Law No. 341 of 19 November 1990), under certain conditions: they must pass the relevant entry tests, have an upper secondary school diploma, and be awarded learning credits on the basis of their learning pathway (theory and practice) and the exams passed to obtain the two-year specialisation diploma as special needs teacher (*ibid.*).

*Work conditions:* In the *scuola dell’infanzia*, teachers are currently paid at the same rates as primary teachers, and conditions of work are good. The State provides them with many opportunities for in-service training. Conditions for staff in the *asilinido* are much less satisfactory. Although often as highly trained, these staff have less pay, longer working hours, and in some cases less access to in-service training than teachers in the *scuola dell’infanzia*.

*Child-staff ratios:* Maximum group size in *asili nido* is 10. The established ratios are: 7:1 in the *nido*, 8:1 for complementary services outside the home, and 3:1 for services inside the home. Ratios are higher in state *scuola dell’infanzia*: 20 children (if there are children with disabilities), 25 children (generally), 28 children (in exceptional cases) per 2 teachers (double staff, if working hours are more than 25 per week), plus a teacher assistant (special needs teacher) and a religion teacher.

*Curriculum and pedagogy:* The National Guidelines for Personalised Educational Plans in *scuole dell’infanzia*,<sup>6</sup> define the basic levels of performance that *scuole dell’infanzia* of the National Education System have to meet in order to guarantee the personal, social and civil

rights of children to quality education and training. They exclude pedagogical approaches aiming at anticipating formal learning and define the essential elements of educational provision: personal relations between peers and with adults; enhancement of playing in all its forms and expressions; emphasis on productive making, and direct contact experiences with nature, things, materials, social environment, culture (*op. cit.*, p. 2).

The National Guidelines set out the general objectives of the educational process: developing personal identity, autonomy and competences. They also classify specific learning objectives in four areas: 1) the self and others; 2) body, movement and health; 3) receiving and producing messages; 4) exploring, knowing and planning (*op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 5). A further step for teachers is to plan Learning Units that, on the basis of the general educational objectives, transform individual skills into competences. The Learning Units effectively implemented with the differentiations that some children may require, form the Personalised Educational Plan, which is at the disposal of families and is an important document for the development of the Individual Competences Portfolio (*op. cit.*, p. 6). Throughout *scuola dell'infanzia*, each child records the competences acquired on a Portfolio composed of: a basic description of courses attended and progress made; a standard but significant documentation of his/her works information on learning resources, ways and timing, as well as on his/her personal interests, aptitudes and aspirations (*op. cit.*, p. 7):

*Scuole dell'infanzia* enjoy autonomous management and teaching methodology.<sup>7</sup> Much importance is given to setting up laboratories or investigation groups, to organise children's work, according to children's individual learning needs (by section/intersection, by level, by task or by choice).<sup>8</sup> The national government has demonstrated a high degree of flexibility allowing programmes to develop their own pedagogical orientations. The autonomy has led to highly-regarded innovative programmes in some settings (such as in Reggio Emilia, Pistoia and Milano) and much-less favourably perceived programmes in others. There is no set of national guidelines for *asili nido* services. Some municipal and regional projects give curriculum and pedagogical direction in particular localities.

*Monitoring, evaluation and research:* Because there are wide discretionary powers at the local government level, local districts apply their own criteria for admission to services, have their own recruitment examinations for teachers, in-service teacher training and pedagogical approaches. Innovations and research are similarly diverse in scale and size. Regions of Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, and Tuscany have contributed substantially to advanced ECEC programmes. *Nidi d'infanzia*, integrated services and private, confessional and municipal *scuole dell'infanzia* have always enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. With recent legislation,<sup>9</sup> state educational institutions – including state *scuole dell'infanzia* – enjoy autonomous management and are in charge of designing and carrying out their educational provision, within the framework of the tasks and functions transferred to regions and local authorities.<sup>10</sup> Each educational institution designs its Educational Plan. The Plan is the essential document for the definition of the cultural and planning identity of the school and/or nursery. It sets out the plan for curricular, extra-curricular, educational and organisational activities that each school adopts autonomously (*cf.* above, art. 3) Educational institutions enjoy autonomy in teaching methodology (*cf.* above, art. 4) organisation, (*cf.* above, art. 5) research, experimentation and development (*cf.* above, art. 6).

Besides enhancing the opportunities for autonomous management and teaching methodology, the reform of the school system introduces a new professional figure in *scuola dell'infanzia*: a teacher-co-ordinator of the pedagogical team, who works in one or

more schools in the same area (if a school has less than three sections). This teacher has the task of promoting harmony and consistency in teaching and organisational planning in connection with families, local authorities and the head-teacher.<sup>11</sup> The co-ordinating teacher may also draw up agreements with local authorities to set up sections with children younger than 3 years, in association with *asili nido*, for the whole academic year or for shorter periods, according to the educational and teaching projects of the local schools (*ibid.*).

*Parent and community involvement:* In the *nidi d'infanzia* and in integrated services, parents' committees and councils guarantee the social management of the services. In the *scuole dell'infanzia* inter-section councils have been operating for years: they are composed of all teachers and one representative of parents, for each section. Parents of children enrolled in state *scuole dell'infanzia* can be elected in district councils (*consigli di circolo*).<sup>12</sup> *Scuole dell'infanzia paritare* must set up collective bodies based on democratic participation (Law No. 62 of 10 March 2000, art. 1, par. 4):

### OECD policy issues

Among the issues for policy attention identified in 2001 by the OECD review team for Italy were:

- *A relative neglect of children from 0-3 years:* In terms of state intervention, the early childhood system in Italy has been focused most strongly on the 3- to 6-year-olds. There is an urgent need for the State to take on greater responsibility to meet the needs of children under 3 and their parents. The recent extension of paid parental leave has been a significant step forward. Further support to municipalities to extend their integrated programmes would help to address the learning and socialisation needs of infants and toddlers, even when being cared for by a parent. Besides the increase in number (+27.5%, from 2 180 to 3 008) and provision (from 5.8% to 7.4%) of *asili nido*, the provision of integrated services has also improved and is more diversified thanks to the setting up of “in-home” and “company” services. Moreover, the recent reform provides the possibility for centres to enrol children younger than 3 years in *scuole dell'infanzia*: for the time being, only those who will be 3 years old by 28 February of the academic year; and later on, children who will be 3 years old by 30 April (Law No. 53 of 28 March 2003, and Government decree No. 59 of 19 February 2004):
- *Co-ordination of administrations and services:* Fragmentation of responsibility has been a longstanding problem to be solved in order to facilitate the coherence of ECEC services in Italy. A need is perceived for increased co-ordination of policy formulation and planning both vertically (state, regional and municipal levels) and horizontally (across state, municipal and private providers). More collaborative projects between the different partners may be useful. Recent legislation on school autonomy provides for centres to set up or participate in school networks (Decree of the President of the Republic No. 275 of 8 March 1999, art. 7, par. 1). Educational institutions can also promote or participate in agreements for the co-ordination of joint activities within the framework of specific projects involving various schools, bodies, volunteer and private non-profit organisations (Decree of the President of the Republic No. 275 of 8 March 1999, art. 7, par. 9). Finally, schools can set up or participate in public and private consortia in order to carry out institutional tasks coherent with the Educational Plan and to acquire goods and services facilitating the educational tasks.

- *The effectiveness of policy formulation and its actual outreach to the municipalities and regions:* Basic texts governing ECEC services are not necessarily applicable in parts of the private system. More effective monitoring of the system is needed. Standards need to be developed enabling internal evaluation and communication to the public as to how resources and services are managed. Integrated in-service training for administrators and teachers from the different networks is recommended. The National Guidelines for Personalised Educational Plans in *scuole dell'Infanzia* provide for the possibility to draw up agreements with local authorities to set up sections with children younger than 3 years, in association with *asili nido*, for the whole academic year or for shorter periods, according to the schools' educational and teaching projects.
- *Dissemination of research and good practice:* Italian early childhood educators have a wealth of knowledge about young children, and many Italian programmes are recognised world-wide for their high quality. To date, however, much of what has been learned in the various cities and schools in Italy has remained in those settings, to the benefit of small numbers of children and their families. A number of in-service training activities for teachers of state *scuole dell'infanzia* have been carried out for the implementation of the current reform. In particular, the National Documentation Institute for Educational Innovation and Research (INDIRE) has developed on-line training activities.

### **Developments**

The *nidi d'infanzia* for children up to three years, although still underdeveloped, have steadily increased in number (+27.5%, from 2 180 in 1992 to 3 008 in 2000) and provision (from 5.8% in 1992 to 7.4% in 2000).<sup>13</sup> In parallel, all ECEC services for the younger children – *nidi*, integrated services (play areas, centres for children and parents, in-home services) and recent innovative pilot schemes (in-home and company services) – have become more complex and diversified. Two elements may be noted:

- The diversification of the provision, with the development of new types of services, which is a result both of the lack of resources necessary to further develop the *nidi* (in a situation of unmet demand) and of the families' interest for alternative services.
- The diversification of ECEC providers, with the growing development of private services offered in most cases in connection with public authorities.<sup>14</sup>

In the *scuole dell'infanzia*, catering for the 3- to 6-year-olds, the most significant innovations introduced by the reform are: the possibility for parents to enrol children younger than 3 years; and the publication of National Guidelines for Personalised Educational Plans in *Scuole dell'Infanzia*.<sup>15</sup> These guidelines set out:

- The “general objectives of the educational process”, and “specific learning objectives” in the following areas: the self and others; body, movement and health; receiving and producing messages; exploring, knowing and planning.
- The relation between educational objectives and personalised educational plans.
- A number of clarifications about the development of the individual competences portfolio.

Organisational rules and guidelines for school staff have also been published, dealing with:

- Opportunities for autonomy in management and teaching methodology.
- The appointment of a teacher to coordinate the pedagogical team.

- The definition of an annual timetable allowing centres to set up annual modules ranging from 875 to 1 700 hours that families can choose when they enrol children.
- Centre agreements with local authorities to set up sections with children younger than 3 years, in association with *asili nido*, for the whole academic year or for shorter periods, according to the schools' educational and teaching projects.

## Notes

1. "I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia. Indagine sui nidi d'infanzia e sui servizi educativi 0-3 anni integrativi al nido al 30 settembre 2000", Florence, Istituto degli innocenti, 2002, p. 13.
2. "I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia. Indagine sui nidi d'infanzia e sui servizi educativi 0-3 anni integrativi al nido al 30 settembre 2000", Florence, Istituto degli innocenti, 2002, p. 14.
3. Data drawn from "Sedi, Alunni, classi, dotazioni organiche del personale docente della scuola statale, Anno scolastico 2004-2005", MIUR, September 2004, p. 29.
4. Data drawn from "Alunni con cittadina non italiana, Anno scolastico 2003-2004", MIUR, September 2004 p. 33.
5. Law No. 444 of 18 March 1968, art. 1: "Enrolment is optional, attendance is free."
6. The "Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani Personalizzati delle Attività Educative nelle Scuole dell'Infanzia" are attached to the Government decree No. 59 of 19 February 2004, Annex A.
7. Decree of the President of the Republic No. 275 of 8 March 1999 – Regulation on school autonomy under law No. 59 of 15 March 1997, art. 21.
8. "Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani Personalizzati delle Attività Educative nelle Scuole dell'Infanzia", p. 8.
9. Law No. 59 of 15 March 1997, art. 21, and Decree of the President of the Republic No. 275 of 8 March 1999.
10. Decree of the President of the Republic No. 275 of 8 March 1999, art. 1, item 1.
11. "Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani Personalizzati delle Attività Educative nelle Scuole dell'Infanzia", p. 8.
12. The functioning of collective bodies is still regulated by the Decree of the President of the Republic No. 416 of 1974, contained in the Consolidation Act of 1994.
13. I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia. Indagine sui nidi d'infanzia e sui servizi educativi 0-3 anni integrativi al nido al 30 settembre 2000, Florence, Istituto degli innocenti, 2002.
14. Aldo Fortunati, "I servizi educativi per la prima infanzia come risorsa ed opportunità per bambini e genitori: tendenze e prospettive", in *Cittadini in Crescita*, 2004, pp. 18-19.
15. Indicazioni Nazionali per i Piani Personalizzati delle Attività Educative nelle Scuole dell'Infanzia.