



Investing in
Children's Services
Improving Outcomes

esn-eu.org



The European Social Network (ESN) brings together people who plan, manage and deliver local public social services, together with those in regulatory and research organisations. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and experience.

The project **Investing in Children's Services, Improving Outcomes** aims to support the implementation of the European Recommendation "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage", which recommends that national governments promote **access to quality services** as an essential pillar of multidimensional children policies.

The project maps the implementation of children's services in several European countries in order to suggest proposals for improvement in line with the European Recommendation. The methodology that we used included a **questionnaire** – to gather intelligence on how overarching principles may be implemented in practice – and three **peer reviews** to bring together children's services directors, national, regional and local government's representatives with responsibilities in children's services, and services providers from each country.

Some of these member states, such as Spain and the UK, feature a decentralised approach to the organisation of children's services, in which case the analysis focuses only on some parts of the country, such as Catalonia and Scotland. Here you will find a summary of country profiles with some key facts and relevant themes for the organisation of children's services in the countries analysed. The information contained in these profiles is based on the answers to the questionnaires.

About the research project

This research project is managed by ESN and is being carried out in collaboration with a number of child welfare agencies across Europe.

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Children's Services in Bulgaria

In Bulgarian childcare, the dominant theme is currently deinstitutionalisation (DI) and the development of community-based services for children, particularly children with disabilities. Relevant themes for children's services relate to the need to have a **holistic approach** to childcare, the effectiveness of children's services in the context of the national transition to community-based services, and the need to have **more work in the field of risk prevention**.

Children's Services in Bulgaria

Key facts

The most significant action related to childcare and family support is the implementation of the Action Plan linked to the National Strategy "Vision for the Deinstitutionalisation of Children in Bulgaria". The aim is to reach complete closure of the classical type of institutions and end the institutionalisation of children aged 0-3 years. One of the specific sub-targets is to close, within the next 15 years, the 137 children institutions, which were still operating in December 2009.

Some elements of this overarching reform include:

- Working with families and social workers to prevent children's abandonment
- Developing alternative forms of care, with focus on foster care
- Introducing a new financing approach with resources directly addressed to children's services
- Ensuring sustainability – so that the total costs of new services do not exceed the current costs of the 137 institutions
- Improving service quality through, for instance, improved personnel-children ratio and increased number of children in foster care
- Improving outcomes: improved general health and physical development; educational attainments; acquired social skills
- Significantly lowering the number of children in the care system.

Relevant themes

The Ministry of Social Policy produces an annual monitoring report on the progress made on deinstitutionalisation. In its 3rd monitoring report (July 2012-July 2013), the Ministry appealed for a **holistic approach** and the need for legislation to be *"improved in other key areas related to child wellbeing such as health, education, justice, social welfare and family policy"*. Another significant theme concerns the rapid increase of childcare and family support services and whether **these services are actually answering care priorities** in the context of a national transition to community-based services. In the report there is a call for a shift of focus towards the **operational effectiveness** of existing services.

The consolidation of existing services needs to be accompanied by more work in the field of **risk prevention**, which also has implications for other services, such as education and healthcare. For example, the intervention of community health mediators and social workers in maternity units to prevent children's abandonment has been effective as a component of a coherent, multi-disciplinary action linked to the closure of institutions in nine municipalities.

With thanks to Martina Krasteva, State Agency for Child Protection, and David Bisset, National Network for Children

Children's Services in France

There are two tiers in early childcare provision – formal childcare and nursery schools – and roughly 2% of all children receive some form of support within the child protection system. According to the 2013 Innocenti report, with 3.7% of its GDP for children and families, France ranks high in public spending on children policies and performed efficiently in reducing the relative family poverty rate to 8.8% after transfers (net rate) as opposed to 19.4% (gross rate). Relevant themes for children's services relate to the difficulties for **low-income families** to **access early childcare services** and recent **developments in child protection**.

Children's Services in France

Key facts

Formal childcare includes publicly-subsidised centres and home-based arrangements (e.g. child-minders). Since 2002, "early childhood commissions" are working in county councils to bring together representatives from local authorities, ministerial representatives, the Family Benefits Fund, trade unions and family associations to enhance services' coherence and coordination, and increase equality of access.

Legislation recognises that priority should be given to maintaining family ties, and in-home interventions represent roughly half of all child protection measures. According to the 2013 report of the National Observatory for Children at Risk (ONED), at the end of 2010 there were 273,000 children in the care system (1.9% of total number of children), who were receiving at least one assistance measure. Half of these children were living with their families. The other half were in placement – 53% in foster care and 38% in residential care.

Relevant themes

Although formal childcare provisions are subsidised and fees are income-related, according to authoritative authors like Fagnani and Math **early childcare services** still remain **too expensive for low-income families**. Various analyses suggest that most children from the lowest income families are cared for mainly by their parents. Thus, representatives from the Ministry for Families announced in 2013 that *"since 92% of children living below poverty level are minded by their parents at home, the aim for the next few years is to set aside 10% of all available places in crèches for these children."* In addition, the government announced a plan to create an additional 275,000 childcare arrangements by 2018.

Since the 1980s, **child protection** has been gradually transferred from the state to the *département* (local) level. According to the 2007 law reforming child protection policy, the President of the *département* is now responsible for policy coordination and for the situation of the family and the child in care. The new legislation provided for the development of local observatories of child protection and the CRIP, a pluri-disciplinary unit in charge of centralising, assessing and despatching all information giving rise to concern in every county council.

With thanks to Marie-Paule Martin Blachais, National Observatory for Children at Risk, and Jeanne Fagnani, National Centre for Scientific Research

Children's Services in Germany

According to federal law, youth offices within local authorities are responsible for the organisation of children's services. Within youth offices, there are youth service committees consisting of representatives from youth organisations, service providers and local authorities. Youth offices plan and fund a wide variety of services, including youth work, social work, education and day care. Relevant themes for children's services relate to the **fragmentation of legislation and policy** (federal/states level) and **practical implementation** of children's services at the local level.

Children's Services in Germany

Key facts

Children below school age (1-6 years old) are entitled to a place in childcare day centres. The actual care quota throughout Germany for the 3-6 age group is over 90%. However, in view of the 2005 requirements to extend provision to children below 3 years old, the German average of 1-3 year olds is currently around 40%. In 2007, the federal and state levels agreed an 'investment programme on childcare financing' that laid down the steps and provisions for the legal entitlement to early childhood measures from year one.

Children and young people often have their own legal entitlement to services. For example, children are entitled to counselling in emergency or conflict situations, referral to day care facilities and childcare, as well as specific provisions for education and participation support, including costs of class trips, homework support and lunch expenses.

Relevant themes

The fragmentation of children's services concerns legislation, policy and implementation. It is the duty of the federal states and local authorities (who in turn implement regional policy) to implement federal legislation in the field of children's services. Actual implementation takes place at local level, since the holding of tenders and their implementation is in the first instance the responsibility of public youth welfare services in the municipalities.

The preconditions for placing children and young people in the child protection system are covered by the same legislation as early childcare. Youth offices have the right and duty to take a child into care, if the child so requests, or if there is immediate danger to the child's wellbeing, hence the subjective feelings of the child are taken as the overriding criteria. Children and young people are provided with care in foster families and care homes that need to meet the requirements of the local youth office.

Children's Services in Ireland

In spite of the economic downturn and Ireland's budgetary constraints, a number of key changes have taken place in supporting children and families in past years. In 2011, a Department for Children and Youth Affairs was established and a number of priorities identified (for example, to hold a referendum that strengthened children's rights, to establish a dedicated agency for children and families, and to put child protection on a statutory footing). Relevant themes for children's services relate to the **coordination, monitoring and evaluation of children's services**.

Children's Services in Ireland

Key facts

The early childcare scheme includes a free pre-school programme for children aged 3-4 years. A Community Childcare Subvention Programme provides childcare at reduced rates for disadvantaged families. As of June 2013, 92% of children in care (6,423 children were in care, out of a total population of 1.5 million children) were placed in foster care or with relatives, and 5% in residential care. According to the 1991 Child Care Act, social services must identify and help all children not receiving adequate care and protection. Social work teams operate across the country to ensure this takes place.

A new Child and Family Agency was established on 1 January 2014, with a subsequent major sectorial infrastructure embedded in the delivery of services aiming for a more equal, coordinated and focused approach in the delivery of care for children and families. The responsibilities of the Agency include child welfare and protection services, child and family-related services and the National Education Welfare Board. The establishment of the agency represents one of the largest and most ambitious areas of public sector reform involving over 4,000 employees and a budget of over €570 million across existing agencies.

Relevant themes

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 was launched in April 2014 and will provide a seamless, whole-of-childhood approach to the development of policies and services to improve children and young people's outcomes. The policy outlines that services should be of quality, outcomes driven and will be obliged to prove their effectiveness and value for money.

The policy framework will focus on the key developmental periods for children and young people:

- Prenatal, infancy, early childhood (0-6 years)
- Middle childhood (6-12 years)
- Adolescence and early adulthood (12-plus years)

All three strategies will be **coordinated** through this single policy framework. The establishment of an infrastructure for **monitoring and evaluating services** is to be provided through the new Child and Family Agency.

Children's Services in Poland

According to a 2013 European Social Observatory paper on intergenerational justice, the state spent 8.6 times more on each older person than on each non-elder in the late 2000s. The impact of demographic change on service demand and the lack of public investment represent a challenge for the provision of children's services. Although progress has taken place recently, relevant themes for children's services relate to the lack of clarity as to which governmental level is responsible for **financing and providing** children's services and which mechanisms should be deployed to secure **effective cooperation** across professionals and sectors.

Children's Services in Poland

Key facts

In regards to early childcare, there are three forms of services for children aged 20 weeks to 3 years old: public or non-public crèche, children's clubs (from 1-3 years old), or private carers. As for 3-6 year old children, there are public and non-public nursery schools (kindergartens), pre-school branches in primary schools and other forms of pre-school education such as pre-school education groups.

Families identified as having problems with the care and upbringing of their child may be eligible for a family assistant, who acts as the point of contact and support for families and their children. The Blue Card is a mechanism guiding the actions of basic and specialist social services when a child or a young person has been identified as being at risk. It has various layers of risk matching a set of actions for social services, local health and education professionals and the police.

Local health programmes for children with disabilities (complementing programmes in the public health system) have been developed by the municipalities to enable the use of multi-professional and comprehensive rehabilitation programmes and parental support. Municipalities provide free transport or reimburse travel costs to the nearest nursery, primary or junior secondary school. The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons funds the participation of children with disabilities in rehabilitation programmes.

Relevant themes

The various forms of early childcare are all **financed by parents themselves**, which may pose difficulties in **access for low-income families**. Some progress has been made in subsidising early childcare centres; for instance, complete or partial exemption from payment may be possible in a public nursery and in case of a daily carer when the family is in a difficult financial situation. Children's clubs are co-financed by the European Social Fund (and parents).

The 2011 'Act on family support and foster care' focuses on preventive and intensive work with families to prevent the placement of children in care. The Act also emphasised that care should take the form of professional foster families and family homes. Since the introduction of the Act, there has been an increase in the number of family assistants. From 2015 onwards, **municipalities** will become **responsible** for hiring the assistants directly, which will further clarify the municipal role in **coordinating** the work on **prevention** with children and families.

Children's Services in Catalonia (Spain)

The first Plan for Childhood and Adolescence was implemented between 2006 and 2009. Due to this plan, the provision of child benefits and services improved, but it was limited and disparate across the regions. Relevant themes for children's services relate to the **decentralisation** of children's services across the **17 autonomous communities** (regions) that have a **devolved responsibility for labour and social welfare policies**. With the crisis, severe cutbacks – resulting from fiscal consolidation policies – have affected access to education, prevention and support services for children. Nevertheless, the picture varies across the regions. The focus here is on children's services in Catalonia. The full report will include an analysis of three additional regions in the context of the national policy.

Children's Services in Catalonia (Spain)

Key facts

The overall budget of the Catalan Government has been reduced over the last five years. Although the Catalan Government, which is responsible for social policy, was allocated an average of 70% of the annual budget for social policies, child poverty (measured as household income) surpassed 25% during the crisis. As a result, there was a need for an **integrated approach** for the development of children and family policies, while reducing some universal benefits and reinforcing targeted allowances. Despite the difficulties in maintaining the level of services for early childhood, as expressed by some local authorities' representatives, data shows that, between 2010 and 2013, the level of enrolment in early childcare for children aged 0-3 increased by 1.5%, and by 17.5% for children aged 0-6 with developmental difficulties or disabilities.

Relevant themes

The Catalan Government carried out a series of reforms to establish structures for **planning, coordinating, delivering and monitoring** comprehensive and integrated policies for children and adolescents through **The Pact for Children**, approved in 2013. This is an agreement signed by all social, economic, civil, institutional and political stakeholders to promote comprehensive policies for children and young people. It consists of a Monitoring Committee with representatives appointed by the National Children's Board and representatives of the signatory organisations, who are responsible for assessing the implementation of both the Pact for Children and the Integrated Plan for Children and Adolescents.

The National Children Board of Catalonia, together with the Territorial and Local Children Boards, are collective bodies for planning, coordinating, delivering, monitoring and evaluating policies and services for children and adolescents. The Boards consist of all governmental departments, the federations of municipalities, county councils with policies for children and the Observatory of Children Rights. They are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Integrated Plan for Children and Adolescents, focusing on strategic and operational issues.

With thanks to Jordi Muner i Armengol,
Regional Ministry of Social Welfare and Family,
Catalan Government

Children's Services in Sweden

Sweden has worked in a sustained and robust way with most of the issues addressed in the questionnaire. This applies, for instance, to early childcare and the development of community-based services. Municipalities are responsible for the provision of early childhood education and care, the implementation of the concept of freedom of choice, and the development of independent schools and parental support programmes to prevent children from being taken into care. Relevant themes for children's services relate to **evidence-based practice** about **equality** in the provision of public **education, health** and **social care services** in a decentralised system.

Children's Services in Sweden

Key facts

Municipalities provide pre-school services for children from the age of one, when parents are working, studying or unemployed. Children whose parents are unemployed are offered a place for a minimum of 15 hours a week. Children receive at least 525 hours of pre-school free of charge from the age of three. Though pre-school is optional, in 2012 almost 85% of children aged 1-5 year were enrolled.

According to the 2001 Social Services Act, municipalities assess the needs of children who may be at risk. In their assessment, they work with families, health and education professionals, who share the statutory duty of reporting to social services when a risk has been identified. The National Board for Health and Welfare provides a system of risks identification and documentation (BBIC) used by social services in almost all municipalities.

Relevant themes

There is a challenge to establish **evidence-based practice** in regards to the delivery of **education, health and social care** based on best available knowledge and assessment of the child or the family's needs and **circumstances**. For instance, the growing number of unaccompanied children implies that they should be recognised as individuals and not as another group that is expected to have relatively similar needs. Whilst children's rights have become an important legal and policy issue, individual children's influence and involvement in health and social care is not always ensured.

Interaction and **coordination** within and between **schools, social services, and health care** requires knowledge of the often complex needs among children, youth and families, and clarity on the responsibility of each authority and professional. This is, for instance, a main issue for children and young people who have or are at risk of mental illness, children and young people with disabilities or experiences of violence and abuse.

Children's Services in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has a long tradition in child and youth social services with a high standard of professional practice. However, during the last 20 years assessments have highlighted the dis-functioning of the care system for children and young people at risk, with demand for care rising by approximately 10% each year. Relevant themes for children's services relate to the **childcare reform** (from January 2015), according to which Dutch municipalities are responsible for most services, including mental health, for children, young people and families in need of support.

Children's Services in the Netherlands

Key facts

The responsibilities for children's services are shared across a number of departments: social affairs, internal affairs, justice and education. Early childcare services have traditionally been fragmented with services for working parents, play groups for children and education services for children at risk of educational disadvantage. Between 2005, when the Child Care Act was issued, and 2010, the number of children in early childcare services more than doubled. However, with the budgetary cuts brought by the economic crisis, the uptake of these services has decreased considerably.

In the field of child social welfare, the main reasons triggering the childcare reform include:

- Growing number of children/young people in care (7.5% per year), mental health care (12.5% per year) and special education (17.5% per year)
- A fragmented system with too many professionals dealing with one child or one family
- An unbalanced system, too focused on risk rather than prevention
- An increased use of care and medicalisation.

Relevant themes

The transformation of the child and youth care system gives Dutch **municipalities** the **coordination** of most services in the social domain. The change is not only related to the process of decentralising responsibilities, but also to a process of care transformation. There will be a bigger focus on the role of the family and social networks in the care process, on prevention and better coordination and service integration. Under the principle "one family, one plan, one coordinator", these changes aim to create more coherent, effective, transparent and cost-effective services for children, young people and families.

Within the new youth care system it is the local government's duty to help a child, within the range of their possibilities, grow up safe and healthy. The municipality decides which services are freely accessible and which ones are not. The municipal Youth and Family Centres will act as front offices for local youth care services, as well as multidisciplinary neighbourhood teams. The intended changes should lead to better outcomes and better services for children and their families. Whilst the system is moving towards a more family-based approach, this will mean that families will also receive different services across the country.

Children's Services in Scotland (United Kingdom)

As a devolved country, the Scottish Government only has some of the powers that can affect children's welfare. For example, the responsibility for welfare and benefits assessment and payments remains managed by the UK Government. However, policies related to education, health and social care for children and families are a devolved matter. Relevant themes for children's services refer to **devolved policies**, which may diverge in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, local authorities across all UK countries have traditionally had the principal public sector role in the provision of early years' childcare. There are also specific protections for children with disabilities and children at risk, placing a duty on local authorities to undertake a review of needs and provide services as required.

Children's Services in Scotland (United Kingdom)

Key facts

The Scottish Children and Young People Act, issued in 2014, has increased the minimum national funded early childcare entitlement from 475 to 600 hours per annum for 3 and 4 year olds; additionally, this has also applied to 15% of 2-year-olds starting in August 2014. The latter group includes 'looked after' 2-year-olds.

The Early Years Collaborative initiative is a coalition of Scottish Community Planning Partners – the groupings of key public sector bodies, including education, social work, health services and the police, responsible for planning and ensuring that, within each local authority, every child has access to the best support available. It is the world's first national multi-agency quality improvement programme.

The Scottish Government convened a National Review of Services Group in 2010 to consider the landscape of services for disabled children and set out actions for improvement. As a result, the National Review of Services for Disabled Children and Young People, and accompanying Action Plan, was published in February 2011 and implemented over the following two years.

Relevant themes

The responsibility for child protection remains **devolved to the Scottish administration**. It is the responsibility of Local Authorities to ensure that child protection procedures are pursued by all relevant agencies and overseen by local Child Protection Committees. These committees bring together key local services to ensure that there are common procedures, guidance and training at local level and to oversee any reviews of particular cases that warrant a retrospective inquiry.

The support for vulnerable children takes place within the 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) framework. GIRFEC seeks to put into practice a series of key principles that ensure public services provide full and appropriate support for children and young people. These principles include planning according to the identified needs, finding the right **cooperation** structures and ensuring that all actions are driven by the child's **wellbeing**, with children having a designated professional acting as a single point of contact and a single child's plan.

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