

Provision of quality early childcare services (Czech Republic, 10-11 November 2015)

Provision of quality early childcare services in Latvia: policy context and initiatives¹

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1. Short description of the related policy context in Latvia

To understand the work-family reconciliation situation of individuals and families in Latvia, it is important to obtain an insight into employment rates and overall situation of families. According to the Eurostat Labour Force survey, Latvia is among the countries with a traditionally high employment rate of both men and women². If in some EU countries governments have made it a point to involve more women in labour market, historically in Latvia most women have jobs, and most of them have full-time jobs. Full time work is a norm for both men and women. Indicators show that substantially less people in Latvia work in part-time jobs compared to the EU-average; one reason for it is that employers do not offer part-time positions, another reason is that people desire to work full-time and earn full salaries because they cannot make both ends meet on half-salary. If employees could live on a half-salary, it would be possible that he/she would choose a part-time job. As a result of high women employment rates, there is a high percentage of working mothers in Latvia too. More than two of three mothers with dependent children (0-16) are in paid employment. Maternal employment rates are one of the highest across the EU.

The largest part of women returns to the labour market when a child becomes 1.5 years old. The reasons for returning to work or starting to work among the women who have already returned to work or plan to start working are as follows: in both groups the mothers most often (86.7 and 78.3 %) mentioned '*a need for bigger income*' and the fact that '*childcare allowance is too little*' (correspondingly 59.3 and 53.0 %). Other reasons for those mothers who already work and those who plan to work differ a bit. For those mothers who have returned to work the third most important reason is that '*there is somebody who takes care of the child*', the fourth that '*I wanted to have something more not only taking care of my child*', and also the mothers wanted to work '*because she didn't want to lose her qualification*'. For those who just plan to return to the labour market the third most important reason is that '*the parental leave came to an end*' (for those who work this was just the seventh important reason). It is essential that '*the child has a place in a preschool establishment*'. Moreover, the mothers want '*something more not only take care of a child, they don't want to lose their qualification*' and '*they miss social contacts, communication*'. For such factors as '*worries about career*' and '*income*'

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² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_labour_force_statistics



there is a correlation with the income of a family. The correlation between *worries about career* and *'income'* is seen in the respondents' subjective evaluation of income: the better the material situation the more important is the factor *'worries about career'*; and the worse the material situation of a family is the more important is the factor *'income'*.

Employment has a crucial effect on the financial situation of families. Average annual net earnings for a single person without children are higher than those of families with children. The average annual net earnings for a two earner couple with two children per family member are about half of the income of a single person. Families with one earner and their children are in a relatively bad financial situation when compared to two-earner families. Surveys³ indicate that people in Latvia tend to agree with the statement 'On average a family life suffers from the fact that women work full time'. In surveys this statement is supported by 73 % of men and 65 % of women. The average number of people living in a household in Latvia is nearly 3. The decline in institutionalised relationships goes along with an increase in other; previously less wide-spread forms of family life, such as lone-parenthood, reconstituted and cohabiting families. Today there are comparatively high percentages of unmarried as well as divorced (or separated) single parents (mainly mothers) who live alone with their children.

The data⁴ shows that women are more involved in unpaid work than men are. As well, it indicates to traditional division of duties in men's and women's responsibilities. The biggest part of domestic chores is the woman's responsibility and men do not involve because they either work much or there is no man in the family. This traditional model is based on the perception that a man is the main provider of a family and that is why his main responsibility is to work out of home. A woman's task is to take care of children and house despite the fact that she works for money too. Nowadays there is an observable tendency towards greater men involvement in family life.

Individuals and families face difficulties to reconcile work demands and family responsibilities. Work-family reconciliation is complicated and a topical issue in contemporary Latvia. The research⁵ about work-family balance problems so far shows that the main hindrances to successful work-family reconciliation are connected with social and economic barriers and gender stereotypes existing in society, as well as insufficient state support in the area of care and rearing of young children. The employees' capacity to reconcile work and family is largely affected by the necessary infrastructure – the environment created by state and municipalities and the structure of organisations as workplaces, forms of work organisation and corporate culture. Work-family reconciliation does not happen in the circumstances of a social vacuum; its processes, problems and solutions are tightly knit with the social, economic and political context of the particular period of time. The necessity to combine work and family produces a variety of issues, problems, challenges and dilemmas for different stakeholders. Work-family balance is often seen as an individual issue. The discourse of work-family balance is often based on a neo-liberal assumption of the individual's free choice.

³ Gender Equality Aspects in the Labour Market. Project "Studies of the Ministry of Welfare" No. VPD1/ESF/NVA/04/NP/3.1.5.1./0001/0003 of the national programme of structural funds of the EU "Labour Market Studies". Riga, 2006.

⁴ epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY.../KS.../KS-CC-06-006-EN.PDF

⁵ Korpa V., Work-Family Reconciliation in the Organizations of Private Sector. Published Doctoral Thesis. Riga: The University of Latvia, 2012. (in Latvian); Men in Latvian Public Environment: Policy, Social and Economic Aspects. Research Report, 2006.



2. Child care support and child-minders service in Latvia: social context, target groups, financial support and legal framework

The research⁶ on the effectiveness of child care benefit and preferable payment periods showed that 42 % of parents face a real risk of losing their job after child care leave. A certain linear dependency exists between the age of the minded children and the family income: the younger the children, the bigger the risk of insufficient income. The research⁷ on inclusion of parents into the labour market after child care leave demonstrated that one of the most significant factors, which hinders parents' return into the labour market after child care leave, is the lack of availability of state provided pre-school establishments (long waiting lists) and insufficient coverage of private child care and child-minders services (small numbers and high prices). The lack of availability of municipal pre-school educational services also prevented many women from participation in the State Employment Agency's organised active employment measures.

Surveys have showed that amore preferable form of state support for families with small children (0-3 years old) is the availability of state financed pre-school educational services or subsidised child care services, which allow full-time employment for parents. The research⁸ of the development of pre-school educational services and alternative child-minders services in Latvia planning regions established that the most effective form of support for families with small children are organised by the state, municipalities and private companies alternative child care services (day care centres, child-minders services, baby-sitters, nannies, private kindergartens). Diversification of child care facilities in turn increase its' accessibility in relation to different individual needs of parents and different age of minded children.

Weak points⁹ of the Latvian early child care support system before policy initiatives have been implemented in 2013 were:

- Low availability of municipal pre-school educational institutions (long waiting lists): in the school year of 2011/2012 91,000 children attended pre-school educational institutions out of 145,700 children in the age group up to the age of 7. According to the General Education Law Article 21, the local governments shall provide equal accessibility of pre-school educational institutions for children from the age of one and a half in their administrative territory. At the end of 2012 7,900 children were on the waiting list for a place in pre-school educational institutions.
- High cost of private pre-school educational services and the lack of municipal support: according to the information provided by 43 private pre-school educational institutions in Riga, the average cost of one child in preschool educational institution in 2012 was EUR 243. Most of the families do not use the private preschool educational services because they cannot cover the difference between the allowance paid by the local government for this service and the actual cost of the private pre-school educational institution services.

⁶ Pētījums par bērna kopšanas pabalstu, tā efektivitāti un vēlamajiem izmaksas periodiem// Labklājības ministrijas sociālās politikas pētījumu rezultāti 2002.gadā. — R.: LU, 2003.

⁷ Pētījums par vecāku iespējām iekļauties darba tirgū pēc bērna kopšanas atvaļinājuma. Rīga, 2007.

⁸ Pētījums "PII un alternatīvu bērnu pieskatīšanas pakalpojumu attīstība Latvija plānošanas reģionos". Rīga, 2009.

⁹ Child care support and child-minders service in Latvia: Social context, target groups, financial support and legal framework. Unpublished paper presented at the Ministry of Welfare. September 20th, 2013 (author: M. Ivanovs).



- Deficiency of professional alternative child care services: the child health and safety before September 2013 had not been sufficiently ensured within alternative services in contrast with hard-line requirements proposed to the pre-school educational institutions (there were no special requirements to providers of child care and child-minders services, including registration and supervision regulations, as well as special educational and hygiene requirements). Child-minders services were established only in few municipalities – Liepāja, Jēkabpils and Ķekava.
- Large proportion of illegal providers: in most cases individual nurses have been employed illegally, without contracts and taxpaying, as a result these nurses haven't been socially insured and qualified for work with small children (without education, professional skills and sanitary certificate). It has had a negative impact on the protection of the child's health and protection of the service recipients, as well as labour market legalisation.

The above-mentioned points showed that weaknesses of the Latvian child care support system had a complex nature and many determining factors – related to the labour market and educational system, as well as to an inadequate state support system. Identified shortcomings have indicated the necessity for policy makers to increase child care supply and demand for diversified services available (financially and territorially) for families in all regions.

2.1. Local municipalities as the main actor for the provision of pre-school education and child care services

Latvia has a long tradition of public provision of childcare services but it does not meet all demands for such services. Thus, for a long time private provision was operating alongside in the form of private kindergartens and nannies. In Latvia local governments are almost fully responsible for the provision of public childcare. The autonomous function of local governments is to provide for the education of residents (ensuring children of pre-school and school age with places in training and educational institutions; organisational and financial assistance). In compliance with the Law on Municipalities, it shall be the duty of every municipality to ensure an option for children residing within the territory of the municipality to undergo the pre-school education programme. A municipality shall establish, maintain and provide funding for pre-school educational establishments after obtaining an approval from the Ministry of Education and Science and ensure admission of children into the educational establishments implementing the pre-school education programmes upon parents' request.

Starting with August 2011 the Education Law prescribes that local governments shall ensure equal access to pre-school educational services for all children at the age of 1.5-5 years in their administrative territory. Due to the lack of an infrastructural base and/or intensive inter-regional migration (rapid increase of registered children in Riga) many local governments have been contiguous with long waiting list problems¹⁰. Starting at the beginning of 2013 the local governments that are unable to provide pre-school educational services for children declared in their administrative territory, are partly paying for those children who are acquiring education in private pre-school educational institutions. The allowance is between EUR 70 and 260 per month¹¹.

¹⁰ Child care support and child-minders service in Latvia: Social context, target groups, financial support and legal framework. Unpublished paper presented at the Ministry of Welfare. September 20th, 2013 (author: M. Ivanovs).

¹¹ Ibidem.



In 2012-2013 local governments consequently implemented many measures in order to increase the enrolment of children in the formal child care system¹², e.g. investments in pre-school educational groups; organisation of basic and secondary education schools; building new kindergartens using EU structural funds; financing, optimising cooperation between local governments and private kindergartens; increasing local government's co-financing or purchasing of places for children on the waiting lists. In 2012 the Ķekava municipality¹³ created a nannies' data base and organised training courses for nannies. For children from the age of one and a half who have not been provided with places in pre-school educational institutions of the local government, support is provided by the local government to finance the nanny's service. The amount of the local government's financial support is EUR 170 per month for 160 hours of work performed by a nanny. The support is provided to the child's parents if the child or one of the parents is declared in the administrative territory of the local government of Ķekava; the child has been on the waiting list for a place in a local government's pre-school education institution; a contract has been signed between the parents and the nanny. In order to receive such support the parents shall have to choose a nanny from the local government's data base of nannies.

Until 2012 local governments were rather conservative in the provision of child care services; solely pre-school educational institutions were set. The good examples of local governments' practice show that local actors are capable to solve some structural problems of weak early child care and education system by implementing unaccustomed and novel incentives. However, due to the lack of finances and political willingness this problem is still topical or even crucial in many local municipalities in Latvia.

2.2. The pilot project of a child-minders service in Latvia and its impacts

On September 2013 the Latvian government started the pilot project to provide financial support for parents who need child care support for their children aged 1.5 to 4 years who are not benefiting from public childcare (as from 5 years on municipalities have a legal obligation to provide primary education to children). The purposeful financing is provided for three years – till the end of 2015 in order to solve the problem of long waiting lists for public kindergarten registration and help parents to return to work at the same time providing safe conditions for the child. The co-funding of the state and the co-funding paid by the local government to the child summed together should be able to decrease parents' expenditures for attendance of private kindergarten or child-minders service. The monthly amount of the state support for full time service (8 hours) is up to 142 EUR with meeting the condition that total of state and municipal support (most municipalities already provide some support towards addressing such situations) per one child does not exceed 228 EUR in Riga planning region and 185 EUR outside. Simultaneously the Cabinet of Ministers' regulation on child-minders registration, register and professional activity organisation, came into force, defining the qualification and safety requirements for family day carers. The regulation stipulates that a person who wishes to work as a child-minder needs to have completed a professional education programme of at least 40 hours in order to be registered, unless the

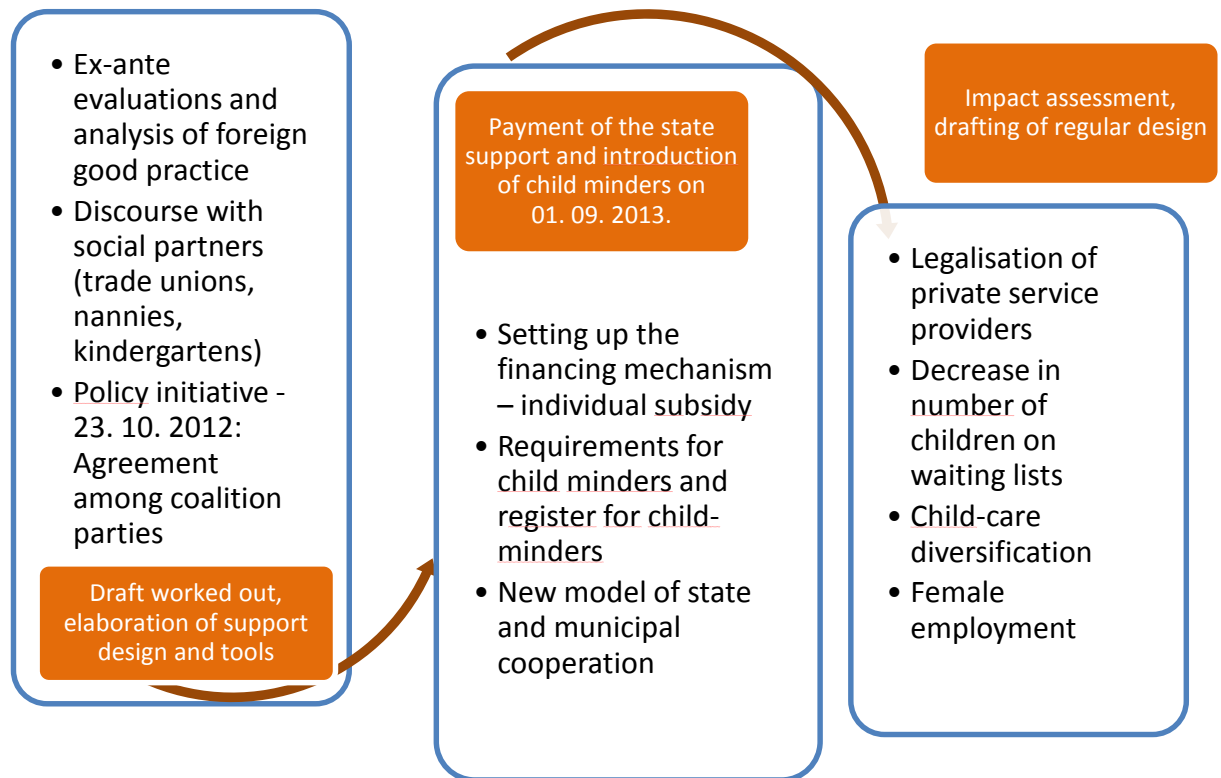
¹² Child care support and child-minders service in Latvia: Social context, target groups, financial support and legal framework. Unpublished paper presented at the Ministry of Welfare. September 20th, 2013 (author: M. Ivanovs).

¹³ Aicina uz sapulci par aukļu dienesta izveidi. <http://www.kekava.lv/pub/index.php?id=150&lid=2680>; Aukļu dienests Ķekavas novadā – alternatīva bērnodārzam. <http://www.maminuklubs.lv/pirmsskola/20120827-auklu-dienests-kekavas-novada-alternativa-bernodarzam/>



person has received secondary or tertiary pedagogical education or obtained a professional qualification as a child-minder¹⁴.

The pilot project has been elaborated in close collaboration with local governments and NGOs representing families with children, trade unions and private care givers (see design of pilot project).



The state support (cash transfer) should be paid to private service providers that are registered within the Education Register (private kindergartens) or Child Supervision Services Providers Register (nannies, child care centres and other care givers, except private kindergartens) providing full-time service (at least 8 hours per working day). In order to get state support parents have to sign a written contract with the provider. Parents have to inform the respective municipality of the place of residence of the child about the fact that the child is benefitting from such private service. Service providers have to inform the Ministry of Education and Science about services provided in each month; the respective payment should be made to the provider within 10 days.

On 1 September 2013 the regulation on child-minders registration came into force, defining qualification and safety requirements for caregivers, who are not registered as educational institutions.

The Protection of the Rights of the Child Law has defined:

- A child may be left in public places for short-term supervision to a provider of child supervision services;

¹⁴ Requirements for Providers of Child Supervision Services and Procedures for Registration of Providers of Child Supervision Services, <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=258873>



- A provider of child supervision services shall ensure an environment appropriate for a child at the place of provision of the service, which does not threaten the child's safety, life, health, morality and wholesome development;
- It is a duty of the parents not to leave a child up to seven years old without the presence of an adult person, in this case parents should ensure the child's supervision by a trustworthy person, child-minder or pre-school educational service provider;
- the Cabinet Regulation No. 404 prescribes the professional qualification and safety requirements in providing child supervision services, the procedures for registration of service providers in the Register, the manager of the Register and the information to be included in the Register.

Results of this pilot project:

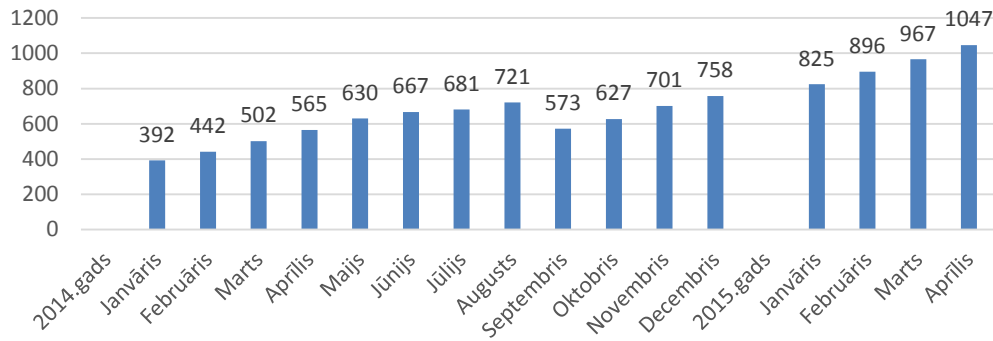
- Amount of children in waiting lists for two years reduced by 22 % and by 32 % in Riga;
- Approx. 1,400 registered child-minders in September 2015;
- In 2014 8,347 families have received state support (financing – 8.8 mill. EUR).

The results of the pilot project have indicated that conditional cash transfers for care and education of children at private service providers simultaneously with the diversification of child care services efficiently encourage the involvement of children in formal care and there is a big demand for this model in the society.

State support to child-minders in 2014			
	Number of child-minders	Funding	Number of children
January	392	93,646.31	873
February	442	107,140.21	959
March	502	125,221.57	1,120
April	565	134,320.72	1,193
May	630	173,331.67	1,347
June	667	186,101.03	1,346
July	681	190,310.00	1,480
August	721	200,320.96	1,500
September	573	136,185.73	1,041
October	627	149,194.83	1,158
November	701	165,941.78	1,329
December	758	190,512.85	1,400
Total:		1,852,227.66	



Amount of child-minders in 2014 and 2015



Municipality	Amount of children on waiting list	
	2014	2015 ¹⁵
Rīga	2,395	2,000
Liepāja	1,507	1,350
Jelgava	2,756	950
Ķekava	1,244	1,210
Sigulda	186	180
Ādaži	578	580
Ozolnieki	213	160
Ropaži	195	140
Ikšķile	167	150
Carnikava	174	150
Tukums	206	218
Bauska	67	80
Iecava	129	77
Mārupe	1,114	1,284
Valmiera	55	n/a
Stopiņi	279	280
TOTAL:	11,265	8,809

It is expected that the introduction of child-minders services will improve the quality of childcare and protection of the child health by skilled and educated child-minders which can help to acquire pre-school education programmes, and by the requirements, registration and supervision for all child care services in the country. Alongside promotion of employment and labour market legalisation will be enforced by legalisation of private service providers, involving them in social insurance schemes and ensuring their social security rights. Besides parents are enabled to faster return to work after parental leave and earn income, thereby reducing the potential risk of unemployment and poverty.

¹⁵ Pašvaldību sniegtā prognoze uz 2015.g.septembri.



The new elaborated report adopted by the government in September 2015 prescribes the continuation of the support programme with changing the financing source – on 1 January 2016 the municipalities which have waiting lists should pay to private service providers the compensation for children which receive the private child-care service in their administrative territory. The amount of compensation should correspond with preschool education expenses in municipal kindergarten per one child. Simultaneously the child-minders registration and development programme will be continued.

3. Further initiatives on the improvement of well-being and accessibility to early childcare services for families with children

Along with the further implementation of this measure and the increase of the financing for free meals by gradually providing state financed meals until grade 4, as well as the financing for the study materials at educational establishments, it can be foreseen that the proportional share of subsidised services within the public support provided to families will increase in Latvia¹⁶. The data of the OECD comparative analysis confirm that as regards the family it is efficient to combine social policy activities by combining cash transfers with a flexible vacation system and the improvement of care services, which has the most direct impact upon the welfare of families with children. They also confirm a clear correlation between the support policy of two breadwinners, women employment results and child poverty: higher employment of women determines the reduction of the child poverty. Investments in the child care system, the measures for balancing private life and work have the most intense impact upon the employment of women¹⁷.

At present in Latvia considerable resources (above 180 mill. EUR) are focused for the provision of state support to children aged up to 2 years, however, after reaching this age the scope of the state support rapidly decreases and this has a negative impact upon the continuity of the social security of families. Thus, in the course of promoting the quality of life of families with children it is important to focus not only on cash transfers, but also on the improvement of the accessibility of services and increase of the indirect support (allowances) by providing balanced social support for the whole life cycle of a child. In this respect the advantages of the combined family policy need to be emphasised by increasing the support to both cash transfers and services and targeting it to different age groups.

In 2013-2014 Latvia implemented a range of support measures for families with children by simultaneously increasing the insurance and the state social benefits for child care, by increasing the allowance rate of the personal income tax for a child and by introducing various tax discounts for large families. In addition to that, investments were made in the child care and education system: the introduction of the state support programme for elimination of waiting lists at kindergartens, the support for buying of study materials and the increase of the subsidy for free meals at schools¹⁸. As a result of the implementation of these and other measures, the

¹⁶ Data of the public financing for family policies by the OECD countries (2011, in % of the GDP) attest that Latvia has a low proportional share of subsidised child services, just 0.2 % of the GDP.

¹⁷ OECD, COMPARING THE EFFECTIVENESS & EFFICIENCY OF FAMILY CASH BENEFITS & SERVICES, 15.11.2013.

¹⁸ See more details in the Agreement protocol of the fractions of the 11th Saeima (the National Union "Visu Latvijai"- "TB/LNNK", the fraction VIENOTĪBA, the fraction of the Reform Party) as well as the Members of the Parliament not belonging to fractions dd. 23.10.2012 regarding the state support for the improvement of the birth rate and to families with children and the Protocol Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 51 50§ dd. 01.10.2013 "Demography support measures in 2014").



summary mean income from benefits increased by 20-45 % for parents who take care of a child aged up to 1.5 years, and the support to families with children financed by the Ministry of Welfare has increased by almost 25 % during a period of three years (up to 1.08 % of the GDP in 2014).

Although the operationalisation of the direct causal effect of this combined intervention upon the welfare of families is difficult, the structural indicators of the welfare of families with children have improved:

- Increase of the employment of women continued (constant increase in 2013 and in 2014 [on 0.7 %]);
- The birth rate increased (from 1.44 in 2012 up to 1.65 in 2014)¹⁹;
- The death rate of babies considerably decreased (from 6.3 deaths per 1,000 alive born children in 2012 to 3.9 deaths in 2014);
- Decrease of poverty line to 2.4 % in 2013.

EaSI PROGRESS PROJECT

In August 2015 Latvia has signed the agreement on the implementation of the project "Vouchers for the provision of flexible child-minders service to workers with nonstandard work schedules" receiving a grant in the framework of the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)²⁰. The main activity of the project will focus on introducing, within a focused political intervention, flexible child-care arrangements in Latvian enterprises with nonstandard work schedules (jobs requiring evening, weekend, or variable schedules) and further development of self-regulation or cross-section (private and public co-financing scheme) subsidisation.

The main aims of the tested innovation are:

- To find optimal child-care arrangements for workers with nonstandard work schedules;
- To find optimal conditions for inter-sectorial partnership and self-regulation practices;
- To find long-term models of subsidising and development of flexible childcare service.

Therefore in terms of social policy innovation, child care patterns among respondents will be described, taking into account the range of different child care arrangements used over time; the association between nonstandard work characteristics and different types and amounts of child care will be examined and the relationship between child care subsidy use and different types and amounts of child care will be also examined.

Vouchers for the provision of flexible (open hours) child-minders service to workers with nonstandard work schedules will provide innovative solution within which both employers' need for optimal range of employment and employees' need for flexible childcare arrangements and work and family life balance would be satisfied. This social policy innovation will include also the effective measurement of socially

¹⁹ 20,596 children or by 4 % more than in 2012 were born in 2013. In order to achieve the index of the newborn children specified in the National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014-2020 in 2020 (28,000), the annual increase in the number of newborn children should be on average 5.2 % over the period 2014-2020.

²⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=632&langId=en>



economic outcomes of the intervention, including stability of employment, low degree of workforce rotation and voluntarily dismissals. Also significant positive side effects will be measured: positive impacts of childcare diversification, reconciliation of work and family life, readiness to have the second/third child in the family if there was/were one/two before. This social policy innovation will be built-up by an innovative partnership, including close collaboration between the Institute for Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility (InCSR), private companies with nonstandard work schedules, municipal and state authorities.

Main stages of the project

1st stage – preparation and pre-evaluation:

Detailed analysis of organisation practices, consultations of enterprises and selection procedure; forming of experimental and control sample; elaboration of data base and vouchers co-financing scheme; the organisation of the purchasing procedure for 150 registered child-minders.

2nd stage – implementation:

Within the period of 10 months the system of vouchers subsidising the child-minders service will be implemented for 150 potential recipients in the territory of Valmiera, Jelgava and Riga; the voucher gives the right to use a child-minders service not more than 20 hours per week for one employed person with non-standard work schedule and a child up to the age of 7 years; the implementation process will include permanent monitoring and consultations of personnel within experimental and control samples.

3rd stage – evaluation and communication:

Evaluation of the impacts and outcomes of intervention; comparative analysis of experimental and control samples; measurement and verification of two dependent variables; process of pilot project has been implemented evaluation; , sharing of experience and communication with stakeholders and society.

The main target group are employed parents with nonstandard work schedule who have child up to the age of 7 seven years. In case of competition priority could be given to parents who fall under one of these conditions: 1) single parent; 2) parent with a disabled child; 3) parent with 3 and more children. The additional selection criteria will be clarified within the consultations with the employers, evaluating the degree of social vulnerability of the specific group.



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