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The child care transition – ignore quality at your peril

A report out yesterday from UNICEF¹ calls for much closer monitoring of the quality of early childhood services, as out-of-home care becomes the norm for pre-school children across economically developed countries.

Some 80% of children aged 3-6 are in some form of education and care in the OECD countries. For the under 3s, its approximately 25% of children, but this ranges from over 70% in Denmark to under 10% in Germany, Hungary, Austria and Italy. There is no comparable data available for the under-1s.

But according to Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General of Eurochild² *“What is so important about this report is that it puts children’s best interest at the heart of the child care debate. In the EU, we tend only to think of early childhood services in the context of the Barcelona childcare targets – basically providing enough places to ‘park’ children so their parents can work. This report re-addresses that balance and puts emphasis on quality not quantity.”*

The report is the eighth in a series of Innocenti Report Cards designed to monitor and encourage progress by OECD countries in advancing the rights of the child. It offers a comparative analysis of the early childhood care and education services in 25 OECD countries across 4 dimensions presented in a league table of 10 benchmarks: policy framework, access to services and their quality, and supporting economic and social context.

Eurochild’s member in Ireland, the Children’s Rights Alliance³, urged their government to take note. *“Having met only one of the study’s ten minimum standard benchmarks and having one of the lowest spends on pre-school education in developed countries, less than 0.2% of GDP compared to the EU average of 0.5%, the Irish Government must now act to ensure this trend is overturned,”* says Chief Executive, Jillian Van Turnhout.

The report raises crucial questions about how rising child care needs are being met. A key concern for Eurochild, is how early years services can contribute to breaking poverty cycles and improving outcomes for children. There is evidence that children from low-income families, or from a migrant background can benefit from starting day-care early, as they are more socialized and better equipped for school. But worrying the prevailing pattern among OECD countries is that child care actually accentuates existing social inequalities, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds receive lower quality early childhood education and care.

Governments have a responsibility to deliver high quality, universally available early childhood services, which concentrate resources, staff and skills on the most disadvantaged. Only this way, can the transition to out-of-home care achieve its full potential in helping to reduce poverty and inequality.

¹For a full copy of the report see : www.unicef-irc.org

²[Eurochild](http://www.eurochild.org)^{AISBL} is a network of organisations and individuals promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people in Europe. The network currently has 57 members in 27 European countries. Our work focuses particularly on the fight against child poverty in Europe. Members participate actively in thematic working groups, one of which focuses on early childhood services.

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Press release



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For more information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html

³www.childrensrights.ie

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