

**Innocenti Working Paper**

**BENCHMARKS FOR EARLY  
CHILDHOOD SERVICES IN  
OECD COUNTRIES**

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This paper presents a review and analysis of early childhood services carried out in the context of the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 8 on 'The Child Care Transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries' (UNICEF 2008).

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# Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries

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**Summary:** The Innocenti Report Card 8 presents ten benchmarks for early childhood services. It represents a bold first step towards the ultimate goal of improving the lives of young children by enabling international comparisons to be made in the early childhood field, thereby encouraging countries to learn from each other's experiences. The current paper provides some critical reflections on the challenges involved in establishing the principle of standard-setting in the early childhood field and suggests factors that should command our attention as the principle – as is hoped – becomes established and the process of standard-setting matures.

Chapter 1 begins from first principles by asking: Can universal quality standards be agreed for early childhood systems? The challenges are indeed daunting. Definitions and instruments for measuring quality differ considerably across stakeholder groups, researchers and countries. There is a lack of reliable data on children from birth to 3 or 4 years. Essential concepts such as childhood, children's services, early education and educator are understood in different ways by administrations in different countries. It is also necessary to consider critiques of the very idea of seeking universal standards, from the viewpoints of culturalist, socio-cultural and post-modernist scholars. These are respected currents of thought, and in response it is important to acknowledge that the goals of early childhood services, and the definition and pursuit of quality in them, should be an ongoing democratic process involving all the stakeholders.

Despite these caveats, within the early childhood field there is considerable agreement on the structural and programmatic requirements needed to ensure quality. Documents from different countries and analyses of state policies by different experts are fairly consistent in their view of what the core elements of system quality might be. Chapter 2 outlines how a longer list of 15 benchmarks was generated through a number of consultations at the UNICEF-Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) with country representatives and individual experts from Asia, Europe and North America. This chapter considers in more detail the challenges raised by international benchmarking, both in general and specific to the early childhood field. It concludes that while they may not be able to reflect fully the interactional and pedagogical aspects of care, upbringing and education, or the quality of the living and learning experiences that children have in different settings, the benchmarks do call attention to basic conditions that allow good process to take place.

Chapter 3 considers in detail the 15 benchmarks that made this original list, which were grouped into four areas: those focusing on child health and family support; those focusing on the governance of early childhood services; those focusing on access to services; and those focusing on programme quality. Each benchmark in turn is defined, the basic criteria proposed for its achievement are outlined, and there is an in-depth explanation of the thinking which lay behind its selection, with particular reference to early childhood system quality and conformity to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Throughout the process of selecting benchmarks, it was clear there would be a balance to be struck between the interest of early childhood professionals to do justice to the complexity of their field and the aim of UNICEF-IRC Report Cards to present data that is straightforward enough to capture the

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attention of a general audience and stimulate public debate. Chapter 4 explains the selection of the 10 benchmarks for the Innocenti Report Card 8. There is a gain in clarity and the language speaks more directly to the general reading public. However the risk inherent in achieving the aims of communicability and measurability is that insufficient attention may be paid to aspects of early childhood which are not so easily measured and communicated but which are no less important. The factors most significantly at risk of being underplayed by approaches which are necessarily more quantitative than qualitative are identified, bearing in mind that the Report Card's overall objective is to stimulate debate on both dimensions.

The paper ends with a reference section, followed by an Annex in which the performance of the 25 selected countries across the original, final 15 benchmarks is recorded, country by country.

**Keywords:** basic social services, early childhood education and care, ECEC.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABC	Arkansas Better Chance (programme in the United States)
CAP	contextually appropriate practice
ChildONEurope	European Network of National Observatories on Childhood
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAP	developmentally appropriate practice
DECET	Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (research network)
DPT	diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus vaccine
EC	European Commission
ECEC	early childhood education and care
EPPE	Effective provision of preschool education
ETS	Education Testing Services
EU	European Union
Eurostat	European Union Statistical Office
GDP	gross domestic product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMR	infant mortality rate
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LBW	low birth weight
LICOs	low income cut-offs
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children (United States)
NEGP	National Educational Goal Panel (United States)
NIEER	National University for Early Education Research (United States)
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (United States)
NLSCY	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Canada)
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)
SES	socio-economic status
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF IRC	UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
UOE	A worldwide education data collection, administered jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, OECD and the Statistical Office of the European Union, hence the abbreviation UOE. The data collection is based at the OECD.
WHO	World Health Organization

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## CHAPTER 1

### CAN UNIVERSAL QUALITY STANDARDS BE AGREED FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS?

This paper describes an exercise in benchmarking the early childhood policy field. It reviews the different stages of the process: firstly, a review of the challenging nature of international benchmarking; then, an account of the methodology used to make a first selection of benchmarks. After a number of expert consultations, 15 benchmarks were selected, belonging essentially to four categories: Group A: Benchmarks focusing on child health and family support; Group B: Benchmarks focusing on the governance of early childhood services; Group C: Benchmarks focusing on access to services; Group D: Benchmarks focusing on programme quality. There follows a justification of each benchmark, based essentially on the relevance of the benchmark to early childhood system quality and its conformity to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). A final chapter then discusses the evolution of these benchmarks and their relationship to the 10 benchmarks selected for the Innocenti Report Card 8, *The Child Care Transition*. The focus therefore of this paper is on methodology, and the advantages and limitations of benchmarking early childhood systems.

#### The concept of quality

Definitions and instruments for measuring quality differ considerably across stakeholder groups, researchers and countries in the early childhood field. It is well-known, for example, that parental assessments of quality may diverge significantly from views current among early childhood experts, e.g. with regard to when a child should begin to learn letters and numbers and how educators should approach this task.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, many common elements in definitions of quality across economically advanced countries exist, especially in early education provision for children from the age of 3 years. In early education, most countries focus on similar structural inputs to ensure quality: child-staff ratios, group size, facility conditions, staff qualifications, staff certification, and curriculum. For governments, improving quality generally means ensuring that necessary programme standards are in place and that children are developing and learning in accordance with government objectives for the sector. At the same time, there is general recognition that national quality guidelines need to be broad enough to allow individual settings to respond to the developmental and learning needs of the children present.

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<sup>2</sup>With regard to childcare, there is room for more consideration. Parents are often obliged to take the nearest childcare within their financial means and may have little choice among childcare options (Galinsky et al., 1994, NACCRA 2008). Because they want the best for their child, they tend to be more positive about the quality of the childcare provision than it actually warrants (Cleveland and Krashinski 2003; Helburn 1995). Additionally, beyond the psychological need to be positive about what they can provide for their child, parents can be unfamiliar with the structural, process and pedagogical indicators of good quality education and care. At the same time, the viewpoint of the Italian authors, parents should be seen as competent citizens “because they have and develop their own experience, points of view, interpretation and ideas...which are the fruits of their experience as parents and citizens” (Cagliari, Barozzi and Giudici (2004: 30 – cited in Moss 2005).

While these elements of quality are accepted in most countries, quality is also considered a relative and not a universal measure across early childhood systems (Dahlberg et al., 1997). Variations in emphasis across countries are greatly dependent on the views of particular societies about early childhood and on the goals they establish (or implicitly hold) for young children. Even, within relatively small countries, there may be a wide diversity of criteria and goals for young children between rural and urban populations, across socio-economic or multicultural contexts, between parents and professionals, and even between ministries. In addition, high quality in services depends largely on interactional processes and voluntary approaches to quality improvement - elements that by their nature are difficult to measure accurately or compare cross-nationally. Is it then possible to propose a means of measuring system quality across a diverse range of countries? Is quality always relative to particular economic conditions, traditional values and practices? To answer these questions, the paper first outlines the positions taken by some important contemporary schools of thought in early childhood research.

### **Culturalist critiques of universal standards**

Anthropologists, such as Tobin et al. (1989, 2006), generally hold that it is intellectually and methodologically unsound to attempt to understand another peoples' cultural practices using the assumptions and categories of one's own. Human behaviour can be understood only in the context of the culture in which it occurs. In particular, child-rearing practices, tend to be highly specific and deeply influenced by tradition and societal organization. The relevance of this principle can be seen within OECD countries, e.g. the very different expectations about young children that operate in different cultural groups, for example, in the Republic of Korea (where the Confucian values of social discipline, academic achievement, effort and perseverance hold sway) as opposed to Canada where individual autonomy and respect for the choices of children are more valued (Choi 1999).

Even more marked are understandings of childhood from one historical period to another. The following approaches to children are examples from within western Europe:

*Nourish the sons well...How you nourish the daughter does not matter, as long as you keep her alive.*

Paulo de Certaldo, Middle Ages

*I wish and command you to whip him any time that he is obstinate or does something bad. I know from experience that I myself benefited, for at his age I was greatly whipped. That is why I want you to whip him and to make him understand why.*

Advice of Henri IV of France (1553-1610) to his son's tutors

Seen from a historical perspective, the cultural relativists argue that the beliefs, practices and standards of the 21st century with regard to young children are the products of a particular culture and history and, as such, are no more or less deserving of being considered universal than those of any other time. The belief that the manifestations of human psychological functions are themselves invariable and that the principles underlying intervention programmes and evaluation instruments are applicable everywhere is naive. In sum, although cultural constraints, such as child-rearing practices, norms, belief systems or conventions exist and are quite resistant to change, they have no necessary connection with any fundamental psychological function or internal disposition. Attitudes to children are more a

product of modes of economic production and of the distribution of gender roles within a society.

### **The socio-cultural critique of universal standards**

The socio-cultural critique of universal standards came to importance in the late 1990s when DAP or *developmentally appropriate practice* dominated early childhood theory and pedagogy, and was strongly promoted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, Washington D.C.). Formulated by Bredekamp (1987) and later by Bredekamp, S., and Copple, C. (eds.). (1997), DAP was seen in early childhood circles in many countries as a powerful developmental defence of good early childhood practice against the downward push of school methodologies into early childhood programming. Children, according to DAP, learn best through play that is self-initiated, self-directed and self-chosen. The educator's role is to provide a rich variety of activities and materials, support the child's play and to talk with children about their play in accordance with the child's age and maturity. DAP based its approach on (American) evidence and observations about children's nature, their needs, and about what aspects of the environment were harmful or beneficial for healthy development.

According to Woodhead (1998), many of these assumptions had as much to do with a particular socio-cultural context as with shared features of early human development. The case for a more contextual, situated, cultural approach to developmental psychology was increasingly promoted, particularly by developing world experts (ibid. p. 8). To illustrate this need, Woodhead (1998) gives several examples of how basic psychological concepts differ in their manifestations from one country to another, e.g. patterns of attachment; Piagetian notions of cognitive stages; the appreciation of socially valued skills or the adult-child interactive patterns related to first language acquisition. Woodhead concludes that DAP must be complemented by an equally important principle: practice appropriate to the context of early development, that is, *contextually appropriate practice* (CAP).

Proponents of contextually appropriate practice argue that the quality of early childhood experiences should be judged in relation to the social and economic features of the environment. The role of children in the family economy shapes attitudes toward childhood and education. In rural subsistence economies, young children are a trainable economic resource for the family. Unlike the North where personal, cognitive and social development can be pursued, socialisation will insist on obedience, inter-dependency and the child's contribution to family (generally gendered) tasks. In addition, community poverty will have an inevitable influence on material resources, buildings, child:staff ratios, educator training, the role of parents. In such circumstances, the quality assumptions that underpin standard-setting in the economically advantaged regions (Europe and North America) may be quite inappropriate in poorer contexts. In the majority world, services are obliged to use the resources at hand. In sum, an open, context-sensitive approach is most sensible. Programmes will differentiate and serve the socially constructed needs of the particular environment in which the children actually live, even if those needs do not correspond to Western practice. Yet, although quality is relative, it is not necessarily arbitrary. Early childhood programmes in any context must address the fundamental needs of all children for survival, health, security and well-being.

### **A new field for socio-cultural concern**

More contemporary socio-cultural analyses in Europe focus, not on the contrast between the industrialized and developing worlds, but on the tensions within European early childhood programmes arising from local (sometimes ethnic) aspirations for young children and the national norms defined by the dominant culture and its institutions (Vandebroeck 2006, 2007). Researchers from this school<sup>3</sup> argue that because of the large numbers of immigrant or ethnic minority families coming into the European countries, the dominant national cultures and early childhood institutions need to put themselves into question and change their mono-cultural discourse. In sum, early childhood services need to respond more sensitively to diversity, in keeping with the CRC, with a concern to improve access to disadvantaged children and employ culturally sensitive pedagogies.

The access of immigrant children to early childhood services is a particular challenge. The issue is often 'culturalized', that is, the low access of minority families to early childhood services is often ascribed to their particular culture ('*their*' belief that mothers should rear their own children, '*their*' lack of appreciation for childcare, etc.). However, authors such as Vandebroeck (2007) bring forward evidence to suggest that structural inequities also play an important role in the access of low-income and immigrant families to services. These include not only problems of affordability (which are far more acute for immigrant populations), but also issues about the appropriateness and quality of services on offer. Evaluations in several countries (e.g. the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the United States) suggest that when disadvantaged children participate in ECEC, they often do not receive the full range of child development, health and family services that are needed to optimise their learning (OECD 2001). Seeing the low quality of services on offer, immigrant families prefer to fall back on their traditional child-rearing patterns, all the more so as employment opportunities for immigrant women can be extremely limited. Even in programmes that by mainstream standards are of acceptable quality, discussion and dialogue with local parents may be necessary to make the institutional offer attractive. In sum, in multicultural societies, the definition of early childhood goals and the actual organization of services needs to happen at the micro-level in relation to specific populations, as well as at the national level (Vandebroeck 2007).

### **The post-modernist critique of external quality standards**

In line with the previous critiques, post-modernists argue that current education orthodoxies are more a product of the current social arena than an outcome of scientific research. In particular, they see the current governmental discourse about quality in education as being closely linked to a managerial, economic vision of the world, which is generally presented as

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<sup>3</sup>This school is particularly influential in Belgium and finds a strong expression through DECET, a research network promoting respect for Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training. DECET brings together European organizations and projects with common goals about valuing diversity in early childhood education and training. The network aims at promoting and studying democratic childcare, acknowledging the multiple (cultural and other) identities of children and families. It views early childhood education and care as a meeting place where people can learn with each other across cultural and other borders, and as a public service that can effectively address prejudice and discrimination.

self-evident, as a regime of truth (Foucault 1975). The values or premises on which this discourse is founded are seldom subject to analysis or discussion.

Thus, government and international agencies can affirm without much contradiction that all children should acquire the basic literacy and informatics skills necessary for the new knowledge economies to develop. Administrations assume that these skills are the major goals of education, that schools in all communities should aspire to these goals, and that all children should be prepared in the same way to make the achievement of these goals possible. A strong managerial agenda is established to ensure that schools and teacher everywhere should follow this agenda and pursue similar outcomes. Teachers are trained to instruct and are evaluated on how they perform this task. Rather than being encouraged to use personal judgment or to adapt their teaching to the particular needs of the children present in their classes, teachers become technicians of education who are expected (and evaluated) to deliver a pre-defined curriculum to homogenous groups of children. The selection of technical skills for public education systems follows a neo-liberal logic, which assumes that the priority goals for society are economic. In sum, there is a tendency to de-politicise life, to reduce everything to questions of money value and calculation, management and technical practice. Public service reform – including reforms of education - often prefers technical to critical questions and, under its influence, there emerges, what Clarke refers to as, ‘managerialised politics in a managerial state’ (Dahlberg and Moss 2005).<sup>4</sup>

In accordance with this vision, the contemporary state tends to conceptualise and organize children's services as an instrument of its economic vision, for example, it tends to see childcare services as serving primarily the labour market, that is, as places where young children should be 'minded' while their mothers work. In early education, a tendency exists to promote utility, that is, to prepare children for school rather than to seek broader goals or to give sufficient attention to play, an activity that young children value highly. The notion that young children are the future of society - potential human capital that should be formed to become productive workers – is strongly rooted. A fundamental inability exists to understand childhood as an important period of life, of value in its own right (Moss and Petrie 2003:80).

To counteract narrow interpretations of children's education, Dahlberg et al. (1999) put forward a democratic vision of early childhood education and care. They question the notion of a value-free, technical definition of early education quality, based on the specification of quality criteria by experts or a central authority. A more democratic means of rethinking early childhood services should be found, based on the citizenship of children and parents. Children are subjects of rights, not just objects, and their parents have recognized rights concerning their education. According to Malaguzzi of Reggio Emilia (in Edwards 1993), the child is strong, powerful, competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children. Their learning, like real learning in adult situations, is primarily social, taking place in interaction with others. Each child is understood as a competent citizen, an expert in her own life, having opinions that are worth listening to and having the right and competence to

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<sup>4</sup>Clarke (1998:174) goes on to remark: “Terms such as ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’, ‘performance’ and ‘quality’ depoliticise a series of social issues...and thus displace real political and policy choices into managerial imperatives.”

participate in collective decision-making. The educators they need are not just technicians but well-educated, reflective practitioners, capable of engaging with children and parents at many different levels.

Moss argues powerfully in later works (2005, 2006) that early childhood settings should be established as autonomous and independent sites "*for democratic practice*". This means that not only should the certainties of the predominant discourse be challenged "*by local knowledge and provisional truths*" but also, alongside government funding and direction, there should be a strong element of local control. It is essential that the voices of parents and local communities should be heard:

Bringing democratic politics into the nursery means citizens engaging in at least four types of activity. First, decision-making about the purposes, the practices and the environment of the nursery. Second, evaluation of pedagogical work through participatory methods. In the book *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care* (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999), the authors contrast 'quality' as a technical language of evaluation with a democratic language: 'meaning making'. Third, contesting dominant discourses, what Foucault terms regimes of truth, which seek to shape our subjectivities and practices through their universal truth claims and their relationship with power. This political activity seeks to make core assumptions and values contestable... It is through contesting dominant discourses that the fourth political activity can emerge: opening up for change, through envisioning utopias and turning them into utopian action. For as Foucault also notes, there is a close connection between contesting dominant discourses, thinking differently and change: "as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible". (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, p. 8).

In sum, early childhood institutions "should be understood, first and foremost, as forums, spaces or sites for ethical and political practice".

Underlying this interpretation is a recognition that society is not uniform but diverse. If justice is to be done to the range of child-rearing ideals within a society, to the wishes of stakeholders (communities, parents, educators and children as well of governments), to the diversity of children and childhoods, then it were better that closed discourses were replaced by encouraging participation and a discourse of meaning-making.

Participation is based on the idea that reality is not objective, that culture is a constantly evolving product of society, that individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to construct a project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with those of others, within a framework of shared values. The idea of participation is founded on these concepts: and in our opinion, so, too, is democracy itself (Cagliari et al., 2004: 29).

Rather than the education of young children focusing on preparation for school and future economic profiles, the question what is truly important and worthwhile about being human should be discussed. Such questions are rooted in local realities as well as in the larger frameworks of national or global economies. For this reason, services should be localized to ensure full participation of the key stakeholders (including children and parents), in which the

ethical and (minor) political choices<sup>5</sup> of parents and communities are recognized (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). From this perspective, early childhood institutions should be considered not just as centres that supply services to consumers (childcare, early education, preparation for school; etc.), but as children's spaces, domains of negotiated social practice and relationships within specific communities. The goals of services and the definition and pursuit of quality in them should be an ongoing democratic process involving all the stakeholders, and not least, the children, parents and professionals.

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<sup>5</sup>By 'minor' political choices, the authors mean not decisions about political parties or the country as a whole, but a valuing of community and personal responsibility. The early education centre is seen as a public space for dialogue among citizens, in particular, about family and children's issues.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SELECTION OF BENCHMARKS AND ISSUES IN BENCHMARKING

Faced by the evidence outlined in Chapter 1, the outlook for international comparative work on early childhood systems across the industrialized seems rather stark. Is it possible to select a range of comparable system benchmarks that are recognized by most OECD countries? Despite difficulties with regard to understandings about childhood and variations in early childhood services across countries, good reasons exist for making the effort to align policy in the early childhood field.

In the globalized economy, there is a push in the developed economies to bring women into the labour market. In turn, this has led to an awareness of the need for extra-domestic childcare services and, most importantly, a growing recognition of the responsibility of governments for the funding and governance of early childhood services. Again, within the early childhood services field, there is considerable agreement, particularly in early education, on the structural and programmatic requirements needed to ensure the quality. Documents from different countries and analyses of state policies by different experts are fairly consistent in their view of what the core elements of system quality might be (Cryer et al. 2002). Likewise, the OECD *Starting Strong* reviews have identified various key elements of successful policy that are common to twenty 20 countries reviewed by the organization (OECD 2001; OECD 2006).

#### Methodology

The benchmarks for the present exercise were identified after two consultations at UNICEF-IRC with country representatives and individual early childhood policy experts from Asia, Europe and North America. A major difficulty was to confine the benchmarks to a manageable number. The early childhood field is a complex one. It is concerned with providing health, education and care to young children but it is also linked with women's employment and equality of opportunity; child development and child well-being issues; health, social welfare and family policy.<sup>6</sup> Early childhood policy makers need to address issues of provision and access, family benefits, parental leaves from work, family-friendly measures, modes of funding, status and training of personnel, and links with the education system. They need also to give attention to more programmatic and qualitative issues, and to the high-ground questions: what do societies want for young children? What is truly important in their education at this age? These were some of the issues that the experts needed to address before selecting and formulating the benchmarks.

After discussion and consultation, fifteen benchmarks were selected and a comprehensive questionnaire was developed. Twenty-five countries were approached and agreed to reply to the questionnaire. Rather than burdening country administrators with a heavy research task,

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<sup>6</sup>Labour market supply is also important, but governments and business groups can be depended on to give priority to this issue.

the IRC team first analysed available government publications and independent country reports, to provide preliminary responses to the questions for all countries. The completed questionnaires were then sent by UNICEF IRC to ministries and experts in the selected countries for checking. After their feedback, the benchmarks were modified in a second draft and again sent out for checking and correction. Later, as countries replied in more detail, a third round proved necessary. It was discovered, for example, that the balance of positive and negative answers across the benchmarks had become uneven or that the formulation of certain benchmarks did not correspond to the practice of some countries. Constant revisions of concepts and wording were required. In addition, several countries and experts recommended moving away from strictly quantitative benchmarks to more qualitative ones, in particular, toward benchmarks that would take into account the rights of parents, supports to educators and more consultative and democratic procedures, which, it was felt, should characterize the early childhood field. The final agreed list of benchmarks is reproduced below, divided into the main categories covered, namely, social and family context; the governance of early childhood systems; access to services: and programme quality:

### **List of 15 benchmarks**

#### **A. Social and family context**

**Benchmark 1:** *An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care<sup>7</sup>.*

**Benchmark 2:** *Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10 per cent. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.*

**Benchmark 3:** *Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about one year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50 per cent of earnings (with limitations) over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.*

#### **B. Governance of early childhood systems**

**Benchmark 4:** *National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.*

**Benchmark 5:** *The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national*

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<sup>7</sup>Three indicators are used to measure this benchmark: infant mortality rates; low birth weights; the percentage of children immunised against the major vaccine-preventable diseases. The benchmark is considered to be met if the rate of infant mortality is less than 4 per 1,000 live births, if the proportion of babies born with low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) is less than 6 per cent, and if the immunization rate for 12 to 23 month-olds (averaged over measles, polio and DPT3 vaccination) exceeds 95 per cent.

*objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.*

**Benchmark 6:** *The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.*

**Benchmark 7:** *Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1 per cent of GDP.*

### **C. Access to services**

**Benchmark 8:** *The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination. (Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment no. 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.*

**Benchmark 9:** *At least 25 per cent of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.*

**Benchmark 10:** *At least 80 per cent of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.*

### **D. Programme quality**

**Benchmark 11:** *Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child*

**Benchmark 12:** *Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training;<sup>8</sup> participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.*

**Benchmark 13:** *At least 80 per cent of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place – with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.*

**Benchmark 14:** *At least 50 per cent staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals – educators, pedagogues and/or teachers – with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.*

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<sup>8</sup>The target set by the European Commission Childcare Network (1996) recommended at least one tenth of the working week as non-contact time allocated to preparation and continuous training.

**Benchmark 15:** *The child/trained adult ratio for 4-5-year-olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 1:15, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.*

### **No measure of child outcomes**

There may be some surprise that the selected benchmarks do not include a specific measure of cognitive outcomes, e.g. that children should have reached a certain level of pre-literacy or language mastery before transitioning into school. Cognitive outcomes are avoided in this survey because they are multiply determined to a significant extent. It is well known, for example, that family and child characteristics, the quality of home care and social class - all moderate significantly the effects of children's services and schools (Lamb 1998; Coley and Barton 2007). In addition, a numeracy-literacy perspective on assessment may give undue importance to a particular type of child development model, and allow insufficient space for other, equally valid, developmental frameworks (Schweinhart 2001). Most countries avoid testing or noting young children, a position supported by early childhood experts who argue that such tests are often poorly designed and developmentally inappropriate (Meisels 1996, 2007).<sup>9</sup>

### **The spirit of the benchmarks: beyond enrolments toward system quality**

As seen from the list above, the 15 benchmarks selected for the country survey are ordered into four sections:

- Three benchmarks focusing on the social and family context: accessible health services for families with young children; guaranteed income, social and labour supports for low-income families; and a statutory, remunerated parental leave period (combining, maternal, paternal and parental leave) around the birth of a child;
- Four benchmarks focusing on governance quality, including one financing benchmark;
- Three benchmarks focusing on access to services, in particular, access for vulnerable children;
- Five benchmarks focusing on programme quality, stressing in particular pedagogical frameworks, professional education and support for staff, minimal staff qualifications and child:staff ratios.

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<sup>9</sup>It is useful for administrators to have a measure of the developmental curve of young children from year to year. Yet, if poorly organized, assessing children can lead to a focus on particular content and distract teachers from the relational and pedagogical work that young children need. Supporters of assessment argue that regular assessments are part of formative evaluation, and give valuable information to teachers about the effects of their teaching and allow them to improve their practice. The argument is not without merit, but across countries, the sticking point seems to be how assessments are made: early childhood teachers and parents often react negatively to what is seen as a regimentation of childhood, and resist attempts to impose what they consider are confining curricula and tests. In addition, governments can obtain comprehensive information about systems by regular national evaluations based on sample assessments, without involving or putting pressure on staff and children in every early childhood centre. Local administrators and teachers seem to accept this approach without difficulty and often complement external evaluations by voluntary quality assessments at team and centre level. Examples of what can be achieved through voluntary attention to quality can be seen in the NAEYC accreditation programme in the United States, the documentation processes of Reggio Emilia, the reflective practice and national evaluations of the Nordic countries and, most importantly, in the child observation records or portfolio work practiced in many centres.

These categories and each benchmark within them, including its definition and justification, are described in detail in the next chapter. The reader can conclude from this ordering that quantitative measures of access were not the primary purpose of the exercise. The benchmarks proposed refer primarily to system organization and policy orientations. Some – especially structural requirements can be measured quantitatively, but they also include values and objectives for young children more ambitious than simply enrolment figures. The aim was equitable, universal systems that ensure high quality outcomes for all young children and families across a country. These systems should be guided on the one hand, by the general principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, on the other, by the best early childhood research available:

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): A major contribution of the Convention is the recognition that each child is a citizen with rights and that early childhood is an important life stage in its own right. In the design of public policies and the development of national plans and programmes for young children, States have the responsibility to assist parents and make available to young children the health and education programmes that they need, in particular, to vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination. States should also approach the provision of these services from a citizenship perspective, ensuring that services for young children are considered as part of the right to education and development, that they protect young children and promote their rounded development, including their ability to participate in democratic processes at their own level.
- Early childhood research: While maintaining a critical attitude to research, early childhood agencies should rely on the best research available to guide their policy-making. A well-rounded national policy will be sensitive not only to educational outcomes for children but also to what research tells us about prenatal and postnatal care of mothers and infants, the place of families in the life of children, the need to aim for high quality in services and what quality standards imply. Where access and content issues are concerned, governments will fund and encourage local research, as the needs of different populations within a country can differ greatly. The aim is to ensure that early childhood policy is research based and to ensure through evaluation research that national and parental objectives for young children are being achieved.

As the experts convened by UNICEF included administrators engaged in policy-making and responsible for public investments in the early childhood field, economic and social returns to society from early childhood investments were also taken into account. Returns on investment are potentially great, if the right programmes and approaches to families can be put into place. At the same time, early childhood administrators are generally aware that lack of services or poor quality in services or misguided services that are too focused on school preparation are all missed opportunities for young children.

### **Definition and issues of benchmarking**

The word ‘benchmark’ is used to denote the basic requirements that governments should meet in order to establish or maintain acceptable quality in their early childhood systems. The benchmarks chosen include not only structural and programmatic inputs that governments should ensure but also certain social environment and governance requirements that impact

strongly on the outputs of early childhood and educational systems. More detailed information on the benchmarks is provided in Chapter 3 below, which discusses the definition of each benchmark and its rationale.

Benchmarks for early childhood systems should be distinguished from 'targets', the concept used by the European Commission Childcare Network (1996). Targets are aspirational, that is, they are standards to which countries should aspire. In contrast, benchmarks refer to minimum standards below which early childhood systems or services should not fall, if negative consequences for young children, educators and families are to be avoided. Here, in particular, is referred to unfavourable child:staff ratios, low wages and qualifications for staff, and lack of affordability of services for families. This minimal approach may cause some disappointment in early childhood circles.

European expectations for early childhood systems are expressed most completely in *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children*, published in 1996 by the European Commission Childcare Network (1996). The 40 targets selected addressed nine areas important for early childhood policy development, including: the Policy Framework, Financial Targets, Targets for Levels and Types of Services, Education Targets, Targets for Staff Employment and Training, Environmental and Health Targets, Targets for Parents and Community, and finally, Performance Targets. Important aspirational targets are proposed in each of these domains, among which the target of 1 per cent of GDP to be invested in early childhood services, which again is taken up in the OECD *Starting Strong* reports and in Benchmark 7 of this paper.

### **Benchmarks in human services: some issues**

Issues are often raised about the use of benchmarking in human services. Ideally, indicators and benchmarks should provide an overview of system performance that includes both quantitative and qualitative elements; that is in addition to providing information on access and structural features, they should also address issues of equity, the democratic participation of stakeholders at both governmental and local level, or the process and interactional quality of systems. As explained in Chapter 4 below, this was not fully possible in the present exercise. As a guide to interpreting the results of the exercise, some issues meriting consideration include the following:

- As defined above, benchmarks are by nature minimalist. The achievement of benchmarks – basic standards – does not necessarily ensure a high quality system. Benchmarks say little about the process and interactive quality of children's services, an aspect that is fundamental in any evaluation of quality.
- Interpretations of and responses to policy benchmarks, like any standard, are variable and open to question and reflection. For example, although a country may have a policy or regulation corresponding to a particular benchmark, e.g. to ensure first call on childcare services for children from deprived backgrounds, this may not necessarily reflect the actual practice on the ground. Although a law or a policy may be present, one is not always in a position to evaluate the implementation of particular policies, and implementation may vary across localities. Thus, responses need to be interpreted with

caution. Every country involved has been asked to verify the information they provide, but even national administrators may not have the full picture.

- Another issue is that benchmarks tend to be static, unless the exercise is followed up on a regular basis. A once-off benchmark exercise cannot show trends or movement. An example of this is the transformation of labour, social and education policy affecting young children brought about in the United Kingdom since 1998. A determined focus on improving life outcomes for young children has led to a commitment to end child poverty by 2020; to make work pay for families, particularly for women with low education; and to increase parental leave and introduce flexible working hours. The policy also aims to make additional investments in children's services, including significant subsidies for childcare for low-income families; to open free and universal part-time early education places for 3- and 4-year old children; and more recently, to establish a comprehensive, cross-ministry programme for child protection and well being, called Every Child Matters. Benchmark scores cannot capture this movement unless repeated over time.
- Benchmarking achieve its aims only across rather similar countries. Although they may be generated from careful observation of how things work across a range of countries, some benchmarks may not be pertinent to all countries: Can one expect, for example, the same interpretation of particular benchmarks in a country as diverse as Mexico as from the highly urbanised northern European countries?
- Finally, benchmarking may obscure the need for process and the importance of local actors. Conclusions reached by the European Commission Childcare Network in 1996, about quality in the early childhood field are apposite here:
  - Quality is a relative concept, based on values and beliefs current in a society at a particular moment;
  - Defining quality is a process, and this process is important in its own right, providing opportunities to share, discuss and understand values, ideas, knowledge and experience;
  - The process should be participatory and democratic, involving different groups including children, parents and families and professionals working in services;
  - The needs, perspectives and values of these groups may sometimes differ;
  - Defining quality should be seen as a dynamic, continuous process, involving regular review and never reaching a final objective statement.

(European Commission Childcare Network, 1996:C7-8)

However, despite such risks, benchmarks can be useful. They set clear performance standards for developed economies that indicate what can and should be expected in early childhood systems. Used in cross-national comparisons, they show what the leading countries have achieved. Although they may not address process quality adequately, they provide a measure of how governments are performing vis-à-vis commonly accepted standards and, it is hoped, can stimulate discussion and greater accountability at national level.

### **Data difficulties specific to the early childhood field**

In addition to the challenges that a benchmarking approach presents, there are also underlying weaknesses in data collection in the early childhood field affecting all aspects of indicators and target setting. Among these are:

### *Data for the age group 0-3 years*

A major difficulty in choosing comparative benchmarks for early childhood systems is the general lack of data on the younger children. This is partly due to the private nature of many ECEC arrangements, particularly in countries with weak state investment in the sector. In addition, until fairly recently, data on young children were subsumed by health and social affairs ministries under family services. Data on children either failed to be disaggregated from family data or were grouped into age categories, e.g. 0-12 years, which were of little use for planning early childhood policy. Within education ministries, data collection on young children tended to begin only at the age of three or four years, leading to the assumption that early childhood education did not begin until a certain age, up to which age, children should only receive care. Thus, an unhelpful distinction has evolved – both in the English language and in institutional practice – between care and early education (called by various names: preschool education, pre-primary education etc.). This distinction has led inevitably to the down-grading of childcare services. Traditionally, these services have been weakly regulated, with unsatisfactory staffing, curriculum and evaluation practices.<sup>10</sup> In addition, reliable data is difficult to find, even on matters as simple as access. In recent years, countries have begun to engage in the task of providing better data, but many statistical offices are still not able to provide enrolment rates per single year of age, until attendance at early education services begins. They are content to present aggregated figures for the age group 0-3 years, based often on national household surveys that, in general, are blunt instruments for collecting data on ECEC services.<sup>11</sup>

### *Definitions of early education services*

With regard to children (3-6 years) in early education services, the data situation is better, but current definitions lead to some inconsistency and confusion. In collecting data on young children 3-6 years, ministries of education follow the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) definition of services for children 3-6 years (ISCED level 0). ISCED level 0 programmes are defined as centre or school-based programmes that are designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children at least 3 years of age, and that have staff that are adequately trained to provide an educational programme for the children. Programmes for children under 3 years, family support elements or programmes for children 3-6 years privileging play or other non-instructional pedagogies are not included in this definition. When programmes are considered to be pre-primary education, they are further defined as the initial stage of organized instruction. However, as the instructional or educational properties of programmes are difficult to identify, different proxy measures are utilised by countries to determine whether a programme should be classified at this level. Nordic countries, for example, generally count only 3 hours per day as ISCED level 0 programming, although pedagogues or teachers may approach these hours no differently from

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<sup>10</sup>The sector is still dominated in some countries by non-accredited childminding and unqualified staff.

<sup>11</sup>Household surveys can add a few questions concerning childcare arrangements for young children, but not nearly enough to extract the type of data needed for policy-making. In addition, there are issues concerning the quality of the data collected because of sample size and sample selection issues. Some national statistics bureaus, for example, Statistics Austria, overcome this difficulty by collecting uniform data from early childhood services each year and through launching special data collections and surveys, e.g. micro-censuses in 1995 and 2002, which included a special section entitled 'Household Management, Day Care and Nursing Care'.

other programming. This model of reporting leads not only to an underestimation of the time that Nordic children spend in educational services but also to a significant undervaluing of the level of investment in early childhood services engaged by these countries.

In other countries, children attending programmes outside ministry of education auspices – sometimes with well-qualified personnel and recognized pedagogical aims – may or may not be counted. In particular, children attending non-subsidized or private services may be completely overlooked. The confusion caused by ambiguous data concepts and definitions is referred to in the following box on the UOE data collection. This collection is administered jointly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics (UNESCO/UIS), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) – hence the acronym UOE.

**Box 1: The UOE pre-primary education data collection**

A major objective of this data collection effort is to provide internationally comparable data on key aspects of education systems, specifically on enrolments and completion of education programmes, as well as the cost and type of resources dedicated to education. The Member countries co-operate to gather information, to develop and apply common definitions and criteria for the quality control of the data, to verify the data and to provide the information necessary to interpret and report the submitted data.

In principle, the UOE provides the most reliable framework for the collection and analysis of international data on early childhood education services. However, pre-primary education remains a minor focus in UOE work plans. Data are collected in only a few relevant domains of early childhood, and until very recently, little analysis of this data was provided. The dynamic analytic procedures of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA – OECD 2004) linking socio-economic status, student characteristics, financing variables and the like are not applied to services for young children, where, in fact, they would be very useful. ECEC researchers have to be content with raw figures of enrolment and variable unit costs per child. Early education in particular is subsumed into a primary education framework as if services organization, objectives, group sizes, staff-child ratios, staffing and training domains were similar in both sectors.

Again, although OECD member countries are committed to making all reasonable efforts to report according to the definitions, classifications, and coverage specified in the current ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) document, and to report deviations from these standards in their data collection protocols, data supplied for pre-primary education often lack comparability. For example, the 2007 edition of Education at a Glance (OECD 2007) provides expenditure figures per child aged from 3 to 6 years in early education centres during the year 2004: in France, US\$4,938 per child, in Sweden, US\$4,417 per child, and in the United Kingdom, US\$7,924 USD per child. For the lay reader, this may seem reasonable until one considers that child-staff ratios are significantly lower in Sweden than in France and the United Kingdom, that the Swedish preschool is a full-day, full-year (11 months) service, and that over half the staff are trained preschool teachers educated to tertiary level 5A (university degree level). How then can unit costs per child come to less than 56 per cent expenditure of the United Kingdom, a country that provides only two-and-a-half hours free early education per day during the academic year to 3- and 4-year-old children? Clearly, countries are interpreting the category ISCED Level 0 (pre-primary education) in different ways and are using different definitions to report expenditure and other data.

Part of the difficulty for countries lies in the 1997 ISCED definition of early childhood education. ISCED Level 0 programmes are defined as centre or school-based programmes that are designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children at least 3 years of age, and that have staff that are adequately trained (i.e. qualified) to provide an educational programme for the children. These programmes are further defined as the initial stage of

organized instruction. Such an understanding does not correspond to how early childhood programming is conceived in many countries or as described in *Starting Strong* (OECD 2001, 2006). The distinction drawn by ISCED between education and care and on that basis, its decision to begin data collection at the age of 3 years or to treat certain forms of kindergarten education as outside the ISCED definition further confounds the issue. In reality, there is no valid pedagogical reason for such distinctions and, in fact, several countries begin early education at earlier ages and often practise age-mixing in ECEC centres.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the instructional properties of programmes are difficult to identify. ECEC programming in its better manifestations relies to a great extent on the child's natural learning strategies (viz. play, interaction with others, the exploration of the wider environment) and seeks, in addition to cognitive development, other aims that cannot be taught through instruction only, e.g. socio-emotional development and social competence. In sum, without further information from other sources, UOE figures concerning the volume of ECEC provided, enrolment rates, public expenditure on ECEC and unit costs per child, may not be adequate for valid international comparisons to be drawn.

#### *Double counting*

Because of different definitions and licensing arrangements across countries, many children actually attending services may not be counted, and in other circumstances may be counted twice. The former occurs most often in systems where private, unlicensed services predominate. Being private, attendance at these services will be picked up only through household surveys. Over-counting occurs in countries with split systems in which the early education service lasts only for half-a-day or less. Because the duration of this period in an early education service does not correspond to a normal, full-time working day, children have to be placed in another service, often family day care, for the rest of the day. In split systems in particular, this leads to double counting as family day care and early education often fall under different regimes and separate data collection offices.

#### *Conclusion*

A tension undoubtedly exists between standard setting based on external criteria and the actual educational process at work in early childhood centres. Yet, attention to both is needed. Although universal benchmarks may not be able to take into account the interactional and pedagogical aspects of care, upbringing and education, or give sufficient attention to the quality of the living and learning experiences that children have in different settings, they do call attention to basic conditions that allow good process to take place. In the advanced economies, high quality in early childhood provision and process is unlikely to be reached or maintained unless financing and training benchmarks are fixed and applied.

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<sup>12</sup>A 1998 government publication from the UK affirms that in the early years there is “no sensible distinction between education and care” (DfES 1998).

## CHAPTER 3

### BENCHMARK DEFINITIONS AND RATIONALES

#### **Group A: Benchmarks focusing on child health and family support**

For early childhood care and education systems to work effectively, prior attention needs to be given to the family and social contexts of young children. The research evidence shows that in most OECD countries children from low-income groups tend to access health services and early childhood services less, and succeed less well in school (OECD 2001; PISA–OECD 2004). Early childhood services can do much to alleviate the negative effects of disadvantage by providing a protected milieu for the development and education of young children, and by facilitating the access of families to basic services and social participation. However, a continuing high level of child and family poverty in a country undermines these efforts and greatly impedes the task of raising educational levels. Governments aware of the link between social well-being and educational achievement will employ upstream fiscal, social and labour policies to reduce family poverty and give young children a fair start in life.

According to General Comment no. 7 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, an integrated approach to parents with young children would include:

...interventions that impact indirectly on parents ability to promote the best interests of children (e.g. taxation and benefits, adequate housing, working hours) as well as those that have more immediate consequences (e.g. perinatal health services for mother and baby, parent education, home visitors); .... Assistance to parents will include provision of parenting education, parent counselling and other quality services for mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and others who from time to time may be responsible for promoting the child's best interest (CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1, 20 September 2006, p. 10)

Benchmarks focus on these issues, and call attention to the effects of ill-health and poverty on the lives of young children and their families:

**Benchmark 1:** *An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care.*

**Benchmark 2:** *Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10 per cent. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.*

To these benchmarks, a third has been added, the impact of which on child outcomes has not been researched to the same extent, viz.

**Benchmark 3:** *Employed parents are entitled to a statutory leave of about a year (maternity and parental leave combined) after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at*

*least 50 per cent over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.*

The research available suggests many beneficial effects of leave on the health and well-being of nursing mothers, a critical factor for virtually all aspects of child well-being. A period of remunerated leave of 50 weeks, supplemented by annual work leaves covers the first critical year of a child's life. It greatly relieves pressure on mothers and covers the initial breast-feeding period. Home care by a parent should also lead to building deep, affectionate bonds between the child and parent. In addition, remunerated maternity and parental leave contributes to greater gender equality, and helps families, in particular lone parent families, to avoid poverty. The setting aside of a use-it-or-lose-it leave period for fathers underlines the paternal responsibility for young children, and encourages paternal care for and bonding with young children. Further explanations and justifications of these benchmarks are provided in the text below.

**Benchmark 1:** *An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* This benchmark measures whether a comprehensive network of health and family support services has been established to assist families with information and primary health care, in particular, when families are rearing young children. Again, General Comment 7 is clear on this issue:

“States parties should ensure that all children have access to the highest attainable standard of health care and nutrition during their early years, in order to reduce infant mortality and enable children to enjoy a healthy start in life (art. 24). In particular: (a) States parties have a responsibility to ensure access to clean drinking water, adequate sanitation, appropriate immunization, good nutrition and medical services” (Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment no. 7, p. 12).

By a public network is meant a network supported financially by public funds, and accessible to all families needing advice, health care, information or assistance. The network should maintain a strong focus on child and family health (e.g. pre- and postnatal health care), child development, parenting, and provide home-visiting and other outreach services to families with young children. In particular, families from disadvantaged backgrounds will receive first call on services, and have access to outreach services through the local health nurse and social protection personnel. Families with disabilities or having a child with disabilities are also a priority for support. The network will offer parenting and child development information and support, with links to health care, home-visiting, counselling, vocational services and childcare services.

To measure the effectiveness of health and family support networks, three indicators concerning children from birth to 2 years are used, viz.

- The infant mortality rate (IMR) is less than 4 per 1000 live births,

- The proportion of babies born with low birth weight (LBW) (less than 2500 grams) is lower than 6 per cent, and
- The immunization rate for 12 to 23 month-olds (averaged over measles, polio and DPT3 vaccination) exceeds 95 per cent);<sup>13</sup>

The rich countries that achieve the standard for two of the above are considered to have reached the benchmark. According to the most recent WHO/UNICEF figures<sup>14</sup>, the countries (in our survey) with an IMR of <4 per 1,000 are Belgium (Flanders), Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden. Those with a LBW rate <6 per cent are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden. Those with an immunization rate of >95 per cent are Belgium (Flanders), Finland, Hungary, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. The countries meeting at least two of the three criteria are: Finland, Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden, that is, among the 25 countries that were surveyed, seven countries achieve the benchmark.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* According to the UNICEF (2007) Innocenti Report Card 7 on *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries*, the great majority of children born into today's developed societies enjoy unprecedented levels of health and safety. Almost within living memory, it states, one child in every five in the cities of Europe could be expected to die before his or her fifth birthday; today, the risk is less than one in a hundred. Nonetheless, the Report concludes:

...health and safety remain a basic concern of all families and a basic dimension of child well-being. It can also be argued that the levels of health and safety achieved in a particular country are an indicator of the societies overall level of commitment to its children (UNICEF 2007, p. 13).

Although children enjoy unprecedented levels of good health in the rich countries, there is no room for complacency. In its Concluding Observations to recent European Union (EU) country reporting on the implementation of the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to two EU countries and two EU accession countries to improve effectiveness of antenatal care, maternal health education and immunization programmes. The Committee was obliged also to encourage countries to take necessary measures, in cooperation with parents and religious leaders, to ensure universal vaccination of children.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the health care needs of pregnant women, mothers, infants and young children require a highly integrated service that includes attention to the prenatal period, the birth of the baby, the postnatal period, and the needs of the infant. This continuum is serviced in many countries by a child health network attentive to the needs of young children, and then by a school health service. Through such services, many potential hazards to the health of mothers and young children can be identified and measures taken to minimize their effects.

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<sup>13</sup>Three indicators are used to measure this benchmark: infant mortality rates; low birth weights; the percentage of children immunised against the major vaccine-preventable diseases.

<sup>14</sup>Supplemented by disaggregated data for Belgium (Flanders).

<sup>15</sup>ChildONEurope, The child's right to early childhood education and care – Survey on the CRC committee's concluding observations on the last EU countries' reports, available on <<http://www.childoneurope.org/events/ppt/PresentationHelsinki21nov06.ppt>>

The prenatal clinic also provides an excellent opportunity for birth and child-rearing information, e.g. to inform mothers how to take care of themselves during pregnancy, what to expect at delivery, and how to care for a baby after birth. Good parenting has a strong impact on a child's educational development, behaviour, and mental health. A warm, affectionate bond between the child and her parents (or caregiver) is critical for well-being and for the socio-emotional development and learning of the child. Without such parenting knowledge, the well-being, health and development of infants may suffer.

Family health-care can be much enhanced by government investment in family and child welfare outreach services, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In these clinics, infants can be examined thoroughly to determine their health and normality, both physical and mental. Later periodic examinations serve to decide if the infant is developing satisfactorily. Arrangements can be made for the child to be protected from major hazards by, for example, immunization and dietary supplements. Recurrent conditions, such as chest infections or skin disorders, can be detected early and treated. Throughout the whole of this period mother and child are together, and particular attention is paid to supporting the mother in caring for her child. Later, all service types, including family day care, can work with families and the local health services to ensure an adequate level of health screening for infants and toddlers.

Country research in this domain from, for example, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the European Network of National Observatories on Childhood (ChildONEurope 2007) shows how governments differ in their efforts to ensure the access of families with infants and young children to primary health services, immunization and parenting information. Health insurance for poor families can be weak or non-existent, especially for families without an employed member. This is especially the case for unregistered residents, or for groups that find it difficult to access employment, such as Roma or immigrant families. In consequence, young children in these families can suffer from under-nourishment, chronic sicknesses and vulnerability to infectious diseases. Likewise, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged several countries to address the issue of high infant mortality especially in remote and rural areas.<sup>16</sup>

It may be thought that the differences between rich countries on IMR or vaccination rates are so small as to render comparisons worthless. In fact, they can be quite significant. Across OECD countries, the IMR rate ranges from 2.3 per 1000 live births in Iceland to an IMR of 6.8 in the United States and 18.8 in Mexico. These figures are a measure of the concern of governments for public health and education, in particular, for the poor and marginalised groups who need preventative health services for both children and families.

**Benchmark 2:** *Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10 per cent. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.*

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<sup>16</sup>ChildONEurope, *ibidem*.

*Definition of benchmark:* This benchmark seeks to measure the effectiveness of government social policies with regard to families with young children considered to be in poverty or at risk. The definition of living in poverty means living below the poverty threshold set by most cross-national studies, viz. children living in families with disposable household income less than 50 per cent of median household income for the whole population of the country in question.<sup>17</sup> The supports provided to these families may involve a mix of policies designed to provide social support and increase benefits while providing incentives to work and, in some instances, action on minimum wage levels.

Because of the difficulty of tracking information on social benefits streams or employment initiatives across a wide range of countries, the benchmark focuses on the effectiveness of government policies to enable families to maintain their children above the poverty line. To measure government effectiveness in this domain, it is proposed the use of child poverty rates advocated in the Innocenti Report Card 6 (2005) on 'Child Income Poverty in Rich Countries', country policies that reduce child income poverty to a rate of 10 per cent or less are considered to have reached a minimal standard; countries that have child poverty levels above 10 per cent are considered not to have reached the standard (At the date of the final revision of this paper, updated child poverty figures were not available from the OECD<sup>18</sup>).

The measure, however, is not entirely satisfactory. First, the OECD measures child poverty to the age of 17 years. For present purposes, it would be preferable if the table measured child poverty rates for children 0-6 years as research indicates that during the early childhood years, children are most vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty (NCPP 1999, Duncan and Magnusson 2002).<sup>19</sup> Second, consideration of a series of proxy measures might yield a more accurate picture of the situation of families with children under 6 years: for example, a combination of data on public spending on family benefits (in cash, services and tax breaks),<sup>20</sup> the percentage of households without an employed parent, the level of labour force participation of lone or immigrant parents; the minimum wage levels across different

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<sup>17</sup>To reach an accurate picture of child disadvantage, measures other than relative income poverty should also be used (see UNICEF (2005) for a more extensive discussion). The use of the OECD child poverty measurement affects in different ways the countries analysed in the benchmark tables. For example, the use of the international standard increases the proportion of children considered to be in poverty in the United States, compared to the use of the American 'absolute' poverty measure (the minimum amount needed to meet the subsistence needs of a household). However, the use of one or other definition makes little difference to the performance of the United States: the use of the 50 per cent international measure yields an American child poverty rate of just under 22 per cent, while the use of the 'absolute' poverty measure gives a figure of 16 per cent – both well above the 10 per cent child poverty rate set as a minimum benchmark. On the other hand, the use of the 50 per cent of median household income favours Canada, as Canada's own poverty measure (low income cut-offs or LICOs) are stricter than the international measure. In 2000, the LICO measure provides a child poverty rate for Canada of around 18 per cent, compared to just under 15 per cent on the international measure. Again, both figures are above the 10 per cent cut-off point of the benchmark.

<sup>18</sup>At a later date, UNICEF received an indication from the OECD whether child poverty rates in countries exceeded or fell below 10 per cent.

<sup>19</sup>In practice, 6 years – the age of which compulsory schooling begins – is generally considered to be the end of the early childhood period in the OECD countries. In developmental terms, early childhood policies should also include the critical prenatal period and be concerned with early childhood development up to the age of 8 years.

<sup>20</sup>For a comparative estimation of the taxes and benefits by age and by low and average income status, see UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 6 (UNICEF 2005) figure 13.

countries, etc. In addition, poverty is not only characterized by levels of family income, but also by psychological and social factors. It is not material poverty alone, but poverty combined with social exclusion that undermines the confidence of families and leads over generations to low educational and social aspirations.

*Evidence for the benchmark.* The importance of lifting young children out of poverty is supported strongly in poverty research literature. Chronic poverty is a far more important determinant of negative psychological and social functioning than almost any other variable. Its prolonged impact on very young children – despite their well-known resilience and adaptability – is recorded unanimously in the literature (Rutter 2006a, 2006b). In this respect, relative poverty seems to count as much as an absolute poverty. For example, the general standard of living in the United States (the richest large country in the OECD) is far higher than in Mexico (the poorest country). Because of this, the median income of poor households with children under 18 in Mexico in 1998 was less than US\$1,000, compared to a median income of US\$8,700 per poor household in the United States in 2000. Yet, both American and Canadian research (see Bennett 2008a, section 1.3) shows that the variables poverty and family dysfunction – as defined in these richer countries - are far more powerfully correlated to poor educational outcomes than any other variable, including ethnic belonging. Poverty is statistically linked with a variety of poor outcomes for children, from low birth weight and poor nutrition in infancy to increased chances of academic failure, emotional distress, and unwed childbirth in adolescence (Brooks Gunn and Duncan 1997). For this reason, it seems important that, for the sake of the health and development of children, attention should be given to relative poverty issues and to ensuring that parents can work and earn a living wage.

Large-scale country evaluations, such as PISA (OECD 2001, 2004), and national studies such as the recent Education Testing Services (ETS) study in the United States (Coley and Barton 2007), confirm the link between low socio-economic status (SES) and low educational achievement in school.<sup>21</sup> Low SES children tend to exhibit poorer cognitive and verbal skills because of features correlated to poverty: low community aspirations; poorer housing; homes with fewer toys, books, and other stimulating experiences; low parental educational levels and reduced language patterns, etc. Poor parents also tend to rely on home-based childcare, where the quality and amount of attention children receive can be significantly inferior to that of professional facilities. However, as the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth NLSCY shows (see Bennett 2008a, section I.3), material poverty remains the major underlying cause of inadequacies in these and other domains.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child calls attention to the responsibility of governments to ensure services for young children, in particular for vulnerable children. Young children are entitled to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (art. 27 CRC). Growing up in relative poverty undermines children's well-being, social inclusion and self-esteem and reduces opportunities for learning and development. Growing up in condition of absolute poverty has even more serious consequences, threatening children's survival and their health, as well as undermining their

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<sup>21</sup>Clearly, other factors also affect educational outcomes for children: family dysfunction, weak parenting or low community expectations about education.

basic quality of life. States parties are urged to implement systematic strategies to reduce poverty in early childhood as well as combat its negative effects on children's well-being. All possible means should be employed, including material assistance and support programmes for children and families (art. 27.3 CRC), in order to assure to young children a basic standard of living consistent with rights:

The Committee calls on States parties to ensure that all young children (and those with primary responsibility for their well-being) are guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services, including programmes of health, care and education specifically designed to promote their well-being. Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2005).

UNICEF research in this area is encouraging, showing that social programmes and transfers can be very effective in reducing child poverty, e.g. income redistribution measures, family allowances, child benefits, employment and community programmes. The conclusion of Innocenti Report Card 6 on child poverty in rich countries (UNICEF 2005) is that:

Variation in government policy appears to account for most of the variation in child poverty levels between states. No OECD country devoting more than 10 per cent of GDP to social transfers in aid to poor families has a child poverty rate higher than 10 per cent. No country devoting less than 5 per cent to social transfers has a child poverty rate of less than 15 per cent.

**Benchmark 3:** *Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year (maternity and parental leave combined), and to a wage replacement level of at least 50 per cent over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.*

*Definition of benchmark:* Parental leave as defined here is statutory, employment-protected leave of absence for parents around the time of childbirth, or adoption in some countries. The ILO convention on maternity leave (International Labour Organization 2000) stipulates that the period of leave for a mother around childbirth should be at least 14 weeks. In the use of the term here and in the calculation of its duration, parental leave includes maternity leave (both pre- and post childbirth), paternity leave and parental leave. In addition, the state and employers also provide job protection, that is, a guarantee of return to the same or a similar position in the company where maternity leave began. The basic proposal is therefore for a year-long, remunerated parental (including maternity) leave period after the birth of a child, with a guarantee of return to work.<sup>22</sup>

In most countries in Europe, the parent on leave – in general the mother – receives a replacement salary, which counts in later calculations of her retirement and pension rights. Replacement salaries help to ensure greater gender equality for women. The remuneration or replacement wage provided is taken into account in the estimation of the effectiveness of parental leave, based on its duration and level of payment (see Figure 1 below). The

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<sup>22</sup> Working definitions of these terms can be found in the OECD Family Database: <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>

definition of parental leave, the portion of leave assigned to fathers, and the paternal replacement wage are also included in the definition. It is interesting to note that in most countries paternal leaves are short and generally paid at 100 per cent of salary. For this reason, several countries – Austria, Canada, Germany and Hungary – with generous parental leave provision do not achieve this benchmark, as these countries do not provide a two-week paternity leave.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* In recent years, many countries, including Canada, France and the United Kingdom, have significantly increased the parental leave period to cover the first year of life. In fact, most OECD countries provide some form of state remunerated parental leave. The policy rationale differs from country to country; e.g. there is a concern in several countries to encourage families to have more children, as fertility rates, particularly in Asian and European OECD countries, are often well below replacement levels. A leave period of 50 weeks – supplemented by annual work leaves – covers the initial breast-feeding period and allows parental care of the infant during the first critical year of life. In normal circumstances, home care by a parent should lead to building a warm, affectionate bond between the child and her parents (or caregiver). In this regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, referring to the *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding* (World Health Organization 2003), refers to the advantages of breast-feeding. Bonding between parent and child seems to be critical for the well-being, socio-emotional development and learning of the child.<sup>23</sup>

Common to most countries is a concern for the health of mothers and the well-being of infants. Article 18.3 of the CRC requires States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services, maternity protection and facilities for which they are eligible. In this regard, the Committee recommends that States parties ratify the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) – (see: Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment no. 7, p.10). All the rich countries, except Australia and the United States, provide a remunerated maternity leave period for most or all women. In the European Union, this remunerated leave must have a duration of at least three months.

An analysis of the data shows that a yearlong, remunerated parental leave (embracing maternity, paternal and parental leaves) is, in fact, the average for OECD countries. Several countries – the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Spain – provide parental leaves of 2 to 3 years, and other countries, such as Finland and Norway, provide home-care allowances up to the age of 3 years to parents who do not wish to use ECEC services. However, in this regard, the adage *Not too long, not too short and not too maternal* merits consideration: parental leaves in excess of a year can affect negatively the participation rates of women in the labour market and ultimately, the achievement of gender equality in the workplace. In addition, data from the OECD *Starting Strong* reviews suggests that mothers with less than completed secondary school studies are more likely to accept

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<sup>23</sup>Concerns have been expressed by paediatricians and experts in several countries - notably in France and the United States, and most recently in NICHD research (2007) – about placing infants in long-day care in crèches and childcare centres.

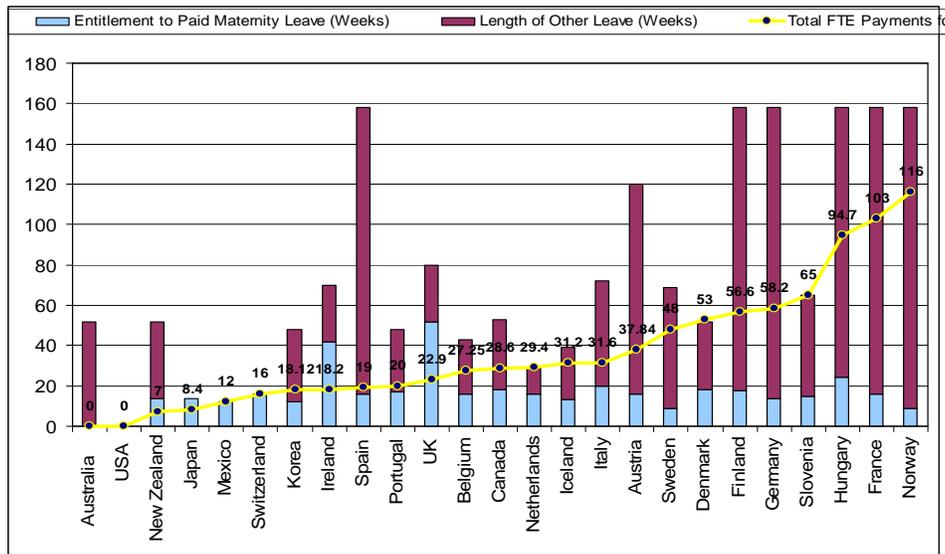
home-care allowances and remain outside the labour market. In some instances, full-time home care lasts until obligatory schooling begins, which is not always in the best interests of young children. Children from low socio-economic and second-language groups benefit much from early access to appropriate early education services. Without this support, they can enter obligatory school at a great disadvantage in terms of language development.

The condition that the law should ensure to the parent on leave (almost always mothers) a reasonable replacement wage is justified in terms of family well-being and gender equality. A reasonable replacement salary - in particular, if linked with employment status — helps to ensure greater gender equality for women, and more income for the family. In Sweden, where the replacement level remains at 80 per cent of salary for 77 weeks, the parent on leave is still considered to be in employment and the replacement wage counts in later calculations for retirement and pension rights. Such dispositions of the law have positive impacts on the status and life chances of women, and perhaps also, on maintaining fertility levels.

The figure below measures the probable effectiveness of national parental leave policies by relating the length of leave to its remuneration over the entire leave period. The index of efficiency runs from 116 in Norway to zero in Australia and the United States, where no right to state remuneration during parental leave exists. The maternity leave provision in Australia is one year, but the external motivation to take leave is probably weak, as there is no statutory wage replacement during this period. In contrast, the period of leave that can be taken in Iceland is 39 weeks, but the motivation to take leave is high, as the entire period is remunerated at 80 per cent of earnings, giving Iceland a coefficient of 31.2. In addition, unlike for example Austria or Hungary (where parental leave is generous), Iceland stresses the importance of paternity leave, and places fully a third of parental leave at the disposition of fathers.

It is useful to note that the attractiveness of taking parental leave changes at different cut-off points. For example, some countries provide very short leaves, but with full remuneration during the period. The motivation for parents to take this leave is high. This is the case of Mexico, which allows 12 weeks of maternity leave paid at full replacement wage, but does not provide a remunerated parental leave period. In contrast, the United Kingdom allows 90 per cent wage replacement for the initial 6 weeks of maternity leave, then a flat rate of approximately 33 per cent for 20 weeks; followed by 26 weeks (if the mother so wishes) of leave without remuneration. The incentive offered by the state to mothers to continue taking leave after six months is low, but this can be offset by the desire of parents to rear their child at home during the first year of life, or by the more mundane impact of the high cost of childcare.

**Figure 1: Effective parental leave provision across the OECD countries**



Source: Bennett (2008), based on Moss and Wall (2007).

Note: This figure on effective parental leave provision is based on a previous figure proposed by the Dutch researchers, Plantenga and Siegel (2004). Effective leave is computed by weighing the duration of the leave entitlement in weeks (maternity, paternity and parental combined) by the level of the replacement wage offered, calculated in full-time equivalents. Because the level of the replacement wage influences take-up, the figure provides an indication of the usefulness (effectiveness) of the parental leave package to parents, and their probable use of leave. Based on recent parental leave data (Moss and Wall 2007), effective leave ranges from a coefficient of 116 points in Norway to a low of zero points in Australia and the United States, where a general legal entitlement to paid maternity leave does not exist (except in California), although parents may receive employer payments (no entitlement) or a once-off public payment for the birth of a child.

Another justification for introducing generous parental leave policies is to involve parents intensely in the lives of their children from the earliest age. Recent paediatric research confirms that building affectionate and stable attachments in infancy and early childhood is of primary importance for the psychological structuring of the child (see, for example, the summary of this research in Shonkoff et al., 2000). Parents bring to children not only an important genetic inheritance but also provide the child's first environment. Their influence is particularly strong in the early years when basic attitudes, relationship patterns, dietary and health habits, knowledge about the world, interest areas, language and communication patterns are laid down. The US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study on *Early Child Care and Youth Development* (NICHD 1997) underlines that the quality of parenting that children receive is a far stronger and more consistent predictor of children's academic achievement and social functioning than children's experiences in early childcare. Maternity and parental leave policies encourage parents to become involved with their children. Other research suggests that parental leave during the first year brings other important benefits: lower infant mortality, more breast-feeding, less maternal depression, more use of preventive health care (Chatterji and Markowitz 2005; Tanaka 2005).

In most countries, parents themselves decide which partner will take parental leave and claim income support for that parent. In practice, this means that mothers rather than fathers use the leave entitlement. To counteract the exclusive use of leave by mothers – and the association of child rearing with women only – some countries (Iceland, Norway and Sweden) have

introduced a paternity leave or father quota, that is, a period of paid leave that is reserved for fathers only on a use it or lose it basis. Paternity leave allows paternal care of young children during the period and is reckoned to strengthen family bonding and increase the interest and responsibility of fathers for their children. For this reason, the benchmarks includes: *At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers*. As noted above, this condition prevents Austria, Canada, Germany and Hungary – countries with generous parental leave provision – from achieving this benchmark, as these countries do not provide a two-week paternity leave.

In summary, parental leave policy serves well labour policy, gender equality, paternal bonding with young children, family well-being and the best interests of the child. Its interest for parents could be further enhanced if greater flexibility in the use of leave were granted to parents, as the need for leave can arise at different moments during childhood. Parental leave also accords with a central finding of the *Neurons to Neighbourhoods* Committee, which found overwhelming scientific evidence of the central importance of early relationships for children's development. Indeed, young children who lack at least one loving and consistent adult often suffer severe and long-lasting developmental problems. But, according to the Committee (the United States National Research Council):

the reality of life in the United States today makes it difficult for many working parents to spend sufficient time with their children. The committee therefore recommends policies that ensure more time, greater financial security, and other supportive resources to help parents build close and stable relationships with their young children (Shonkoff et al., 2000).

### **Group B: Benchmarks focusing on the governance of early childhood services**

Governance relates to the allocation of responsibility for policy-making and to the values, structures and instruments that sustain policy in a given field. In the early childhood field, the exercise of governance includes a wide range of functions; e.g. to ensure access on an equitable basis to all children; to enhance quality through attention to staffing and quality initiatives; to foster research and data collection; to monitor and evaluate the goals and outcomes set for the system. Because of the importance of leadership and governance in a field that is only beginning to develop, four benchmarks were allocated to the section, dealing with governance:

- The importance of assigning responsibility for young children to one ministry that combines policy-making, funding and regulatory powers;
- The need to formulate early childhood policy on the best research available and in consultation with parents, and to ensure that national objective for young children are being effectively achieved;
- A strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.
- And finally, the need for governments to invest adequately in early childhood services,

A further measure of the critical mass of governance units and data on the extent of their staffing and budgets would also be useful here. As the early childhood field expands, and

becomes increasingly important, attention will need to be given to these questions, with the likelihood that policy units in charge of early development and education will become more specific and increase in size and significance. At the moment, early childhood units are often subsumed under larger divisions, such as primary education or health, and receive few specialised staff or appropriate funding.

Although governments need to reconcile many different interests in making early childhood policy, such as labour force expansion, gender equality, social cohesion and other important issues, an underlying principle should be the best interests of the child. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expresses the principle as follows:

States parties are urged to develop rights-based, coordinated, multisectoral strategies in order to ensure that children's best interests are always the starting point for service planning and provision (Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) General Comment 7, p. 11).

**Benchmark 4:** *National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making, funding, and regulatory systems (including support/supervision) being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published. (Note: in the final definition of the benchmark, the existence of a national plan became the primary criterion).*

*Definition of the benchmark:* This benchmark requires that responsibility for both childcare and early education has been consolidated under one ministry or agency at national and/or state level. The purpose is to integrate and consolidate national policy for young children from birth to the age of compulsory schooling, and to increase consistency in goal-setting, access criteria, regulations, funding, staffing, quality criteria and costs to parents. In early childhood systems integrated under one ministry or agency, a common vision of education and care can be forged, with agreed health, social and educational objectives. Duplication of administrations and budgets can also be avoided. In sum, under one ministry or agency, greater efficiency and consistency are achieved, and the present division between early education and an ill-funded, ill-regulated childcare sector overcome. To have succeeded in bringing together care and education together under one ministry or agency is the criterion that countries should meet to achieve this benchmark.

Fundamentally, this is a question of accountability. For historical reasons, national policies for the 'care' and 'education' of young children have developed separately in most countries. Typically, care services were assigned to health or social ministries, and the 'infant' or junior school to ministries of public instruction or education. The administrative division is translated in many countries into a two-tier organization of services: 'childcare' for the younger children followed by 'pre-primary education' for three, four or five years old. The result is often a fragmentation of services and a lack of coherence for children and families. In many countries, care and early education institutions differ greatly in their funding requirements, operational procedures, regulatory frameworks, staff-training and qualifications (OECD 2001). Childcare services, in particular, suffer from this division of auspices. They are less regulated and tend to be less developed in terms of coverage. In some countries, the

childcare field is a patchwork of private providers and individual family day carers. Affordability to parents is often an issue, and as a result, low-income groups are often excluded from access to centre-based services, unless government financed targeted services are available. Frequently, staff – almost exclusively female – have low educational qualifications and wages, and may not be given employment contracts or insurance.

This fragmentation of responsibility seems to be based more on traditional divisions of government than on the actual needs of families and young children. In the United States, for example, the General Accounting Office noted that in 1999, 69 federal programmes provided or supported education and care for children under 5 years. Nine different federal agencies and departments administered these programmes, though most were operated by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Education (United States General Accounting Office 2000).<sup>24</sup>

The picture is very different in the Nordic countries, which from the post-Second World War period progressively integrated all day care services under social welfare ministries. Co-ordinated policy frameworks for children's services were agreed and enacted at both local and centralised levels. Subsequently, some of these countries have since moved all children's services into education, but the important point is that a split between 'childcare' and 'early education' does not exist either administratively or conceptually in these countries. All children's services are considered to be characterized by care and education. The move to integration of services has contributed greatly to the quality of Nordic 'educare', helping it to maintain favourable child staff ratios in early childhood while recruiting, training and remunerating staff to a level higher than in childcare systems in other rich countries. Child well-being is placed first in the hierarchy of goals that early childhood services can aim to achieve.

The publication of a national plan or policy for the development of a universal early childhood system is added as a sign of serious intent by the ministry assigned to take in charge the early childhood sector. Its addition is an orientation only (which in many countries has proven to be very useful), but the benchmark focuses on the first part: the unification of early childhood responsibility, policy, regulation and funding under single auspices. (Note: in the final definition of the benchmark, the existence of a national plan became the primary criterion).

A word of explanation may be needed for the inclusion of the word 'universal' A universal early childhood system is one in which provision is made available at free or affordable rates for all children whose parents wish them to participate. This approach to access is contrasted

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<sup>24</sup> In the United States, a strong move toward the integration of services can be seen during the last decade. In May 2004, Georgia created an integrated governmental Department of Early Care and Learning to take in charge more effectively the State's varied early childhood services. Similarly, in April 2005, the state of Massachusetts merged the Department of Education's Office of School Readiness with the Massachusetts' Office of Child Care Services into a consolidated office for early education and care. In 2006, Washington State brought together, under a newly created Department of Early Learning, several ECEC services, including Head Start, childcare, state-funded preschool, and a small early reading programme. In addition, several integrated governance structures (e.g. governors' cabinets for children, public/private governance boards, inter-agency councils) have emerged to make ECEC policy and oversee its implementation (Neuman 2005).

with a targeted approach to ECEC, whereby a government provides public funding primarily to ensure programmes for certain groups of children, with significantly less support for the mainstream.<sup>25</sup>

*Evidence for the benchmark:* Early childhood policy is a complex field. It is concerned with providing education and care to young children but it is also linked with women's employment and equality of opportunity; child development and child poverty issues; labour market supply; health, social welfare and early education. In addition to more programmatic and qualitative issues, early childhood policy makers need to address issues of provision and access, family benefits, parental leaves from work, family-friendly measures, modes of funding, the status and training of personnel. Countries that aim to create systems that can deliver services to parents and young children in a co-ordinated way feel the need to pull together these various policy strands. A systemic approach entails developing a common policy framework with consistent goals across the system, and clearly-defined roles and responsibilities at both central and decentralised levels of governance.

One option has been the creation of inter-departmental and/or inter-governmental co-ordination bodies to generate a cooperative policy framework. Such bodies are found in Canada, Denmark and other countries. Choi (2003) provides evidence that co-ordinating mechanisms can work well when they are established for a specific purpose, e.g. to co-ordinate a particular early childhood task, or to focus on a targeted population. However, the limitations of co-ordinating bodies and cross-sectoral co-operation can also be seen. In the absence of a lead ministry or agency with a sound knowledge of early childhood policy and a mobilizing agenda for young children, government finance departments will often treat children's services primarily from a labour market or public expenditure angle (May 2001). In addition, diverse and sometimes conflicting goals for young children are put forward.<sup>26</sup> Split auspices lead to different access criteria and quality disparities on the ground.<sup>27</sup> In sum, though the fact of ministries working closely together constitutes real progress, the cultures and aims of different government departments can make it difficult to achieve co-ordinated policies in favour of the development and education of young children.

Country experience suggests that greater progress is made when a central vision is put at the centre of ECEC policy, and a dedicated ministry nominated to translate this vision into

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<sup>25</sup>Proponents of universal services point out that targeting is costly and inefficient. Programmes like Head Start miss most poor children, and at the same time, exclude by regulation low income families just above eligibility for subsidized services. These children would also benefit greatly from free or subsidized state sponsored services. In addition, the presence of middle-class children in groups raises standards and provides a mix of social class and diversity that targeted programmes often lack (Barnett et al., 2004). Critics of universal programming argue that it is fairer to channel scarce funding toward targeted programmes for children at-risk of school failure; taxpayers from low and moderate-income families should not be obliged to fund programmes for the children of middle-class parents who can afford to pay for services.

<sup>26</sup>An example is the contrasting approach of health and education ministries toward infant/toddler services: the former privileging a health-and-hygiene approach while education services are more influenced by learning goals.

<sup>27</sup>Early education services tend to be free, more universally accessible and staffed by graduate educators, while programmes within other sectors often charge fees, have eligibility requirements and are staffed by less qualified personnel.

reality. A lead ministry at national level can address the care and education of young children from birth to 6 years more holistically and coherently, with an integrated approach to staffing, financing, regulation and monitoring. Various analyses, including the OECD reviews, show the advantages that flow from bringing policy-making under one agency:

- More coherent policy and greater consistency across sectors in terms of regulation, funding and staffing regimes, curriculum and assessment, costs and opening hours, in contrast to fragmentation of policy and services;
- More effective investment in young children, with higher quality services. In a split system, the younger children are often defined primarily as dependent on parents or simply in need of childminding services. As a result, their services have often to make do with insufficient investment, non-accredited childminding and unqualified staff;
- Enhanced continuity of children's early childhood experiences as variations in access and quality are lessened under one ministry, and links at the services level across age groups and settings are more easily created;

Consolidation of responsibility is taking place in a growing number of countries: firstly, among the five Nordic countries, and now in more recent years in New Zealand, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom and in several states in the United States. Even in countries that continue to have split systems, consultation between the line ministries is growing in order to forge a unified vision of early childhood services to which all relevant ministries, local authorities and parents can subscribe. The formulation of a common national policy or plan for the development of the early childhood system also serves to consolidate policies across ministries, and to forge a unified vision for early childhood services at national level. It is not necessary for the achievement of the benchmark to have published this plan.

The need for consolidation is further underlined by two recent phenomena: decentralisation and the growth in private provision in most OECD countries over the past decade. Decentralisation is particularly encouraged in the early childhood field as a strategy to adapt services and resources to community needs, as it is generally recognized that early childhood policy and organization need to be geared closely to parental needs and local circumstances. Yet, while generally useful and necessary, the devolution of early childhood decision-making to local authorities can lead to fragmentation and uneven implementation of national policies – a phenomenon that is further amplified by a division of responsibilities among sectors.<sup>28</sup>

Where private provision is concerned, much depends on the type (or absence) of contractual arrangements made with providers by the public authorities. In some countries, little regulation of private providers takes place. Operating outside the public system, these providers often determine the eligibility requirements, fees and quality standards for their own services, sometimes aided by government subsidies and parental fees. Without the guidance and regulation of a strong line ministry acting on behalf of all families, there is a risk that a two-track system may develop, with children from more advantaged families having access to better financed private programmes and less fortunate children being

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<sup>28</sup>Seemingly, the desire to use resources more effectively and to avoid service duplication led local authorities in the Nordic countries during the 1980s to bring together social and education policies for young children at local level.

segregated into minimally financed public services that are unable to provide the high quality that these children need. The Committee on the Rights of the Child comments:

In order to ensure that young children's rights are fully realized during this crucial phase of their lives, States parties are urged to adopt comprehensive, strategic and time-bound plans for early childhood within a rights-based framework. (Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment no. 7, p. 18)

**Benchmark 5:** *The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* This benchmark seeks to reflect the professionalism of the national agency in charge of the education and care of young children outside the home. It asks whether the responsible agency has invested significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring and programme evaluation. The purpose of such investment is to base national early childhood policy on evidence (that is, the findings of the best research and the actual needs of parents) and to ensure that national objectives set for young children are being achieved. The proxy used to measure this sense of purpose is the commissioning and publication in the past ten years of an independent national evaluation of early childhood services, focused on achieving the well-being and holistic development of children in services.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child reiterates the importance of comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data on all aspects of early childhood for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved, and for assessment of the impact of policies. The Committee also states that theory and evidence from early childhood research has much to offer in the development of policies and practices, in the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives as well as in the education and training of all responsible for the well-being of young children. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p. 19)

National evaluations are normally carried out either by research teams, according to strict experimental research norms or by inspectors through agreed observation protocols, supported by site visits, questionnaires and interviews. For the purpose of this benchmark, either approach suffices. The aim of the benchmark is to encourage governments to undertake national evaluations, so that an objective picture can be had whether early childhood systems (into which much public funding is invested) actually meet the goals and standards expected of them. The content of the evaluation is left open to countries, but questions often posed in these evaluations are: Who is being served by the programme? What is the range of services being provided? What is the quality of services being provided? Is the well-being of young children assured? Are the main objectives of the guideline curriculum being met? Are resources being effectively allocated? Is parenting strengthened by early childhood services? What are the effects of decentralisation? Is community cohesion enhanced? Is there sufficient

co-operation among the main child services, notably, health, social welfare and education? Is there a strong and equal partnerships between the early childhood and school sectors?

*Evidence for the benchmark:* Periodic programme evaluations contribute greatly to system accountability and quality development. Such evaluations are common in the United States, and recently have been undertaken in Sweden (Skolverket 2004) and the United Kingdom (EPPE 1997-2007). Evaluations are greatly facilitated by a national guideline or pedagogical framework document (see Benchmark 11 below) that has already identified agreed goals for the early childhood system and its different programme types (family day care, centre-based care, integrated services, etc.).

For a number of reasons, programme evaluations are more suitable in the early childhood field than the use of standardised tests or individual child assessments within early childhood centres, a practice that is discouraged by many early childhood authorities. Programme evaluations are less high stakes for individual centres or groups of children, and avoid placing immediate pressures on educators and children. They focus on structures (the quality of funding, staffing, programme standards, etc.), processes (both relational and pedagogical) and the achievement of curriculum goals. The centre of attention is on administrative accountability and on the (formative) assessment of the educators work, rather than on testing young children.

The minimum benchmark proposed is that the responsible government ministry or agency has published within the last decade a comprehensive national evaluation of early childhood services (including information on process quality) and has made the report available to the public. In principle, all the countries involved in the OECD reviews have met this benchmark, as each country was required to prepare and publish a comprehensive Background Report on its early childhood services. For this reason most countries can respond positively to this benchmark. However, it may be noted that these reports were, for the most part, desk reports, written by national experts. A future benchmark could justifiably require a national programme evaluation according to the methods and norms usually employed in this type of evaluation.

**Benchmark 6:** *The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* This benchmark calls attention to two issues: first, the importance of placing the well-being of the child as a primary objective of children's services, alongside developmental and educational goals; and second, the need for government agencies to enact a regulatory framework for children's services that is monitored equally across both public and private sectors. The Committee on the Rights of the Child draws attention to both issues in the following statements:

Acknowledging that traditional divisions between care and education services have not always been in children's best interest, the concept of *educare* is sometimes used to signal a shift towards integrated services, and reinforces the recognition of the need for

a coordinated, holistic, multisectoral approach to early childhood. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p. 14)

Secondly, the Committee underlines the responsibility of governments with regard to the supervision of early childhood services, even in countries in which private provision predominates:

States parties are responsible for service provision for early childhood development. The role of civil society should be complementary to - not a substitute for - the role of the State. Where non-State services play a major role, the Committee reminds States parties that they have an obligation to monitor and regulate the quality of provision to ensure that children's rights are protected and their best interests served. (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p. 14)

The challenge is complex: to achieve well-being and developmental objectives for children across a disparate array of early childhood services requires vigilance and clear management structures. Governmental management of the early childhood field will ideally link all local services to local authority supervision and eventually to central government laws and regulations. The public authorities need to formulate not only clear expectations about what high quality provision looks like, but also develop regulatory frameworks that are monitored and enforced. Although Benchmarks 12, 13 and 14 underline that the key to the care, well-being and development of young children lies in process and the quality of staff employed, the regulatory framework also has its importance and needs to be carefully formulated and monitored.

In addition to defining provider profiles and child eligibility for programmes, a typical regulatory framework will address five key areas: staff profiles, staffing patterns and professional development; child:staff ratios and group sizes; programme standards and curriculum; child assessments including developmental and health screening; and parent and community involvement in children's development and learning. An example of what might be required is provided by the Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC) in the United States (Arkansas Department of Education 2005):

**Box 2: Rules Governing the Arkansas Better Chance Program (ABC)**

In addition to defining child and provider eligibility for the programme, the rules governing the ABC programme address five key areas:

1. Child:staff ratios and group sizes: Child:staff ratios in the classroom shall not exceed: 4:1 for infants up to 18 months; 7:1 for toddlers 18 months to 3 years; 10:1 for children 3-5 years. Maximum group sizes for these age groups are respectively: 8, 14 and 20 children.
2. Staff profiles, staffing patterns and professional development: Staff are divided into three categories, each being required to have minimal certification: Lead teachers with a Bachelors or Masters degree in early childhood education (or other relevant degree with an emphasis on child development); Classroom teachers with an Associate Arts degree (2 years tertiary) in early childhood education; and Paraprofessional aides with a child development associate credential. ABC staff should also reflect the ethnic diversity of the children participating in the ABC programme. Lead teachers are responsible for curriculum, programme planning and supervision of aides, and should have 30 hours annually of professional development; aides have a right to 20 hours. Each classroom should be staffed by one teacher and one aide. Centres with four classrooms must employ two lead teachers, two classroom teachers and four paraprofessional aides.
3. Programme standards and curriculum: Programmes shall be developmentally appropriate and individualised to meet the needs of each child. Centres follow NAEYC guidelines and the Arkansas ECE Framework. In addition to enriched environments (equipment and materials for children; interest areas and learning corners; appropriately planned outdoor areas), programmes will have thematic units and goals related to: cultural diversity, socio-emotional learning; creative-aesthetic learning; cognitive development; physical development and language. Teachers shall implement and maintain individual child portfolios, including samples of children's work, teacher and parent observations. The daily schedule should reflect a balance between indoor/outdoor; quiet/active; individual/small group/large group; gross motor/fine motor; child initiated/teacher initiated. A free meal and snacks are provided free to children in need, and mealtimes and other routines are used as opportunities for incidental learning. Attention should be given to easing transitions for children from one programme or age grouping to another, with particular concern for the transition to public school kindergarten.
4. Child assessment, developmental and health screening: All children in ABC programmes shall receive comprehensive health and developmental screens to determine their individual needs. Health screening will cover: growth and nutrition, developmental assessment, neurological and cardiac status, vision, hearing, teeth, immunization status, blood and urine lab tests. The developmental screen will cover the following areas: vocabulary, visual-motor integration, language and speech development, fine and gross motor skills, social skills and developmental milestones. A comprehensive longitudinal study shall also be implemented to evaluate the ABC programme over time and ensure that it meets its goals.
5. Parent/community involvement: Each programme shall have a parent handbook and a plan for parental involvement that will include opportunities for parental inputs into programme operation and design. The plan will include parental reviews of programmatic plans, parent conferences and a method to involve the parent in the child's educational experience. There will also be an open door policy for parents that encourage visiting and participation in classroom activities (Arkansas Department of Education 2005).

Not all early childhood programmes — and perhaps, not even the ABC programme itself — will always reach these standards. However, it is important for children in all countries that a clear regulatory framework should exist, that it should cover essential areas, and that it should be consistently applied to all providers, both public and private. This is the substance of the benchmark. The protection and development of young children is too important to allow derogations from basic requirements.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* Research informs policy-makers that healthy, enriched settings; developmental programming and well qualified staff are necessary to achieve high quality care and education outside the home. Given the national importance of optimising early

childhood development, it behoves the responsible government agency to ensure that all settings for young children reach essential standards. If monitoring and regulation are weak or are applied only to public services, negative practices are easily engendered and tolerated. The OECD *Starting Strong* reviews show that unregulated provision is often characterized by premises unhealthy for young children, unqualified staff, and the practice of slot services that undermine all notion of graduated developmental programming, and even more importantly, of continuity of relationships for young children.

In some of the rich countries, early childhood policy, planning and organization has still not emerged – particularly in the childcare sector<sup>29</sup> – as a specific field needing to be addressed professionally by a national agency, endowed with sufficient critical mass and a budget adequate enough to take on or ensure the monitoring of basic regulations. As a result, regulatory frameworks can be weak, with insufficient numbers of regulators and/or insufficient parental information available to maintain minimal standards. In fact, in several countries, much of the private provision in the childcare sector tends to be exempt from all but minimal health and safety rules. In the United States, for example, although State Boards of Education set minimum operational standards for public pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programmes (children of 3, 4 and 5 years), the licensing of childcare settings is often very incomplete. In 2002, 37 states in the United States required no or minimal training for childcare providers in the private sector which supplied the majority of services for children under 3 years (Kagan and Rigby 2003). At the same time, research from the United States suggests that appropriate governmental regulation, licensing and programme standards in ECEC consistently lead to improvements in quality (see, for example, the Cost, Quality and Outcomes studies in 1995 and 1999, Helburn and Howes 1996; and Phillipsen et al. 1997).

During the OECD reviews, review teams encountered many positive initiatives to improve regulation and quality standards in ECEC services, such as: accrued attention paid to regulatory frameworks; the tying of financing to programme standards; the combination of regulation and fiscal measures to discourage unlicensed provision; the improved organization and regulation of family day care; the creation of voluntary standards, codes of ethics, and guidelines; and the use of rating systems. All these means are useful, and some, such as the tying of financing to programme standards may be necessary. What is needed in addition - if minimal protection for children is to be ensured - is to apply basic regulations rigorously and fairly to all providers.

In early childhood services, the market principle that more information to consumers, and competition among providers are sufficient to ensure quality to young children is open to question for a number of reasons (see Bennett 2008a, section 4.6). If such is the case, the loss to young children is great: early development and education is not a repeatable process for any child, and unlike material commodities in a market, the possibility for parents to receive

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<sup>29</sup>Clear national or state regulations are more a feature of public early education systems than in the childcare sector. The basic structural standards or profile of quality decided by each country, such as adequate premises, child:staff ratios, curriculum frameworks, adequate professional education and certification of staff, and organized parental involvement are generally respected in early education. However, variations in the understanding of these indicators can exist, in particular with respect to buildings, child:staff ratios, educator qualifications and the role of parents.

a refund for their child's missed developmental opportunity is a meagre consolation. According to the Canadian economists, Cleveland and Krashinsky (2002, 2003), early childhood development and education is a public good, delivering externalities beyond the benefit of immediate, personal consumption. Important national goals are achieved through participation in services, in particular, a significant contribution to the health, development and learning of a nation's children. For this reason, it is appropriate for governments to intervene in the field, through regulation, funding and quality control, even more so as the benefits gained by society are greater than the costs incurred.

**Benchmark 7:** *Public expenditure on early childhood education and care services for children aged 0-6 years is equal to or greater than 1 per cent of GDP.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* According to the most recent figures released by the OECD: (See: <<http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database>>), 0.7 per cent is the average percentage of GDP spent by OECD countries on childcare and early education services combined. This level of spending seems too low as early childhood services in countries at this level of spending are of observably poor quality. This is particularly so in the childcare sector, but low quality can be observed also in early education where 3 and 4-year old children are subjected to very unfavourable child staff ratios (sometimes reaching 25 children to one adult) and formal curricula that leave little room for the natural learning strategies of young children. For this reason, the Committee on the Rights of the Child notes:

In order to ensure that young children's rights are fully realized, an increase in human and financial resource allocations for early childhood services and programmes (CRC, art. 4) is required. [...] It is ... important that there be sufficient public investment in services, infrastructure and overall resources specifically allocated to early childhood ... In this connection, States parties are encouraged to develop strong and equitable partnerships between the Government, public services, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and families to finance comprehensive services in support of young children's rights (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p. 18).

After consultation with countries, the minimal benchmark was set at 1 per cent of GDP, the level recommended by the former European Commission Network for Childcare (1996). As the evidence below suggests, the benchmark of 1 per cent of GDP is considerably lower than the estimated costs of a quality services as calculated by a number of experts in this field.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* There is general consensus across the OECD countries that while ECEC may be funded by a combination of sources, substantial government investment is necessary to support a sustainable system of high quality, affordable services (OECD 2006). Without strong government investment and involvement, it is difficult to achieve broad system aims, such as, child health and well-being, equitable access, social inclusion and quality learning goals. The question remains: how large should government investment be? Estimates made by a number of authoritative sources (Kagan and Rigby 2003; Barnett and Robin (2006) (Abecedarian); Head Start 2004; CED 2006) indicate that costs per child in a high quality early education service, with child:staff ratios equal to or less than 10 children per trained adult, range from US\$8,000 to US\$14,000 dollars annually per child 1-3 years,

and between US\$6,000 to US\$10,000 per child 3-6 years.<sup>30</sup> In terms of hours in services with qualified educators, the best estimates suggest the following figures:

- At least US\$5,000 per child, per year for a half-day, school year programme;
- Around US\$9,000 per child per year for a full-day, school year programme;
- Around US\$13,000 dollars per child, per year for a full-day, year round programme with integrated childcare. (Abecedarian costs run to US\$63 476 per child over 5-years, that is, c. US\$12,700 per child). See also Gormley et al. (2004) on Oklahoma Pre-kindergarten costs, and the analysis of Barnett et al. (2007) of pre-kindergarten costs across five States.)

These figures suggest public expenditure well in excess of the amount allocated on average by rich countries to primary education services. The estimate is not surprising. In well-run early childhood services, child:staff ratios need to be lower than for older children, facilities need more equipment, and children use the services for longer hours every day than is usually the case for primary school children. The conclusion must be that budgets for early childhood services need to be increased significantly if minimal quality standards are to be maintained in the sector. To move from an average OECD investment per child of US\$4,741 (OECD 2007) in pre-primary education to almost double that amount (equivalent to the Head Start investment per child)<sup>31</sup> will demand a significant financial effort on the part of many governments.

Some uncertainty exists about the expenditures to be included or excluded in calculating public expenditure on early childhood education and care. The following is suggested for both direct funding-to-services and indirect funding-to-families models.

- For the funding-to-services model, the following should be taken into account: (1) Direct service costs such as annual service staff salaries or staff subsidies taken in charge by public authorities; (2) Physical infrastructure costs (current building costs, facilities, furniture, maintenance); (3) Administrative and system support costs: these include governance costs; e.g. salaries of policy and administrative staff, both central and local; pre-service workforce preparation and ongoing professional development; programme monitoring, evaluations and technical assistance (e.g. in the form of pedagogical advisors, quality initiatives), data collection and analysis, other support services, e.g. costs of comprehensive services (health and nutrition services, parenting and adult education) where these are paid for by the early childhood governing authority; and (4) Exceptional direct subsidies granted to services and providers; e.g. funding to raise the level of quality (Brandon et al. 2004; Golin et al. 2004).<sup>32</sup>
- In demand-side funding models, that is, support given by government not to services but to the families who use the services, direct service costs will be replaced by public financial support to families – in cash, in kind or through the tax system – that is designated to assist children to participate in services. Thus, vouchers, fee subsidies, tax

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<sup>30</sup>These figures are based on 2002 costs in the United States, when the dollar and euro were more or less equivalent.

<sup>31</sup>The Head Start investment is generally filled out by a 20 per cent local contribution.

<sup>32</sup>Though seemingly simple on the surface, funding estimations are often complicated, particularly in countries and states that draw heavily on several funding streams (European, Federal, provincial, municipal, etc.) to finance children's services.

relief on childcare expenditure should be included, but not child benefits and general family allowances. As mentioned, physical infrastructure costs, administrative and system support costs and exceptional direct subsidies should also be included. The latter expenditures are important, although sufficient funding for these functions is often lacking in demand-side funding models.<sup>33</sup>

In estimates of public expenditure, local government expenditure should also be included, both funding-to-services and family supports for childcare. Meticulous tracing of funds may be needed when local governments use non-earmarked general block grants and/or parallel sector funding (e.g. European funding to support social programmes, such as equal opportunity for women) to finance childcare or early education services. In federal or highly decentralised countries, such expenditure is often difficult to trace.

### **Group C: Benchmarks focusing on access to services**

In its simplest form, access means that a sufficient number of spaces, appropriate for children and suited to parents' schedules, are available. However, like discussions on quality, access indicators are less simple than may at first be suspected. The figures supplied by international organizations need to be read with caution, as they often use a narrow definition of early childhood services (the ISCED level 0 definition) or fail to take into account important internal factors of access, e.g.

- The conditions of access: Is access free or fee-paying? If fee-paying, is access affordable for all parents? Is access equitable? Is it governed by eligibility criteria? Are children from low-income homes subsidized in fee-paying services? Do low-income children and children with special learning needs receive first call on services and additional resources? At what age does obligatory free schooling begin?
- The scope of access: Do access rates refer to just one type of service, and are other services, such as parental leave, family day care, playgroups and after-school care, also considered in the overall picture of provision? Is access typically sessional, half-day or full-day? Is there access to a continuum of services for parents and children across the whole working day, throughout the year? Is provision convenient for families, including families in rural areas and travelling families?
- The appropriateness of access for young children: Are services flexible, yet suited to the socio-emotional needs of young children (not merely slot services but environments where children are cared for by trained professionals, able to offer a sustained developmental programme)? Is access appropriate for young children, or is it a part of the primary school system with conditions and pedagogy more suitable for older children? Are the basic quality indicators child-staff ratios; group size; the qualifications levels and certification of the educators, the quality of materials and environments respected for all children in the services to which access is offered? Is access appropriate for children requiring special support, with specialised educators and environment provided?

In sum, national agencies and local authorities need to continually collect data and information on access and its various features. Despite these complexities, three simple access benchmarks are chosen for which we have data, but without being able to provide

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<sup>33</sup>Direct funding-to-services models generally invest more in these areas. In addition, direct funding to ECEC services enables governments to tie more easily funding to quality, and in particular, to direct funding to certain aspects of quality that need to be addressed at a particular moment.

definitive answers to many of the above questions, in particular those concerned with appropriate access. The first benchmark focuses on children in greatest need of services.

**Benchmark 8:** *The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents.*

Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.

Definition of the benchmark: The organization of early childhood services at local level should ensure appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet, in so far as possible, the needs of all parents. Access should be appropriate (that is, it meets the needs of all children),<sup>34</sup> affordable, and universal. Choice of service also needs to be offered to parents, e.g. between family day care or centre-based services, or the choice – if such is possible – of early education services offering, for example, second-language support. In so far as possible, services should be universal, that is, services that are inclusive of all children, regardless of capacity, origin or background.<sup>35</sup>

UNICEF has proposed for many years that vulnerable children should have first call to services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary. Where these children are concerned, their categorisation and thus, special treatment – depends on the country in question. Thus, in its Concluding Observations to the last EU country reports, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to State Parties to ensure that affordable and high quality early childhood education is available to all children. In particular, it recommended improving access to preschool for children living in rural areas. It also expressed its concern for the limited access to preschool for children in neighbourhoods where poverty is high and a Roma population is dominant. The Committee drew particular attention to the lack of teachers and of preschool teaching materials in the Roma language.<sup>36</sup>

The following is a table of indicators used in England to identify children at risk of educational failure:

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<sup>34</sup> Appropriate access is often lacking for children with special needs; e.g. lack of specialised staff, difficulties of physical access, overcrowding of groups... These children and children from at-risk backgrounds need smaller groups and attention that is more individual.

<sup>35</sup> Universal services are particularly important for children coming from second language or culturally poor backgrounds. Rather than segregating these children into target groups, administrations will endeavour to provide them access to mixed groups, with positive impacts on their language and cognitive development.

<sup>36</sup> ChildONEurope (2007).

**Table 1: At-risk indicators used in the UK EPPE study, 1997-2007**

<b>Child characteristics</b>	<b>Disadvantage Indicators</b>
First language	= English not first language
Family size	= 3 or more siblings
Birth weight	= Premature or below 2500 grams
<b>Parent characteristics</b>	
Mother's highest qualification	= No qualifications
Social class of father's occupation	= Semi-skilled, unskilled or never worked, or absent father
Father's employment status	= Not employed
Age of mother	= Age 13-17 at birth of EPPE child
Marital status	= Lone parent
Mother's employment status	= Unemployed
Home environment scale	= Bottom quartile

Source: Sylva et al. (2004).

In Belgium (Flanders), poverty is defined as a persistent state in which people are restricted in their opportunities to have a satisfactory share of socially valued goods such as education, housing and work. Six selection criteria are derived from this definition on the basis of which it is established whether a family should be regarded as underprivileged: namely the monthly family income, the educational level of the parents, the development of the children, the working situation of the parents, the home and health. If a family accumulates three or more negative criteria, including the development of children, the children are considered at-risk.

Other at-risk indicators such as family dysfunction, a history of family violence, parental drug addiction could also be added, which although more dramatic are not uncommon. A combination of several such indicators places the child firmly in the category of needing a professional service. If countries can provide priority enrolment for these children from the earliest age, they may alleviate health and language development problems before these children reach school entry age, in addition to providing vulnerable young children with protection and well-being. Evidence from the OECD *Starting Strong* reviews also shows that access to adequate childcare services children is often limited for children from lone parent and/or from low or modest income backgrounds, unless they or local childcare services are subsidized by government (OECD 2001, 2006). To maintain these children above the poverty line, their parents need to work, which in turn requires extensive childcare provision.

Altogether, children at-risk of poverty and educational under-achievement form a significant group, sometimes numbering over 20 per cent of the total child population (Leseman 2002). As these are the children who will benefit most from professional childcare services, the benchmark proposes that governments should give them priority of enrolment in the services that it subsidizes directly (direct funding to services) or indirectly (cash benefits to parents for childcare attendance, vouchers, tax concessions). The benchmark is measured by whether there exists a national regulation or national guidelines in this sense and a national programme addressing the issue.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* International research from a wide range of countries shows that early intervention contributes significantly to putting children from low-income families on the path to development and success in school; see, for example, Thorpe, et al, 2004,

(Australia); McCain and Mustard, 1999 (Canada); Jarousse et al., 1992 (France); Kellaghan and Greaney 1993, (Ireland); Kagitcibasi et al, 2001 (Turkey); Osborn and Milbank 1987, (UK); the longitudinal EPPE project, 1997-2007 (UK); Berrueta-Clement 1984 (United States); McKey et al 1985 (United States); and Schweinhart et al, 1993, 2004 (United States). All concur that well-funded, integrated, socio-educational programmes improve the cognitive and social functioning of children at-risk. Statistically, children from low socio-economic and at-risk backgrounds perform as a group well below the national performance average for their age in language production, general knowledge and cognitive development, and they experience consistently weaker outcomes and weaker retention rates in later education (OECD-PISA 2004). Education and human services ministries in the OECD countries are conscious of this, and seek to provide either targeted or universal early education programmes for these children. Examples are the universal early education programmes of the European countries that begin at 3 years or the targeted programmes of the liberal economies. Targeted programmes, such as Head Start, Sure Start, etc. contribute to the health and development of young children and provide a measure of social cohesion in difficult neighbourhoods, but they generally cover less than a third of the children they are supposed to reach (Barnett et al. 2004). They tend to suffer also from insufficient investment, in particular with regard to the recruitment and training of staff. Few large-scale targeted programmes enjoy the investment per child, the level of staff training, the intensity of programming and parental outreach found in the well-researched smaller programmes such as the Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian, Chicago Child-Parent Center Program or others.

Yet, given the right conditions, evaluation research is unanimous that large-scale programmes can make a real contribution to children's overall development. At a presentation to the United States Congress, Professor Brooks-Gunn (2003), focusing on educational returns, confirmed that:

- High quality centre-based programmes enhance the school-related achievement and behaviour of young children;
- These effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education;
- Positive benefits continue into late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school;
- Programmes that are continued into primary school, and that offer intensive early intervention, have the most sustained long-term effects.
- In addition, if properly linked to labour, health and social services, early childhood services can be expected to deliver additional outcomes, such as enhanced maternal employment, less family poverty, better parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion.

Yet, the limits of the benchmark are evident. It measures whether there exists national or state regulations and whether a national programme is in place that provides priority access to infants and toddlers most in need of services for developmental reasons. It does not measure the effectiveness of this legislation or programming. For example, in the municipalities of many of the rich countries, it is usual to set criteria for access to childcare services. The criterion of two parents working is often used. This can mean, for example, that a middleclass child with two salaried parents will have priority over the child from a Roma, indigenous or

immigrant background, whose parents have great difficulty in accessing employment. A similar situation may pertain to children with special needs. For many reasons, services proposed to these children – who can benefit much from a professional service and the company of other children – are too few or may be wholly inappropriate. Neither do the regulations take into account how families from the above backgrounds may view collective childcare, nor whether the institutional childcare and early education on offer is suitable for these families. Analysis of such issues is fundamental where the take-up of programmes by marginalised groups is concerned (Vandenbroeck 2007).

**Benchmark 9:** *At least 25 per cent of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services*

*Definition of the benchmark:* The gross enrolment rate of children under 3 years in early childhood services is available from household surveys in most OECD countries. The benchmark proposed is narrower than the rate of gross enrolment as it carries a requirement: enrolment in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services. Children in unlicensed, family day care or in non-subsidized private services are not counted. The requirement is introduced to measure the commitment of government to supporting childcare that is both affordable and of quality. Despite good intentions, local family day care and private services may not be able to provide either quality or affordability. Without government subsidies, they may be obliged either to accept only families that can pay well or to cut back on staff training and wages. In addition, the practice of tolerating unlicensed childcare leads to significant under-reporting of the use of childcare: for example, in Canada,<sup>37</sup> only 19 per cent of children are reported to use childcare (9 per cent only in licensed childcare centres) although about 60 per cent of women with a child under 3 years are employed. In other countries, such as Denmark, the majority of children 0-3 years are in family day care, but the service is fully licensed, supervised and subsidized.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* This benchmark proposes a general enrolment level of 25 per cent for children under 3 years, a minimal level for a modern service economy in which the great majority of women between 25 and 35 years are working. Without this level of subsidized service provision, families will access childcare with great difficulty and women will be obliged to withdraw from the labour market or work part-time. The access target for all EU countries, proposed by the Barcelona EU meeting in 2002, is an attendance rate of 33 per cent of children 0-3 years (European Council Conclusions 2002).<sup>38</sup> The Barcelona target is not an arbitrary figure as countries will require this proportion of subsidized childcare places outside the home if minimal female participation rates in the labour market of 65 per cent and over are to be maintained.

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<sup>37</sup>In English-speaking Canada, most family day care operates outside of regulation, although provinces and territories set a maximum number of children who can be cared for in a family childcare setting before regulation is required.

<sup>38</sup>The 2010 objectives set by the EU at its Barcelona meeting in 2002, encourages member countries to supply subsidized full-day places for one-third of children 0- to 3-year-olds, and for over 90 per cent of all 3- to 6-year-olds. The Starting Strong recommendation of moving towards universal and appropriate access does not set a target or benchmark.

The benchmark that proposed is lower, considering that other elements need to be taken into account when planning the enrolment of very young children in services, and not least the issue of quality and parental choice. Barcelona makes no reference to quality or parental leave but simply proposes an access rate. As has been pointed out by many commentators (see, for example, Cohen et al. 2004), a gross enrolment rate of 33 per cent may be good for the European labour market, but not necessarily so for children placed in services. In several countries, much childcare is unregulated and of poor quality. For this reason, the enrolment figure for this benchmark is reduced and entered the requirement: enrolment in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services. Such a condition is not always a guarantee of quality,<sup>39</sup> but it is more probable that if governments invest in and license services, they will also enforce basic regulations about health and safety, staff training, group sizes and child:staff ratios.

There is also the question of parental choice and the provision of parental leave. Well-subsidized parental leave of a year or 18 months will obviously reduce the demand for places during this period, not to mention home-care allowances that subsidize a parent (generally mothers) to remain at home with children for a period of two or three years. With this context in mind, the enrolment rate of one-quarter of the children from birth to three years in government-subsidized services is not excessive. It leaves open the choice for most parents to look after their children at home if they so wish, while proposing that government should subsidize and license childcare places for at least 25 per cent of the children. It suggests a benchmark such as: *From the end of the parental leave period, every child has a legal entitlement to a publicly subsidized ECEC place outside the home, if parents wish*, but very few countries achieve this goal.

**Benchmark 10:** *At least 80 per cent of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week*

*Definition of benchmark:* This benchmark proposes that at least 80 per cent of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week. The definition of an accredited early education services should correspond to ISCED requirements: regular attendance in centre or school-based programmes that are designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children and that have staff that are adequately trained (i.e. qualified) to provide an educational or pedagogical programme for the children.

Four year-old children are children in their fifth year of life, that is, 4-5 year-olds. This age group is chosen for two reasons: first, to encourage countries to provide appropriate and universal services for children from this age, that is, for countries to provide a free or highly subsidized readiness for school cycle at least two years before the age of obligatory schooling. The second reason is that to have chosen the 3-year old or the 5-year old age groups would have led to problems of definition or lack of information and comparability.

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<sup>39</sup>In some countries, a license to engage in the care and education of young children on a daily or regular basis can be acquired through notification only. Once notification is received, no further response may be engaged by the local authority except to ensure that there are no undue risks to health or safety, and that the carer does not have a criminal record.

For example, where 3-year olds are concerned, the difficulty is to know their actual rate of attendance, as many 3-year old children may attend services, even free ones, on a sessional basis, e.g. for a few hours daily or on certain days of the week, especially in countries where high rates of female part-time work are recorded. Where 5-year olds are concerned, compulsory elementary schooling begins at five years in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, while in Hungary and Mexico, the final year (5-6 years) in early education is compulsory.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* There are several reasons why children at 4-years of age should have access to subsidized early education programmes for at least 15 hours per week. Firstly, research suggests that young children benefit greatly from a readiness for school cycle at least two years before compulsory schooling begins (Lee and Burkham 2002).<sup>40</sup> Secondly, parents in most OECD countries feel that their children are ready by the age of 4 years to participate in early childhood programmes. Early education programmes are valued for the socialising and educational contribution they bring to children and also because they provide a space, particularly for at-home mothers, to do other things including, if they wish, to rejoin the workforce. Thirdly, the great majority of European countries now provide a free or highly subsidized half- or full-day early education programme for all young children from the age of 3 years. The free or subsidized provision of at least 15 hours per week for 4-year olds would seem a minimum, although several rich countries do not reach currently an 80 per cent enrolment.

*The limits of the benchmark:* As with the previous indicator, the limits of the benchmark are evident. For example, the ISCED definition speaks only of *qualified* educators, which means that in several countries the educators of young children are qualified as primary school teachers but are not necessarily *certified* as trained to support the learning of young children. This distinction, recognized widely in the United States, is one that many European countries might wish to consider.

Again, the enrolment rate of 80 per cent is today – in most countries – an absolute minimum. The standard to aim for is ideally an access rate of 100 per cent from the age of 4 years, which would include children from at-risk backgrounds. When a benchmark is set at 80 per cent, it is probable that these children will form a significant proportion of the 20 per cent not accessing services. However, as indicated already, these benchmarks are minimal requirements that governments should meet in order to lay the foundations of a comprehensive, high quality system for young children.

Additionally, the benchmark measures only whether 80 per cent of 4-year olds are enrolled in an accredited early education service. It does not take into account the quality of these programmes or the structural and cultural barriers faced by many low-income and immigrant

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<sup>40</sup>In the current context, ‘readiness for school’ does not mean preparing 3, 4 or 5-year-old children to read, write and do maths. An early ‘head start’ in these fields is unnecessary and, according to some research, may have later harmful effects. Support for the socio-emotional well-being, social attitudes and the natural learning strategies of young children – including play and space for individual development – is a fundamental part of early childhood programming. At the same time, because of the child’s natural drive to communicate, the early childhood environment can be shaped to encourage ‘the 100 languages of children’, including emergent literacy.

families in accessing institutional early education, e.g. the daily length of the period proposed may be far too short for parents – especially mothers – wishing to work. Likewise, immigrant parents may feel that the institution is unsympathetic to their particular vision of child rearing or does not support sufficiently second-language children.

Nor does the benchmark evaluate the appropriateness or effectiveness of the programmes in question. In some countries, where children are enrolled in universal programmes from the age of 3 years, child:staff ratios are so unsatisfactory that children entering with weak socio-emotional development and/or (official) language skills tend to fall further behind their mainstream peers. In addition, the pedagogical approaches in such services can be unsuitable to children outside the mainstream, with educators insufficiently trained to deal with children of varying abilities, to adopt cohesive diversity approaches or to practise effective outreach to poorer families and communities.

A priority then is that early education programmes for 4-year olds should have the widest possible access (hence the importance of highly subsidized or free places) and that they should be appropriate – *in their recruitment strategies* (showing respect for diversity and practising effective outreach to families); *in their programming* (inter-cultural sensitivity is often necessary and the pedagogical approach should unite care, upbringing and the education of young children); *and in their investment practices* (children from at-risk backgrounds need first class educators, materials, environments – equal investment is not enough).

Recognition is also needed, particularly in the liberal economies, that early childhood programmes alone cannot substantially address issues of structural poverty and institutional discrimination (Zigler et al., 1996, Dearing et al., 2006). The challenge of improving the life chances of young children at-risk has to be met on several fronts. Governments need to support early education programmes upstream through energetic social, housing and labour policies, including income transfers to low-income groups, comprehensive social and family policies, and supportive employment schemes and work training.

#### **Group D: Benchmarks focusing on programme quality**

##### **The complexity of the concept of quality**

Understandings of quality in the early childhood field vary greatly across countries, and often undermine the validity of cross-national comparisons. Depending on the country context at a particular moment, quality is defined in different ways. Among the elements that governments promote or that occur frequently in research studies are the following:

- **Structural quality:** Structural quality refers to the overarching structures needed to ensure quality in early childhood programmes and systems. They define the quality of the physical environment for young children (buildings, space, outdoors, pedagogical materials, health and safety requirements); and the quality and training levels of the staff. They may also include programme standards, such as regulations concerning child-staff ratios; adequate work conditions and compensation of staff, the employment of an approved curriculum covering all the broad areas of child development. Typically, a selection of structural standards forms the substance of national licensing requirements.

- Interaction or process quality: The warmth and quality of the pedagogical relationship between educators and children, the quality of interaction between children themselves, and the quality of relationships within the educator team figure among the process goals most frequently cited.
- Educational concept and practice: The educational concept and practice of centres is generally guided by the national curriculum framework, which sets out the key goals of the early childhood system. These goals differ widely from country to country, and no doubt from decade to decade. Yet, a common conviction is emerging across countries that lead staff needs to be trained to a high level to achieve the broad goals of early childhood programming.
- Operational quality: Operational quality refers to the smooth and responsive running of services which, in turn, is influenced by the quality of the regulatory framework. The level of quality achieved depends largely on the professional competence of the local administration and of the leaders of centres.
- Child-outcomes: Positive child outcomes are a major goal for ECEC programmes in all countries, but differences between countries arise concerning the outcomes to be privileged. A child-outcome approach that privileges language and logico-mathematical skills is characteristic of France and the English-speaking countries. The Nordic and several other countries, while not neglecting preparation for school as children approach that age, privilege the well-being of children, participation and the capacity of children and adults to live together guided by democratic principles.
- Standards pertaining to parent/community outreach and involvement: With perhaps the exception of the United States, this area is mentioned less than other quality standards in national regulations and curricula, but can emerge strongly in the requirements for targeted and local ECEC programmes. Among the tasks of centres in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are: outreach to parents and efforts to improve both the home-learning environment and the enrolment of children in services; the capacity to relate well, without bias, to local cultural values and norms; support to women's and parent groups; participation in integrated programming with the employment, social affairs, health and adult education authorities. It is not clear yet whether countries will opt for a new type of educator to undertake this kind of work or whether it is sufficient that early childhood personnel should be trained on the job to work in inter-disciplinary community teams.

Within this vast field, five simple proxies of programme quality are chosen:

- The development of a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework for all early childhood services (11);
- The provision of an adequate support structure to early childhood staff (12);
- At least 80 per cent of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children (13);
- At least 50 per cent staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals with a minimum 3 years, tertiary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field (14);
- The child to trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 1:15, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group (15)

To take these benchmarks in turn:

**Benchmark 11:** *Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* The benchmark proposed is that government or the national early childhood agency should have published, after broad consultation on the subject, an official guideline or curriculum framework that identifies the broad goals to which early childhood education and care services can aspire. This is not a curriculum in the traditional sense, that is, a detailed outline of what children should learn during a particular month or school year. Rather, a national pedagogical framework for young children is a guideline or framework document addressed primarily to parents, administrators, centres and educators outlining the values, ethos and basic requirements that should govern the reception of young children, and the broad goals that centres should aspire to in the key early childhood developmental areas.

A characteristic of the new guidelines or framework documents that have been formulated in recent years is that, in general, they propose broad pedagogical orientations rather than a detailed list of what should be taught or learned. These orientations differ from country to country, but there is general agreement across countries on the items mentioned in this benchmark: viz.

- That the child's well-being, early development, learning and participation are at the core of early childhood work. Well-being and learning are closely linked in the psychology of young children. Without the former, the latter is unlikely to take place in any optimal way. In turn, the well-being of young children is closely linked to warm, reciprocal relationships between educators and children – a factor that influences strongly the quality of early childhood services (Shonkoff et al. 2000). When the well-being and involvement of the child is ensured, a deep engagement with learning is more likely to take place (Laevers 2003).
- That the curriculum should outline clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, across a range of developmental areas.<sup>41</sup> The five goals proposed by the US National Educational Goal Panel (NEGP) in 1997: (health and physical development; emotional well-being and social competence; positive approaches to learning; communication skills; and cognition and general knowledge) are meant to be treated and pursued equally. As already mentioned, a goal such as readiness for school should not be defined narrowly;

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<sup>41</sup>The United States National Education Goals Panel identified five goals as contributing to the young child's overall development and later success in school, viz. health and physical development; emotional well-being and social competence; positive approaches to learning; communication skills; and cognition and general knowledge. These are individualistic aims. Other frameworks call attention to democratic values, such as awareness of inter-dependency, equality, participation and citizenship, e.g. the Delors Report (Delors 1996), promotes: learning to be (forming one's self identity); learning to do (through play, experimentation, teaching and group activity); learning to learn (through a learning environment providing interest and choice and that includes well-focused pedagogical objectives); and learning to live together (within the early childhood centre, in a democratic way, respectful of difference). What seems to be important is that educators, children and parents agree on clear, measurable goals across a broad range of developmental areas, guided by the state framework and the desire of each child.

- That the participation of children and the natural learning strategies of the child (play, active exploration, interaction, movement) should be respected and followed by educators so that learning about the world and meaning-making can take place. This orientation is stressed in many of the new pedagogical frameworks, in particular in the Nordic countries, which aim consciously to increase the influence or agency of young children within early childhood services. The orientation corresponds to Article 29 of the Convention and the Committees' General Comment no. 1 (2001):

...the Committee recommends that States parties include human rights education within early childhood education. Such education should be participatory and empowering to children, providing them with practical opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities in ways adapted to their interests, concerns and evolving capacities (Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment no. 7, p.15).

In many programmes, therefore, there is growing respect for – and confidence in – children's agency and natural learning strategies, that is, play, active learning, expression in language and other media, learning from relationships with significant others, informal but intense research on matters of interest or concern to the child. Listening to children is also a sign of respect for the child's capacity to guide his or her own learning, when supported by well-trained educators within a rich learning environment. Project themes or specific topics, influenced by the surrounding environment, are determined by dialogue between children and educators. The main aim is that children should develop a desire and curiosity for learning, and confidence in their own learning, rather than achieving a pre-specified level of knowledge and proficiency (Martin-Korpi 2005). Underlying the approach is also the desire to introduce young children to democratic values and reflexes – learning to participate and live together (adults and children) in a respectful, constructive manner.

The requirement to involve and consult parents is also a part of this benchmark. The new curricula generally require administrations and educators to involve parents and local communities in children's development and learning. They call attention to the primary role of parents in the education of young children and encourage services to consider parents as partners in their children's learning. This requires both regular discussions with parents about their children and their involvement in decision-making processes regarding issues of importance to the centre. Some families and communities can have low educational aspirations. The work of raising their expectations begins most effectively in early childhood, at a moment when they are deeply involved with their young children. In some countries, centres routinely draw up - in common with the child and his or her parent(s) individual learning plans for each child, for which both the centre and parents have their specific responsibilities.

The framework approach also encourages municipalities and centres to generate local programmes, based on the guiding principles and ground rules of the national curriculum. Such openness requires of central administrations confidence in their educators, rather than opting for control and the imposition of detailed early learning goals that do little to foster understanding. Trust in educators and local management is critical in open systems, but for trust to be realistic, it needs to be based on high quality initial and in-service professional education, and on continuous information flows and support.

The adoption of a national curriculum can present a challenge in federal or highly decentralised countries. The example of Germany shows, however, that it is possible: each *Land* has formulated its own curriculum, while in 2004, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education adopted a Common Framework for Early Education. Several items in this Framework refer to the important role of parents in early education.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* As in all branches of education, guidelines or curricula for early childhood are necessary for educators in planning their work. A validated early childhood curriculum will help: to promote a more even level of quality across age groups and provision in different regions; to guide and support professional staff in their practice and to ensure pedagogical continuity between early childhood programming and schools. In the last decade, many countries have published national early childhood curricula, mostly for services dealing with children over 3 years: England in 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2006; Scotland 1999; France 2002, Ireland 2004; Germany 2004-05; and Mexico 2005. In 2006, the Republic of Korea published its 7th National Kindergarten Curriculum for children 4 to 6 years, based on an original curriculum from 1969. Some countries have also developed a common curriculum or pedagogical framework for children 0 to 6 years: Denmark 2004, England 2006, Finland 2003, Norway 1996 and 2006, and Sweden in 1998. These documents are also necessary for administrators and organizers of early childhood services as many include a selection of the basic laws or regulations governing the reception of young children. They are also useful for parents, reassuring them about the ethos and practices of early childhood services. Because they provide essential information about the aims and goals of services, curricula also facilitate communications between parents and staff.

**Benchmark 12:** *Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training<sup>42</sup>, participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* Central to quality improvement is the attention paid by governments or state agencies to staff issues. In most countries, the qualifications, certification levels and work conditions of staff are improving, but there is a need also to improve the practice of services through the development of a culture of participatory quality improvement in services. Consultation of the countries in this regard showed that approaches to the organization of support systems differed.

In the pursuit of quality in services, some countries - perhaps the majority - rely mostly on regulation, inspection and tight curriculum control. Staff may be trained only to a low tertiary or secondary level, and their salaries and work conditions remain low. The responsible government agencies may not trust them to achieve quality without strict regulation, and for this reason, site visits by inspectors are considered necessary. In contrast, the Nordic countries consider that dependence on external control, e.g. prescriptive curricula, site visits

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<sup>42</sup>European Commission Childcare Network targets (1996) recommended at least one tenth of the working week as non-contact time allocated to preparation and continuous training.

by inspectors, are outdated means of ensuring quality. A high level of professional education and engagement in participatory quality improvement initiatives is considered more effective, especially when supported by enhanced professional development opportunities and continuous information flows.

This benchmark opts more for a support rather than a supervisory system. The benchmark seeks to measure whether the responsible early childhood agencies are effectively reaching out to staff and providers at local level and engaging them in voluntary, participatory quality initiatives. Voluntary quality initiatives are efforts to improve the quality of children's services undertaken freely by staff in centres at local or district level. Such efforts are strengthened by partnerships with staff unions and training foundations, and if possible, with local university departments so that a research element can be included. The combination of strong underlying structures (adequate financing, active governance, high qualified staff, and reasonable child:staff ratios) and government support for participatory quality initiatives seems a winning combination.

The benchmark names a number of these participatory practices, in particular teamwork, regular in-service training, pedagogical research and documentation, and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services. Among the latter are included: formative centre evaluation, the renewal of pedagogical practice vis-à-vis young children, parent involvement in children's learning, district co-operation and research. Voluntary quality initiatives become motivating for staff when supported by incentive measures, subsidies and expertise, e.g. when staff are compensated through the award of professional development credits, linked to salary scales. The standard proposed in the benchmark is that the governing authorities have effectively initiated at least some of these participatory quality measures, and that educators in the major services feel that they receive sufficient information and training supports to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* In-service training is critical to maintaining a workforce that is knowledgeable about current care and education practice (Bowman et al., 2000; Kagan and Rigby 2005). Research also finds that regular in-service training is closely associated with high-quality early childhood settings (Katz 2001). Some countries, e.g. Portugal, Hungary have established foundations or specialised agencies at provincial level to organize in-service courses and training.

As noted in relation to Benchmark 11 above, the main educational concept/practice of centres is guided by the national curriculum framework, which sets out the key orientations of the early childhood system (see Benchmark 11 above). Initial training to serve this curriculum and its values is fundamental. The fostering of child development and of experiential, self-motivated learning requires a practice that calls for the specific training of early childhood educators in the competencies that allow this to happen.

A common conviction is also emerging across countries that lead staff need continuous and further training to maintain their knowledge and motivation, and to meet the new challenges emerging in the early childhood service field. Because of the rapidity of social change and the emergence of new demands on professionals, the preparation of staff can no longer rely only

on initial training. New educational concepts and practices are needed to take into account changing social parameters; e.g. new responsibilities vis-à-vis parents, families and communities, and vis-à-vis the growing diversity that educators find within centres. Today, early education practice needs to take into account respect for diversity as a central quality criterion, a factor that may not have been taken into account in initial training some ten years ago.

In English-speaking countries, a usual means of encouraging voluntary quality initiatives is through the accreditation of services. Accreditation is a lengthy process of quality improvement that a centre or a service takes on voluntarily to reach standards considerably higher than minimum licensing standards. Governments can encourage this process through offering subsidies or granting the award of an official quality label. In Australia, government has established the Quality Assurance System to help centres achieve accreditation, while in the United States, accreditation from the NAEYC or comparable bodies is the norm. Research indicates that centres that reach accreditation standards provide higher quality care and education (The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers (CQCO) Study Team 1995).

Regular in-service training and professional development courses can also help to overcome one of the major difficulties of early childhood services, namely, high turnover of staff, which creates serious management difficulties and above all, undermines the confidence of children at this age. Staff turnover, particularly in childcare services, comes to over 30 per cent in several countries, in particular the liberal economies where part-time service sector jobs for women are in plentiful supply. Research suggests that high turnover of staff is closely linked with poor quality programmes and weak child outcomes in language and social skills (Whitebook, Howes and Phillips 1990). Participation in quality initiatives and continuous in-service training, linked to career advancement, motivate staff and serve to strengthen their retention in services that provide this kind of support.

**Benchmark 13:** *At least 80 per cent of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have initial training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged or is in place — with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social care sector.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* Contact staff are personnel in direct contact with young children on a regular basis, with primary responsibility for their care and education. Normally speaking, contact staff in early childhood services are children's nurses, child assistants, educators, pedagogues and teachers. All licensed early childhood services include licensed family day care, childcare and early education centres, licensed leisure (out-of-school) services and official pre-primary services. The aim of this benchmark is to ensure that staff caring for young children outside the home receive a minimum of training, as would be the case in any other line of professional work. The need for training is underlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child:

States parties must ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for early childhood conform to quality standards, particularly in the areas of health and safety, and that staff possess the appropriate psychosocial qualities and are suitable, sufficiently numerous and well-trained.

The Committee emphasizes that a comprehensive strategy for early childhood must also take account of individual children's maturity and individuality, in particular recognizing the changing developmental priorities for specific age groups (for example, babies, toddlers, preschool and early primary school groups), and the implications for programme standards and quality criteria.... Provision of services appropriate to the circumstances, age and individuality of young children requires that all staff be trained to work with this age group (Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment no. 7, p.11).

In light of these remarks, the preference would be for a more demanding benchmark, such as: *Contact staff in licensed early childhood services (including family day care) should all be trained to at least a minimum two-year senior secondary or one-year post-secondary level in early childhood education and care or an equivalent field.* However, as so few countries have yet reached this modest level of training for all early childhood staff, the benchmark that staff in contact with young children should have initial training for the task. It is preferable if this training takes place before beginning work, in the form of pre-service training, as this is a guarantee that the public authorities take seriously the question of staffing early childhood services.

For reasons of social inclusion and respect for diversity, some countries give added attention to assistant staff. Their aim is to ensure that the composition of staff in early childhood centres should reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve. For several decades, this has been the case in the United States Head Start project where local parents are often employed as members of staff, sometimes, according to critics, with insufficient investment in their professional education.<sup>43</sup> In Flanders, several cities have recently legislated that municipal services should indeed recruit personnel to match the ethnic mix of neighbourhood populations, but at the same time guaranteeing this personnel full on-the-job training with the delivery of a recognized diploma.

Cross-national information on the training required of family day-carers (that is, licensed carers who provide care for young children on a sessional, half-day or whole day basis in their own homes) is sketchy. The collection of data on this important group of carers is rarely seen as a priority by early childhood authorities. In general, family day-carers work as independents, setting a mutually agreed fee with parents, but they can also be members of a municipal or association network. The latter arrangement is generally preferable as reasonable fees can be set and respected, training made available, and back-up provided in case of illness or other lack of presence. In addition, recognition of the profession can carry with it the provision of social insurance, paid holidays and pensions. Because family day care is so widespread and is often the first choice of parents for infant/toddler care, early childhood systems need to be addressed, in the coming decade, as well as the status of family day carers and the training required to look after the children of other parents. They are therefore included in this benchmark. The basic criterion for achieving this benchmark is then that across all staff in state regulated early childhood services, at least 80 per cent should receive initial training in the care and education of young children.

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<sup>43</sup> Apart from this restriction, Head Start practice can be impressive, particularly with regard to the involvement of the local community.

A move toward a unified staffing system with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector is an orientation is added to encourage governance bodies to consider this option. It has proven very useful in a number of countries in raising the training levels and status of childcare staff.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* In the human life cycle, the years from 1-3 years is an extraordinary period for language, cognitive and social development. Services for young children at this age should be staffed by educated and well-trained personnel, who work closely with families and parents. Given the employment patterns of contemporary service economies - and in particular, the low remuneration of care staff - it is most unlikely that the public authorities will be able to recruit and retain educated staff in the childcare field unless a real effort is made to improve qualifications, work conditions and salaries.

According to research, staff training and their level of qualifications are significantly linked to the quality of early childhood services. The situation is summarised in *Starting Strong* (OECD 2001, 2006):

Staff working with children in ECEC programmes have 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 conditions – and the quality of ECEC services (Bowman et al., 2000, CQCO Study Team 1995, EC Childcare Network, 1996; Whitebook et al., 1990) In particular, staff who have more formal education and more specialized early childhood training provide more stimulating, warm, and supportive interactions with children (CQCO Study Team 1995, NICHD 1997, Phillipsen et al., 1997, Barnett 2003; EPPE 2004).

Little cross-national research on the qualifications of assistant staff is available, but the existing research shows that the general educational level of the team working with young children is important for language development, general knowledge and adult-child interaction: (Whitebook et al., 1990; Bowman et al., 2001; Burchinal et al., 2002; Barnett 2003). Again, these findings are borne out by the practice of leading countries in the early childhood education and care field: Belgium (in early education), Finland, France and Sweden have all imposed standards and pre-service training for auxiliaries and classroom assistants.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the Nordic countries, such training provides the opportunity to engage in further training in order to become fully-fledged educators. In addition, assistants in the Nordic countries are considered as full members of the pedagogical team.

**Benchmark 14:** *At least 50 per cent staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals – educators, pedagogues and/or teachers – with a minimum 3-years, post-senior secondary training and certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.*

*Definition of the benchmark:* Early education services privilege the educational needs of children 3-6 years and have staff who are adequately trained to provide an educational

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<sup>44</sup>This is not the case in France where teachers are recruited – as is the custom for most professions within the French public administration – by open competitive examination. A pre-condition for sitting the examination is to have already a university license or degree.

programme. Taking into account the situation in countries that have different training and higher education traditions,<sup>45</sup> a minimum benchmark of a 3-year post-secondary diploma (Tertiary B), specialised in early childhood education and care is proposed. We are conscious that this benchmark is unsatisfactory: the link between early childhood professionals and university studies is important for the status of the early childhood profession and the self concept of educators. There is, in principle, a marked difference between vocational training and university studies. The link with universities is also critical for the level of research on early childhood that can be undertaken in a country. Teacher training colleges detached from universities, not to mention secondary-level institutions, generally have no mandate or funding for research.<sup>46</sup>

However, even the minimum standard of a three years specialised training at tertiary level is not always met, e.g. in countries that allow certification after a 2-year college diploma. The situation is unsatisfactory, for a different reason, in France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. These countries train teachers to work across the early childhood period to the end of primary school, but do not require any specific early childhood certification. For this reason, a schoolification of early childhood services in these countries can be seen, with the predominance of whole group teaching, large groups and weak attention to the natural learning strategies of young children. However, as the general education levels of teachers in these countries is high, and the practice of in-service training is well established, the training imparted to teachers in these systems qualifies under the rubric 'equivalent field'.

*Evidence for the benchmark:* The issue at stake here is: what level of qualification is appropriate to engage in the care and education of young children outside the home, given the returns to children and society that participation in high quality services can bring? A traditional attitude has been that being female and of good character is sufficient preparation for early childhood education and care. Today, this attitude has evolved as evidence accumulates on the complexities of promoting the learning of young children in a systematic way, and in the face of research on the impact of educator training. Many research projects have shown the link between higher training of early childhood professionals and improved outcomes for young children (Groark et al. 2002, Bowman et al. 2000).

This research is further confirmed by the practice of the OECD countries, most of which require the lead professionals in early education services to have tertiary level training. In the United States, several states require a 4-year B.A. degree, with a specialization in early childhood education, as a minimal requirement for a teacher of young children. In Finland, many early educators have an M.A. degree in education or social sciences (but do not make up 50 per cent of staff) and in France, all teachers have the equivalent of an M.A. degree, albeit with weak initial certification in early childhood studies. The National Academy of Science report, *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods*, notes that the quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the educator and the child, although it

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<sup>45</sup>In Germany and Switzerland, relatively few students (about 30 per cent) can gain admission to university studies. A far greater number take 'training' in tertiary or post secondary colleges.

<sup>46</sup>Thus, contemporary German language research in the early childhood field is relatively weak compared to English studies, despite the early 20th century German language pre-eminence in this field.

does not pronounce on what qualifications or competences are needed to achieve a sufficient quality of relationship.

Experience from education and other sectors suggests also that investment in the higher or continued training of centre leaders and local managers pays significant dividends. Few countries have progressed in terms of preparation for educational leadership as far as England, which founded in 1998 a National College for School Leadership (Nottingham). The key responsibility of the College and its associate branches is to deliver a National Professional Qualification for Headship, or NPQH. The credential, underpinned by a set of national standards, will become mandatory for all newly appointed head teachers by April 2009. The training corresponds to the government's *Every Child Matters* agenda, which requires head teachers to coordinate education with other social services and to give children access to a variety of activities beyond the school day.

**Benchmark 15:** *The child:trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in publicly subsidized, centre-based services is not greater than 15:1 and group size does not exceed 24 children per group.*

*Definition of the indicator:* For children aged 4-5 years, the benchmark proposed here requires that maximum group size should be no larger than 24, and that overall, the child:trained adult ratio should not exceed 15:1. The ratio, therefore, is not 15 children per lead educator. What is implied rather is a lead educator for every group of 24 children, supported by at least one trained child assistant.

The ratio of 24:2 may be considered far too lax in the United States and the Nordic countries, and too demanding in the state early education services of some Asian and European countries. Research indicates that child:staff ratios should vary with group size and the age of the child, becoming higher (more children per adult) as children become older and more autonomous. To illustrate, the following is a child:staff ratio table proposed by the National Association for the education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States (NAEYC 2004), which takes in to account the ages of children and group sizes.

**Table 2: Teacher<sup>1</sup> – child ratios within group size**

AGE OF CHILDREN	GROUP SIZES									
	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24
<b>Infant Accreditation Strand</b> (birth to 15 months) <sup>2</sup>	1:3	1:4								
<b>Toddler Accreditation Strand</b> (12 to 36 months) <sup>2</sup>										
12-28 months	1:3	1:4	1:4 <sup>3</sup>	1:4						
21-36 months		1:4	1:5	1:6						
<b>Preschool Accreditation Strand<sup>2</sup></b>										
2.5-year-olds - 3-year-olds (30 – 48 months)					1:7	1:8	1:9	1:10		
4-year-olds						1:8	1:9	1:10		
5-year-olds						1:8	1:9	1:10		
<b>Kindergarten Accreditation Strand</b>								1:10	1:11	1:12

Source and copyright: NAEYC (2004).

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Includes teachers, assistant teachers/teacher aides.

<sup>2</sup> These age ranges are approximate and tentative pending further consideration by the NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

<sup>3</sup> A group size of 10 for this age group would require an additional adult.

Ratios are lowered when there are one or more children who need additional adult assistance to fully participate in the programme due to ability, language fluency, developmental age and/or stage or other factors, or to meet other requirements of NAEYC Accreditation.

For the purposes of the group size criterion, a group is defined as the number of children who are assigned to a specified teacher(s) within a specific, well-defined space.

In a mixed-age preschool class of 2.5 to 5-year-olds, up to 20 per cent of children 2.5 to 3-years-old may be enrolled. The ratios with group size for the predominant age group apply. If infants and toddlers are in a mixed-age group, the ratio for the youngest child applies.

*Evidence for the benchmark.* As mentioned previously in this paper, anthropological research questions the fitness of this indicator for all countries and cites the success of the preschool services of France, the Republic of Korea or Japan, despite large numbers of children per teacher (Tobin 2006). In sum, cultural expectations are suggested as being the a primary factor in deciding what child:staff ratios are suitable. It would seem a more convincing explanation is to posit that a range of structural characteristics (adult:child ratios, educator qualifications and work conditions, pedagogical expertise, group process and practice, cultural expectations) determine quality, and that no one structural characteristic can uniquely predict process quality (Cryer, Tietze, Burchinal, Leal and Palacios 1999).

Early childhood research – particularly from the United States – consistently shows the positive influence of low child:staff ratios and limited group sizes where young children are concerned (Barnett and Boocock, ed 1998; NAEYC 2006). In view of the strong correlation between structural and caregiver characteristics and children's academic, cognitive, behavioural and social development, Vandell and Wolfe (2000) conclude that smaller group sizes, lower child-caregiver ratios, and more caregiver training and education appear to have positive effects on important developmental outcomes (p. 22). The probable reason is that

with fewer children, educators can engage in more caring and supportive relationships with children. Rather than relying predominantly on whole group instruction, they are able to be more responsive to individual children and scaffold learning and progress at the appropriate moment. In addition, they can plan with children more stimulating activities, based on the children's interests, and engage in more intensive experiential work (Bowman et al. 2000).

Country and programme practice confirm this research. The most successful programmatic interventions in the United States (Perry Pre-School 1962-67, Abecedarian 1972) have been characterized by well-trained teachers, low child-staff ratios and intensive work with children using open curricula. Clearly, other structural and process variables enter into the picture, but today, the research position is reflected consistently in OECD country practice. The tendency in the last decade in almost all countries has been to reduce group sizes, in particular when disadvantaged children or children with special needs are present. The majority of American states have now achieved ratios of 10:1 for pre-kindergarten children (3-5 years), while the Nordic countries practice even lower ratios. With smaller groups and fewer children per educator, children have greater opportunities for interaction with adults and can receive more individualized attention.

Although France, the Republic of Korea and Japan can point to successes within their early childhood services, voices are also raised within these countries to reduce child:staff ratios. In France, for example, *école maternelle* classes in the ZEP (priority education areas with many disadvantaged children) are reduced to 15 children per teacher, often helped by a class assistant. In Japan and the Republic of Korea, groups' sizes and ratios have traditionally been large, and children in these countries are socialised from an early age to conform to family and group norms. Self-direction and individual expression are considered – up to the moment, at least – less important than fitting conduct within ones group. Yet, concerns about group socialisation and lack of attention to the individual child are expressed in both countries. In the Republic of Korea, parents make frequent reference to the whole group discipline and teaching that large numbers impose, in particular, in the private *hakwons* (for-profit private specialized schools that train their students to meet particular goals, in this case entrance to primary schooling) that are attended by most young children in the large cities. In Japan, cases of bullying have been noted in early childhood centres, particularly during play periods. Parents sometimes attribute such conduct to the large numbers of children present, as without sufficient staff supervision, children's play can sometimes take on unacceptable forms.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SELECTION OF BENCHMARKS FOR REPORT CARD 8

Throughout the process of selecting benchmarks, it was clear there would be a balance to be struck between the interest of early childhood professionals to do justice to the complexity of their field and the aim of UNICEF Innocenti Report Card series to present data that is straightforward enough to capture the attention of a general audience and stimulate public debate. On further consideration of the original list of 15 benchmarks, it was decided they were at risk of being too diverse and qualitative in nature to generate a message that would be sufficiently focused and backed up by convincingly quantitative evidence. To improve measurability and communicability, 10 benchmarks were chosen. The new benchmarks read as follows:

#### **1. A minimum entitlement to paid parental leave**

*The minimum proposed standard is that, on the birth of a child, one parent be entitled to leave of at least a year (to include pre-natal leave) at 50 per cent of salary (subject to upper and lower limits). For parents who are unemployed or self-employed, the income entitlement should not be less than the minimum wage or the level of social assistance. At least two weeks parental leave should be specifically reserved for fathers.*

#### **2. A national plan with priority for disadvantaged children**

*All countries going through the childcare transition should have undertaken extensive research and evolved a coherent national strategy to ensure that the benefits of early childhood education and care are fully available, especially to disadvantaged children (see discussion below). This aspect of early childhood services cannot currently be assessed and compared in a satisfactory way. Rather than omit such a critical factor, benchmark 2 records, as a proxy measure, whether governments have at least drawn up a national plan for the organization and financing of early childhood services.*

#### **3. A minimum level of childcare provision for under-threes**

*The minimum proposed is that subsidised and regulated childcare services should currently be available for at least 25 per cent of children under the age of three.*

#### **4. A minimum level of access for four year-olds**

*The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of four-year-olds participate in publicly subsidised and accredited early education services for a minimum of 15 hours per week.*

#### **5. A minimum level of training for all staff**

*The minimum proposed is that at least 80 per cent of staff having significant contact with young children, including neighbourhood and home-based child carers, should have relevant training. As a minimum, all staff should complete an induction course. A move towards pay*

*and working conditions in line with the wider teaching or social care professions should also be envisaged.*

#### **6. A minimum proportion of staff with higher level education and training**

*The minimum proposed is that at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognised qualification in early childhood studies or a related field.*

#### **7. A minimum staff-to-children ratio**

*The minimum proposed is that the ratio of pre-school children (three-to-five year-olds) to trained staff (educators and assistants) should not be greater than 15 to 1, and that group size should not exceed 24.*

#### **8. A minimum level of public funding**

*The suggested minimum is that the level of public spending on early childhood education and care (for children aged 0 to six years) should not be less than 1 per cent of GDP.*

#### **9. A low level of child poverty**

*Specifically, a child poverty rate of less than 10 per cent. The definition of child poverty is that used by the OECD; i.e. the percentage of children growing up in families in which income, adjusted for family size, is less than 50 per cent of median income.*

#### **10. Universal outreach**

*To reinforce one of the central tenets of this report – that early childhood services should also be available to the children of disadvantaged or marginalised families – this last benchmark attempts to measure and compare demonstrated national commitment to that ideal. As no direct measure is currently possible, the suggested proxy measure is the extent to which basic health services have been made available to the most marginalised, disadvantaged, and difficult-to-reach families.*

*Specifically, the benchmark of ‘universal outreach’ is considered to have been met if a country has fulfilled at least two of the following three requirements: a) the rate of infant mortality is less than 4 per 1000 live births b) the proportion of babies born with low birth weight (below 2500 grams) is less than 6 per cent and c) the immunisation rate for 12 to 23 month-olds (averaged over measles, polio and DPT3 vaccination) is more than 95 per cent.*

These 10 revised benchmarks are clearly shorter and more concrete than the originals from which they are drawn. There is a gain in clarity and the language speaks more directly to the general reading public. There is also a good mix across the four categories of benchmarks proposed, namely, family and social benchmarks, governance, access and quality.

These gains have, unavoidably, come at a price. The second benchmark in the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card concerns only the existence of a national plan; the original benchmark

required a judgement on whether responsibility for early childhood education and care services had been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. The following areas from the original 15 benchmarks have been incorporated in the revised benchmarks or reflected in the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card otherwise:

- 1. The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.*
- 2. The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings;*
- 3. A national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning;*
- 4. Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment).*

These sacrifices were, however, inevitable given the aims of achieving clear and direct communicability and measurability, as it is clear that the benchmarks which did not make the final list are those which require the most subjective judgements.

The risk inherent in achieving the aims of communicability and measurability is that insufficient attention may be paid to aspects of early childhood which are not so easily measured and communicated but which are no less important, and that the public debate which the Report Card aims to stimulate may prove to focus too strongly on structural considerations. That is considered a risk worth-taking in comparison to the alternative risk of failing to any stimulate public debate by trying too hard to reflect the complexities and subtleties of the early childhood field.

Nonetheless it is hoped that the publication of these benchmarks, by setting the precedent of comparing early childhood services internationally, may stimulate an appetite to work towards overcoming some of the challenges involved in international benchmarking in the field of early childhood and consequently allow future such exercises more scope to incorporate qualitative input. In the context of the prevailing emphasis on quantitative approaches, the following considerations are nominated as key 'next generation' issues in the assessment of early childhood interventions and outcomes:

1. *The strong link between child-rearing practices and culture*: Essential concepts used in early childhood literature and policy-making, such as childhood, children's services, early education or pedagogy, are understood in very different ways by administrators from different countries, even when expressed in a common language.<sup>47</sup>
2. *The complexity of the early childhood field*. Early education and care, like other human endeavours, is a complex political, economic, social and cultural construction. To approach it from a managerial, performance angle tends to obscure what Foucault (1990) refers to as 'the production of truth'. In simpler terms, a quantitative approach, based on structural features, focuses attention on the central government inputs. The role of educators and the central interests (and influence) of parents and families can be overshadowed.
3. *Pedagogical outcomes for children and the wider social goals of early childhood services*: A focus on structural benchmarks can crowd out attention to the fundamental socio-educational role of children's services, for example, to foster equity in education and to form citizens to participate and live responsible lives in free and democratic societies.
4. *The pedagogical relationship between educators and children*: the importance of the pedagogical relationship between educators and children tends to be neglected in quantitative approaches. This relationship is fundamental and should provide to every child in every setting: care, upbringing and pleasure in learning.
5. *The supports needed by educators to learn and research together*. An element difficult to measure but extremely important in early childhood and school settings is the support provided to educators to learn and research together. Such supports may be as important as criteria easier to measure, such as the level of initial diplomas.
6. *The centrality of the social experience of young children in early childhood settings*: The Delors Report – *The Treasure Within* (Delors 1996) – summarises the elements of this experience as *learning to be* (forming one's self identity); *learning to do* (through play, experimentation and group activity); *learning to learn* (through a learning environment providing interest and choice and that includes well-focused pedagogical objectives); and *learning to live together* (within the early childhood centre, in a democratic way, respectful of difference). Structural elements set the conditions for such learning to take place, but they cannot measure the living experience.

The early childhood field is complex. Policy is concerned not only with providing education and care to young children but is also linked with issues of women's employment and equality of opportunity; parental time with young children; child development and child poverty issues; labour market supply; child health, social welfare and later education for

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<sup>47</sup>It might be thought that using one language; e.g. English, should simplify things and make communication easier. On the contrary: despite its richness, English alone does not have the range of concepts and words to translate all the understandings of childhood and child-rearing found across Europe, not to mention the wider world. A simple example is the word pedagogy, which has a meaning in the German-speaking and Nordic countries very different to the English sense. Without due care, the use of a lingua franca can often sow confusion. Due attention needs to be given to the comparability of concepts and linguistic equivalences (Osborn 2004).

young children. There are also more fundamental questions. How do different countries define childhood? What are the purposes of early childhood services? Are our democracies served by the manner in which these services are organized? These are not questions which are easily susceptible to international benchmarking, but they are questions to which international benchmarking open the doors for reflection and merit our continued attention.

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**ANNEX**  
**COUNTRY RESPONSES TO THE EXTENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

## AUSTRALIA – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
5.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
6.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
7.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
8.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
9.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
10.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	No
11.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
12.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
13.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
14.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
15.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
16.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
17.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
18.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training and certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
19.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## AUSTRIA – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	No
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## BELGIUM (FLANDERS) – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## CANADA – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	No
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary	No
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	No
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

**DENMARK – A profile of early childhood system quality**

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive income, employment and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. Two weeks or more of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making, funding, and regulatory systems (including support/supervision) being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services that included child observations and consultations with parents and educators.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a comprehensive regulatory framework has been enacted, and is monitored rigorously across both public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure (national and local combined) on early development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1.0% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## FINLAND – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (3)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training, participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	No
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## FRANCE - A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training;, participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## GERMANY – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## HUNGARY – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## ICELAND – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary..	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training;, participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## IRELAND – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	No
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary..	No
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## ITALY – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## JAPAN – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year at least 40 weeks after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	No
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## KOREA – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training, participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## MEXICO – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	No
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## NETHERLANDS – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## NEW ZEALAND – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## NORWAY – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (2)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which educators and children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from statutorily agreed work conditions and salaries	No
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	No
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## PORTUGAL – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or curriculum framework has been adopted for use in early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
<b>12.</b>	Effective structures and procedures are in place to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. Governing bodies ensure support to staff working in teams, and assist them to engage in regular in-service training; participatory forms of development and evaluation (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children and benefit from agreed work conditions and salaries	Yes
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## SLOVENIA – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
<b>1.</b>	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	Yes (3)
<b>2.</b>	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
<b>3.</b>	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
<b>4.</b>	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
<b>5.</b>	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
<b>6.</b>	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
<b>7.</b>	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
<b>8.</b>	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
<b>9.</b>	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
<b>10.</b>	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
<b>11.</b>	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
<b>12.</b>	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
<b>13.</b>	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social care sector.	Yes
<b>14.</b>	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
<b>15.</b>	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## SPAIN – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	?
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	?
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

**SWEDEN – A profile of early childhood system quality**

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. Infant and toddler health care is equal to or above the average for rich countries for at least two indicators	Yes (3)
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	Yes
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure (national and local combined) on early development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	Yes
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, pre-service training, with certification in early childhood education and care, or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size are not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

## SWITZERLAND – A profile of early childhood system quality <sup>48</sup>

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	Yes
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of about a year after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	No
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	No
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	No
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes

<sup>48</sup>Because of differences across cantons, several of the questions have received a negative answer for Switzerland as a whole, although some cantons may have achieved the benchmark in question.

## UNITED KINGDOM/ENGLAND – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of at least 40 weeks after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	Yes
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	Yes
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	Yes
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	Yes
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	Yes
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	Yes
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres (maintained school settings) are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	No

## UNITED STATES – A profile of early childhood system quality

<b>A. SOCIAL AND FAMILY CONTEXT</b>		
1.	An effective public network of child and family health services has been established, accessible to all families and with outreach services to families with young children. The country achieves at least two indicators out of three for infant and toddler health care	No
2.	Effective national policies are in place that reduce child poverty to below 10%. Low-income families receive employment, income and social supports to help them to maintain their children above the poverty line, and to ensure their equitable access to early development and education services.	No
3.	Employed parents are entitled to a statutory parental leave of at least 40 weeks after the birth of a child, and to a wage replacement level of at least 50% over the period. At least two weeks of parental leave are set aside for fathers.	No
<b>B. GOVERNANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION</b>		
4.	National or state responsibility for early childhood education and care services has been assigned to one agency or ministry, with goal-setting, policy-making and funding being effectively integrated. A national policy or plan for the development of a universal early childhood system has been published.	No
5.	The responsible agency (or agencies, if auspices are split) invests significantly in public consultation, research, data collection, monitoring, and programme evaluation to ensure that early childhood policy is evidence based and that national objectives for young children are being achieved. The agency has commissioned and published in the past ten years an independent national evaluation of early childhood services.	Yes
6.	The government agency(ies) in charge places a strong focus on the well-being and holistic development of children in early childhood services. Given the importance of protecting young children and optimising their early development, a regulatory framework has been enacted, and is applied equally to public and private settings.	No
7.	Public expenditure on early childhood development and education services for children aged 0-6 years is at least equal to 1% of GDP.	No
<b>C. ACCESS TO SERVICES</b>		
8.	The organization of early childhood services at local level ensures appropriate access for all children, with opening hours and adjusted fees to meet the needs of parents. "Particular attention is paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination." (CRC Comment 7, p. 23). These children receive first call on services and to additional programmes and resources as necessary.	Yes
9.	At least 25% of all children under 3 years access places in publicly subsidized and regulated childcare services.	No
10.	At least 80% of 4-year old children participate in publicly subsidized and accredited early education services for at least 15 hours per week.	No
<b>D. PROGRAMME QUALITY</b>		
11.	Based on wide consultation, a validated, national/state guideline or pedagogical framework has been developed for all early childhood services. The framework places the child's well-being, holistic development, learning and participation at the core of early childhood work. It involves parents as partners in their children's learning and outlines clear goals to which children can aspire, in accordance with the capacities of each child	No
12.	Governing agencies provide effective support structures to assist educators to achieve curriculum goals and values, in co-operation with parents. They provide support to staff working in teams, through regular in-service training; participatory forms of quality development and assessment (e.g. pedagogical research and documentation); and other forms of collaborative working both within and between services.	Yes
13.	At least 80% of contact staff in state regulated early childhood services (including family day care) have pre-training in the care and education of young children. A move toward a unified staffing system is envisaged – or is in place - with qualifications, work conditions and salaries aligned on the education or social sector.	No
14.	At least 50% staff in state regulated early education centres are composed of professionals - educators, pedagogues and/or teachers - with a minimum 3-years, tertiary B, post-secondary training, with certification in early childhood education and care or equivalent field.	Yes
15.	The child / trained adult ratio for 4-5 year olds in all publicly subsidized, centre-based services is no greater than 15:1, and group size is not larger than 24 children per group.	Yes