



**Research on Accessibility
and Quality
of Institutional Care
for Children
under the Age of Three
and the Level
of Popularity
of Preschool Care
in Małopolska Region**

Summary

**Małopolska Regional
Development Observatory**

**Department
of Regional Policy**

ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a research titled: Research on Accessibility and Quality of Institutional Care for Children Under the Age of Three and the Level of Popularity of Preschool Care in Małopolska Province, conducted by St Hedwig, Queen of Poland Foundation and ECDF Badania i Szkolenia Ewa Joachimczak.

Aim of the research

The aim of the research was to characterize the local and beyond local conditions in the field of deficiency in educational-care services provided by nurseries and preschool institutions, dedicated to the youngest representatives of the society.

Methodology

The research was conducted with the use of several different methods and research techniques: desk research, mixed-mode technique interviews (CAWI web interviews and CATI telephone interviews). Within the mixed-mode technique, the research was conducted with the participation of several groups of respondents: representatives of the communes from Małopolska Province, directors/managers of day care institutions for children under the age of three and preschool day care institutions and employees of designated institutions. Computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted with the participation of parents whose children are under the age of three or are in preschool age.

Diagnosis of the situation in the province, regarding day care for children under the age of three

In Małopolska in 2015, 6.3% of children under the age of three were in the institutional day care.

Regarding the indicators in the particular territorial units, there is an evident prevalence of big cities. In almost all communes, where some kind of day care is offered in nurseries or children's clubs, the percentage of children attending such institutions rose over the last couple of years.

In 2016, there were 195 nurseries and 45 children's clubs in the region. At the end of the reporting period, nurseries in Małopolska Province offered 7109 places, with 6430 children attending (the occupancy level was therefore 90.4%). Children's clubs offered 690 places, with 438 children attending, which gives a 63.55% level of occupancy.

In 2016, there were 47 people employed as a day carer in Małopolska Province. They were caring for 115 children under the care of a day carer.

There are only several communes throughout Małopolska Province, where not all places in the day care institutions for children under the age of three were occupied.

Cases of admission denial in nurseries or children's clubs occurred in less than half of the researched communes throughout the province. The main reason for the admission denials in nurseries was lack of available places, less common – a financial barrier related to the increase in nursery or children's club fees.

Representatives of more than half of the communes had difficulties to determine, whether the number of places in the day care institutions for children under the age of three is adequate to the residents' needs. 19.3% of all the respondents described the number of places in the day care institutions as insufficient, more commonly in those communes, where infrastructure for institutional day care for small children already exists. Over half of interviewed directors and managers of day care institutions shared the belief that the number of places is insufficient.

Amongst the parents who did not apply for a place in an institutional day care, the most common reason given was the personal belief, or a decision to take care of a child personally by the child's parents/guardians. This approach was slightly more popular amongst the parents of the youngest children. Almost one third of the interviewed persons indicated accessibility of a day care institution for children under the age of three, as the reason for not applying for a place in such institution.

Parents preferences as to their chosen form of day care of a child under the age of three differ. Most parents indicated nanny as their first choice, with nursery being only slightly less preferred. Children's clubs and day carers are less popular amongst the interviewed parents.

Most parents of children under the age of three believe that a new nursery or children's club should be created in their commune, even if this required increase in taxation (this belief is slightly more popular amongst the respondents living in big cities). Respondents lack knowledge concerning availability of day carers, therefore it is important to undertake activities increasing awareness of the existence of this form of care. Access to information on possibility of organizing day care for children under the age of three in the commune of residence was not rated very well – about 29% negatively rated availability of such information and 25.9% lacked such knowledge (which also indicates a poor level of accessibility of this information). Respondents lacked knowledge, whether they can file requests with their communes for additional places in day care for children under the age of three.

A little over half of the communes does not diagnose the demand for places in nurseries/children's clubs. The most common methods (in those communes, where such surveillance is performed) included the analysis of demographic projections and demographic changes, as well as analysis of requests for places filed by the parents and of waiting lists. The opinion as there is no demand for additional places in day care institutions was justified by the communes by the lack of requests from the residents.

Level of communal activity in increasing number of places and promoting institutional day care for children under the age of three is very low. Even in the communes aware of insufficient number of places in the day care institutions for children under the age of three, the activities aimed at development of the infrastructure or promotion are scarce.

Amongst the interviewed parents of children under the age of three, 8.2% indicated that their child has some form of long term health condition. The most common were allergies, less common – other types of dermatological conditions.

Most of the communes were unable to evaluate, whether they offered sufficient number of places for children with disabilities in nurseries and children's clubs. Main areas where day care institutions for children under the age of three are not adapted to the needs of children with disabilities are mainly infrastructural shortcomings (equipment, including medical rehabilitation equipment, architectural barriers) and lack of skills amongst the employees.

The data regarding employment situation of the parents of children under the age of three, show a quite high level of professional deactivation caused by necessity to take care of a child. This mostly concerns women. There is also a high level of inclination towards a decision to resign from work in order to take care of a child in case of no access to institutional day care.

Youngest children parents' perception of institutional day care can be analyzed on several levels. Most generally, it should be looked at from the point of view of the worldview and belief, whether the institutional form of care is beneficial for child or not. The interview research showed that in many cases the primordial concern was whether to send a child to a nursery at all, the question of accessibility being of a secondary nature

For many parents, applying for a place in a nursery is difficult and requiring a lot of effort. It often results in necessity to place a child in a private nursery (more expensive than a public nursery). Parents, who managed to obtain a place for their children in the institutions, generally rate positively different aspects of their functioning.

Diagnosis of the situation in the province, regarding day care for preschool children

Małopolska offers 2 175 of preschool institutions, out of which 1365 are located in the countryside and 810 in the cities. Together, all preschool day care institutions in Małopolska Province offered 121 341 places in 2016, most of them in kindergartens. When comparing situation in urban and rural areas, it is visible that the country offers large amount of institutions, but with a limited number of places (there are more institutions, but less places and less pupils in the country). Regarding the number of places in Małopolska institutions and number of attending children, there is a globally high level of occupancy, reaching 91.3% for children aged 3-6 years.

The biggest number of children per place was observed in kindergarten in Gródek na Dunajcem (15.9). In rural communes of Limanowa and Biały Dunajec this indicator is at the level of about 7 children per place. The lowest level for this indicator and therefore the best accessibility to places in this type of institutions was in the following communes: Zakopane, Tarnów, Bukowno, Bolesław (0.7 each). If we divide all the communes of the Małopolska Province into two categories, based on the level of this indicator, there are as many as 144 communes, where this level is greater than 1. During the time period of 2011-2015 this indicator was falling in the province, which shows the increase of accessibility to places in preschool day care institutions.

In the whole Małopolska Province, 84.1% of children aged 3-5 is under preschool care, a value is coming close to the rest of the country (84.2%). There is a significant difference in the level of this indicator between the cities (100.4%) and the countryside (70.9%) in the province.

In the opinion of the representatives of most of the communes, the number of places in preschool day care is adequate to the needs of the residents. On the other side, most of the researched communes experienced the situation, where not all the applications for a place in the kindergarten were accepted. This problem concerned mostly the children aged three and the main reason for the denial was the insufficient number of places. Respondents of the interviews generally did not regarded the restoration of school obligation for the children aged seven and the increase in denials of applications for preschool day care institutions in 2016 as correlated.

The occurrence of sending children to preschool day care institutions in a commune different than the place of living is not common. According to the representatives of the communes, altogether 9.7% of children attending preschool day care institutions were the residents of other communes.

It is much more common for the communes to monitor the demand for places in preschool day care institutions, than it is in the case of the day care for the children under the age of three. Analysis of applications filed by the parents/guardians and of waiting lists is significantly most common form.

However, the results of these analyses are rarely used for undertaking particular actions. Most usually, the results of the diagnosis of demand for places was used to create new preschool departments adjacent to maternal schools.

According to interviews conducted with the representatives of Małopolska Province, 43.1% of the researched communes provides transportation services for the children attending preschool day care institutions. Amongst the researched communes, 49.7 covers the costs of transportation of children to a kindergarten incurred by the parents/guardians, under the art. 14a (3) of the Polish Act of September 7th 1991 on the Education System (Journal of Laws 1991 No 95 item 425).

Activities planned by the communes in the scope of preschool education consisted mostly of purchase of didactical materials or organizing trainings for employees of preschool care system. 39.2% of communes plans to increase the number of places in preschool day care institutions. In half of the cases, this concerns the children aged three.

According to the responses from directors of the institutions, parents whose children attended their institutions most commonly requested extension of opening hours of the institutions, slightly less often – increase in the amount of foreign languages classes. Activity of preschool day care institutions in increasing their offer is not significant (half of them showed no plans in this scope).

Amongst the interviewed parents of children in preschool age, 8.4% respondents indicated that their child has some form of long term health condition. Most commonly indicated, were different types of allergies, asthma also being very common. In the entire province, 1 361 children were following an early development aid program, based on the opinion from psychological and pedagogical counseling centre. Children with such needs were located in 105 communes throughout the province.

Adaptation level of preschool day care institutions to the needs of children with disabilities is often regarded negatively, although there was a common belief amongst the directors of the institutions that in their commune, every child with disability will eventually find some institution adapted to their needs. Almost all respondents who declared that their institution is not adapted to the needs of disabled children, indicated architectural barriers, large percentage indicated lack of medical rehabilitation equipment, little less lack of other necessary equipment. This shows quite common shortcomings of the infrastructure.

Combining the data on level of attendance of children to the institutions of preschool day care and the general positive opinion on the functioning of this type of institutions, it can be established that the image of this type of institutional day care is positive amongst parents.

Delimitation of Małopolska Province in terms of accessibility to day care services, their offer and socio-economic conditioning

The study examined in detail the issue of the accessibility of childcare services for children up to 3 years of age, as well as preschool education services in every individual municipality of the Małopolska Province. For this purpose, point models were elaborated that allowed the creation of rankings of the municipalities and a relative assessment of the situation of a municipality in comparison to other municipalities. The assessment included a number of key variables: the number of available places of care / education, the number of missing places of care / education, the number of organizations providing care for a child under 3 years / institutions of preschool education, the balance of commuting in a municipality, the demographic forecast of a number of nursery /preschool children and municipalities' own assessment regarding the accessibility of care services / services of preschool education (in total and for children with disabilities).

In relation to the care for children up to 3 years of age the situation of only one municipality can be assessed as very good, and 4 – as good. Negative evaluations dominate (87 municipalities – moderately bad, 60 municipalities – bad, 15 municipalities – very bad).

With regard to preschool education 13 municipalities have a very good situation, another 45 – good and 68 – moderately good. Very bad situation in the field of pre-school education was diagnosed in 8 municipalities, bad - in 5, whereas in 42 municipalities it is moderately bad.

Detailed data on the assessment of individual municipalities and the number of missing (currently and in the perspective of the years 2020 and 2025) places in institutions caring for children up to 3 years of age / pre-school establishments are located in the section 3.4 of the report. Demand both in childcare services for children up to 3 years of age and the services of preschool education declared by the surveyed parents of nursery and preschool children currently is not satisfied, which makes the activities undertaken within the framework of ROP 2014-2020 to be considered adequate.

Recommendations

The conducted study allowed to diagnose a number of problems to which recommendations - proposals to solve these problems - were assigned. The most important recommendations are:

- Continuation of implementation of ROP 2014-2020 under Measure 8.5 *Support for combining professional and private life* (under which efforts aim at increasing the availability of childcare services for children up to 3 years of age) and Measure 10.1 *Development of general education* (under which activities aim at increasing the availability of pre-school education),
- Making use of rankings of municipalities regarding the care of children under the age of 3 and preschool education, developed within the research, to create criteria for selection of projects under the ROP 2014-2020 rewarding the projects that involve action to increase the accessibility of childcare services for children up to 3 years of age / services of preschool education in municipalities with the most difficult situation in this respect.
- Engagement of the Regional Social Policy Centre (ROPS) in Kraków in the advisory services for municipalities of Małopolska Province in the area of diagnosing and solving the problems of care for children up to years of age and the care and education of preschool children with disabilities.
- Taking actions to increase the availability of childcare services for 3-year-old children with disabilities, mainly through the elimination of architectural barriers in institutions for children up to 3 years of age, providing rehabilitation equipment and the enhancement of qualifications of employees in these institutions.
- Introduction of incentives (financial, organizational) to organize the institutional forms of care for children with disabilities in order to increase the accessibility of this type of care for this group of children (eg. within the Measure 8.5 of the ROP 2014-2020).
- Conducting promotional and informational activities aimed at strengthening the positive image of institutional nurseries care in the implementation of projects under Measure 8.5 of the ROP 2014-2020 and at the municipal level: mainly by increasing the transparency of information provided by the child care institutions for children up to 3 years of age and the introduction of a transparent communication system between a municipality and its residents regarding the demand for places providing child care for the children up to 3 years of age.
- Taking actions to improve access to services of preschool education for children with disabilities, mainly through elimination of architectural barriers in the institutions of pre-school education and deficiencies in facilities equipment, as well as taking actions to strengthen the

qualifications of personnel regarding working with children with disabilities and chronic diseases such as allergies, asthma, and others.

- Extension of the offer of additional activities and working hours of pre-school establishments, within the framework of Measure 10.1 of the ROP 2014-2020.



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