

## KEY MESSAGES

### Launch of the Report Card 8:

#### The Childcare Transition

A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries

EMBARGO: 00.01 GMT, 11 December 2008

### Key Messages

- For the first time, a majority of the rising generation is spending a significant part of childhood in some form of out-of-home childcare.
- In the OECD countries, almost 80% of three-to-six year-olds are now in some form of early childhood education and care.
- For the under threes, the proportion is 25%, rising to more than 50% in individual countries.
- In the last decade many countries have also begun to see sharp increases in the numbers of infants being cared for outside the home.
- Evidence from neuroscience suggests that loving, stable, secure, stimulating and rewarding relationships with family and caregivers in the earliest months and years of life enhance potential for child's comprehensive development.
- The Report looks at early childhood education and care from the perspective of the child and the opportunity to enhance children's cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development. Good childcare can help to mitigate many social, educational and behavioural problems having their origins in disadvantaged backgrounds and weak parenting.
- Some OECD countries have engaged closely with the childcare issue, pursuing policies designed to realize the potential benefits. In others the childcare transition is proceeding in an ad hoc way with minimal assurance of quality and higher risk for harm.
- The Report Card calls for substantive parental leave with financial compensation and increased investment in high quality, universal and inclusive early childhood education and care services, to enable every child to attend high quality ECEC in the following years.

### Driving the change

- The promotion of early childhood education and care has also been closely linked with expanding women's labour force participation.
- More than two thirds of all women of working age in the OECD countries are today employed outside the home.
- The poorer the family, the greater the pressure to return to work as soon as possible after a birth - often to unskilled, low-paid jobs.

### Potential good

## KEY MESSAGES

- ECEC can enhance children's cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development.
- ECEC can help boost educational achievement.
- ECEC can be an investment in good citizenship.
- ECEC can limit the early establishment of disadvantage, narrow economic and social gaps and promote social inclusion.
- ECEC can advance progress for families and for societies as a whole.

### Potential harm

- Poor quality care can lead to both immediate and long-term harm, including when care outside the home is 'too early and for too long'.
- In the absence of high quality and inclusive early childhood services, the mass-movement towards out-of-home care will follow a course determined by needs and pressures of the moment and be transformed in a 'double disadvantage' for the children of poor and marginalised families.

### Monitoring

- *Innocenti Report Card 8* advances a set of minimum standards for early childhood education and care services – a set of ten benchmarks falling under four broad headings: a policy framework, access to services, quality, and the supporting context of wider social and economic factors
- The benchmarks proposed should be regarded as a first step towards establishing a common core of minimum standards for early childhood services in OECD countries and beyond.
- Of the 25 countries for which data are available, only 10 currently meet this standard.
- Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, France, and Norway meet 8 or more of the 10 benchmarks and are the same six countries that top the table of government expenditures on early childhood services, reaching or exceeding 1% of GDP.

### 1. Policy framework

#### *Parental leave (Benchmark 1)*

#### *National Plan with priority for disadvantaged (Benchmark 2)*

- Very young children are best served by policies that make it easier for at least one parent to care for the child during the first twelve months of life.
- Universal ECEC supported by special efforts to reach and include disadvantaged children are recommended.
- The report stresses the importance of a national, holistic strategy and coordinating body for the organization of early childhood services; efforts to raise the status of care-givers, through high quality training, improved staff ratios; reduced group sizes for young children; a secure, consistent, sensitive, stimulating, and rewarding environment, as well as significant public subsidy, supervision, and support if services of the good quality are to be made available to all.

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### 2. Access

*Subsidized and regulated services for 25% of children under-three (Benchmark 3)*

*Subsidized and accredited services for 80% of 4 years old (Benchmark 4)*

- Access to early childhood education is approached in different ways by OECD governments, some providing free and universal pre-school at the age of three, others postponing substantial public investment in education until the age of five.
- Differences are even more marked for children under the age of three, with the Nordic European countries organizing highly subsidized services at community level, and liberal economies adopting in general more market oriented approaches.
- The extent of early childhood education and care services is difficult to assess because education and care are often considered two different areas and data kept separated.
- Over half of the OECD countries for which data are available meet the standard of subsidized services for 25% of children under-three.
- Fifteen of the 25 OECD countries meet the standard of 80% enrollment for the 4 years old.

### 3. Quality

*80% of all child care staff trained (Benchmark 5)*

*50% of staff tertiary educated and qualified (Benchmark 6)*

*Minimum staff-to-children ratio of 1:15 in pre-school education (Benchmark 7)*

*1.0% of GDP spent on early childhood education (Benchmark 8)*

- The quality of early childhood education and care depends above all else on the ability of the care-giver to build relationships with children, and to help provide a secure, stimulating, and rewarding environment.
- Higher levels of staff training, improved staff ratios, and smaller group sizes are critical, especially in centres serving at-risk children and children with special educational needs.
- Currently OECD countries on average spend 0.7% of GDP on ECEC. Some countries will need to double their spending if minimum acceptable standards are to be met.
- All countries spend massively on the education of older children because the public benefits clearly justify the public costs. The same case should be made today even more convincingly for investments in younger children.

### 4. Supporting context

*Child poverty rate less than 10% (Benchmark 9)*

*Near-universal outreach of essential child health services (Benchmark 10)*

- Childcare services cannot alone break the grip of poverty and social exclusion. Governments should bring child poverty rates below 10% (measured at 50% of median income or below), if childcare is to fulfil its full positive potential.

## KEY MESSAGES

- High quality early childhood services offer increased productivity and higher returns on investments in education

### **About UNICEF**

*UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.*

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### **Note to Editors**

The Report Card series present 'league tables' on aspects of child wellbeing in the world's most advanced economies (countries that are members of the OECD) seeking to stimulate debates through comparisons of what has actually been achieved by one or more countries.

Report Card no. 8 complements research presented in Report Card 6 and Report Card 7 dedicated to monitoring different aspects of child well-being and of child poverty in rich countries.

**Embargoed media materials and copies of the Report Card in English, French, Spanish and Italian are available from the Centre's Innocenti Newsroom:**  
**<http://www.unicef-irc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>**

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