



Investing in Children

**Innovative Solutions
to Improve Children's Well-Being**

editors

Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder



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Table of Contents

Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder, <i>Investing in children innovative solutions to improve children's well-being. Introduction</i>	7
Section one	
Social investments, campaigning and advocacy for children: European and Polish perspective	13
Julius op de Beke, <i>The case for investing in young children</i>	15
Alfonso Lara Montero, <i>Investing in children's services, improving outcomes. A study of the organisation and implementation of children's services in response to European recommendations</i>	21
Agata D'Addato, Katerina Nanou, <i>Money, influence and mind-sets: How can advocacy and research help the EU to be a positive force for change in children's lives?</i>	41
Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas, <i>"Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage" EU Recommendation – some remarks on the situation of Polish adolescents</i>	51
Section two	
Investing in children: instruments and results	79
Marek Rymsza, <i>Investment in children as a public good : the example of the Family 500+ Programme</i>	81
Almudena Moreno Mínguez, <i>Effects of early childhood education on school achievement and inequality in Spain: the value of early childhood education</i>	95
Piotr Michoń, <i>Mothers' employment and its consequences for investment in children</i>	113
Johanna M. Thomas, Shaun A. Thomas, <i>Understanding early childhood truancy: the influence of life course studies on evidence-based interventions</i>	129
About the Authors	147

Investing in children innovative solutions to improve children's well-being

Introduction

Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, Jolanta Grotowska-Leder

Contemporary social sciences on the one hand perceive children as a social group posing a challenge for the adulthood and childhood as a stage in life cycle when one is at risk of multiple problems on the other (Ornacka 2013: 11). The children-focused perspective found its reflection not only in academic theory, research and publications, but also in social policy documents and tools. Children and childhood were placed at the centre of welfare state interests in modern societies threatened by “new social risks” whereas the “investing in children” discourse became dominant in the EU’s social investments paradigm (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2015). As Eurochild (2015: 3) states, “a child-centred investment strategy is a precondition to achieving sustainable and equitable economic and social development”, and therefore it needs to be prioritised in the European Union’s policies. In February 2013, the European Commission published a Recommendation on *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*, which serves as a key element of the EC’s Social Investment Package. The document was followed by a study on national policies, synthesised by Hugh Fraser and Eric Marlier in a report subtitled *Assessment of what Member States would need to do to implement the European Commission Recommendation* (2014), and by 28 national country reports prepared by members of the Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion (2014). The idea behind the Recommendation and the new children and youth policy approach is that focusing on children enables tackling disadvantage early, before it compounds (European Commission 2014: 7). Investing in children should cover actions undertaken by public, non-governmental and private entities to improve children’s well-being to provide them with a chance to become self-efficient and active participants of social, economic and political life.

The Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work of the Institute of Sociology of the University of Łódź has been involved in children and childhood studies,

particularly in the context of children's poverty, social exclusion and social policies aimed at improving children's and families' situation, for a long time. Therefore, for almost a decade, the Department has organised a series of conferences on children and youth in research, policy and professional helpers' practice, to stimulate debate and exchange knowledge on children's needs and solutions to meet them. The first two conferences were titled *Neglected Childhood* and took place in 2009 and 2011. The publication of *Investing in Children* Recommendation and relevant studies became an inspiration to change the conference title, as well as the nature and the scope of the next two conference editions which took place in 2014 and 2016, and were entitled *Investing in Children*. International and interdisciplinary speakers and audience, representatives of local, regional, national and international public and non-governmental organisations as well as research institutions took part in these events.

This book contains a selection of speeches and papers delivered during the *Investing in Children. Social Innovations for Children and Youth: Research and Practice* conference which was held at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Łódź on October 20–21, 2016, and was organised by the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work. The conference was the fourth of the *Neglected Childhood – Investing in Children* conference series. The aim of the conference was to continue the discussions on theoretical frameworks, research results, policy solutions and methods of professional work with children and youth in eight key dimensions: (1) children's rights; (2) child poverty and social exclusion; (3) early years care and education; (4) family and parental support; (5) child and youth participation; (6) children in alternative care; (7) migrant and refugee children; (8) children's health. The aim of this conference was to provide a platform of knowledge and experience exchange among researchers, policy makers and practitioners representing disciplines and working fields such as sociology, economy, psychology, pedagogy, social policy, social work, medicine, and law, working towards developing innovative solutions to improve the well-being of children and youth. Researchers, policy makers and professional helpers from 10 different countries took part in the conference. They represented numerous academic institutions (University of Sussex, University of Georgia in Athens, USA, Manchester Metropolitan University, National University of Ireland, Polish Academy of Sciences, University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, University of Łódź among them), non-governmental organisations (such as EUROCHILD, European Social Network, UNESCO, the Empowering Children Foundation), public policy entities (for example the European Commission, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland, Regional Office of the Lodzkie Region in Brussels). The content of the book reflects the international and interdisciplinary nature of the conference.

The book is divided into two sections, each of them containing four texts. The first section is titled *Social investments, campaigning and advocacy for children: European and Polish perspective* and is dedicated to investing in children as a social

inclusion and poverty reduction policy strategy. The second section is entitled *Investing in children: instruments and results* and presents findings of the research on mechanisms and consequences of specific solutions aimed at improving children's well-being.

Section one begins with an inspiring speech: *The case for investing in children*, which was delivered by Julius op de Beke at the opening plenary session of the *Investing in Children. Social Innovations for Children and Youth: Research and Practice* conference. As a representative of the European Commission, DG Employment, Affairs and Social Inclusion, J. op de Beke advocates for investing more public funds into upbringing of very young children, referring to comparative data on European Union Member States and pointing to the values, targets and elements of European policy developments aimed at improving children's opportunities. The next paper titled *Investing in children's services, improving outcomes* by Alfonso Lara Montero, the Policy Director of the European Social Network, presents the key guidelines of the European Commission's Recommendation "Investing in Children" and provides a thorough analysis of organisation and implementation of the Recommendation on the policy development level in Poland. Referring to results of a study conducted in 14 European countries, A. Montero concentrates on the case of Poland and indicates five fields which require attention in terms of implementation of "Investing in Children" Recommendation, emphasising the need of coordinated governance of the child related policies, the lack of stable and adequate financial support for formal early childcare, shortages in housing policies for families with children, the need to develop the foster care system, and necessity to involve parents and children as key stakeholders in drawing, implementing and evaluating family policies. The third paper in this section: *Money, influence and mind-sets: How can advocacy and research help the EU to be a positive force for change in children's lives?* provides an insight on the role of advocacy and research in enhancing implementation of policy solutions which improve children's well-being. The authors: Agata D'Addato, Senior Policy Coordinator, and Katerina Nanou, Policy and Advocacy Officer, represent Eurochild, a network of 180 organisations which promote and protect children's rights. In their publication, they document research and advocacy ventures promoting children's rights and mainstreaming child-oriented policies in Europe. The last paper in this section: *"Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage" EU Recommendation – some remarks on the situation of Polish Adolescents* by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas of the University of Łódź, contains an analysis of selected dimensions of the well-being of the Polish youth in the light of "Investing in Children" Recommendation. The author claims that significant drop in objective indicators of children and youth poverty and social exclusion in Poland is accompanied by an ideological shift which might put children's rights and participation at risk.

The opening paper of the second section of the book continues to be concentrated on the Polish social policy developments. It documents and analyses a new (introduced in spring 2016) instrument of social and family policy. In his paper titled

Investment in children as a public good: the example of the Family 500+ Programme, Marek Rymysza of the University of Warsaw presents the new scheme as a signal of a shift from neo-liberal into social investment social policy in Poland which leads to subjectification and empowerment of families, although the scheme is not free of limitations and negative side-effects.

Leaving the national Polish context and moving into a more international perspective, the book offers a paper by Almudena Moreno Mínguez of the University of Valladolid, Spain. In the publication titled *Effects of Early Childhood Education on School Achievement and Inequality in Spain: the Value of Early Childhood Education* the author presents results of a comparative study on shifts in family and child education policies in selected European countries with regard to the relation between access to pre-school education and educational attainment and different uses of pre-school education depending on the socioeconomic situation of the family. Focusing on her country of origin, the author concludes that access to pre-school education for children aged from 0 to 3 has a positive impact on educational attainment in Spain and helps to reduce the educational inequalities that stem from socio-economically disadvantaged family contexts. Therefore, pre-school education in Spain proves to be beneficial for economically and socially disadvantaged children.

In the following paper, Piotr Michoń of Poznan University of Economics and Business confronts the investing in children concept with the idea of “intensive motherhood”, focusing on the role and significance of informal care performed by mothers in the first months/years of children’s life for cognitive and non-cognitive development of their offspring. Attempting to answer the question “Does mothers’ employment have negative consequences for children’s development?” the author provides a thorough literature review leading to conclusion that paid work women perform in the labour market does not influence the level of parental investments as it is the quality, not the time of care that counts as far as child’s development is concerned. In this way, the study findings remain consistent with “Investing in Children” Recommendation, which supports both parents’ participation in the labour market and investing in early childhood education and care (Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013, *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* 2013).

The last paper, written by Johanna M. Thomas and Shaun A. Thomas of the University of Arkansas, titled *Understanding Early Childhood Truancy: The Influence of Life Course Studies on Evidence-Based Interventions* documents a truancy intervention programme built on the basis of life course research with participation of inmates either on death row or serving life sentence, which was in operation in Louisiana for 15 years. The case study provides an example of an effective scheme designed for youth who are prone to chronic truancy and are at risk of social exclusion.

We hope that Readers of this book will enjoy the collection of papers, which in our view contain inspiring work on multiple innovative solutions focused

on improving well-being of children and youth. On this occasion, we would like to thank first and foremost all the Authors who have contributed to publication of the book, as well as all *Investing in Children* conference participants. We already invite you to take part in the next edition of the conference that will take place in Łódź in spring 2019.

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Section one

**Social investments, campaigning
and advocacy for children:
European and Polish perspective**

The case for investing in young children¹

Julius op de Beke

Robert Putnam's latest book *Our Kids*, was a real eye-opener for me. Putnam is the father of *social capital*. In his inspiring book he talks about a growing opportunity gap for the advancement of children in the U.S. society. The book contains a number of disturbing "**scissor graphs**"² comparing children of parents with not more than a high school degree to children of parents who graduated from university. The graph that disturbed me most was the one where Putman analysed the situation of **children living in single parent households**: in 2010, 65% of children whose parents graduated from high schools were raised by a single parent compared to only 8% raised by parents holding university education, in 1960 this proportion was 19% versus 5%. This decline in upward social mobility is not just a result of more fragile families. Putman also refers to crumbling communities and disappearing jobs combined with an alarming lack of public investment in education. Fortunately, in Europe things are not yet as extreme as in the U.S., however similar trends have been observed to emerge in many countries. Putnam's book serves as a **warning signal** for Europe, as it shows what happens if we ignore the rise in inequality in our societies.

The **Polish education system** has made a tremendous progress over the last 10 years according to the most recent OECD PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) assessment. The score of 15 year old Polish children for mathematics is now on par with the 3 best performers in the EU. Poland gained 2.6 points

- 1 The original text of a plenary speech delivered at the opening plenary session of the "Investing in Children. Social Innovations for Children and Youth: Research and Practice" on October 20, 2016, at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Łódź.
- 2 See: <http://avidcollegeready.org/college-career-readiness/2015/9/9/welcome-back-to-our-kids.html> (last accessed 04.05.2018).

a year between 2003 and 2012 while the rest of the world, on average, remained unchanged. Poland did so by replacing the socialist system of state sorting students into vocational tracks by a more meritocratic system that allows students to make their own choices. Poland also did it relatively cheaply as the total spending on education did not rise. This is a truly remarkable achievement.

The arguments for investing more public funds into the upbringing of very young children in particular are overwhelming. They are not just about fairness but also about being economically efficient. Intervening during the early years, particularly when children come from a disadvantaged background, can prevent a lot of social misery later on in a child's life. Then problems can usually only be set right at a very high cost. This is because the brain continues developing till a child is around 5 years old. What you learn at the start of your life you will remember for the rest of your life. In particular **early childhood education and care (ECEC)** turns out to be very effective.

Moreover, it is also crucial for gender equality. It is a **win-win strategy**. Affordable quality child care makes it possible for both parents to take on a job, and we know that paid work is the best cure against child poverty. Research shows that childcare pays to a large extent for itself because the additional working mothers will pay more in taxes and social contributions.

We should also not forget that every child that does not manage to become a **productive taxpaying citizen** will in the end have to be supported by our welfare state and thus weaken it. This is something our ageing societies in Europe cannot afford. Poland will age much faster than most other EU MS due to your late **baby boom** in the 1970 ties. Future Polish pensions will largely depend on the productivity of your children. It is not surprising that the European countries with the **best work life balance** are the ones that invest most in their young children. This is why the Scandinavian countries, the Benelux and France have the highest fertility rates. Parents should of course be free to choose their work life balance but when affordable child care is missing, there is obviously no freedom of choice. If women are **forced to choose between a child or a career**, ultimately many educated women will remain childless or have only one child. This is what we observe in countries like South Korea and Japan.

The early years (0–3) are crucial in a child's development. There is a broad consensus that the experiences of very young children shape the foundations for their later life. Attendance of **high-quality ECEC** positively impacts all aspects of a child's development. It enhances basic **cognitive skills** (literacy and numeracy) that facilitate further acquisition of specific skills related to language, general knowledge and mathematics.

As more and more children have no siblings or are raised in single parent families, access to ECEC gives them an opportunity to play with other children at their age and develop their social skills. There is much evidence showing a substantial **positive relationship between the quality of ECEC and children's non-cognitive development**, such as pro-social behaviour, self-control and learning dispositions.

These long-lasting effects of ECEC on socio-emotional development are even more important than the cognitive effect. In this context, **quality means** that there should be time for individual interaction with the child because it is the personal interaction that drives a child's development.

PISA shows that a two year part time participation (i.e. 4 mornings per week) in quality ECEC corresponds to one year of extra schooling at the age of 14. Quality ECEC is arguably the cheapest policy measure to **reduce early school leaving** as it can effectively compensate for the handicap of growing up in a disadvantaged family. PISA also shows that children of well-off parents are on average one year ahead in mathematics compared to children of poor parents. This trend is not just happening in Putnam's America.

Now back to child care. Already in 2002, the EU agreed on common so-called **Barcelona targets for childcare capacity**. The target for children under 3 is that there should be a place in a formal child care facility for at least 33% of all children. The target for all children between 3 and the mandatory school age is more ambitious and was set at 90%. The biggest deficiencies are still found for the youngest age group, only 10 member states comply with the 33% and Poland is not one of them.

In 2015, 26.9% of all **children** in the EU member states were considered to be **at risk of poverty and social inclusion**. Poverty is defined as either growing up in a household that is living on an income below 60% of the median income or in a household that is materially deprived of at least 3 out of 9 things – ranging from not having more than one pair of shoes, not having a warm meal with meat or fish every second day, not having a week of holiday a year to being behind in paying rent and utility bills, or growing up in a household where hardly anybody works.

Child poverty is highest in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, Italy, Spain and Ireland. In Poland it is now just below the EU average at 26.6%. It has come down considerably over the last 10 years. In all countries particularly children growing up in single parent households, in large families (+3 children) and with a migrant or Roma background are at risk.

To address this problem the European Commission adopted in February 2013, as part of a larger Social Investment Package, a long awaited **recommendation on "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage"**. Four months later this recommendation was unanimously approved by the Council which means that every member state has voluntarily taken on a moral obligation to implement its contents.

The recommendation is **rights-based**, starting from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by all member states. It pleads for an **integrated** approach. Time and time again some of the worst cases of child abuse happen because there is not enough coordination between the many specialised child protection services responsible for a child at risk in a known troubled family.

The recommendation is built around a **three pillar structure**. Member states are urged to step up their investment in young children by providing the following:

- Parents have **access to resources** – ideally in the form of paid work or family income support
- Parents have **access to quality services** such as early childhood education and care and health and parent counselling;
- Children should **participate** in legal decisions which concern them (divorce) and in afterschool activities such as culture and sports

The **implementation** of the LiC recommendation is monitored by the EU. During the European Semester, which is the annual policy cycle when the European Commission discusses the socio-economic reform efforts with the MS. The semester culminates in the adoption of a number of **Country Specific Recommendations** (CSR) by the Council of Europe. In 2016, about 20 MS received recommendations that touched on inclusive education, child care, income and support measures for families and their children.

The EU also helps with money. For the 2014–2020 programming period, **26% of the European Social Fund**, more than €20 billion, has been ring-fenced for projects in the area of social exclusion which can be used to invest in children. For Poland this means that around €4 billion, 16 billion zloty, is available for social policy (ESF: EUR 2.8 billion, FEAD: EUR 474 million, ERDF: EUR 665 million.)

However to ensure that this aim is fulfilled, we need **enough good project applications**. Here NGO's can play an important role by getting in touch with local authorities and by helping them to draft **good project proposals** that can be approved by the Managing Authority.

Examples of good projects can be found on the **EPIC website** of the Commission. EPIC stands for European Platform for Investing in Children³.

Poland has currently the fastest growing economy in the EU. You are the only EU country that avoided the last great recession. Unemployment is now relatively low at 7% but still a driver of extreme poverty. Poland is among the few EU countries that have **accomplished its EU 2020 poverty target** by reducing the number of people in poverty by more than 2.2 million. This is great news. Thanks to the booming economy there are now many bottle necks on the Polish labour market. Yet many young Poles are still working hard outside of Poland. What better way is there to persuade them to come back, or not to leave in the first place, by showing them that **Poland is a good place to start a family**, by increasing quality childcare, parental leave and family income support? In this respect the Commission very much welcomes the plans of the Polish government, like Family 500+ and Maluch, to increase spending on child and family benefits, which at only 0.8% of GDP is among the lowest in the EU.

³ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1246&langId=en> (last accessed 04.05.2018).

When Putnam called his book **Our Kids** he obviously did so because his argument is that one should not just care about one's **own biological** children but about **all other people's children** as well. This is ultimately in everybody's interest and the rationale for stepping up our investment in young children.

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Investing in children's services, improving outcomes. A study of the organisation and implementation of children's services in response to European recommendations

Alfonso Lara Montero

Introduction

The aim of this research study, which took place between March 2013 and March 2016, was to analyse how the key principles on access to quality services of the European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in children, breaking the cycle of disadvantage' were implemented in 14 European countries, including Poland. This exercise helped to identify strengths and gaps and suggest proposals for improvement in line with the European Recommendation. The result of this three year project was the publication of the study 'Investing in children's services, improving outcomes' in May 2016 with a cross-country analysis, 14 country profiles and recommendations regarding how children's services should be developed to be aligned with the European Commission's Recommendation. The study aimed to map and assess the current state of play in regards to the implementation of services by the agencies responsible for children's wellbeing and to document how these findings could be used in policy-making and strategic planning processes in children's services.

General review

According to the Europe 2020 Strategy, there is a need to develop integrated strategies to improve children's opportunities alongside the three pillars of the European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in children': access to resources, access to quality services and child participation (European Commission 2013; European Social Network 2013).

With the aim to contribute to the implementation of the European Recommendation, we mapped the organisation and implementation of children's services in 14 countries, including Poland. The findings highlighted in this paper are part of a comparative study that has been conducted in 14 European countries. The exclusion among children and adolescents are complex matters that should not be addressed uni-dimensionally from an economic perspective, but rather through a comprehensive approach including financial support, access to work and reconciliation of work and family life; the participation of children in policies affecting them and quality of children's services (early childcare, healthcare, education, housing and alternative care) (European Union 2014; Janta 2014).

In the last few years, extensive literature has been produced on the effects of the economic crisis, family changes and family policy on child poverty and the well-being of children in Europe (Bradshaw, Richardson 2009; Bradshaw 2014). This growing scientific and government interest has led to several studies and reports by international organisations, which measure the objective and subjective dimensions of children's wellbeing (UNICEF 2013; OECD 2009; European Commission 2013; Tarki 2010). For instance, there are well-known papers on the positive impact which early childhood education has on the reduction of education inequality and improvement of children's skills and competences in the various stages of the life cycle (Heckman 2004; 2006; 2011; Esping Andersen et al. 2011).

However, Polish expenditure on family/child-related benefits is low compared to other EU countries. In 2012, it amounted to 0.8% of GDP compared to the EU average of 2.4% (European Commission 2016a). In January 2016, various tools were introduced to improve families' income. The 'Act on state aid for raising children' (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2016) provides a monthly childcare benefit of approx. EUR 115 per child under 18 years of age. A new benefit for families called 'Rodzina 500 plus' (Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej 2016), introduced on 1 April 2016, consists of a monthly allowance of 500 Polish zloty (approximately EUR 116), which is provided for the second and any subsequent child in the family. The benefit is also available for the first child, if the family income per person is below EUR 184 or EUR 276 and the child has a disability.

These benefits are intended to reduce child poverty, especially in families with more than one child. The threshold and level of family benefits also increased on 1 January 2016. However, one of the main criticism of 'Rodzina 500 plus' is the potential negative impact that the benefit may have on maternal employment. Moreover, it feels as if this measure is not part of a comprehensive package of measures for children and families, particularly as other developments in this field seem to go in the wrong direction. For example, the government decided to abolish the free preschool year and to raise the age of compulsory schooling to 7 (Doyen, Lara Montero 2016). This is concerning in a country where, according to Eurostat and European Commission's data, just four per cent of children under three attended formal childcare in 2013 (European Commission 2016b), though the Polish

government raised this percentage to an 8% estimate in its 2016 National Reform Programme¹ (Council of Ministers 2016).

Various policy developments have taken place over the past years to improve child participation in early childcare. From 2011, the offer of childcare arrangements diversified and the number of childcare facilities increased from 571 in 2011 to 2,910 in 2015. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy launched the 'Toddler' programme to incentivise local authorities to establish childcare facilities. In July 2013, some rules were modified, mainly the reduction of the municipality's own contribution from 50% to 20% of the establishment and operational costs. Funds earmarked for the development of the programme grew significantly in 2011–2015: from 15.2 million PLN to 151 million PLN (from around €3.4 million to €34 million) (European Commission 2016a). In 2016, the government confirmed that it would continue implementing the 'Toddler' programme (Council of Ministers, Republic of Poland 'National Reform Programme' 2016).

The lack of adequate income support in Poland means that a large proportion of children are at risk of poverty. According to the European Commission, the coordination of family benefits with social assistance benefits – in terms of governance, benefit indexation and eligibility rules – is weak. The risk of poverty or social exclusion among children stood at nearly 28% in 2014, whereas the risk of poverty of children living in jobless households was as high as 78.5%, which is well above the European average (European Commission 2016b). Families rather than children seem to focus the attention of policy makers, which influences both strategies and actual measures taken and makes them strongly family-oriented (European Commission 2014).

The Ombudsman for Children's Rights has the responsibility to observe the respect for children's rights but children's rights are not mainstreamed and do not have any visible impact on the overall design of child related policies. The 2014 National Reform Programme for Poland set a number of child-related tasks and measures, focusing on the reconciliation of work and family life (through the development of childcare and parental leave) and supporting children at risk (strengthening foster (care) families for children who cannot remain with their biological families, implementing scholarship and food programmes).

The 2016 National Reform Programme, which was produced in June 2016 under a new government, responded to Commission's concerns on plans to abolishing the free pre-school year, raising compulsory schooling age and the need to reinforce early childcare. In its 2016 National Reform Programme, the Polish government stated that policy in pre-school education was not subject to changes, and changes to compulsory education would have no impact on participation in pre-school

1 The National Reform Programme is the document put forward by national governments in response to the European Commission's assessment of the situation in each EU country in the framework of the European Semester (the annual cycle of policy coordination between the European Commission and national governments).

education. The Polish government also committed to the continuation of the ‘Toddler’ programme and the obligation for children aged 6 to undergo a year-long pre-school preparation in the context of the reinstatement of compulsory education to the age of 7. The Polish government also confirmed that children aged four and five had the right to pre-school education and that since 1 September 2017 this right would be extended to children aged three and early childcare places were to be provided by the municipalities (Council of Ministers 2016). However, the 2016 National Reform Programme does not refer to any developments in the field of community-based services for children. It has also been argued that further attention should be paid to children’s needs rather than just families, and that children’s rights and their well-being should be explicitly taken into account in policy design and development (European Commission 2014).

Numerous studies demonstrate that investing in quality services for children contributes both to increasing society’s social capital and mitigating inequalities in the first stage of the life cycle; inequalities that are otherwise likely to be reproduced in the transition to adult life (Conti and Heckman 2012; Heckman 2011; Rolnick and Grunewald 2003). There is no systematic data detailing the services provided for children by the various administrations with responsibility for children’s services in Poland nor their impact on fighting inequality and social exclusion of children. The challenge remains to improve knowledge in this area according to the guidelines of the European Commission’s Recommendation and findings of several reports on social services for children (Lara Montero 2016).

Research method and process

Empirical work involved the development of case studies, which mapped the current state of play in regards to the organisation and implementation of children’s services in the various countries, including Poland. Case study research calls for selecting a few examples of the phenomenon to be studied and then investigate intensively the characteristics of those examples (Yin 2009). According to Yin (1994), case study research is particularly well suited to investigating and monitoring public policies, which was the main focus of the study. Yin (1993) and Tellis (1997) also emphasise that the evaluative application of this methodology is useful to assess the effectiveness of social policies.

We used the *exploratory case* (Whyte 1993), which describes the state of a particular policy, as we did with the state of play of children’s services in 14 countries, including Poland. The study used an exploratory case study design and relied on qualitative methods, including the answers to open questionnaires provided by senior civil servants at key child welfare agencies, children’s services directors and providers.

The European Commission's Recommendation 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage', which was published on 20 February 2013, presents Member States with policy guidance on multidimensional children's policies around three pillars: access to resources, access to quality services and child participation. The Recommendation outlines access to quality services as an essential pillar in the framework of multidimensional policies for children. Within the services pillar, the European Commission recognises five types of services:

- Reduce inequality at a young age by investing in early childhood education and care;
- Improve education systems' impact on equal opportunities;
- Improve the responsiveness of health systems to address the needs of disadvantaged children;
- Provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment;
- Enhance family support and the quality of alternative care settings;

We used a two-fold methodology. First, we designed a questionnaire where the overarching principles contained in the Recommendation were formulated as questions in an open and qualitative questionnaire. Next, we selected the countries that would be analysed as part of the study. A total of 14 countries out of the 28 EU Member States were selected in order to provide a representative sample of trends across Europe: Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and The United Kingdom. The selection was undertaken on the basis of several criteria, including geographical considerations, welfare systems, varying degrees of development of children's services and different levels of decentralisation of competences in the field of children's services.

The aim was to gather intelligence to draft 14 country profiles addressing how the principles put forward by the European Commission's Recommendation might be implemented in practice. In order to fulfil this aim, we identified key members of the European Social Network² in each country, specifically public agencies with responsibility for children's services and child protection. We addressed a call to the General Directorates (DG) for Children and Families in governments. The DGs coordinated the collection of information from the different departments, including early years, education, health, housing and child protection in order to provide a picture as accurate as possible to the questions provided in the questionnaire. They also liaised with directors of children's services in the municipalities that provided additional views around implementation.

Data collection took place between January and September 2014 and included the completion of questionnaires (including legislation and policy), and a review

2 The European Social Network is an independent network of public social services in Europe, with over 120 member organisations in 34 European countries. The Network brings together senior officials in public authorities responsible for planning, financing, managing, providing and evaluating social services across the life cycle – from children to older people.

of research, grey and peer reviewed literature to complement the answers provided by practitioners in the questionnaires. Second, we organised three peer review meetings, one per year, bringing together a delegation per country consisting of children services' directors, national, regional and local government's representatives with responsibilities in children's services and service providers from each country. The second peer review meeting took place in Barcelona, where the Polish case was analysed together with other four countries. This was an opportunity for senior civil servants that coordinated the gathering of information from the various departments that had been contacted to discuss and compare key findings.

The analysis of the national policy and legal frameworks in the 14 countries was structured around five key principles.

Table 1. Principles of the National policy and legal frameworks in the 14 countries

Principle 1: Early Childhood Education and Care	The legal and policy framework, funding and financial incentives, provision's variability, and inter-services and parental cooperation
Principle 2: Education systems and equal opportunities	The inclusiveness of the education system, with a focus on children with disabilities, migrant and ethnic minorities and children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds
Principle 3: Responsiveness of health system	Specific provisions for children with disabilities, children with mental health problems, unaccompanied children, pregnant teenagers and children from families with a history of substance abuse
Principle 4: Access to housing	Measures guaranteeing the access of families with children to housing and forms of support for families with children at risk of eviction
Principle 5: Risk assessment protocols	Protocols to assess the risks to a child and which forms of support are implemented when risk has been detected. Provisions guaranteeing that children are not placed in institutions and that children without parental care have access to services. Specific mechanisms to listen to and record the voice of the child within the child protection system.

Source: author's own analysis.

Data analysis

The answers to the questionnaires were provided in writing. The main challenge was to select the key data from the description provided by the interviewed on the basis of the analytical criteria, which had been previously defined (Yin 1993). The analysis involved becoming familiar with the data, developing a coding schedule, data coding, description of main themes, linking themes, and developing explanations of those relationships. The project management team at the European Social Network undertook the codification and review of the data provided in the questionnaires to facilitate the identification of similar and divergent trends and ensure that all key themes were captured.

Results³

As highlighted above, the questionnaire translated the principles contained in the services pillar of the European Recommendation into questions. The responses to the questionnaires were provided by senior civil servants at key regional child welfare agencies, children's services directors and providers. This exercise allowed us to identify legislation and policy developments but also key challenges in regards to the development and practical implementation of children's welfare services. The findings presented here are important to understand the current state of play of children's welfare and services and main challenges regarding implementation of policy and practice. A description of the main results is presented.

1. Reducing inequality at a young age by investing in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Legal/policy framework accounting for ECEC's delivery

The Education Act on the System of Education and the Act on the care for children under the age of 3 provide the normative framework for the delivery of early childhood education and care in Poland. There are three forms of care for children aged 20 weeks to 3 years old: public or non-public crèches, children's

3 The section 'Results' correspond with the results of the study which are available in the publication: Lara Montero (2016).

clubs – for children aged 1 to 3 years old – and daily carers and nannies. The latter is not under the control of the state and all three types of care are paid for by parents, with the obvious difficulties for families with limited resources. The government has been introducing incentives to legalise the employment of nannies through state budget contributions to social and health insurance for contracted nannies.

Public and non-public kindergartens for children aged 3–6 years old are considered to be the first stage of the education system. Other forms of preschool education include preschool branches at primary schools and preschool education groups. Until 2015, every five year-old had to take a preschool year at the kindergarten or attend some other form of preschool education. The government in 2016 raised the compulsory pre-school year to children aged 6.

Funding and financial incentives

Children between 3 and 6 years old in public kindergartens have the right to free tuition, education, and care provided by the municipality for at least five hours a day. As for care extending beyond that time, the municipality (through the director of the early childcare centre) may charge a fee of maximum 1 zł (around 0.25€) per hour. Parents do not pay any fees for a child who is in the kindergarten for only 5 hours per day and who does not eat meals there.

The municipality covers a partial amount of the monthly payment for childcare costs and parents pay the remaining part. In July 2013, some rules were modified, mainly the reduction of the municipality's own contribution from 50% to 20% of the setting up and operational costs of childcare facilities. At the request of parents, kindergartens may exempt them or lower the fee on the basis of the family's socio-economic circumstances. The family may also be supported through a local welfare centre to cover meals and basic fees.

To obtain a place for a child in a kindergarten, parents have to fill in a questionnaire, where they have to respond to questions about their background. Each municipality has a points system (available on their respective websites), by which children with a disadvantaged background receive more points, meaning that these children are given priority to attend the early childcare facility. For children with disabilities, the municipality has the responsibility for providing free transport and care during transportation or reimburse the costs regardless of the distance to the nearest kindergarten.

Variability of provision

Despite the improvements highlighted above, the coverage of childcare facilities for children below three and in rural areas continues to be problematic (European Commission 2016). The national rate of participation in education for three to six year olds increased rapidly in the last few years. Participation of three to four year olds increased by 7.4 pps. (to 71.6%) in the school year 2014/15 compared with 2013/14 whilst participation for five year olds reached

94% (Central Statistical Office 2015). However, challenges remain in reducing disparities in access to early childhood education for children under three years old. According to Eurostat, in 2013 only 4% of them were covered by formal childcare arrangements vs. 14% in the EU. While there is strong evidence that early learning is crucial for later school and labour market success, in particular for children in families from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the school entry age was recently raised from 6 to 7.

According to the European Commission, this change is likely to impact on the availability and take-up of pre-school education. This is due to the fact that the 6 years olds will have to stay in kindergartens occupying places that could be allocated to younger children and compulsory pre-school education for five years olds was abolished. The European Commission emphasised that these changes were likely to negatively affect children from poorer backgrounds and the supply of labour (European Commission 2016b).

Inter-services and parental cooperation

The different sectors involved in the system of early childhood education and care should include health, education and social services. However, the legal Act on children under the age of three does not describe any form of cooperation between the various sectors or different organisations involved. This is where the local level has in many cases taken the lead in bringing services together in children's care. For example, public and non-governmental organisations run programmes on preventing child abuse for nurseries, kindergartens, schools, and childcare centres. In Warsaw, the Local System for Preventing the Abuse of Young Children is an interdisciplinary system of cooperation between local authorities, the local welfare centre, a health centre, the police, probation officers, local psychological consultation points, day nurseries and NGOs.

2. Improving education systems' impact on equal opportunities

Until 2015, education was compulsory for children aged 6–18 years old. As of 2016, education is compulsory from the age of 7. There are public and non-public schools, but only education in public schools is part of the compulsory curriculum and is free. Fees in non-public schools depend on the internal regulations of each school.

The inclusiveness of the education system

Under the terms of the Education Act, the Polish law guarantees the equal right to education for every child. Children with special needs may attend general schools,

inclusive⁴ schools and special schools⁵, and may receive psychological and pedagogical support.

Fostering the inclusion of children with disabilities

‘Early intervention teams’ have been operating in kindergartens and schools for several years and are financed by the state. Their activities are aimed at fostering and stimulating the motor, cognitive, emotional and social development of the child from the time the disability is detected until they start school. Early support for children’s development consists of an integrated system of preventive, identification, therapeutic-rehabilitative and therapeutic-educational activities provided by an interdisciplinary team of professionals.

The tasks of the team include: the development and implementation of an individual programme of early intervention for the child and their family; establishing a partnership with a therapeutic or social welfare centre to ensure that the appropriate support is provided; and analysing the effectiveness of the support received by the child and their family. 13 categories⁶ of disabilities have been defined; these may trigger the consideration of a child having special education needs. In this case, parents may choose a general school, a special school or an inclusive school. Special educators use several criteria to determine the functioning of a student, including the type and degree of disability.

Fostering the inclusion of migrant and ethnic minorities and children from disadvantaged backgrounds

In Poland, all children have the right to education regardless of their nationality or legal status. The law insists in the inclusion of foreign children in the system of public education as soon as possible. Children, who are refugees or seeking a refugee status, and children under state protection are entitled to free education at all levels.

4 This means schools where children with special education needs learn together with other children. The number of students in integration classes should be between 15 and 20, including 3 to 5 children with disabilities. An inclusive school has to employ additional supporting teachers qualified in special education, who also work individually with students with disabilities.

5 This means schools where children learn together with other students with special education needs. The number of students in a class is relatively small: for instance, 6 to 8 students in special classes for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, deaf and children with hearing impairments, blind and visually-impaired children, children with physical disabilities, centres for children and young people with abnormal social functioning, and ill children. For the latter, schools are situated in hospitals.

6 These categories include long-term illnesses, adaptive problems, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, speech impairment, trauma-induced emotional and behavioural difficulties, and learning difficulties.

Children under legal protection or applying for it have the right to assistance in the form of: additional Polish language lessons (for 12 months for at least 2 hours per week), learning their own language, preserving their culture and studying a religion other than Roman Catholic, as well as the necessary social assistance to help them fully benefit from education at the same level as any other Polish children. They also have the right to free reinforcement if considered necessary by their teachers. Local educational authorities provide training for teachers to support them in their work with ethnic minorities.

Family support centres prepare the Individual Inclusion Programme (IIP), which supports foreigners in all possible fields of life when they first come to Poland. However, the maximum period of assistance under the IIP is 12 months. According to the IIP, the family support centre is obliged to provide information about the conditions for receiving financial assistance, help with contacts in the local community, e.g. the local social support office; and provide accommodation support.

In addition to the figure of Roma assistant that was introduced in the Polish education system in 2001, the 2014–2020 programme for the inclusion of the Roma community also includes support in housing, health, and employment.

Families and children in difficult socio-economic circumstances may also apply for 'social scholarships' (e.g. for reasons of unemployment, illness, large families, single parents), school allowances for text books or emergency situations.

3. Improving health systems' responsiveness to address the needs of disadvantaged children

Specific provisions for children with disabilities and/or mental health problems

According to Poland's Social Policy Strategy, local authorities should put in place health programmes for children with disabilities to support them in their recovery, as well as various forms of therapy and parental education. These are provided in addition to the public system of free healthcare, and may include various medical, educational, psychological and speech therapies, support in performing daily life activities and in promoting children's participation.

The State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (PFRON) funds rehabilitation programmes for children with disabilities and supports the elimination of architectural, technical and communication barriers. However, no specific examples of programmes for children with mental health problems were identified nor provisions for children from families with a history of substance abuse.

4. Providing children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment

Measures guaranteeing the access of families with children to housing

In Poland, the number of households exceeds the number of homes, forcing families to cohabitation and causing frequent overcrowding of properties. The only governmental response to this problem comes from the young persons'/family planning programme, which includes subsidies for the purchase of flats from the primary market. Families in a difficult financial situation and who own or rent a property can apply for financial help to pay their mortgage or rent through their local authority.

Supporting families with children at risk of eviction

Municipalities decide the allocation of their housing stock. In Warsaw, for instance, the right to apply for social housing is limited to people who do not own or rent a property and are in poverty⁷. Additional reasons may include losing the home or flat in a natural disaster, leaving foster care, or leaving a correction facility and being unable to secure any housing on their own.

A family who is at risk of eviction due to a difficult financial situation has the right to apply for social housing or temporary accommodation through their local authority. The municipality, or sometimes the court, decides if the evicted family is entitled to social or temporary housing. However, the Ombudsman for Children's Right drew attention to the fact that not all municipalities were securing places for evicted families with children. More specifically, the Ombudsman referred to the failure of certain municipalities to offer evicted debtors, including pregnant women and children, temporary accommodation (Rzecznik Praw Dziecka 2014), despite their legal obligation to do so.

5. Enhancing family support and the quality of alternative care settings

When a family cannot, do not know how or do not want to look after their children, they have the right to receive support to help them with the upbringing of their children. Help is provided by family assistants and day support centres, and organised by local authorities. In case of parental inability to care for their child adequately,

⁷ Here, poverty is defined as a situation where the family income per person for the last three months has been below the lowest pension or, in case of a single-person household or a single parent, lower than 150% of the lowest pension.

the relevant court may rule a custody replacement measure. Measures may include a foster family, a family-type children's home or an institutional facility, e.g. care and educational facility, care and therapeutic facility, pre-adoption centre. Regarding family and children matters, the decision is made by the court, which may also grant the family another form of aid: the supervision of a probation officer.

Removing a child from their family home is the last resort when working with the family does not bring the desired results. However, when a child is placed under foster care, various institutions, such as welfare centres, the court (e.g. probation officers), NGOs and pedagogical and psychological assistance centres, continue to work with the family, so that the child can go back to live with their biological parents.

Protocols to assess the risks to a child and put in place appropriate support

The 2011 Act on family support and foster care states that a family that has difficulties in caring for their children may be provided with support by day care centres or by family assistants, whose main task is to prevent placing the child out of the family and help them dealing with various problems connected with the upbringing of the child, and social, psychological and behavioural problems.

A risk assessment form must be completed by social workers and the other professionals working with the family, and two legal procedures may follow afterwards: the Blue Card and the procedure for removing a child from the family. The Blue Card procedure is initiated when there are suspicions that a child suffers from violence at home. It consists of four phases. The initial phase involves gathering all the necessary data about the case and those involved. The next step includes defining which type of violence professionals may be looking at and which procedure is to be followed. Step 3 involves defining an action plan and meetings of the interdisciplinary child protection team (including social services, education, health and the police) to monitor progress. The final step consists of an assessment as to whether the plan has fulfilled its objectives.

The procedure for removing a child from the family is the second type of legal procedure. According to the 2005 law on preventing domestic violence, in case of a direct danger to the life or health of a child due to domestic violence, a social worker has the right to take the child away from the family and put them under state care, either in a foster family or in a care home. This decision shall be taken jointly with representatives of health services and the police, who also take part in the intervention. When the social worker removes a child from their family, the family must be instructed about their right to file a complaint.

Main reasons for children to be taken into care

In 2012, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy conducted a survey (Council of Ministers 2013) about the reasons for placing children in care. The most common reasons were parents' addiction and unwillingness to conduct their duties of care. A full list of the reasons for children to be taken into care can be found in Table 1 in the Annex.

Main provisions guaranteeing that children are not placed in institutions

In our study and according to data provided by the Institute for the Development of Social Services (IRSS) based on data from the national statistical office of Poland, 27,300 children were in institutional care, while 50,100 children were in (family) foster care in 2013. According to data provided by the Ministry for Labour and Social Policy, in 2015 there were 24,785 children in kinship care, 11,549 children with a non-professional family, 2,025 with a professional foster family and 488 in family children's homes (please see Table 2). However, no data was provided as to how many children were still in institutions.

It is important to highlight that since the introduction of the Act on family support and foster care in 2011, there has been an increase in the number of family assistants, under the responsibility of local authorities, with an emphasis placed on prevention and intensive work with families. According to data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in 2015 there were 3,815 family assistants, which accounts for a 12.5% increase in comparison to 2014 data⁸.

Family assistants' main task is to prevent placing the child out of the family and help them dealing with various problems connected with the upbringing of the child and social, psychological and behavioural problems. With this purpose in mind, they define and implement a plan with the family, and monitor its implementation, such as their participation in psychological and education sessions. Family assistants also draw up an opinion at the request of a court and follow up on the family's functioning after the intervention comes to an end. Family assistants have a maximum caseload of 15 cases and must cooperate with local authorities, NGOs, providers of services and the specialists in the interdisciplinary child protection team. In almost 50% of cases, the work undertaken by family assistants had the desired results (please see Graph 1 in the Annex).

The Act also emphasised the concept of family foster care, including professional foster families and family-type care homes. The aim is that all children below 10 are placed in foster care from the year 2020, and that the number of children that are placed in the same home does not exceed 14, from the year 2021.

Main provisions guaranteeing that children without parental care have access to services

According to the Act on family support and foster care, a foster family and a family type children's home shall provide a child with round-the-clock care and education. This includes ensuring that the child has access to healthcare and education and that he/she keeps contact with their parents, unless decided otherwise by the court.

⁸ Presentation of Katarzyna Napiorkowska, Head of Unit, Department of Family Policy at Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy in Poland. Conference on the implementation of the European Commission's Recommendation on investing in children at University of Lodz, Lodz (Poland), 20th October 2016.

Young people brought up in a foster family or a residential facility can be supported to ease their transition to adulthood. The foster family or residential facility shall inform the county's family assistance centre about the person's intention of becoming self-sufficient two months prior to turning 18. The young person is provided with an 'empowerment guardian', who drafts with them an individual empowerment plan. However, support under the self-empowerment provision is not mandatory and it is dependent on fulfilling a number of requirements. These may include completing compulsory education, providing proof of continuing education, proof of interaction with the empowerment guardian and the allocated social worker, and informing the county's family assistance centre of any substantial change in their personal and financial situation.

The assistance under the empowerment programme comes in the form of financial aid, i.e. for the continuation of education, and support in kind (houseware, materials for renovating the property, purchase of school materials, equipment that may be used for work or rehabilitation equipment). Young people leaving care may also benefit from a housing allowance, social housing and training on self-reliance, financial management and skills needed in adult life.

Specific mechanisms to listen to and record the voice of the child within the child protection system

A special procedure for hearing the child during a court case was reported in the answers to the questionnaire, but no specific details were provided. Article 4 of the Act on family support and foster care states that children have the right "to receive information and express their opinions on issues that are of their concern in accordance with their age and maturity", but there was no information as to how this is actually implemented in practice.

Concluding remarks

These research findings can be useful in the policy-making process and the development of children's services, including documentation and analysis. The case studies provide significant insight into policy and legal developments, implementation and evaluation of activities and efforts to improve policy and practice in children's services. The findings could be used to assess the state of play in regards to children's services across the countries studied and beyond, with a focus on children being placed at the centre of public services' intervention, using a comprehensive approach and promoting critical thinking and reflective practice. The results of the study show that a significant development of laws and policies has taken place; however, a main challenge remains when it comes to ensuring implementation and monitoring, and evaluation of programmes and services for children.

In Poland, there are several areas in the field of children's policies and services which require attention to implement European and international recommendations. First, there is a need to develop a comprehensive strategy covering all strands of child related policies and ensuring their coordinated governance. It may be possible to achieve better governance if a single executive government body or agency for children's issues was established. Second, the development of formal early child-care, including adequate and stable financial support (not only based on projects funded by European Structural Funds), should be reinforced. This is particularly important to ensure the participation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those in rural areas.

Third, any comprehensive strategy should include a focus on housing for families with children. The Polish government should develop a comprehensive response to address overcrowding and the lack of housing in cooperation with local authorities to increase social housing supply, rental housing in the private market and the share of affordable accommodation. These measures should ensure that local authorities have the necessary means to provide families with children at risk of eviction with temporary accommodation and that there are mechanisms in place to make sure that the municipalities fulfil their legal obligation to do so. Fourth, though there has been progress in placing children in alternative care, it is recommended to improve training for professional foster carers, counselling and support services for foster families and work with prospective foster parents to increase the number of caretakers for children with disabilities. Finally, future policy strategies should ensure the wider involvement of stakeholders, including parents and children, in drawing policy measures, their implementation and monitoring.

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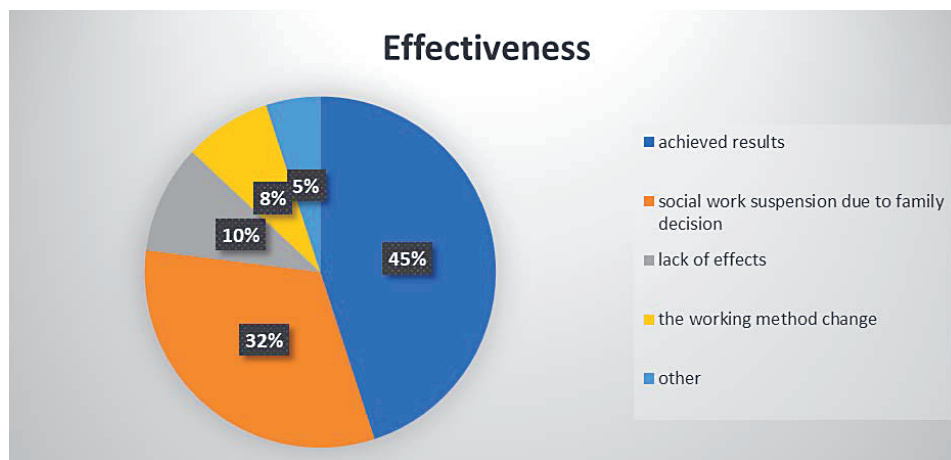
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ANNEX

Table 1. Main Reasons for children to be taken into care in Poland in 2002

Addiction of the parents	39.62%
Helplessness in matters of parental care	25.17%
Abandonment	12.98%
Domestic violence	3.63%
Disability of one of the parents	3.24%
Long-term or severe illness of at least one of the parents	3.04%
At least one of the parents abroad	2.98%

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Poland, 2013.



Graph 1

Source: Presentation of Katarzyna Napiorkowska, Head of Unit, Department of Family Policy at Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy in Poland. Conference on the implementation of the European Commission's Recommendation on investing in children at University of Lodz, Lodz (Poland), 20th October 2016.

Table 2. Number and types of foster families in 2011–2015

Year	Kinship care	Non-professional family	Professional foster family				Family-type children's homes
			total	professional	many children	specialist	emergency
2011	36 701	6 227	1 906	x	1035	252	625
2012	25 836	12 162	1 843	1 036	x	264	543
2013	25 842	12 182	1 906	1 099	x	256	551
2014	25 071	11 711	2 024	1 215	x	251	558
2015	24 785	11 549	2 025	1 216	x	253	556
							488

Source: Department of Family Policy at Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, 2016.

Money, influence and mind-sets: How can advocacy and research help the EU to be a positive force for change in children's lives?

Agata D'Addato, Katerina Nanou

Introduction

The financial and economic crisis is profoundly impacting millions of people in Europe, including children and their families: according to official data, over 1 child in 4 is living in, or is at risk of, poverty (Eurostat 2016). Governments' tendency to resort to austerity measures, moreover, has further contributed to the worsening of the situation of children and young people. As poverty rates become increasingly higher, the potential implications for children's development and well-being are enormous: poverty often results in less opportunities, it affects the quality and availability of essential services, and ultimately hinders a child's chance to reach his or her full potential.

Eurochild, a European network of over 180 organisations working for the promotion and protection of children's rights, actively advocates for child poverty to be prioritised within the political agenda at the European Union (EU) and national level. As part of its work, Eurochild monitors policy developments in the social field, promoting children's rights and supporting those most vulnerable. However, the critical situation of children and families in Europe has shown that policy commitments alone do not suffice.

Child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, which cannot be effectively addressed without a comprehensive understanding of the issue, which takes into consideration its root causes. Eurochild believes that a strong link exists between the alarming rates of child poverty and the lack of a coordinated, multidisciplinary and integrated approach based on preventive measures and the provision and availability of quality services for children and their families, such as education, health and child care. It is not only about the amount of resources invested in children, it is very much about reforming the system, making it more empowering for children and their families, and allow them to live a more autonomous life.

How can policies tackling child poverty and promoting child well-being become more effective and achieve better outcomes for children? This paper provides an overview of recent opportunities at the EU level, potentially capable of influencing and shaping policies to address child poverty and social exclusion. Although such instruments constitute important first steps, it is still difficult to translate them into concrete actions. Therefore the question is how to ensure a shift in mentality, from principles to practice.

The negative impact of poverty on children and families can only be prevented if sufficient resources are allocated to this purpose. It is argued here that specific evidence and compelling arguments proving the strict correlation between investing in children and better outcomes in the long run are needed to urge institutions, EU or national, to translate policy commitments into reality.

Two case studies are presented as an example which shows how advocacy and research can help gathering such evidence: the Opening Doors for Europe's Children campaign (hereafter 'Opening Doors'), and the Childonomics research project, two initiatives led by Eurochild and its partners, which aim to collect evidence and good practices demonstrating that strengthening the prevention system not only is sustainable and cost-effective, but also has a stronger impact on breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality.

Setting the context – key EU policy levers and funds

At the EU level, several initiatives that represent important policy levers are already in place. In many instances, however, the gap between theory and practice is still significant.

The adoption of the **European Commission Recommendation on “Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage”** (hereinafter referred to as ‘the Recommendation’) in 2013 as part of the Social Investment Package was an important milestone (European Commission 2013).

With its three pillars and its multidimensional approach to child poverty, it constitutes a key policy guidance which has been used at Member State level to influence policy reform and the way the EU **structural and investment funds** (ESIF or ESI Funds) are used.

The momentum created by the Recommendation fostered the establishment of the EU Alliance for Investing in Children in 2014, which was coordinated by Eurochild and made up of 24 European networks of social NGOs and organisations sharing a commitment to end child poverty and promote child well-being across Europe.

This Alliance was specifically set up to engage national stakeholders in the process of implementing the Recommendation – through making maximum use

of Europe 2020 and the Structural and Investment Funds. It also produced an Implementation Handbook that provides evidence of integrated approaches to breaking the cycle of child poverty across Europe, and an Advocacy Toolkit to be used by organisations at the national level to influence policy reform and investment (the EU Alliance for Investing in Children, 2014; 2015).

The EU governance and structural funding were supposed to reinforce the implementation of the Recommendation, but in reality, the Recommendation has slipped down the list of priorities and the follow-up has been weak. The current political climate at the EU level continues to support a rather narrow political agenda, which has become less favourable to supporting children's rights. EU institutions are neither following up on past initiatives nor coming up with new initiatives to tackle child poverty and promote child well-being. While there is some focus on specific issues (e.g. asylum and migration) to provide such organisations as Eurochild with the opportunity to explore new areas of work, the attention to broader policies on children rights seems to be missing.

The provision on “ex ante conditionalities”, i.e. a set of conditions to be fulfilled by Member States in order to spend EU funds on a given priority effectively is an important factor in the regulations for the **Structural Funds** programming period 2014–2020. One of these conditionalities, under the thematic objective “Promoting social inclusion combatting poverty and any discrimination”, is intended to promote investment in deinstitutionalisation. In countries where the European Commission has identified a specific need, Member States have to put in place policy frameworks on poverty reduction which include measures for the transition from institutional to community based care. One of the priorities of Eurochild, through the Opening Doors Campaign, is to make sure that Structural Funds are being allocated and spent on measures that will reduce the reliance on institutional care and that will contribute to the development of high quality family and community based care in EU Member States.

The **European Semester** – the EU's governance framework to coordinate fiscal, economic and social performance across EU Member States – appears to be taking a much more limited and short-term perspective defined solely by jobs and economic growth. As Eurochild noted in its 2016 report on the European Semester (Eurochild 2016), children remain largely invisible in the Semester process, they are rarely mentioned in Country Reports and National Reform Programmes, and even when mentioned, specific measures are missing. There has been no improvement in the Country Specific Recommendations since 2015, most references to children are indirect (e.g. employment), and Ireland is the only country with a specific recommendation on child poverty.

Currently, new instruments are being developed and implemented at the EU and international level, and they have the potential to become important tools to trigger policy change and deliver better outcomes for children.

The European **Pillar of Social Rights** is a new initiative by the European Commission, which aims at establishing a framework to identify and promote common

principles, within the Eurozone, in the fields of employment and social policies. Eurochild's goal is that the Pillar is underpinned by a child-rights based approach, which should result in investing in children and child well-being being considered as a priority, supporting the implementation of the Recommendation on Investing in Children.

The **Child Guarantee** is a measure proposed by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D) in the European Parliament. They propose the creation of a new EU fund for tackling child poverty, which would guarantee that every child in Europe has equal access to free quality health care, free quality education, free quality childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition. In Eurochild's view the Child Guarantee has the potential to become a catalyst to reinforce national positive approaches to tackling child poverty, and to play a strategic role in helping the EU, Member States and sub-national governments to allocate their resources for investment in children more efficiently. For a Child Guarantee to be effective it needs to contribute to the overall goal of preventing and addressing child poverty, therefore Member States should develop national child poverty action plans, supporting the implementation of the Recommendation on Investing in Children.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently adopted a **General Comment on "Public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights"** (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2016). The General Comment provides the official guidance on how States are to implement the obligations they undertook to uphold the rights of children under their jurisdiction. It states that the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) requires financial resources to be invested and that children's rights should be taken into consideration in every step of public budgeting. The General Comment has become a powerful instrument for advocacy for children's rights, which added much needed political weight to the existing EU Recommendation on Investing in Children.

The European Commission released its mid-term review of the **Multannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 (MFF)** in September 2016, identifying job growth, migration and security as the main priorities for the next three years. Given the lack of any references to children and the strong focus on macroeconomic issues, Eurochild will advocate for children's rights to be mainstreamed in the **post 2020 MFF** of the EU, as it constitutes an opportunity to promote a child rights-based approach to policy and budgeting. The next EU budget should give a higher priority to child poverty and well-being, as a mean to achieve other targets, such as economic growth, and set up a mechanism to track spending on children.

In an increasingly complex European context, the role of the EU institutions should be to provide a sense of direction. Although the above mentioned measures, initiatives and funds represent important instruments that can be used to leverage policy making, better coordination between the EU and its Member States, and stronger political will are needed to translate such commitments into concrete action. For children in Europe to thrive, the EU must step up and embrace its role as an overarching institution acting as a driver for change. The EU can play

a strategic role in showing Member States how investing in children can bring an economic return, and States should be required to report on their progress by demonstrating how public budgeting impacts on children and their families.

Opening Doors and Childonomics are two of the main initiatives currently being developed by Eurochild and its partner organisations. While Opening Doors is an advocacy campaign aimed at supporting national efforts to end institutional care for children and to strengthen families; Childonomics is a research project set to develop a model to measure and evaluate the costs of child welfare and protection systems against expected outcomes for children. Both initiatives are expected to shine light, by gathering evidence and good practices, on the link between investing in children and positive outcomes for children, their families, and society in general.

Opening doors for europe's children – strengthening families, ending institutional care

Opening Doors for Europe's Children is a pan-European campaign advocating for strengthening families and ending institutional care, by leveraging EU funding and policy, and building capacity of civil society organisations. The first phase of Opening Doors was ran jointly by Eurochild and Hope and Homes from 2013–2015 in 12 mainly Eastern and Central European countries. The Campaign's aim has been to strengthen the advocacy capacity of national partners, in particular using the leverage of the EU policy and funding influence to support national deinstitutionalisation strategies, including investing in prevention, family support and quality alternative care. Phase II of the Opening Doors Campaign was officially launched in December 2016. It is a partnership among 5 international organisations: Eurochild, Hope and Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages International, International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) and FICE Europe and civil society organisations across 15 European countries. In its second Phase the Campaign has expanded in Western European countries in an effort to break the myth that institutional care only concerns Central and Eastern European countries. Also, in the context of the current refugee and migrant crisis, the Campaign will call for quality care alternatives to institutional care for migrant, unaccompanied and separated children

While there are no official figures available, it is estimated that across the EU, approximately 500.000 children are growing up in institutional care (Eurochild, 2010). Institutions can be defined as segregating residential care facilities for children without parental care. They are often impersonal; they impose a rigid, standardised routine which depersonalises children and deprives them of the love, affection, care and attention they need to thrive. Living in such conditions can have devastating, long-term consequences for children, but also for their families and for society in general (Opening Doors for Europe's Children 2014). It is important

to mention that institutional care does not always refer to the size of the institutional care setting. That is why, at the European level, we often refer to the term “institutional culture” which indicates the characteristics mentioned above. This culture can be found in big institutional care settings as well as in smaller homes.

Eurochild and Opening Doors strive to advocate for national authorities to take concrete steps towards deinstitutionalisation. The latter does not mean simply the closure of institutions. Deinstitutionalisation is a change in mentalities, aiming to shift the focus on children's rights and on quality of care. While the rigid institutional model only reaches a limited amount of children, who are often forgotten or get lost in the system, becoming vulnerable to abuse; a family and community-based care system is based on the idea that all children should have access to quality preventive services, family ties should be maintained, and interventions should target children's specific needs through personalised care plans.

For that to be successful, deinstitutionalisation measures need to focus on prevention, intervention, and follow-up. Prevention means that providing support to families should be a key priority: the care system should only be a last resort measure. Quality and availability of community services should be improved and services should be integrated, placing the best interests of the child in the centre of decision-making. National authorities should follow the UN Guidelines on Alternative care “necessity and suitability principles”, i.e. that they should take all necessary measures so that children will be separated from their parents only when it is absolutely *necessary* and in their best interest. When a child requires alternative care, national authorities should guarantee that the care settings must meet general minimum standards and that the child is provided with the *most suitable placement* based on the child's individual needs (Cantwell et al. 2012). Intervention measures should be focused on an individualised approach for every child as needs are different. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for children in care, and children should actively participate in the decisions that impact their lives. Family-based or family-like care are preferred, but as a matter of principle children in care must receive the best possible care solution according to their needs. Life after care is equally important as young care leavers are among some of the most vulnerable groups of children due to the frequent lack of a support system for children leaving care. Transition from care to independent living must be carefully planned with participation of children and young adults, and it must be supported for as long as necessary. In other words, fewer children should enter the system by having in place mainstream services in the community; those in care should be provided with high quality family or community based care according to their individualised needs and long-term; sustainable solutions should be put in place to support those who leave the system.

Deinstitutionalisation, however, is not an easy process. There are many barriers, both political and economic, that prevent progress. National authorities often lack political will to put in place coordinated measures, also due to a general lack of know-how and of a shared understanding of deinstitutionalisation. Moreover,

from an economic perspective, the current crisis has resulted in austerity measures that, combined with the common and mistaken opinion that institutions represent a low-cost option, have contributed to halting the deinstitutionalisation process in Europe. The fear of people losing their jobs by the closure of institutional care settings is an additional barrier to deinstitutionalisation process (Eurochild, Hope & Homes for Children, SOS Children's Villages 2014).

Poverty is one of the main reasons for separating children from their families and placing them in institutional care. For the transition from institutional to family and community based care, a holistic and multidisciplinary approach is essential. For deinstitutionalisation to become a reality, social welfare, healthcare, and education, as well as poverty and inequality must be addressed. Lack of equal access to services and the growing poverty rates in Europe are intertwined and constitute contributing factors to the increasing number of families and children at risk.

In most instances, however, policies, driven by short-sighted financial considerations, tend to focus on perpetuating care systems that not only negatively impact on children and their rights, but are neither cost-effective. Opening Doors advocates for financial resources to be invested in prevention and alternative family care: the economic argument is that investing in preventing measures and in integrated protection systems that focus on providing better services – e.g. early intervention, inclusive education, family support and re-integration – is more sustainable and effective in the long run, positively contributing to breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality.

The Opening Doors campaign works towards achieving such goals by building partnerships at international and national level to advocate for change in national policies and public spending. It builds the capacity of national organisations to leverage existing EU policy tools, as well as EU funding programmes to support progress at national level, making the case for a shift from a system based on institutions to family and community-based care, supported by more effective public budgeting and resource allocation.

Childonomics – Measuring the long-term social and economic value of investing in children

With support of the OAK Foundation, Eurochild is currently coordinating the 'Childonomics' research project¹, which aims to measure the long-term social and economic return of investing in children. This project, which also fits in the framework of the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children, will develop and test an economic model to measure the costs of different child

1 For updates see <http://www.eurochild.org/projects/childonomics/> (last accessed 04.05.2018).

welfare and protection system interventions against expected outcomes for children, families and society as a whole. Particular attention is given to preventing the separation of children from their families, supporting their reintegration and reducing reliance on institutional care.

The economic model – which is being developed by academics – is based on the need to protect and promote children's rights in public policy and budgets. The Childonomics approach will be developed and tested in two national contexts to calculate return on investment in child and family support services. Malta and Romania were selected as partner countries due to recently introduced reforms and a strong political interest in child and family policies. Political leaders recognised the need to build a stronger evidence base to support policy and spending choices and better understand the effectiveness of public spending on child protection.

The aim of Childonomics is that it will provide a framework for considering the social and economic cost of a change in policy in the short and long term, and can thus be used as part of the planning process for policy and practice change. It can also be used as part of a strategy for reform of systems that do not provide sufficient support for parents and children hence they lead to poor outcomes for children such as those that can result, for example, from high rates of children living in institutional care or other placements outside of parental care that may not meet their needs.

This cutting-edge, policy-relevant research project will hopefully equip the Eurochild network and the wider community to deliver results for children and help to strengthen the evidence-base that underpins our child-rights advocacy.

Conclusions

For advocacy to be truly effective and change the prevailing mind-set, organisations such as Eurochild need to be rigorous in the way they diagnose the problem, understand the impact their work could have on policy-making, set realistic objectives for policy influence, develop a plan to achieve those objectives, monitor and learn from the progress they are making and reflect this learning back into their work.

This can be done by building a strong bridge between advocacy and campaigning, policy, and research, which should be twofold: on the one hand, it is necessary to understand the role of different stakeholders (civil society, researchers, policy makers) in supporting positive change, and how to ensure coordinated cooperation. On the other hand, civil society organisations need to adopt sound and rigorous research methods to support their advocacy activities and influence policy-making. Over the past few years, Eurochild has been encouraging a broader understanding

of how evidence can and should have a key role in social policy experimentation, social innovation and social entrepreneurship initiatives at the EU and national level (Eurochild 2015).

If the goal is to ensure the allocation of adequate resources for prevention measures and comprehensive child protection systems, then evidence is needed to demonstrate the economic value, also in terms of social outcomes, of such use of public financial resources.

If the overall policy framework promotes greater investments in social inclusion and equality, the volume of children entering the child protection system will be smaller and costs reduced in the long-term. The model we are advocating for around investing in universal services and social protection mechanisms, through projects such as Opening Doors and Childonomics, is based on the firm belief that investing early can reduce the necessity for targeted interventions in the long run.

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“Investing in Children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage” EU Recommendation – some remarks on the situation of Polish adolescents

Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas

Introduction

Children's well-being has become one of the most important issues in the European Union, which is reflected in key documents, scientific analyses and practical activities undertaken by international, national, regional and local institutions. A recommendation “Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage” was published by the European Commission in February 2013. In this document, the European Commission: **“recommends that member states: organise and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children's well-being, through multi-dimensional strategies”**. The Commission has also adopted so-called horizontal principles, which are crucial to implementation of this recommendation. The enumeration of the principles includes *inter alia*: integrated strategies of tackling child poverty and social exclusion, promoting equal opportunities in accomplishing child's potential, founding activities focused on the approach to children's rights, addressing the child's best interests as a primary consideration, recognising children as independent right-holders, but also supporting families as primary care-takers, ensuring a focus on children with multiple disadvantages, e.g. Roma children, migrant/ethnic minority children, children with special needs or disabilities, children in alternative care and street children, children of imprisoned parents, children endangered by the risk of poverty that can result from such factors as being brought up in single parent or large families.

The Recommendation is of a crucial significance in the area of family and youth policies therefore since the moment of its publication it has been attracting the

attention of practitioners, scholars and politicians. In 2014, the EU national policies were analysed thoroughly in the light of “Investing in children...” Recommendation in all EU member states. Irena Topińska (2014) is the author of the Polish report, while the synthesizing and comparative report was developed by Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier (2014). In 2014, I was invited by the Polish Committee of the European Anti-Poverty Network to elaborate an expertise demonstrating how Poland was implementing the Recommendation within the scope of problems faced by Polish adolescents endangered by poverty and social exclusion. The conference “Investing in children. Social Innovations for Children and Youth: Research and Practice”, which was held in Lodz in October 2016, provided an opportunity to consider this issue again in a new light, taking into account two years which had passed since my initial assessment¹.

There are many dimensions that can be taken into account while analysing the situation of children and adolescents, i.e. their living conditions, health, educational career, leisure time, children’s rights. In this text I will concentrate on material conditionings, health issues, education and participation. The first three dimensions provide a framework of children’s well-being, while the fourth seems to be crucial for coming generations in democratic society. I have to emphasise that I am a sociologist who specialises in problems of poverty and social exclusion, and I rather focus on a sociological perspective than on the social policy framework. My way of thinking also results from my past experience gathered as a youth worker and from the ongoing, very close cooperation with practitioners, such as social workers, therapists, pedagogues, etc.

The main thesis of the paper is that Poland is still in the middle of the distance in accomplishing the priority of all children’s well-being. When we consider the multidimensional picture of Polish children living at risk of poverty and social exclusion, it seems that we can observe both very positive and negative phenomena and processes which, in combination with their outcomes, influence everyday life of children and youth. From one point of view a significant decrease in the statistics on poverty and social exclusion is interrelated with the introduction of new legal regulations in the area of family-oriented social policy and with development of new models of social interventions. It also seems that legal acts, despite some failures resulting from competing interests of institutional actors, have created at least a theoretically sufficient foundation to break the cycle of disadvantage². Yet, at the same time, the process which is to reform all the areas of social policy is hindered by many political, institutional, economic, mental or even ideological barriers. Irena Topińska (2014) states that the increasing awareness of the problem is accompanied by an uncertainty regarding prospects of implementation of the

1 At the time of writing, in mid 2017, Poland has been undergoing a process of politically triggered changes in almost all areas of public life for two years, introduced by the centre-right populist government of the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*).

2 See the book “Dobro dziecka jako przedmiot troski społecznej” (Child welfare as the focus of social care) recently published by Magdalena Arczewska (2017).

recommended solutions. I would argue that the implementation of the Investing in Children Recommendation is promising in the area of material support and reducing children's poverty but the conservative shift in politics destabilises children's situation, threatens their rights and participation in social life.

Children's poverty

In 2015 children and youth constituted 20.2% (7,768 thousands) of the Polish population. 7.1% of the total population were adolescents aged between 13–19, which means that 2,730 thousands of adolescents lived in Poland that year (Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2016: 100; Dzieci w Polsce 2015: 1). According to the latest National Census performed in 2011, almost 99% children aged 0–17 lived with their families, 22% of these families were single parent (in vast majority single mother) families. Five years later 18% of older teenagers interviewed under the project “Youth 2016” by the Public Opinion Research Centre stated that they lived in a single-parent household, 13% of such interviewees reported poor material conditions. Economic migrations still influence everyday life of Polish children: 17% of adolescents experienced at least one parent temporal migration, 10% a long-lasting migration of one of the parents (Roguska 2017: 20). In 2015 18,655 children, adolescents and young adults (aged 0–25) lived in the institutions and their number slightly decreased in comparison to the previous years. 53,604 were in foster families (almost 32 thousand in kin-foster families), 3,162 were placed in small family group homes – these numbers were fluctuating, but the trend to develop the network of non-kin foster care is visible as well as the tendencies of locating older children in residential care institutions and younger in foster care (Dzieci w Polsce 2015: 5, 7; Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2016). The statistics demonstrate that 75,5 thousand of children and youngsters were deprived of the parental care (if youngsters in resocialisation institutions are included in this calculation, the number will significantly increase).

Since Poland's accession to the European Union (2004), a decreasing number of children endangered by poverty and social exclusion in statistics has been observed: in 2005, 48% of children in Poland were endangered by poverty and social exclusion, while in 2015, it was 26.6% (Eurostat: Children at risk of poverty and social exclusion). According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the proportion of the households living in absolute poverty has been also falling among the collectivities “traditionally” most exposed to poverty, i.e. large families (4+ children) since 2015. In 2014, 27% of such families lived in absolute poverty, while in 2015, the proportion of such families reached 18% (GUS 2016: 3). This decrease resulted from an increase in the state official poverty threshold, which makes citizens eligible to claim social welfare benefits. 64% of adolescents entering the adulthood interviewed by the Public Opinion Research Centre in 2016 declared that the

material situation of their families was good or very good, and only 6% declared that it was bad – results of this assessment were the best since 2008 (Omyła-Rudzka 2017: 31–32). In 2016, the new Polish government, based on the electoral declarations of the Law and Justice Party introduced a “Family 500+” programme, founded on the idea of supporting all Polish families with 500 PLN (about 120 euro) per child, starting from the second child in the family. Despite a broad criticism regarding its economic and social costs (e.g. withdrawing parents, especially mothers, from the labour market) the programme seems to be very effective in limiting poverty, in large families in particular. For example in families 3+ children, 25.2% increase in their monthly disposable income was observed in 2016. A forecast of the prolonged effects of the “Family 500+” programme is also very optimistic – 64% decrease in child relative poverty (from 28% to 10%) and 94% decrease in absolute poverty (from 11.9% to 0.7%) is expected. However experts underline that such estimations do not take into account the parents’ behaviours, including possible changes in their vocational activity resulting from the programme (withdrawal from the labour market mentioned above and misuse of the financial resources). Therefore the real situation of children in families can differ, and the needs of a certain number of children will remain unmet. In 2016, 400,000 children still lived in absolute poverty in their families. Single parents with one child are a group that is seriously jeopardized by poverty as they cannot benefit from the Family 500+ programme – their material conditionings have not changed since 2014. Ryszard Szarfenberg also underlines that the depiction of family poverty will change – families with one or two children will be endangered by poverty more seriously than large families in the past (Inchauste et al. 2016 as quoted in Wójcik 2017: 17; *Skrajne ubóstwo...* 2017; *Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych...* 2017: 1–2; Szarfenberg 2016; Szarfenberg 2017).

Poland has made the significant progress, however there is no reason to be completely proud of the success in terms of breaking the vicious circle of child poverty. In 2015, over 2,000 thousands of Polish children and adolescents were vulnerable to poor living conditions and social exclusion. In 2016, despite the “Family 500+” programme, the families 3+children were still in the worst economic situation – their average disposable income was 28,7% lower and their expenses were 30.3% lower than the average income in the country (*Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych...* 2017: 16). The economic situation of Polish families is continuously differentiated regionally – the average disposable household income in three voivodships in the south-east Poland and in one central voivodship is significantly lower than the average income in the country, and much lower in comparison to Mazowieckie voivodship (with Warsaw as Polish capital)³.

3 Three voivodeships in south-east Poland were: Podkarpackie (76.9% of the average disposable income in Poland in 2016), Lubelskie (88.1%), Świętokrzyskie (88.6%). Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship with 88.7% of the average disposable income in Poland is situated next to Mazowieckie voivodeship with 120% of the disposable income (*Sytuacja gospodarstw domowych...* 2017: 14).

There are also significant economic differences between urban and rural areas (e.g. in 2015, the average net disposable income per capita in all Polish households reached 17,402 PLN, while in farmers' households – 10,741 PLN; in large cities it was 26,234 PLN, while in rural areas – 13,805 PLN) (Dochody i warunki życia ludności 2017: 136, 138). Besides, it is very difficult to assess if and to what extent the above-mentioned positive trends will influence the situation of the older children, adolescents (with single parents' children) raised in the families endangered by poverty and social exclusion, and in institutions. From the early 1990s Polish sociologists have been observing not only the phenomena of inter-generational transmission of poverty and juvenilisation of poverty, but also the persistence of fundamental characteristics of poverty in neighbourhoods of relegations in Polish large cities (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Golczyńska-Grondas 2010; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013). It seems that macroeconomic changes and trends do not affect the situation of the poorest families. Therefore, it is doubtful if especially older teenagers from underprivileged groups will manage to profit from the new social policy instruments, e.g. to invest in their education or prepare better to the transition into adulthood. Paradoxically, the “promising” solution for them would be to become young parents as soon as possible and benefit from the “Family 500+” programme or any similar programmes which will be implemented in the future.

The Recommendation indicates that **the member countries should provide children with a safe, adequate housing and living environment enabling them (...) to grow up in a safe, healthy and child-friendly places that support their development and learning needs.** The authors of the Recommendation underline the necessity of avoiding ghettoisation and the need for living in affordable and quality housing. Polish statistics on the average housing space, flat equipment and usable floor area are optimistic⁴, in contrast to Eurostat statistics showing that overcrowding rate in Poland is very high. 57% of Polish children live in the lodgings whose standards are significantly lower than the EU norms⁵, and the situation is worse only in Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Latvia. The cost of rent is also increasing. Poor lodgers can apply for housing allowance – in 2015, 4,4 million of such allowances were transferred to the tenants. However the number of these allowances is decreasing (in 2015, 7.5% less in comparison to 2014) as well as the whole amount of expenditures to cover them (7.9% less than in 2014). In 2015, 26% of Polish lodgers were in rent arrears, 18 thousand lodgers were submitted to the

4 According to the National Census (2011), due to demographic processes, and both decreasing birth rate and increasing ageing of Polish society, the housing deficiency is lowering (in 1988 the shortage of flats was estimated to reach 1.2 million, in 2011 – 459 thousands). Concurrently 95% of new flats are flats on the free market, which are purchased by wealthier persons. Only 5% of the new flats were accessible for poorer individuals with the biggest housing needs (Lis 2013; Nowicki 2013).

5 One room for the family, one room for the parents, one room per 2 children and one extra room for next adult person (Wójcik 2017: 23).

eviction procedures – 89% of them, i.e. 8,2 thousand lodgers, were evicted that year from commune and cooperative housing due to the rent arrears (Nowicki 2013, Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania... 2013; *Dochody i warunki...* 2014, *Gospodarka mieszkaniowa* 2016: 18, 31–33, 36; Wójcik 2017: 23). At the same time, the access to quality municipal or social housing is limited. Social housing is defined as a flat which, regarding its equipment and technical standard can be inhabited, but the standard itself can be lower. Usable floor area of the rooms cannot be smaller than 5 m² per person, or in the case of a single inhabitant – 10 m² (*Gospodarka mieszkaniowa...* 2016: 13). In 2012, in Poland there were 78 thousand of social flats, a year later – 83.2 thousand (Salamon, Muzioł-Węclowicz: 2015: 28), but access to this type of housing is extremely limited. In many cities and communes the waiting lists are very long. In some places in Poland persons applying for the social housing have to wait for as long as 20 years, and the average waiting time in 2012 reached 7 years (KPPUiWS 2013).

The poorer a family is, the worse its living conditions are. A qualitative analysis of poverty and social exclusion (e.g. Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013; Bunio-Mroczek 2016) reveals a gloomy picture of lodgings of at least some of the families supported by social welfare agencies. Overcrowded and substandard flats in old devastated tenant houses are inhabited by large families. Shared toilets in shared corridors or even yards, porous windows and leaking roofs, and wet, cold rooms infested by fungi, insects, rodents, living areas heated by small coal stoves – all these conditions seriously affect health of both children and adults. It is important to underline that a certain percentage of children is deprived of their personal space due to financial and housing poverty. A lot of Polish families share the flats with the relatives, and obviously the average space per person decreases in large families. The situation is probably the worst in the low-income families⁶.

The surrounding of social housing, in big Polish cities in particular, although that has changed in the last years, continues to be characterised in terms of “pockets of poverty”. Marta Petelewicz, who researches children’s well-being in the cities of Lodz voivodship writes: “The physical space of [enclaves of poverty] is characterised by a degraded housing substance; tenement houses, mostly devastated and neglected dominating in the area, although they are often in a vicinity of contrasting renovated buildings and blocks of apartments, which are mostly fenced off. There are no recreational grounds in the neighbourhood, (...). Case-hardened yards [are] without greenery, benches, and infrastructure for children. Most often there are only trash-bins and parking areas. A rusty carpet hanger is a meeting and playing place for the local children (...). and information painted on the walls informs that playing football is forbidden (...). The space in Lodz children’s enclaves of poverty

6 In 2009, 9% of Year Six pupils living in Lodzkie voivodeship urban enclaves of poverty shared one room flat with other members of their families, some of them had to share their bed with someone else (Petelewicz, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2010; see also Wójcik 2017: 23).

consists of tarmac and concrete, and there are no squares, parks, playgrounds, thus it does not meet children's needs (...). Most often children do not have any opportunity to express their creativity, and as a result, they manifest anti-social behaviours” (Petelewicz 2016: 9–10, transl. AGG).

The Recommendation also states that **children should be protected from unnecessary moves**. The qualitative analyses of poverty and social exclusion also indicate that children living in the urban enclaves of poverty are exposed to instability resulting from migrations either economically-based, related to other family crises, or resulting from local social policies. For example, in the processes of devastated urban areas revitalisation their inhabitants are “temporarily” moved to a new environment. It seems that the policy of at least some councils of revitalised cities is based on the assumption that multi-problem families in particular should be “pushed” to the city outskirts and moved into low standard flats. Additionally, such poor clients of social welfare agencies in most cases are unable to come back to their revitalised homes as they cannot afford to pay the rent⁷, thus they subsequently have to move to other impoverished neighbourhoods (Warzywoda-Kurszyńska, Jankowski 2013; Garus 2015: 30). Children and youngsters from the enclaves of poverty experiencing such changes face adaptive difficulties related to new social milieus, often in new school environments. They therefore tend to prefer their old neighbourhood, which despite being unattractive remains familiar⁸ (*Nastolatki zagrożone...* 2008).

Another key issue should be emphasised in terms of the housing situation of children and youngsters, i.e. a significant number of homeless children that have been reported to live in Poland in the recent years: 1628 – in 2013 (55% them were 0–6 years old), and 1892 – in 2015. In February 2017, there were 1201 homeless children (0–17) recorded in the national counting of homeless persons (<http://www.mpips.gov.pl/aktualnosci-wszystkie/pomoc-spoeczna/art,8681,mniej-os-ob-bezdomnych.html>), however the decrease in the population could result due

7 For instance under the Lodz programme of the city centre revitalisation for the period 2008–2013, almost 1200 inhabitants were forced to move out from their flats or even districts. The younger, poorer and less educated city residents were more likely to live in old tenement houses. Generally the inhabitants were proposed to choose between 3 different flats, which were sometimes located in remote parts of the city. Those who had resided in social housing or had had rent arrears had no right to come back to the previously inhabited flats, or even to buy those flats (*Procesy gentryfikacji* 2015: 83, 91–93). It seems that the local government in Lodz addressed the criticism towards the revitalisation process, as this year (2017) the City Council has implemented a programme “Social lighthouse keepers”, which provides shield activities for the persons living in revitalised areas (<http://centrumwiedzy.org/projekt-pilotazowy-ii/latarnicy-spoeczni/> [last accessed 04.05.2018]).

8 A small qualitative study performed in Warsaw illustrates an adolescents' tendency towards spatial self-isolation. The respondents did not visit other districts and declared that they did not like their new situation and new places (*Nastolatki zagrożone...* 2008).

to a different methodology used in the research⁹. The homeless children in Poland are not street children, they live with their homeless parents in the places defined as non-inhabitable (sheds, small wooden summer houses, shelters, etc.).

Health and risk behaviours

Access to the free health care

In numerous lines, **the Recommendation addresses the importance of health care in the field of prevention of disadvantage and in promotion of children's wellbeing**. General condition of the health of Polish children and youngsters is subject to regular analyses. There are several national studies performed by the Central Statistical Office of Poland and by non-governmental organisations, such as the Public Opinion Research Centre. Interesting and critical studies are also performed by the Supreme Audit Office. Since 1990 Poland has participated in such international research projects as the HBSC (Health Behaviour in School Children), the ESPAD (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs) or the EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction). Therefore there are sufficient bases to study this issue in more detail.

For obvious reasons, health in its somatic, emotional and social dimension is conditioned by numerous distinguishing factors. These factors include socio-economic status and family situation, the place of living (also the region of the country), and studies conducted in Poland systematically confirm these interrelations¹⁰. The data obtained under different surveys and analyses are not coherent, however there is certain evidence demonstrating that some of the Polish children and adolescents suffer from long-lasting ailments. According to GUS research performed in 2014, over 26% of 0–14 year olds, according to their parents, suffered from this kind of ailments, more often boys than girls (29.4% and 22.6%), also 27% of the older teenagers and young adults (aged 15–29) declared the same – the rates of such declaration increased in most voivodeships in comparison to 2009. The list of serious

9 The definition of homelessness was amended and now is more restrictive. In 2017, in comparison to the research in the previous years, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy announced the research too late in relation to the start date of the national counting of homeless persons, therefore local self-governments and other institutional actors reported that they did not have enough time to prepare for the research).

10 In HBSC survey 2013/14, ¾ of the indicators were strongly associated with the family structure. The most important result seems to be that the presence in the household of two biological parents is a strong factor protecting children's health. Over half of the indicators were associated with the family financial status, and negative phenomena intensified in less wealthy families (*Zdrowie i zachowania zdrowotne* 2016: 11).

problems includes asthma and allergy, ophthalmologic problems, spine problems, headaches, and in case of older youngsters also backaches, thyroid diseases and other chronic disorders. Also in that year, 17% of teenage (11–15 years old) respondents taking part in the HBSC research declared serious health problems. Symptoms such as headaches, abdominal pains, backaches, vertigo, feeling depressed, irritated, grumpy, and sleeping difficulties were reported more often than in 2010¹¹. Children also reported more frequent injuries requiring medical assistance. The subjective assessment of individual's health was worse for children raised in single parent and reconstructed families, poorer families and families living in rural areas. In 2013/14, experts of the Polish HBSC research noted some positive changes in health behaviours. For instance, the level of physical activity of ¼ of the young respondents met the required norms (the increase of 5 pp in comparison to 2010), and a decreasing trend of overweighted population was observed. Yet, the everyday diet of children from low SES families is based on the cheapest products, ready-cooked meals, e.g. so-called “Chinese soups”¹². The experts claimed that not only the teenagers generally decided on their meals, not paying attention to health consequences of their inadequate diet, but also the nutrition model typical for poor families was transmitted to younger generations (*Zdrowie i zachowania zdrowotne...* 2016: 7, 121). Due to the limitation of the text requirements it is impossible to analyse the problem of disability, however it must be stressed that 3.7% of Polish children aged under 15 years of age were disabled in 2014. A higher rate of disability was indicated among older children aged over 10 years.

Employees of helping institutions interviewed in different studies notice that somatic problems as well as emotional and behavioural disorders are more frequent among children endangered by social exclusion than among their peers raised in better-off families. Although the subjective assessment of personal health might change in young adulthood¹³, it is important to acknowledge that chronic diseases of adults living in pockets of poverty partly result from ailments neglected in childhood (*Raport z badania. Kompleksowe...* 2012; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2013; Mazur 2015: 7, 79–82; Mazur 2015a: 86–87; *Zdrowie i leczenie...* 2016: 13; see also Golczyńska-Grondas 2014, *Zdrowie i ochrona zdrowia...* 2014).

It is also important to notice that although children's death rate is systematically decreasing, over 1,500 children and youngster die every year in Poland, and 2/3 of the deaths are reported for the older children and teenagers (aged 10–19). According to the data from 2014, more than half of older children (aged 5–19) death cases were due to injuries and intoxication. The statistics also show a sudden rise of suicidal attempts undertaken by the teenagers. This trend has been observed

11 The most often reported symptom was feeling nervous – 30.9% of adolescents, while vertigo – 13.2% was the rarest.

12 The cheapest ready-made pasta with flavourings.

13 Under a Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) study performed in 2016, young adults (aged 18–34) assessed their health as good (85%) and on average, there were no respondents who indicated that their health was poor.

since 1990, although the number of successful suicides is falling. The suicides recorded in the recent years have contributed to 16–20% of deaths of older teenagers¹⁴, 4 times more boys' than girls' deaths, and it is the second cause of death in the group aged 10–19 (*Dzieci w Polsce* 2015: 13, Szredzińska 2017: 116).

Adolescence is a phase of life in which individual tendencies to risk behaviours can increase – young people test their abilities in alcohol and drug consumption, get involved in erotic relationships, etc. Some positive changes were observed in this area in 2015–2016 in terms of consumption of psychoactive substances: e.g. since 2007 adolescents aged 15–16 were getting drunk less frequently, and a decreasing tendency to consume design drugs was also noted in the last few years (3–4% of 15–16 year olds were regular users). At the same time the studies show that the phenomenon of drinking alcohol in secondary school buildings has been decreasing¹⁵ – 65% of secondary school pupils declared that they did not notice drinking alcohol in their schools (50% in 2013), 27% declared that it happened “relatively rarely” in comparison to 37% in 2013¹⁶. On the other hand, there are some negative observations related to cannabinoids intake. For instance marihuana and hashish, substances illegal in Poland, are used regularly (at least once a month) by 10–15% of teenagers. 35% of older adolescents stated that the drugs were taken in school buildings, 11% said that it happened often or very often. 17–18% of adolescents (mostly girls) use tranquilizers and barbiturates without physicians' advice. 7% intoxicate themselves with OTC pain-killers, and this phenomenon is indicated as a serious problem as such drugs are available in practically all types of shops in Poland (Mazur 2014; Kalka 2017: 57–58; Ostaszewski 2017: 136; Sierosławski as quoted in Ostaszewski 2017: 137). Another type of risk behaviours that are also potentially connected with addictions, concerns the sphere of traditional and modern media – in 2013/14 almost 17% of 11 year olds and 21% of 15 year olds spent over 4 hours a day watching television. As far as computer use is concerned, the following rate was observed among those who used it for over 4 hours a day: 12.6% of 11 year olds and 34.1% of 15 year olds (the average time was less than 2 hours). The older a teenager is, the more time he/she spends on-line. Pupils of last years of secondary schools on average spend 4 hours per day using Internet – their activity is focused on social relations, listening to music and watching TV series. 58%

14 In 2013, there were 148 suicide-related deaths of 7–18-year olds (357 attempts), 2014 – 127 (442 attempts), 2015 – 119 (481 attempts), 2016 – 103 (473 attempts) <http://www.statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/zamachy-samobojcze> (last accessed 04.05.2018).

15 The statistics show *ipso facto* the inability of educational institutions to prevent children from risk behaviours even in their own territory.

16 The information on drinking alcohol (as well as using other psychoactive substances) in school buildings can be interpreted in terms of helplessness of school staff. However the reports do not clearly show which cases the interviewed adolescents have in mind when answering the relevant question. They can mean both use of these substances during school events and parties, but also the use on ordinary school days in any locations of the school area.

of teenage respondents claimed that at least sometimes they think that their life without Internet would be joyless, aimless and boring (Nałęcz 2015: 130, Feliksiak 2017: 190–195).

Early sexual behaviours are another type of risk behaviours in adolescence – the average age of sexual initiation among older teenagers, who reported such an experience (54%), is 16.5 (boys) and 16.9 (girls). The findings of HBSC in 2014 can be interpreted as particularly alarming as almost 37% of the sexually active 15 year old boys interviewed in the research were initiated when they were aged under 13 years. 79% of the sexually active teenagers approached under the study “Youth 2016” used contraception¹⁷. The teenage parenthood rate was significantly decreasing – from 8% in the early 1990s to 3.5% in 2014, and fewer adolescents met teenage parents in their environment. Yet, about 50–60 aged 13–14 become mothers each year, the youngest mothers in Poland are 12 years old. Single cases of this phenomenon were reported last years. There is the evidence which indicates that early parenthood is more frequent among adolescents with lower SES, i.e. children of poorly educated parents and living in poverty, although consequences of teenage parenthood, even in the group of underprivileged individuals, can be both negative and positive (Dzieci w Polsce 2015: 5; Bunio-Mroczek 2016: 21–29; Gwiazda 2017: 168–169).

Violence in all its dimensions affects health of individuals and societies, and endangers their wellbeing. The statistical data and reports on domestic violence against children published in the last years in Poland are not coherent. According to the National Police Headquarter, the number of child victims is decreasing, but the research performed by other institutions, including independent NGOs, show that the scale can be much bigger or even that the indicators are worsening. Over 47% of interviewed adults know families in which children are maltreated physically, 26.4% – emotionally, 32% of the teenagers know at least one peer in his/her environment suffering from at least one form of family violence. In 2013, 34% of children aged 11–17 declared that they were victimised by an adult they had known (mainly one of the parents, more frequently fathers than mothers), 30% of them were maltreated seriously enough to feel pain on the following day, be bruised, wounded or even suffer from fractures. Every tenth child experienced both physical and emotional domestic violence. It must be underlined that in 2012 spanking was still treated by 34% of Polish people as a discipline method in the process of socialisation, and slapping was accepted by 73% of the respondents (*O dopuszczalności kar...* 2012: 2; Wójcik 2017: 194–200, 204; Miedzik 2014 as quoted in Wójcik 2017). Children are also victimised as eyewitnesses of domestic violence (in 2013, 18% were in such a situation) (Wójcik 2013 as quoted in Wójcik 2017: 203). Moreover, over 12% of Polish teenagers experienced sexual violence, almost half of them suffered from two different forms of such maltreatment. Also in this case the experts state that the statistics are underestimated. It also seems that detection and persecution of such crimes is very difficult; in 2015 only 62 persons were sentenced

17 Although 2/5 of the respondents refused to answer this question (Gwiazda 2017: 169).

due to the rape on juveniles, and 629 due to the sexual abuse (Sajkowska 2017: 240; Beisert, Izdebska as quoted in Sajkowska 2017: 240; Trocha 2017). The peer violence seems to be an increasing phenomenon in Poland – according to the Empowering Children Foundation almost 60% of teenagers interviewed in the last years were maltreated at least once by the peers, mostly physically (41%), also under a radical form of group attack (18%). The increased percentage of young people experiencing violence from their peers is confirmed in the HBSC and the CBOS research: 37% students experienced different types of violence at school, the worst situation is in vocational schools, where 20% of the respondents were victimised at least twice during one school year. Over 1/3 of the most victimised adolescents claimed that peer violence had become a very serious problem (Mazur 2015: 7; Kalka 2017: 46–48, 54–55).

In this context it is important to remind that adolescence is the period of psychological moratorium, i.e. the culturally defined time during which adolescents are “socially entitled” to test new behaviours, even the hazardous ones. Polish and foreign studies demonstrate a relationship between SES and risk behaviours, which can be strong in some dimensions, such as anti-social behaviour or early sexual behaviour, and weaker in others (hazardous drinking, self-harm, cannabis, unprotected sex) (e.g. Mazur 2014; Kipping et al. 2015, Malczewski 2014; Malczewski 2017). Obviously, the risk behaviours in adolescence may pose threats related to somatic and emotional harms and can hinder the process of personal and social development, and finally delay the transition into adulthood. In most serious cases they can provoke long-life consequences (see e.g. Ostaszewski 2017: 133–134). It is possible to assume that these consequences are more serious and long-lasting in socially excluded collectivities, although there are also other groups which need more attention. For instance, the HBSC research demonstrates that residents of large cities are usually in the least favourable position (more injuries, lower life satisfaction, more time spent using computer and difficult communication with mother) (*Zdrowie i zachowania prozdrowotne...* 2015). At the same time it seems that adults, not only parents, but also professionals, have problems with adequate reactions to risk behaviours of adolescents, moving from insouciance to panic. Therefore working not only with teenagers, but also with adults, to help them to elaborate ways of successful communication with adolescents is of the utmost importance. Following British experts specialising in risk behaviours it can be stated that the researchers’ “prevention strategies should apply the principal of proportionate universalism with a focus on more deprived populations, within a population-wide strategy, to prevent widening of social inequalities” (Kipping et al 2015: 44).

The Recommendation underlines the importance of the access to high-quality services. In general, admission to constitutionally guaranteed free health care¹⁸ is

18 The Constitution of the Republic of Poland states that: “Everyone shall have the right to have his health protected”. Article 68 states: “Equal access to health care services,

problematic in Poland, and obviously lower SES also means limited opportunities of treatment, also within the organisational framework of the public National Health Fund. The area of public health in Poland has been subject to continuous reforms since the systemic transformation, nevertheless no government has been successful in their attempts. In 2015 functioning of the National Health Fund was negatively assessed in public opinion surveys by 3/4 interviewees, at the same time individuals who provided positive feedback had not used the health services several months before survey. Moreover, during the last 8 years covered by the surveys, the percentage of interviewees who stated that patients had been treated with care and responsiveness is significantly falling, as well as the percentage of respondents declaring that the access to GPs was easy (Zdrowie i leczenie 2016: 27–28, 31–32).

Problems with the access to health care begin already in pregnancy: 1/3 of pregnant women do not visit a gynaecologist in the first trimester of pregnancy. The rate of women who receive free prenatal screening is also low in Poland. One of the problems is due to the fact that this kind of screening is available for older women over 35 years of age (while for example 79% of children with cardiac birth defects are born to younger women) (Szredzińska 2017: 100–101). There are also other structural and cultural factors which can strongly influence women's behaviours¹⁹. The quality of service offered by public outpatient clinics in particular is often assessed negatively – women complain about humiliating and patronising communication between the doctor and the patient, gynaecologists' rude comments, the lack of intimacy during the examination or even a low hygienic standard of some clinics (*Bezpieczny hotel...* 2014: 6–9). An important factor (which seems to intensify) is a strong ideologisation of intimate life and as a result, ideologisation of the gynaecological care. Strong pressure of pro-life groups blocks opportunities of pregnancy termination, even in the cases of fatal birth defects, and leads to criminalisation of abortion²⁰. This causes the atmosphere of trauma and danger, especially if a pregnant woman has been diagnosed with serious complications.

financed from public funds, shall be ensured by public authorities to citizens, irrespective of their material situation (...). Public authorities shall ensure special health care to children, pregnant women, handicapped people and persons of advanced age (...). Public authorities shall combat epidemic diseases and prevent negative health consequences of degradation of the environment. Public authorities shall support the development of physical culture, particularly amongst children and young persons”.

19 Paulina Bunio-Mroczek, who health behaviours of pregnant teenagers in pockets of poverty in Lodz (therefore persons depended on the public health care system) indicates that the pregnancy is diagnosed relatively late which prevents early examinations, the interviewees did not participate in classes for future parents, young women also delayed the time of going to the hospital for child delivery (Bunio-Mroczek 2016: 113–114).

20 Article 152 of the Criminal Code lays down the penalty for both persons who execute abortion procedures (mostly physicians), and persons who help the pregnant women to terminate pregnancy, i.e. deprivation of freedom for the period of up to 3 years.

Furthermore, some evidence of negligence can be noticed in the early infancy, when 14% of newborns (till the 4th week of life) are not cared by doctors and nurses (although this kind of care of a child and a mother is guaranteed by the law), this proportion increases up to 30% in the case of 9 month old babies. The screening examinations which should be performed for all children are delivered in 51–73%, the worst situation is observed in the case of older adolescents (Szredzińska 2017: 97–98). Even though in May 2017 within the whole territory of Poland the care of children was rendered by almost 15,000 paediatricians, there have been a lot of difficulties in obtaining experts' consultation. In the same month, the Supreme Medical Chamber (nil.org.pl) recorded the following numbers of specialists in child medicine: 31 pulmonologists, 56 gastroenterologists, 62 endocrinology and diabetes specialists, 67 urologists, 68 nephrologists, 139 cardiologists, 188 otolaryngologists, 398 psychiatrists, and 425 neurologists. There were also 1502 active neonatologists; probably this number may suggest, particularly to someone who does not specialise in medicine however is professionally involved in the social sciences, that due to the ideological reasons life of a child is much more strongly protected during pregnancy than in the early and late childhood.

Moreover, the quality of free dental care in Poland is poor, and a low percentage of children currently benefit from free public dental programmes (3%), while in 2011, almost 92% of 15 year olds had dental check-ups. The low SES impacts the health behaviour also in this area, for instance over 20% of children of the final year of primary schools, who lived in Lodz pockets of poverty, visited dentists less often than once a year or did not do it at all. The Supreme Audit Office of Poland states that not only the dental care for children does not represent a priority in the Ministry of Health's policy, but it is also severely neglected. In the opinion of the SAO experts, liquidation of school medicine in the early transformation period in Poland resulted in the situation, in which all the responsibility for dental care was transferred to families, while in many well-developed countries the responsibility for forming health behaviours is delegated to educational institutions. (Petelewicz, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2010; *Wyniki badań...* 2011; Petelewicz 2013; *Dostępność i finansowanie...* 2013; *Zdrowie i ochrona...* 2014).

In 2017, it was assessed that 600.000 children and youngsters (9% of the population) needed professional psychiatric care, however access to psychological and psychiatric care is also limited, on average, one psychiatrist is responsible for care of 1508 patients. Additionally, data from 2012 shows that the average age of the professionally active specialist was over 60, and it should be considered if this age gap does not limit possibilities of establishing good rapport with young patients. The number of specialised centres for children and adolescents with sexual disorders, eating disorders, drug and alcohol addictions is definitely insufficient to meet the needs (www.brpd.gov.pl, www.rynekzdrowia.pl, nfz.gov.pl, see also Golczyńska-Grondas 2014, *Przeciwdziałanie zaburzeniom...* 2017). Pursuant to the Polish law, children and adolescents have the right to use psychological support in educational institutions, such as schools and psychological-pedagogical clinics free of charge,

however access to these institutions is limited. The same applies to specialised services at schools in terms of professional diagnosis, additional classes and different forms of support or even therapy (e.g. logopaedics). In 2014–2016, social pedagogues and psychologists were employed full-time only in 44% of Polish primary and secondary public schools. On average a social pedagogue took care of 475 pupils, a school psychologist of 1904 pupils, most often working in a school 20 hours per week. The worst situation was in secondary technical schools and in vocational schools. Significant differences were also reported for urban and rural areas. The average waiting time to get an appointment is one month (with the exception of crisis intervention). The staff of the clinics indicated that their professional activity was limited due to the lack of the employees, insufficient space, incomplete equipment and architectural barriers to disabled patients (*Przeciwdziałanie zaburzeniom...* 2017: 6–8, 15).

In general, the experts underline that the medical care for older children is worse than the care for babies, and that the category of adolescents – perceived as the healthiest members of the society – is often omitted in the analyses (in the research on inequalities in particular), therefore the databases are incomplete. Moreover, the access to specialists is differentiated according to the spatial dimension. There are voievodships deprived of any support in some paediatric specialisations (e.g. in 2014 in some voievodships there were no psychiatric wards and the whole voievodship's needs had to be met by one psychiatrist only). Thus it is likely that children need to be hospitalised instead of receiving treatment in out-patient clinics. There is also a risk that minor ailments, especially in the case of children from low SES families, can develop into more serious chronic diseases (Mazur 2011, Golczyńska-Grondas 2014, Topińska 2014, see also Szredzińska 2017: 99).

Education

The authors of the Recommendation emphasise the importance of access to **“inclusive, high quality education”**, equal opportunities and the role of education system in breaking the cycle of disadvantage, among others **“by targeting resources and opportunities towards the more disadvantaged, recognising and addressing spatial disparities in the availability and quality of educational provision and in educational outcomes; fostering desegregation policies, that strengthen comprehensive schooling, education promoting children emotional, social, cognitive and physical development”**. There was some very good news in this area in Poland, for instance an increasing number of children involved in pre-school education. This number doubled (in 2005/6, 58% of children in urban areas and 19% in rural areas attended kindergartens in comparison to over 98% and 65% in 2014/15). The improvement in school results, e.g. in PISA studies, has been observed (especially

in reading and interpretation, and in mathematics, the 4th and the 6th rank respectively), although in 2015 the results were lower than in 2012. The early school leaving rate is very low in Poland – according to a research, 2.5–3.5% pupils resigned from educational career in the recent years, in the population aged 18–24 the number of education and training dropouts was one of the lowest in the European Union – above 5% in 2016 (Herczyński, Sobotka 2014; Plichta 2017: 166).

The authors of the expertise of the Supreme Audit Office in Poland demonstrate that 76% of Polish pupils relatively willingly attend school, on average 40–50% parents of Polish pupils positively assess good material conditions (53%), friendly atmosphere among peers (45%), and good relations with teachers (39%). Concurrently, 1/3 of Polish children (the older ones, more females than males) interviewed in the last HBSC research reported that they suffered from school-related stress – the rate of such pupils has significantly increased in comparison to previous studies. About 25–30% of the interviewed parents claimed that their children were overloaded with educational tasks, the classes were overcrowded and the teachers did not treat children individually. In 2016, in secondary schools over 20% of pupils had some conflicts with their teachers – the relations between teachers and pupils seemed to be the best in high schools and the worst in vocational schools, where 35% of pupils did not like and did not respect their teachers. Generally pupils interviewed in all types of secondary schools in 2016, claimed that only 1–2 teachers at school were perceived by them as highly respected authorities (*Zdrowie i zachowania* 2016: 76; Kalka 2017: 43; *Przeciwdziałanie zaburzeniom...* 2017).

Despite of some of the above-mentioned successes, Poland still faces a high level of educational inequalities. According to only subjective opinions reported in HBSC project, very good school results were declared by 50.8% children from poor families and 69.5 children from well-off families. There are still numerous barriers in educational career of underprivileged children, such as a low level of basic needs fulfilment, inadequacy of free leisure time activities in comparison to the needs and interests of underprivileged children (adolescents in particular), limited possibilities of receiving economic and educational support from their parents. Moreover, schools are perceived as hostile institutions by “bad” pupils who are subject to formal selecting practices, discrimination and stigmatisation (e.g. Zahorska 2014; see also: Golczyńska-Grondas 2014; Golczyńska-Grondas 2014a; Petelewicz 2016). Educational strategies oriented at early school leaving are common among children from families with lower cultural capital, endangered by poverty and social exclusion. Pupils’ decisions to drop out at the first level of education are often explained by family and health reasons. The phenomenon of ESL is supported by negative self-esteem and the need to earn money for everyday living, especially among older students. Fatyga et al. underline that explanation of ESL in terms of “unwillingness to educate” or “poor pupils’ aspirations” is nothing more than stigmatisation proving the “pedagogical failure of adults”. Additionally, the pupils who were seriously neglecting their education,

in most cases were subject to administrative intervention, educational support was rare, psychological and material support infrequent (Putkiewicz, Zahorska as quoted in Fatyga et al. 2001; Fatyga et al. 2011; *Wybory ścieżki kształcenia* 2013; Herczyński i Sobotka 2014; see also Golczyńska-Grondas 2014).

A constructive school environment can be a very important preventive factor to counteract poverty and social exclusion of juveniles endangered by these phenomena, at the same time a developed educational career increase their chances for good life-quality in adulthood (Mazur 2011; Freeman et al. 2011 as quoted in Mazur 2011). Currently it seems as if most teachers lack the crucial educational and psychological skills required to work systemically with young “troublemakers” through team work and the development of coherent strategies to influence the pupils (i.a. Zahorska 2012). School pedagogues and psychologists are probably better prepared to such activities, however their possibilities are very limited by the number of wards (e.g. *Przeciwdziałanie zaburzeniom...*). Youth work practitioners indicate that children from underprivileged environments require an early diagnosis and teachers’ individualised, regular, and long-term support. All these activities are very difficult to perform in the Polish system of education.

It must be emphasised that since the very moment of systemic transformation in 1989, educational institutions have been subject to some reforms introduced by subsequent governments, and the latest reform has begun to change the system of education in 2017/18. The government commenced the process of liquidating gymnasias and re-introduction of 8-year primary school education, which will be followed by secondary school education. The reform was introduced in a negligent and hasty manner²¹, at the moment it destabilises the system and results in some level of chaos. It also wastes the resources provided under the previous reform implemented in 1999, when gymnasium level was a new element added to the system of education. After the initial (also chaotic) years, the gymnasias and their staff worked out their own educational strategies, many of them were very successful in terms of working with younger adolescents, especially the ones endangered by social exclusion. Due to the liquidation of the obligatory gymnasium

21 The reform was announced in June 2016. The work on the new curricula for the primary and secondary schools was commenced in the late autumn 2016. In February 2017, experts from the Polish Academy of Sciences identified failures in new curricula preparation both in the area of their merits and in the performed procedures. The former Minister of Education, Krystyna Szumilas, stated that the new curricula were contemptable as they aim was to indoctrinate children and youth (e.g. Lech Wałęsa, the Solidarity leader, the Nobel Peace Prize Winner and the first President of the post-transformation Poland was removed from the history handbooks (!)) (See e.g. *Gazeta Prawna* 02.02.2017). The reform provoked mass protests of teachers, parents, and trade unions. There were also demands for a referendum on the reform, which gathered almost one million signatures. The government did not respond to any of these demands, moreover the Polish Parliament, using a parliamentary majority of the ruling party, finally rejected the referendum demand as a result of manipulation to the proceedings.

as the intermediate level, this reform might lead to an increased phenomenon of early school leaving. It is possible to assume that the only aim of the ongoing reform is to re-traditionalise the Polish system of education due to political reasons (the curricula of the primary and secondary schools have been changed, e.g. the idea of new historical politics in humanities is visible, not mentioning the issues of sexual education converted into traditional teaching following orthodox indications of Catholic Church²²).

Participation

The Recommendation also mentions the necessity to “**put in place mechanisms that promote children’s participation in decision-making that affects their lives**” and obliges the EU countries to “enabling and encouraging children to express informed views, ensuring that those views are given due weight and are reflected in the main decisions affecting them”, the authors underline that children from disadvantaged background need special focus in this area. It seems that Poland is an active country which promotes children’s rights, and the office of the Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child was introduced in 2000 as the public authority. Officials who perform this function are very active in the area of children’s well-being. Yet, children and youngsters in Poland are still in a subordinate position and it is their parents or guardians who make decisions for them. Polish adults rarely give children any voice in planning and deciding about issues that are important to young people. So-called “democratic schools” (practically there are only a few private entities which operate in bigger cities)²³, specialise in the area of “alternative education” and some therapeutic systems based on the ideas of therapeutic community represent an exception. It is also possible to formulate

22 Urszula Dudziak, a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin, the main expert of the Ministry of Education, in the context of the school subject “Preparation to family life”, states that women’s spiritual vocation is either vocation or motherhood, she is against contraception as it is a source of divorce and infidelity, and claims that sexual life outside marriage bring serious consequences, such as the feeling of remorse till the end of life. She also states that divorced teachers can negatively influence their pupils (Żelezińska 2017). Next to this extremely conservative standpoint, it seems that the expert of the Ministry of Education is unable to take into account the reality of sexual life of Polish adolescents.

23 Just after the transformation in 1990s, there were some attempts to organise democratic schools, also within the public system of education. XLIV High School in Lodz, founded in 1992, was one of the examples of such a school with a school community, a school tribunal, etc. The school operated in this form for ten years. Nowadays the “Bednarska School Complex” in Warsaw can be treated as a model example of democratic education in Poland (bednarska.edu.pl). Although the education is paid, some places are available to children from unprivileged environments, including refugee children, free of charge.

a thesis that children and youngsters from unprivileged backgrounds are more often treated subjectively than their peers from better-off environments. In many cases they are perceived as individuals deprived of family or social support therefore employees of various institutions locate them in the symbolic space of impunity (Golczyńska-Grondas 2015), treating them in the manner that violates their rights. Children from underprivileged families experience psychological or even physical abuse probably more often than their peers from wealthier families (Sajkowska 2007; Sajkowska-Włodarczyk 2010; Golczyńska-Grondas 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that Polish adolescents are not very willing to participate in the societal life in a collective dimension. According to a report “Youth 2016”, 55% pupils participate in elections for school self-governments, 33% of older pupils (mostly living in big cities) are members of informal or formal groups, NGOs, social movements, only 6% are members of associations oriented on social activism, 2% participate in scouting. 69% adolescents describe themselves as religious persons, but only 32% participate in regular practices (Feliński 2017: 178–179; Głowacki 2017: 146; Kalka 2017: 62). In the recent years Polish youngsters were not particularly interested in politics (although $\frac{3}{4}$ declared that they were patriots). Recently this interest has been increasing: in 2016 more secondary school pupils declared their interest in politics at a high or a moderate level (17% and 36% respectively), 64% did not have a clear political orientation, 20% perceived themselves as right-wing supporters, 8% as left-wing supporters, and 8% as centrists. 22% supported one of the Polish parties – 13% the populist ones. The interest in public life was the lowest among pupils of vocational schools, girls in particular – 46% of them declared that they were not interested in politics at all. Youngsters’ favourable approach to nationalistic movements and organisations should alarm adults in democratic society – 28% of secondary school pupils support nationalistic ideology, 15% of boys and 6% of girls claimed in 2016 that they were nationalists, 25% declared antisemitism²⁴. 25% believed that sometimes undemocratic governments could be better than democratic, at the same time democracy was supported by 28%. A majority of Polish teenagers were convinced that politicians were interested only in their own careers and attracting voters and that nobody had any influence on the Polish government²⁵ (Badora, Herrmann 2017: 91, 102, 107, 112, 121; Głowacki 2017: 140).

Another alarming phenomenon is that youngsters, similarly to adults, have a low level of social trust, only 12% of secondary school pupils believe that they can trust

24 In 2007, in a research on hate speech, pupils and students “relatively more frequently” than adults declared that sometimes they happened to think negatively about someone who was different in terms of nationality, ethnicity, skin colour, gender, sexual preferences (*Spółeczna percepcja...* 2007: 10).

25 It is very interesting if and to what extent the recent political events in Poland will impact the attitudes of adolescents and the level of their participation in public life. I was finalising this paper in July 2017, during the time of a severe constitutional crisis and mass public protests against changes in the Polish legal system forced by the government of the Peace and Justice Party. During that period thousands of young people were taking part in the protests, which were held in all big Polish cities, many towns or even small local centres.

other people, 76% claim that one should be very careful in his/her relations with others. In general, the level of individualisation of Polish youth is high, and at the same time, the teenagers increasingly accept income inequalities, i.e. 10% stated that the level of such inequalities is fair, in comparison to 5% in 2013. 59% believed that they would have a chance to live a better life than their parents, but 17% of older adolescents stated that their generation was lost (!) (Badora, Herrmann 2017: 114–115; Boguszewski 2017: 88, 90).

Instead of the conclusions – what about “the bottle neck” in the process of implementation of the Investing in Children Recommendation?

All these “random choice” data and exemplifications mentioned above depict that the level of inequalities influencing everyday life of Polish children and youngsters is still high. Therefore it is important to consider possible barriers in breaking the cycle of disadvantage and developing a society that will be inclusive for all its youngest members.

1. Politicisation of social issues and “ensilaging model” of management in the area of social policy are in my opinion two main problems observed at the national, most general level, which prevent obtaining the recommended synergy effect in social policy for children and families. Poland’s administrative system relies too much on political games of interests and this phenomenon provokes: a/ instability of legal regulations of social issues, b/ sudden fluctuations in ideologies used as a justification of proposed solutions, c/ sudden changes in trends and implemented models – all these factors bring regular discontinuities forced by the changes of the governments and the resulting replacement of management, d/ focus on short-term results and short-term economising, and at the same time – e/ the absence of realistic long-term planning. The tendency of “ensilaging” social problems (the term is probably used only in Poland) means that despite of the social reality (in which mostly groups and individuals in need face various difficulties), the responsibility for planning and intervention is assigned to numerous institutions reporting to different ministries of the state (which rarely cooperate among themselves). Such model of functioning provokes a certain degree of institutional chaos or even counter-effectiveness. For instance there are two national agencies which operate in the area of the psychoactive substance addictions: the State Agency for the Prevention of Alcohol Related Problems deals with alcohol addiction, and the National Bureau of Drug Addiction which concentrates on drug and behaviour-related addictions. Both these institutions implement separate

programmes focused on different models of addiction, while the mechanism of addiction is identical in both cases, and problems of addicted persons and their relatives are also quite similar. While the NBDA implements numerous programmes dedicated to addicted teenagers, including long-term stationary programmes, the SAPAR does not offer many forms of this support to adolescents; it rather focuses on education and family work. It must be also underlined that long-term stationary programmes for alcohol addicted teenagers are not available in Poland. In the area of social welfare, at a very practical level, the ensilaging means that professionals representing different “silages” undertake uncoordinated interventions (e.g. in multi-problem families activities can be undertaken by social workers, nurses, policemen, probation officers, school pedagogues, etc.)

2. The Recommendation emphasises the aspect of prevention, particularly during early childhood, while the lack of an early diagnosis of the ongoing problems of children and youth at all levels of analysis and practice is observed in Poland. In general, the area of scientific studies is dispersed and fragmented even at the national level. At the regional and local administrative levels certain important, coherent data bases are missing. Scholars and officials working in different institutions apply different methodologies, including basic indices, divisions of age cohorts, etc. All these aspects limit opportunities in terms of conditionings impeding the possibilities of both long-term and comparative analyses. At the practical professional level, the deficiencies in the early diagnosis mean that procedures of identifying individuals, families and groups at risk do not exist or do not function (e.g. social workers do not actively screen the collectivities they work in, ordinary teachers do not recognise child poverty as the source of school difficulties, etc.). The lack of the early diagnosis influences, blocks or delays early intervention.
3. There are also problems with introducing and maintaining long-term, stable, and systemic interdisciplinary activities in multi-problem environments. This phenomenon results from many factors beginning with the issues mentioned above. Models of subsidising not only NGOs²⁶, but also public institutions preconceive unpredictability of financing, which impedes long-term planning. There are barriers to mutual cooperation among key local institutional actors, who can be perceived as “victims” of ensilaging. There are mental barriers, such as stereotyped image of the professionals from “competing” institutions²⁷. Insufficient skills in terms of cooperation are observed even

26 Some of the NGOs, the ones that are most active in the area of human rights and counteracting family violence in particular, lost their subsidies from the state budget last year.

27 E.g. social workers and family assistants express their negative opinion about probation officers and vice versa, etc.

in single “silages”²⁸. Problems in this area also result from bureaucracy and a phenomenon addressed in Poland as “grantosis”, i.e. a dependency on grant projects with strongly limited boundary conditions and very vague prospects of continuation.

4. The problem of strengthening children participation seems to be crucial in Poland too, due to many mental and cultural barriers, starting from the subordinate position of a child in the family, in the system of education and all public institutions. The conservative turn to the so-called “traditional values” (patriarchal family, catholic religion, hierarchical vision of the society, etc.) can have a negative impact on the ongoing changes in terms of children and youth’s participation. On the other hand, particularly teenagers rarely trust adults and do not believe in formal authorities, although it seems that they want to and can profit from relations with older people who treat youngsters as real partners.
5. Last but not least, it seems that modern Polish society has a problem with implementing the idea of social integration – social inequalities are accompanied by strong divisions among groups and social structure layers. In the most general terms, stereotyping, labelling and othering of persons (including children and teenagers) from disadvantaged backgrounds is depicted in private conversations, in mass-media, in public discourse (Tarkowska ed. 2013), also in discussions in social media²⁹. For instance, “gauche” mode of implementing Family 500+ programme has provoked some journalists, as well as Facebook users to present poor families in lampooning and humiliating descriptions, pictures and memes. At the administrative level of social policy two tendencies reflect the attitudes towards social integration. One is the tendency to ghettoisation: very often social housing is grouped in certain fragments of urban spaces in many Polish cities and towns, some public authorities strongly support the idea of constructing social settlements based on container barracks for impoverished families treated as a “threat to the social order”. A continuously strong tendency of institutionalisation of children and youngsters is another phenomenon, which in my opinion depicts the problem with social integration. It seems that the principle of providing a child raised in a multi-problem family with safe and adequate housing and living environment is still too often understood in Poland as the separation from the family of origin and as child’s institutionalisation. Although the birth rate in Poland is very low, the number of children

28 There are some barriers to cooperation between social workers and family assistants (Firlit-Fesnak et al. 2016).

29 Nationalistic and populist ideology has become more popular in Poland for the past few years, and this significantly hinders opportunities of helping other individuals in need, such as refugee children and their parents. The attitude towards refugees changed negatively in 2015. Nowadays, the declarations of some local governments and some authorities of the Catholic Church hierarchy are confronted with reactions, which can be described as hysterical, of populist politicians and a part of the public opinion.

in institutions and in foster care rather remains unchanged. The institutions are under the process of reform, but the progress is slow, foster care mostly relies on biological families, thus the intervention is often implemented too late to solve the family problems. The network of non-kin foster care families is developed rather slowly. This is probably also due to the mental barriers and labelling (e.g. accusation of strictly material motives of being foster parents). Moreover, “psychiatrisation” of child care has recently become a noticeable phenomenon, i.e. poor children’s emotional problems, especially in residential care institutions, instead of providing the wards and their families with a thorough diagnosis, and different forms of psychological support and therapy. Relational problems in interactions between service users and professional helpers can be indicated as the next factor blocking social integration. In this context stereotyped attitudes towards excluded ones, patronizing, etc. are also observed, and it seems that the number of highly qualified helpers who are able to establish partnership with their clients is limited (see e.g. Golczyńska-Grondas, Kretek-Kamińska 2007).

This paper provides a very modest input in the discussion on breaking the cycle of disadvantage and investing in the youngest members of society in Poland. For many years this discussion was mostly led among social scientists, but gradually also mass-media became involved. In 2014, I concluded that Poland needed a national, interdisciplinary, and institutionalised platform, i.e. a kind of research and implementation centre which could coordinate the research projects, support independent expertise, test innovative solutions, and disseminate knowledge about good practices on local level. This notion continues to be valid in 2018.

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Section two

Investing in children: instruments and results

Investment in children as a public good: the example of the Family 500+ Programme

Marek Rymsza

Introduction: what is the Family 500+ Programme?

The Family 500+ Programme (Program Rodzina 500+, hereinafter PR500+) is a governmental scheme that lies at the intersection of social and family policies, implemented in Poland since April 2016 under provisions of the Act on State Support in Raising Children (2016). The benefit has a fixed value of PLN 500 per month per child (about 120 Euro)¹. At the same time, the first (oldest) child in the family is entitled to this benefit only after meeting the income criterion², while the second and the subsequent children are eligible regardless of the size of the family's income. Social services have the right to control how the funds obtained from the programme are spent by parents and – in cases where evident wastage of funds is found – to exchange cash benefits for material assistance³. The benefits are paid to 2.62 million Polish families raising almost 4 million children. Expenditure from the state budget for the implementation of the programme is on average about PLN 2 billion per month. In the period of April 2016 – July 2017, the cost of payment of the benefit amounted to PLN 30.8 billion (MRPiPS 2017).

The announcement of launching the programme was presented in 2014 in a manifesto of the conservative political party Law and Justice (Zdrowie, Praca, Rodzina 2014: 108), which won the parliamentary elections in Poland in autumn 2015, and created an independent majority government. No *green paper*

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- 1 The amount is raised to PLN 1200 if the child has legal disability status issued by a Disability Assessment Board.
 - 2 The benefit is due if the net income per person in the family does not exceed PLN 800.
 - 3 In practice, the services make use of this right sporadically.

was presented prior the adoption of the said Act at the beginning of 2016. The objectives of the programme were indicated in the justification attached to the draft law submitted to the Sejm as a government legislative initiative (Sejm Paper No. 216/2016, justification). The objectives include: (1) reducing poverty of families, families with many children in particular; (2) long-term investment in children as a form of investment in human capital; (3) raising the fertility level of families to reverse, or at least stop the unfavourable demographic process of the ageing population.

The three basic objectives of the programme are interrelated, but the time perspective of each of them is different. Thus, the reduction of poverty, absolute poverty in particular, can be achieved in the short-term perspective. Just 1–2 years after implementation of the programme it is possible to conduct a preliminary estimate of its effectiveness in terms of achieving this aim (Szarfenberg 2017). The assessment of the implementation of the second objective, which is an investment in human capital, can be carried out in the medium term. In order to estimate the social rate of return of investments made by the programme, one must wait until the first children raised and educated using the 500+ benefit will reach adulthood. Reliable estimates in this respect can be carried out within 5–10 years after the implementation of the programme. Achieving the third goal, i.e. stopping the ageing process by increasing the fertility rate of women in the procreative age is an effect planned in the long-term perspective, which covers a dozen or more years. Changes in the number of children born measured in a shorter time perspective (e.g. year to year) do not allow to judge the durability of the demographic trend (Kotowska 2017b).

After eighteen months that passed since the implementation of the programme, it is impossible to perform a comprehensive assessment of its effectiveness and efficiency. On the other hand, an in-depth analysis of the structure and premises of the programme reveal the innovation in public planning in the social area in comparison to the approach dominant in Polish social policy during the time of transformation (1989–2004) and in the following decade (2005–2015). This study indicates that the innovation of PR500+ lies in treating public support for families bringing up children as an investment in human capital and children as a public good. This investment profile of the programme must be somehow revealed since the PR500+ is hybrid in nature, and investment orientation is an element of a broader change in the state's development paradigm, and at the same time, a manifestation of a shift in the organisation of public social support: from a preference for a selective approach towards a more universal approach. The four aspects of the programme are: 1) investment, (2) hybridity, (3) universality, and (4) a new development paradigm that are functionally interrelated and mutually dependent. That is why it is worth presenting them together. This approach is adopted in this study⁴.

4 In this paper I use comments about PR500+, which I presented in a non-scientific essay Rymsza 2017.

The family 500+ Programme as a hybrid

The PR500+ is hybrid in nature due to the following three aspects of its structure: (1) combining different rules governing the availability of benefits; (2) combining social and investment functions; (3) linking social intervention (reduction of poverty) with impact on demographic processes (increase in fertility). The section below contains brief descriptions of these aspects.

The combination of: (i) the logic of the universal access to the benefit, according to which every second and subsequent child is eligible, and (ii) the logic of selective and income related, benefit, when applied to the first child, did not result from the premises of the programme. The introduction of the income criterion in the case of the first child in the family was related to the necessity of adjusting expenses to the funds available in the state budget. In the case of total abandonment of the income test, the annual expenditure resulting from the programme would increase by as much as PLN 14 billion per year⁵.

The combination of two functions of the 500+ benefit: (i) the social function and (ii) the investment function result from the premises of the programme. 500+ is a social benefit, i.e. a benefit provided to increase the disposable income of households, thereby increasing consumer capacity and the level of social security of families. But according to the intention set out in the explanatory memorandum to the bill (Seym paper No. 216/2016, justification), the 500+ benefit is also a form of state participation in financing the cost of raising children. In this context children are treated not only as a private good, but also as a public good. In other words, the 500+ benefit is in this sense the state investment expenditure for the creation of the public good, and not a social transfer supporting private household consumption. The indicated second aspect of hybridity is perceived – so far – only in expert circles. In general public perception, 500+ is a social benefit (CBOS 2017a).

The third aspect of the programme's hybridity concerns including two operational objectives in its structure, i.e.: (i) limiting the poverty of families, absolute poverty in large families with many children (short-term target) in particular, and (ii) increasing family fertility (long-term target). This aspect, like the second aspect, reflects the project proponent's intentions. Hence also in this approach, hybridity is used intentionally. The hybrid nature of PR500+ is illustrated in Table 1.

5 Under the existing rules the PR 500+ benefit benefits 57.2% of all children under 18 – see MRPIPS Report 2017.

Table 1. The hybrid nature of the Family 500+ Programme

Aspect of hybridity	Function A	Function B
Combining the principles of accessibility of benefits:	The principle of universal support: a benefit dedicated to all families bringing up children (in the case of the second and subsequent children)	The principle of selective support: benefit addressed to poorer families (income test applied to the first child in the family)
Combining the benefits function	Classic social function: increasing the disposable income of families upbringing children	Investment function: State participation in the cost of raising children – a form of investment in children as a public good
Combining a short-term and long-term goal	Short-term goal: reduction of poverty, especially absolute poverty in large families	Long-term goal: increasing fertility of families as a way of slowing down the ageing of society

Source: author's own analysis.

Shift in the development paradigm: from the neo-liberal approach to social investment based policy

The approach adopted in the PR500+ is in line with the premises of investment-based social policy. The inclination of social policy towards social investment means that at least part of the state's social expenditure ceases to be treated as satisfying the society's important consumer needs, bypassing market mechanisms (decomodification), by the use of public funds, and instead it is treated as expenditures that will provide specific, financially measurable benefits to the society in the future (see Morel, Palier, Palme eds. 2012). In the first place, investment in human capital, education of citizens in particular, is considered to be such as investment expenditure (see Becker 1993). PR500+ is an example of investment-based policy which addresses children and fertility.

Before social investment policy was created in developed countries, the decline in fertility was considered an inevitable side effect of modernisation processes and was associated with the individualisation of lifestyles (a growing scepticism toward social roles requiring long term commitment) (Kotowska 2017a), consumerism (perception of having children in terms of costs to bear) (Golinowska 1994: 118–119), mass entry of women into the labour market (redefinition of gender roles in the family and society) (Frątczak 2017), but also with the availability of public

social protection in old age, which in traditional societies was provided by their own children. In other words, the fall in fertility below the simple replacement of generations was associated with increasing prosperity and welfare state institutions, including the state guaranteeing social security for the general population.

In the context of investment social policy, the method of reversing the unfavourable trend of fertility decline does not lie in the state withdrawing from the social protection it guarantees, but vice versa – its extension – so that the social security system supports and does not weaken the procreative decisions. It is not a policy based on withdrawing the state intervention, nor compensatory policy, based on the state providing a compensation for benefits lost by parents on the labour market (employment breaks or restricted economic activity as a result of giving birth to and bringing up children). It is a policy of incentives to invest – invest in children as human capital.

The orientation of social policy on investment in children through income support for the family, as assumed by PR500+, is in line with Gary Becker's approach, perceiving the family as a production unit, not a consumer unit (see Becker 1991). But at the same time it goes beyond the framework of Becker's economic theory of the family. Parents raising a family are treated as going beyond the area of producing private goods; children within the paradigm of investment based social policy are a common good, the production of which determines the future of society as a community. Thus, it is assumed that the state should cover from public funds part of the costs of the family investment, which is the upbringing of children. When adopting such an optic, you can even treat the 500+ benefit as a quasi-remuneration for parents for their work at home (raising children), regardless of their professional employment.

The PR500+ reverses the direction of the evolution of the national social security system, which, in Poland after 1989, was determined by the trend to move away from universal redistributive programmes to promote selective support programmes⁶. This trend was a manifestation of the neo-liberal transformation strategy, according to which the modernisation of the country was to be ensured by rooting of market mechanisms in the economy and limitation of state intervention in the free play of market forces (Rymsza 2013: 224–232).

In the neo-liberal concept, social support from public funds can in principle be transferred only to the weakest and the poorest, and the remaining citizens should buy social protection on the market, and thus use individual or group foresight programmes organised in a commercial formula⁷. This is because in liberal macro-economy, social benefits financed from public funds are considered as consumer spending, burdening the state budget and hampering economic development. The income test as a selection tool for those entitled to social support ensures not only the proper selection of beneficiaries (and therefore the aptness of addressing

6 Cf. the comparison of the universal and selective programmes in: Garfinkel ed. 1992.

7 Cf. the description of the liberal social policy model in: Esping-Andersen 1990.

benefits), but above all limits the scale of social transfers. Hence the orientation of social policy in the neo-liberal transformation project towards social assistance and selective programmes.

PR500+ changes the perception of pro-family social transfers in Poland. Treating the 500+ benefit as a social investment does not give grounds for, corresponding to the liberal strategy, differentiation of children to those requiring public support and those not requiring; all children in this perspective are a *public good* (NRR Opinion 2016). It is the recognition of children as a public good that seems to be the most important change at the normative level, where the concept of social investment, of which in Poland PR500+ is a part, contributes to social policy.

Subjectifying treatment of families as a manifestation of the empowerment approach

PR500+ is an example of the empowerment approach in social policy, consisting of simultaneous strengthening and empowering of recipients of support (understanding of empowerment after Berger, Neuhaus 1997). Thanks to the programme, the level of securing the needs of the family and its members increases (the strengthening function), but it is the parents who decide how they spend the funds received from the state (the empowering function). Therefore, the family is not only the addressee of the state's activities, which is the essence of the objectifying approach in social policy, but is also treated as a co-producer of the public good (raising children), entitled to make decisions as to how to conduct the investment. This in turn is a manifestation of the subjectifying approach. This is an important innovation in planning public action: the empowerment approach is associated with the orientation on social investments, including the co-production of public goods by citizens and the state.

This creates a new area for empirical research: monitoring the spending of funds from the PR500+ and related changes in consumption patterns and managing household budgets. Public statistics tries to face this challenge⁸. This is not an easy task; you have to specify which expenses should be included in the category of investments in children with a deferred social rate of return, and which should be treated as manifestations of the growing current consumption of households.

Some critics of PR500+ emphasise that a better form of family support would be benefits in kind and postulates the use of funds for the construction of nurseries, kindergartens and other instruments from the work-family balance palette

⁸ This task is undertaken as part of a panel survey on household budgets kept by the Central Statistical Office.

(Więź 2017, statements by Iga Magda). Supporters of the state's extension of social services infrastructure usually formulate *expresis verbis* or adopt a hidden assumption that parents are not the best holders of public funds. The conviction that it is experts or public decision-makers who know better how to use these funds effectively is a manifestation of the objectifying approach in the planning of social policy related to family. However this reveals the debate present in the literature on the subject over the years, over how to best solve the problem of poverty: whether a more effective and efficient form of supporting persons and families affected by this problem is financial aid or support in-kind (see Golinowska 1994, chapters 9–10).

Findings on the nature of the phenomenon referred to in the social sciences as “inheritance of poverty” represent the key problem in the dispute over effective combating poverty. Two different descriptions of mechanisms of perpetuating poverty function in the literature on the subject⁹. According to the first, the essence of the socio-cultural inheritance of poverty is the long-term shortage on the side of household income, forcing families to save excessively, which translates into children learning to live in a state of permanent deprivation of needs. The second approach assumes that the cause of poverty lies in dysfunctions in the sphere of spending household resources and is associated with established habits of irrational consumption or life without planning the future. In this approach, persistence of poverty results from faulty socialisation and dysfunction of parents' behaviour, which are passed on to future generations living in the enclaves of poverty.

One can say that we have two different interpretations of the phenomenon of cultural inheritance of poverty. According to the first, the inheritance of poverty is an unwanted result of rational adaptation of individuals and families to a structurally flawed situation related to the social division of labour, i.e. the inability of the parents to earn enough, despite their economic activity (low wage market in certain occupations) or readiness to take up employment (structural unemployment). According to the second interpretation, the inheritance of poverty results from faulty socialisation, which is manifested in fixed tendencies to irrational behaviour in normal life situations.

It is impossible to decide which interpretation is right, as in the enclaves of poverty, the two cultures of poverty meet and mutually penetrate each other (see Bunio-Mroczek 2016). However, it can be assumed that if we are dealing with the dominance of the first type of poverty culture, effective solution of the problem of poverty inheritance should consist of providing families with stable income, as predicted by PR500+. If the second type of poverty dominates, then in order to break the process of inheriting poverty, social work is necessary with the parents' generation to change their attitudes as well as investment in children's education

9 Description of two interpretations of the culture of poverty – see Karwacki, Kaźmierczak, Rymśza 2014, chapter 2 (by Rymśza).

to enable them to acquire social competences not available in the process of faulty socialisation at home, which in turn favours their use of state-controlled social services infrastructure.

In summary, the PR500+ is an example of a pro-income approach in combating poverty. This is a consequence of the subjective treatment of families, but also results from the assumption that the key cause of the cultural phenomenon of poverty inheritance in the Polish provinces and enclaves of Polish poverty is the low income of families, and not faulty socialisation patterns.

Defects, limitations and possible side effect of the 500+ Family Programme

The hybridity of the PR500+, consisting of combining different goals, functions and organizational solutions, results in making the programme solutions illegible in its design, which are inconsistently used and remain incompatible with the wider social support system. The following three such drawbacks of PR500+ can be identified: (1) adoption of the rolling definition of the first child in the family; (2) not including the 500+ benefit in family income taken into account when determining the right to other benefits; (3) introducing, through the programme, an additional income criterion, which complicates the social support system.

The adoption of a “rolling” definition of the first child in the family is a way to reduce the scale of social transfers made through the PR500+. According to this definition, the first child in the family is the oldest child, if not older than 18 years of age. The child under PR500+ programme is entitled to support from birth to the age of majority, but when it becomes the oldest in the family within the meaning of the Act (older siblings having exceeded 18 years of age) the right to benefit depends on the family’s fulfilment of the income criterion. This solution, structurally somewhat complicated, could be accepted were it not for the failure to include the 500+ benefit, when determining the right to other social benefits, such as family benefits. The rolling definition of the oldest child brings savings to the state budget, which, however, are offset by spending on other social benefits, which would not apply if the 500+ benefit were included in the family income in the context of an income test.

At the same time, it should be noted that in the context of PR500+ in relation to the first child in the family, the legislator did not use one of the already existing income criteria, but established further one. After the implementation of the PR500+, the Polish social support system contains as many as 6 different income criteria, which makes it structurally complex and highly non-transparent in social perception (NRR Opinion 2016). This system requires ordering.

As regards negative side effects of the PR500+, the demotivating effect on women in terms of continuing their professional activity during the period of raising children, is of the utmost importance (Magda 2016). According to Iga Magda it was possible to establish a link in the second half of the 2016 between 40–55 thousand women leaving the labour market and the PR 500 + (IBS Analysis 2016)¹⁰. From this perspective, the PR500+ appears as a threat to the preferred, especially in the years after Poland's accession to the EU, concept of work-family balance (see Czepulis-Rutkowska, Mirosław 2017). However, the scale of this side effect is difficult to verify empirically. First of all, the years 2016–2017 were a period of economic prosperity and the lowest level of unemployment in twenty years; the unemployment rate after the introduction of the programme was lower than before its introduction¹¹. Secondly, the 500+ benefit primarily increases the unattractiveness of the lowest-paid jobs and does not necessarily have to limit the employment level of women. It is rather more likely to force a rise in wages. It seems that the relatively small resistance of the employers' organisations to raising the minimum hourly wage, which took place in 2016, can be attributed to the PR500+. It is therefore possible that the PR500+ will serve people in escaping the low wage trap, rather than demotivate them from working. Verification of the impact of PR500+ on the labour market requires further in-depth studies and systematic monitoring.

PR500+ should be “encapsulated” by social services. It is not about limiting the parents' agency in administering the 500+ benefit, but about expanding the field of their choices in the field of investments in education and development of children. Expecting that the availability of an additional benefit will trigger an increased supply of pro-family services, in the context of significant deficiencies in public services infrastructure and highly uneven distribution across the country, translating into territorial differences in quality of life (see GUS 2017b), would be wishful thinking. Similar to the assumption adopted at the threshold of transformation, according to which the free market itself will absorb unemployment resulting from the liquidation of unproductive employment in restructured state-owned enterprises. There is a need to develop a child and family support service system at the local level, taking into account the different needs of families and available to all, without using the income test as a selection tool for those entitled. It means shifting – at least partially – social services from social assistance system, on a similar basis as it was done in the case of a 500+ benefit. At the moment there is no such integrated social services system¹².

10 This is several times less than the IBS team expected when preparing the analysis.

11 The unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2016, when the payment of 500+ benefit was started, was according to the BAEL methodology – 3.5%, and in the third quarter of 2017 – 2.7% (GUS 2017a: 74, table 17).

12 The study work was undertaken in the 2017 at the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Poland.

Final conclusions

Social capacity of the programme. In Poland, PR500+ crosses the Rubicon in terms of programming social policy toward family. The adoption of the Act on State Aid in raising children in 2016 turned out to be so socially successful¹³ that it redefined the area of choice of the public decision maker and thus defined the framework for (further) public activities. After the introduction of the 500+ benefit, the return of the preference for family policy based on indirect solutions appears unlikely, and political parties are likely to compete in the future to fill the gaps in the area of direct state support for families¹⁴.

Paradoxically, however, it is hybridity that was largely responsible for the resilience of the PR500+. On the one hand, it turned out to be so widespread that it changed the philosophy of organisation of social support: from the scheme based on addressing support only to the poorest people and families, which dominated during the transformation period, towards universal programmes addressed to all citizens. On the other hand, maintaining the element of selectivity limited the criticism of the PR500+ on the part of opinion-forming liberal circles. In this context, the possibility of presenting PR500+ as an element of the logic of modernisation, rather than counter-modernisation: as a form of social investment, and not “hand-outs for the poor”, became an important element in public discourse.

It is worth noting that for similar reasons, the Third Way programme implemented in the United Kingdom by the Labour Party during the leadership of Tony Blair (Blair 1998), was successful. The Third Way was constructed according to the logic of hybridity, based on a conscious combination of opposites, in accordance with the philosophy proposed by Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1998). It seems that in European social policy time has come for the implementation of hybrid solutions and the introduction of multi-sector solutions, in line with the concept of a welfare mix (see Johnson 1999).

Public debate as a clash of interests. The Polish public debate focused on the functioning of the PR500+ is characterised by a tendency to stereotype and stigmatise poorer families. Criticism of the PR500+ beneficiaries concerns to a large extent behaviour that cannot be considered socially dysfunctional. This is not a critique of pathological behaviours such as “they are spending their benefits on alcohol”, “they do not want to work”, etc. There is a lot of disbelief and indignation that “they went with the children to the seaside”, “they bought a second-hand car”, “they paid off short-term loans”, “they no longer want to work in the supermarket for minimum wages”. Yet these and similar decisions are manifestations of rational behaviour, which demonstrate the aspirations of beneficiaries to the lifestyle of the

13 A year after the introduction of PR500+, 77% of Poles supported it – see CBOS 2017a.

14 The distinction between the implicit and explicit family policy following Kamerman 1995.

middle classes. They confirm the accuracy of the organisation of the PR500+ as an income support programme¹⁵. The consumer choices made by the beneficiaries of the programme and the behaviour on the labour market are generally conducive to raising the children's aspirations for social promotion and their fuller participation in social life (Kośny 2017).

What is the meaning of the social popularity of 500+ and the simultaneous numerous voices critical of the programme and its beneficiaries, which have been expressed by representatives of the elite opinion-makers? The quarter of a century following 1989, including the transformation of the political system crowned with Poland's accession to the EU (1989–2004) and the years of post-accession modernisation of the country (2005–2015) is a period of spectacular economic development of Poland. It is just that the fruits of this development were consumed in a way beneficial for the emerging post-transformation elite, with the marginalisation of interests and aspirations of poorer groups and social strata. In the autumn of 2015, at the polling urns, Poles from smaller towns, or working in the less-paid professions, claimed their rights to participate in the benefits of the country's development. This share of benefits was guaranteed by the social programme of Law and Justice Party and that is why it was met with the support of numerous voters. The pro-modernisation Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) ruling in 2007–2015, however, celebrated the successes of a quarter-century transformation from the position of winners, without seeing the need for a more balanced assessment of the Polish transformation. And that is why it lost in the parliamentary elections.

In conclusion, the PR500+ is a manifestation of the policy of empowering families that have lived so far in the culture of poverty. The vast majority of beneficiaries make rational use of the opportunities created. And this meets with the criticism of the "winners of the transformation". This can be interpreted as a manifestation of the aspiration of these circles to maintain their privileged social position. Thus, the expert and media debate around the PR500+ to a lesser extent serves to diagnose the situation of the beneficiaries of the programme. It rather is a field where the interests of the "winners" of the Polish transformation are articulated.

Towards a social investment policy. PR500+ is an example of investing public funds in human capital. The family ceases to be treated as a consumer unit and begins to be perceived as a production unit. The children are treated as the main public good that families produce. This is in line with the latest trends in the European social policy, where social policy is increasingly referred to as the policy of social investment, and family policy even becomes child-centred (see Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2017).

15 This aspect of the PR500+ is highlighted by experts of the Large Family Association 3 Plus (Stowarzyszenie Dużych Rodzin 3 Plus) – cf. Więż 2017, statements by Joanna Krupska.

Pro-family transfers are not only socially accepted, but in fact there is a functional demand for them. The pro-social orientation of the PR500+ corresponding to the neo-Keynesian logic of stimulating development through public spending has met this demand. Thus, the PR500+ is a harbinger of a fundamental departure from neo-liberal programming of the functioning of the social sphere. This departure is necessary, and even indispensable, if Poland is to develop in a more balanced manner and for the general public to benefit from the benefits of this development. The combination of the social benefits function of PR500+ with the investment function has opened the way to other pro-investment solutions in Poland's social policy. An example of this is the government programme of public investment in cheap housing for rent for young families (with the option of deferred purchase – for those interested), referred to as the Apartment +.

This does not mean, however, that the concept of system transformation based on neo-liberal assumptions was incorrect. Rather, following the change of the political system, the neo-liberal strategy exhausted its potential, and its continued application in the post-accession period in fact strengthened the so-called dependent development. Therefore, a fundamental change in the country's development strategy is needed. This shift was defined in Poland in the formula of responsible development (SOR 2016), one of the dimensions of which is the combination of economic development with social development: one that promotes an inclusive and cohesive society. This is facilitated by PR500+ which is a programme that invests in children as a public good.

Taking into account its hybrid nature, it is possible to build a social and political consensus around PR500+, defining a new framework of pro-family and pro-investment state social policy. The introduction of the 500+ benefit was preceded by numerous family-oriented changes in social policy, although with a smaller scale and impact. Examples of such solutions included: (i) one-off benefit following the birth of a child, (ii) the Large Family Card, (iii) extension of parental leave. The strength of PR500+ lies not in the fact that it is a harbinger of a new approach in social policy of the state, but that through its momentum and social validity it is a breakthrough point, deciding for the (possible) sustainability of the earlier turn of policy towards pro-family solutions (Rymsza 2016: 67–72). It is an incontrovertible fact that the PR500+ introduced in Poland an atmosphere of growing polarisation on the political scene, producing a permanent social division (CBOS 2017b). Nevertheless, the author of these words expresses the hope that the above-mentioned objective premises will prove stronger than the conditions of the mentioned division, and it will be possible in the future to build a consensus around the assumptions of the social investment policy.

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Effects of early childhood education on school achievement and inequality in Spain: the value of early childhood education

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Introduction

The term early childhood education and care, hereinafter the “ECC”, refers to public and private early childhood education services aimed primarily at working parents (Moss 2014; European Commission 2013). Family policies of early childhood education are framed within the context of the related policies in that they merge two key functions by providing both care and education at a vital stage in the child’s life, namely from the ages of 0–3 years old, with major variations being in evidence depending on the institutional context. Recent research has shown that the early years of a person’s life prove crucial for the cognitive development of numerous social skills and abilities (Barnett and Camilli 2002; Burger 2010; Datta et al. 2010; Apps et al. 2012). Only recently the socioeconomic, cultural and educational importance of pre-school learning has been shown through the works of Heckman and Masterov (2007), Heckman (2006) and Esping Andersen (2002; 2008). These authors claim that pre-school education prior to the age of three is vital vis-à-vis ensuring children’s future educational attainment and offsetting any potential inequalities that may emerge as a result of family socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Indeed, research has evidenced how factors such as investment in pre-school education are key to reducing child poverty and to securing children’s well-being in a context of ever-shifting family change (Heckman 2011; Conti, Heckman 2012; Esping-Andersen 2002; Flaquer 2014). In this regard, Haverman and Wolf (1995) reported that child poverty is reduced when children are provided with quality education in the first few years of their life.

The analytical issues which emerge from these studies are key to conceptualising pre-school education and gauging the actual benefits to be gained from investing in this kind of educational service for children in particular and for

society as a whole. The notion of pre-school education was used in the comparative study of family policy and gender equality in welfare states in Europe (Daly, Lewis 2000; Engster, Stensöta 2011). Yet, in analytical terms, the educational benefits to be gained from investing in pre-school education for both the children themselves and for society have received less attention from scholars, and when they have been the subject of inquiry the findings have proved ambiguous. Certain researchers have concluded that early pre-school education is linked to behavioural problems during adolescence, whereas other studies have reported no such negative effects (Baker 2011; Clarke-Stewart, Allhusen, 2005; Waldfogel 2006). Numerous international studies have highlighted that quality pre-school education can contribute positively towards cognitive development and enhanced educational attainment in later stages of education, primarily among financially disadvantaged children who live in low-income families (Belsky et al., 2007; Brooks-Gunn 2003; Campbell et al. 2002; OECD 2006; Schewinhasrt et al. 2005; Waldfogel 2006). Specifically, the analyses to emerge from PISA data underscore the fact that children who have benefitted from at least one year of pre-school education tend to score better in reading at the age of 15 than those who have not (OECD 2007). In contrast, other studies conclude that the educational benefits linked to early schooling tend to become blurred in the second or third year of formal schooling, particularly among children brought up in a nurtured educational environment (Barnett, Camilli 2002; Blau 1999; Magnuson et al. 2007; McKey et al. 1985). According to the comparative study by Engster and Stensöta (2011) on child welfare, investing in family policies which foster quality pre-school education is an effective tool for enhancing both adolescents' educational attainment and their welfare.

Also prominent are the studies which have empirically shown the short and medium term benefits to be gained from attending pre-school, particularly with regard to cognitive abilities, such as acquiring language skills and short-term academic performance (Barnett 2008). Bassok (2010) showed for the United States that children under the age of four who receive pre-school education achieve significantly better results in literacy tests than children taken care of by their parents. In a similar line of research, the studies conducted by Schweinhart et al. (1993), Heckman et al. (2010) on the well-known *Perry Pre-school Project*, reported the positive effects on educational attainment and cognitive skills of attending infant school and on children's health and well-being (Currie 2001). Indeed, researchers such as Bauchmüller et al. (2010), Bauchmüller (2013), Kundsén et al. (2006) and Cunha et al. (2006) highlight that cognitive skills related to learning develop in the early years of life in relation to the environment in which the child grows up; hence the importance of attending pre-school, particularly for disadvantaged children. Furthermore, the conclusions to emerge from these studies evidence the link between the quality of the facilities provided by these pre-schools and the cognitive benefits for those children under four years of age who attend them (Hansen, Hawkes 2009; NICHD 2009).

It should also be mentioned that there is substantial empirical evidence to reflect the existence of differing educational practices among parents depending on the socio-economic status of the family (Ermish 2008; West et al. 2000; Feinstein 2003; Becker 2013; Mistry et al. 2008). Based on these findings, the beneficial effects of pre-school education among lower-class children have been shown, mainly due to the fact that the stimuli to which they are exposed at these centres resemble those received by the children of well-off families who are cared for in their own environment. These findings have been reported for the United States (Mc-Cartney et al. 2007; Bassok 2010), the United Kingdom (Becker 2011) and Germany (Felfe, Lalive 2012; Schober, Piess 2013), although other studies suggest that the beneficial effect of pre-school education is distributed evenly for children with a different socioeconomic status (Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2001; Vandell et al. 2010). Although these studies fail to prove conclusive given the different approaches used to measure socioeconomic condition (in some cases the parents' education is considered whilst in others it is the family income), they do seem to provide clear evidence in the sense that attending pre-school before the age of four does to a certain extent make up for social and educational imbalances resulting from family contexts in which there are limited socio-economic resources that can be devoted to fostering and stimulating the cognitive and personal development of these children throughout their life cycle (Gormley et al. 2005; Melhuish 2003).

Concurring with this line of argument, many researchers have provided empirical evidence that the quality of pre-school education can offer major benefits for children from less-favoured family and socioeconomic contexts and that pre-school education can become a valuable instrument in fighting social inequality (Knudsen et al. 2006; Esping Andersen et al. 2011). Attending pre-school educational centres therefore proves to be an effective mechanism for combating the educational inequality that stems from family circumstances (Bradbury et al. 2011; Dearing et al. 2009; Hansen, Hawkes 2009). For instance, Geoffroy et al. (2010), showed that whereas children whose mothers have a low education level display fewer cognitive skills at the age of six than those whose mothers have a high level of education, said premise fails to hold for children whose parents have low levels of education when the children attend pre-school.

The benefits to be gained are not only individual but also social. In this context, it is also worth highlighting the positive benefits for the public authorities of investing in pre-school education. There is significant literature in the United States reporting the importance of investing in quality pre-school education (Bauchmuller et al. 2010; Karoly, Bigelow 2005; Waldfogel et al. 2011). According to the calculations made by Heckman (2011), each dollar invested in high quality pre-school education generates an annual return of between 7% and 10% on the amount invested.

Although there is widespread consensus in Spain concerning the benefits of education throughout the life-cycle or so-called lifelong learning, there is less agreement with regard to the benefits of early education as a form of human capital due

to the important role played by the family as a key actor in the socialisation process and care of children during the early years of their lives (Cebolla 2014). This accounts for the fact that in Spain few studies have explored the possible link between quality pre-school education and subsequent educational attainment throughout life. Broadly speaking, Spain is a country which offers limited services when it comes to providing pre-school education facilities (Miguélez, Recio 2010; Ibáñez, León 2014; Moos 2014). According to Ibáñez and León (2014), the Spanish notion of pre-school education is characterised by its family-based welfare model in which the family plays a key role in looking after children informally through relatives during the early years of a child's life. This system of "informal family-based care" (Saraceno 1994; Moreno Mínguez 2010) has been grounded on a limited development of pre-school education on the part of the public authorities, where the provision and quality of such services is limited and is more welfare oriented (González 2003). In the specific case of Spain, prominent are the works of Gutiérrez-Domènech and Adsera (2012) and Cebolla et al. (2014), who highlight the positive effects on educational attainment of attending formal education at an early age, although they fail to provide empirical evidence on the beneficial effects of how investing in this type of policy can reduce educational inequality.

From the legislative standpoint, the Act on the General Organisation of the Education System [LOGSE], approved in 1990, constituted the first step towards recognising pre-school education in Spain as part of the educational system, establishing two cycles of infant education: from 4 months old to 3 years old and from 3 to 6 years old. According to Rubio (2002), this educational reform heralded the introduction of a certain minimum in terms of quality and public responsibility in the organisation of nursery school facilities. However, the regional decentralisation of powers in the matter coupled with the lack of sufficient funding hindered the implementation of said regulations (González 2004). The subsequent Act on the Quality of Education [LOCE] (10/2002, 23 December) brought an end to the single model of infant education from 0 to 6 years old. This new law was grounded on creating a cycle of voluntary pre-school education up to the age of three, and was welfare-based in nature, although there was limited public availability, with most services rendered only by private entities. The other educational cycle was also voluntary, but public and free, and addressed to children aged from 3 to 6 years. This law did not last long, as in 2004 the new government repealed the LOCE and approved a new act on education which partly re-kindled the spirit of the 1990 LOGSE Act by re-introducing pre-school education from 0 to 3 years old. For this purpose, the amount of 100 million Euros was invested over the period 2008–2012 through the Educa3 Plan. The plan basically consisted of strengthening the educational and not merely welfare-based nature of such services, training professionals and opening new publicly-run nurseries and schools. The cutbacks enforced as a result of the economic crisis in 2008 and the change of government in 2011 led to the Educa3 Programme being scrapped in 2012 and to the privatisation of many of these services (Ibáñez, León 2014).

Objectives and methodology

Objectives

Based on this theoretical approach, the principal objective of the present analysis is to conduct a comparative study of the shifting development of family child education policies linked to pre-school education and to gauge how these policies impact on educational attainment and on reducing educational inequalities in Spain in comparative terms. In this regard, we present empirical evidence based on an exploratory analysis of the data available from various statistical sources. This is an innovative contribution in Spain since, previously analyses of family pre-school education policies focused on gender equality and changes in family structure, however apart from one or two exceptions, (Cebolla et al. 2014), they lacked the element of exploring their possible link to educational inequality and educational attainment in such a detailed and comparative manner. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned theoretical considerations and adopting a comparative European perspective, our research seeks to provide an answer to the question of whether pre-school education positively impacts educational attainment and whether it helps to reduce the educational inequalities that emerge from the socioeconomic and family contexts in which children live. Based on this general question, our research pursues the following goals:

- To examine the link between access to pre-school education and educational attainment in the various countries analysed.
- To explore different uses of pre-school education depending on the socioeconomic situation of the family in different European countries and to gauge the extent to which pre-school education helps to reduce imbalances in the academic performance of families that are disadvantaged in terms of socio-economics and culture.

Instruments

The approach used in the present analysis is based on gathering secondary data from a range of different statistical sources in order to pinpoint possible educational and social benefits of investing in pre-school education. The method draws on data available from a variety of disperse statistical sources which are not always comparable. The advantage of this measuring technique is that it enables diverse data sources to be brought together, standardised and provided with a comparable format. In addition, this approach highlights the importance of the validity and reliability of the data provided, since they have previously been validated at the primary sources (Sellitz et al. 1980). This instrument also facilitates comparative analysis and allows for the deductive formulation of several questions related to the research topic (Mayntz et al. 2004). The technique merges statistical data from a range of different

sources that contain both individual and aggregate data. We selected data for Germany, Denmark, France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom, since each of these countries represents an example of one kind of welfare state but display a different approach in terms of pre-school education policies. Denmark is included in the so-called “social-democratic” model of welfare in which the provision of educational and care services is universal, free and of high quality. It also fosters work-life balance. Germany is an example of the so-called “corporative” system in which care and pre-school education are conceived by the State as a basic family function, encouraging the involvement of the mother in the care and socialisation of the young. Spain and Italy represent the “Mediterranean” style welfare model which is family-oriented, and where investment in services and facilities of this kind is minimal and welfare-oriented (Ferrera 1996). The United Kingdom is included in the so-called “liberal” model in which pre-school education is market-oriented and there is very little State intervention in supporting such educational services (Esping Andersen 2002; Martín et al. 2013).

The following indicators were chosen to perform the comparative analysis:

1. Indicators of access to pre-school education

- Use of pre-school education for children aged from 0 to 2 years old.
- Difficulties faced by parents in terms of using pre-school education (cost, quality and availability).
- Use of pre-school education for adolescents aged 15 in disadvantaged families.

2. Indicators related to family and educational policies of pre-school education

- Duration of parental leave (maternal and paternal)
- Public spending on pre-school education
- Cost of pre-school education

3. Indicators related to educational attainment depending on use of pre-school education and family situation

- Average reading performance results of children in primary school in terms of the number of years in pre-school education.
- Educational attainment in mathematics of 12 year-old children who attended pre-school education for more than one year.
- Average reading performance results of children in primary school in terms of the number of years they attended pre-school education and the level of education of their parents.

The comparative description of these indicators will allow us to provide previously unexplored results for Spain regarding a possible link between applying policies that foster pre-school education, access to pre-school education, changes in the family, educational attainment and educational inequality. The first three groups of indicators, which are of an exploratory descriptive nature, concern contextual variables related to differing access to these educational facilities and services, family situation and educational attainment policy, and difficulties involved in accessing this type of education in these different countries. The latter group of indicators

provide an explanatory analysis of the link among access to pre-school education, educational attainment and social inequality; in this case, educational attainment is a dependent variable and the independent variables represent access to pre-school education and result from a disadvantaged family situation. Applying this innovative approach to the case of Spain allows us to gain deeper insights into the effect which pre-school education has on academic performance and life-long personal development.

A variety of statistical sources has been used to achieve these objectives and to seek an answer to the above-mentioned empirical goals. The indicators and variables were drawn up based on data provided by the EU-SILC (Eurostat), European Labour Survey (Eurostat), PISA Database (OECD), PIRLS Database, IEA; UOE and National Accounts, OECD Tax Benefit model, UNECE, International Network on Leave Policies and European and EUROFOUND (European Quality of Life Survey).

Analysis of the results

Table 1 sums up some of the indicators which exemplify differences between public pre-school education policies in the various countries analysed. The first finding that is worth highlighting is that investment in this type of educational facilities does not exceed 1% in all the countries considered, with the exception of the Nordic countries. The case of Denmark and Sweden, where the percentage is slightly above 1% of their gross domestic product and where investment has increased most since 2006 (see graph I) is prominent in this regard. Spain occupies an intermediate position, and the effort made by the public authorities to boost this kind of facilities since 2006 can be seen, even though the 2007 figure still failed to exceed 0.7% of the GDP (see graph 1). The United Kingdom and Portugal are the countries which invest least in this type of education, among other reasons due to the neoliberal focus of the British welfare state model and the purely care-oriented nature of these services in Portugal (Tavora 2012). The cost of these services to families in the various welfare systems, with regards to this factor, is worth emphasising. The greatest cost, measured as a percentage of a family's salary in which there are two low-income earners, has been observed in the United Kingdom, where it reaches 27.7%. Germany is the next country. The lowest cost has been noted in Portugal (4.7%) and in Sweden (6.7%). The cost in Spain is around 8.2% of the salary. These figures, however, should also include the amount of fiscal liabilities which are payable in relation to these services, and as a result, their cost is even higher hence for many families informal child care provided by their relatives might prove more cost-effective (European Commission 2013). Although the cost seems lower in Spain, it should be stressed that there is very little public availability of such services in Spain, whereas in Denmark and Sweden

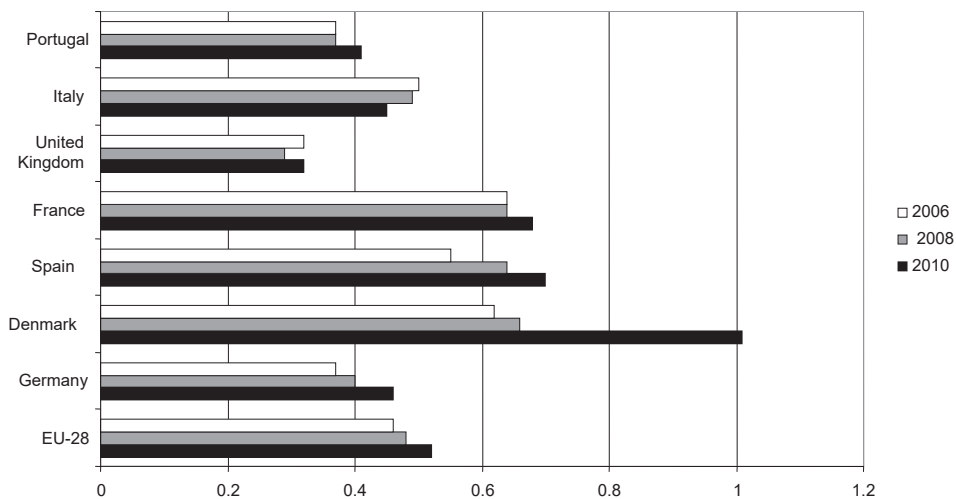
they are provided virtually free of charge to all citizens and paid for with public tax revenues. The lack of pre-school education services in Spain has been a permanent characteristic since the transition to democracy. In fact, a care-based system and poor availability of public nurseries and infant schools has been a predominant theme (Meil, Rogero 2014; González 2004).

The relevance of parental leave should not be underestimated when making any interpretation. It is due to the fact that, depending on options available to families in terms of obtaining paid leave, parents will use the pre-school education services to a greater or smaller extent. The highest number of paid months of parental leave, allowing parents to look after their children, is available in Denmark (12 months), Sweden (18.6 months) and Germany (17.21 months). In Spain this time covers the period of 4 months and 19 days, which resembles the situation in Italy (4 months and 65 days). In the United Kingdom it covers only 1 month and 4 days (see table I). Research carried out in this context underscores the impact of the duration of parental leave on parental involvement (Flaquer, Escobedo 2014). However, less attention has been focused on exploring the link between educational attainment and reducing educational inequality. In the case of Spain, the literature seem to suggest that when parents have low levels of education, they more seldom use parental leave, and their involvement is smaller and of a poorer quality in comparison to parents who have completed secondary and tertiary education (Flaquer et al. 2015). These results fail to provide any conclusions in terms of the use of parental leave in relation to children's educational attainment and reduction in educational inequalities.

Table 1. Table which sums up family policies of pre-school education 2015

Country	Public spending on pre-school education % GDP	Duration of fully or partially paid paternity or maternity leave (duration in moths and days)	Cost of pre-school education (% average salary)	Effective mean taxes (% average salary)
Germany	0.5	17.21	14.2	70.6
Denmark	2.0	12.09	11.2	69.3
Spain	0.6	4.19	8.2	25.7
France	1.2	4.19	9.9	48.6
Italy	0.6	4.65		
United Kingdom	0.3	1.4	27.7	85.4
Portugal	0.4	6.98	4.7	37.4
Sweden	1.6	18.6	6.7	34.6

Source: Authors' own findings based on Eurostat, UOE and National Accounts.



Graph 1. Public social spending on pre-school education as a % of GDP, 2006–2010

Source: Authors' own findings based on Eurostat, UOE and National Accounts.

These data concur with the difficulties expressed by parents with regard to accessing pre-school education (see Table 2). In Spain, Italy Portugal and the United Kingdom, the financial cost is the key difficulty (67%, 63%, 63% and 78%, respectively). The poor public availability of such services poses a major hurdle in the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain and Italy, whereas in Sweden it was reported only by 28% of the respondents. The respondents also highlighted the problem of poor quality of the service. This obstacle was declared by 30% of Spanish respondents, 25% of British and German, and by 36% of Portuguese, whereas only 18% of Swedes declared it. These findings underline the fact that it is not only the cost of public pre-school education services which determines the use thereof but also their availability and quality. Another key barrier is, the high financial cost of these services, which is at comparable level in the southern European countries, where public offer is extremely limited and where families are forced to shoulder the burden of having to pay for private pre-school education services. By contrast, in northern European countries, the public offer and quality of such services is guaranteed for those families which decide to use this service. Facilities are limited in southern European countries and the quality thereof is not subject to any strict control (Esping Andersen et al. 2011; Knijn, Oorschot 2008; Cebolla 2014).

As reported in numerous studies, differential access to these educational facilities also results in the contrasting differences in children's educational attainment and with regard to reducing inequality, in the United States in particular (Bassok 2010; Burger 2010; Heckman 2006; 2011; Waldfogel, Washbrook 2011; West et al. 2000). Table 3 shows, retrospectively, the differences in access to pre-school education facilities among 15 year-olds in terms of the socio-cultural features of their families of origin. A look at the first indicator, which sums up the combination

of disadvantages, reveals that disparities in 15 year-olds' access to pre-school education differ by 12% between those who are disadvantaged and those who are not, in favour of children from families which are better off in socioeconomic indicators, as an average of the EU 28. In terms of countries, it can be seen that the difference in access between families with lower and higher levels of education is 3.5% in Germany, 6.4% in Sweden and 5% in Spain. The country to evidence the greatest difference in terms of level of education with regard to access to educational facilities is Portugal (16.6%), with France evidencing the lowest (2.1%). Furthermore, the children of immigrants are less likely to have access to such pre-school education facilities, with the greatest disparities being in Spain (22.8%) and in Italy (27.9%) and the lowest in France (11.3%) and Portugal (14.1%). These data highlight the fact that children from disadvantaged families are those least likely to have access to pre-school education, despite being the group who could benefit most from such facilities vis-à-vis reducing the social and educational inequality brought about by family origin, a fact underlined in numerous reports and sociological studies (European Commission 2013; Burger 2010; Berlinski et al. 2009; Heckman 2011; Melhuish 2003).

Table 2. Key issues in terms of accessing pre-school education (% of parents), 2011

Country	Availability	Cost	Accessibility	Quality of the service
Germany	61	50	39	25
Denmark	37	43	32	20
Spain	53	67	44	30
France	72	60	50	25
Italy	58	63	37	32
United Kingdom	54	78	39	25
Portugal	53	63	42	36

Source: Authors' own findings based on the European Quality of Life Survey, Eurofound (Self-declared obstacles).

The data analysed previously need to be contrasted with the data that evidence the beneficial effects for educational attainment of attending early pre-school education. The data provided by PIRLS 2011 indicate that pupils who have spent longer periods in these child educational facilities are better prepared and score higher in primary education. As can be seen from Table 4, in all the countries selected for the study, children who have spent over three years in pre-school education obtain higher scores in reading in primary school than those who have spent less than one year. The differences observed between countries may be due to many factors which could include the differing public availability or quality of the facilities.

Table 3. Differences in pre-school education attendance rates for 15 year-olds from disadvantaged family environments, 2012

Combined disadvantages									
	EU-28	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Portugal	Sweden
SPD	-11.9	-8.8	-8.6	-7.9	-6.1	-11.6	-4.8	-16.6	-12.9
SE	0.53	1.7	1.34	1.02	1.14	2.08	0.76	1.92	1.74
Parents with no tertiary education									
	EU-28	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Portugal	Sweden
SPD	-7	-3.5	-6.4	-4.9	-2.1	-5.7	3	-16.6	-7.8
SE	0.4	1.33	1.27	0.83	0.9	1.44	0.61	1.92	1.8
Immigrant families									
	EU-28	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Portugal	Sweden
SPD	-12.4	-16.3	-18.8	-22.8	-11.3	-17.9	-27.9	-14.1	-18.9
SE	0.77	2.24	1.73	1.91	1.74	2.42	1.59	3.39	2.23

Explanatory notes: SPD – score point difference significant; SE – standard error. Comparisons are based on statistical significance tests of $p > .05$. These mean that the likelihood of making a false statement is less than 5%. Cells with less than 50 pupils (unweighted data) have been allocated as missing.

Source: Authors' own findings based on OECD and PISA.

As reflected in the revision of the theory, it is well known that in the United States access to pre-school education for economically and socially disadvantaged children yields major benefits vis-à-vis offsetting educational disparity in primary education (Melhuish 2013; OECD 2014; Heckman 2011). The data provided in the present analysis, taken from PIRLS, support this notion for the European countries chosen for the study. The data in graph II show that the beneficial impact of access to pre-school education on reading performance is greater for children from families with low levels of education than families with high levels of education. On average, in the EU 28, the reading advantage for children who attend pre-school education for over one year and who are from families with a low level of education is 18 points higher than for children of the same level who attended less than one year. The impact on the children of families with a high level of education is 9 points (Eurydice 2014). In the case of Spain, the positive effect of attending pre-school education in children from families with a low level of education is 15 points in reading performance compared to children from the same socioeconomic status who do not attend or who attend for less than one year. For

Spain, these data support the notion of how important it is to have access to pre-school education in the fight against educational inequalities. Similar studies have been conducted by Hidalgo and García (2013) into the impact of children attending pre-school education on reading scores and mathematics in primary school based on individual data from the PIRLS-TIMSS Survey (2011). These results for Spain thus evidence the extremely positive effects on educational attainment, mainly on the scores obtained in reading ability in primary school for children whose parents had no university education but whose children had attended pre-school for at least three years.

Table 4. Mean score in reading depending on the duration of pre-schooling for fourth-year primary school pupils, 2011

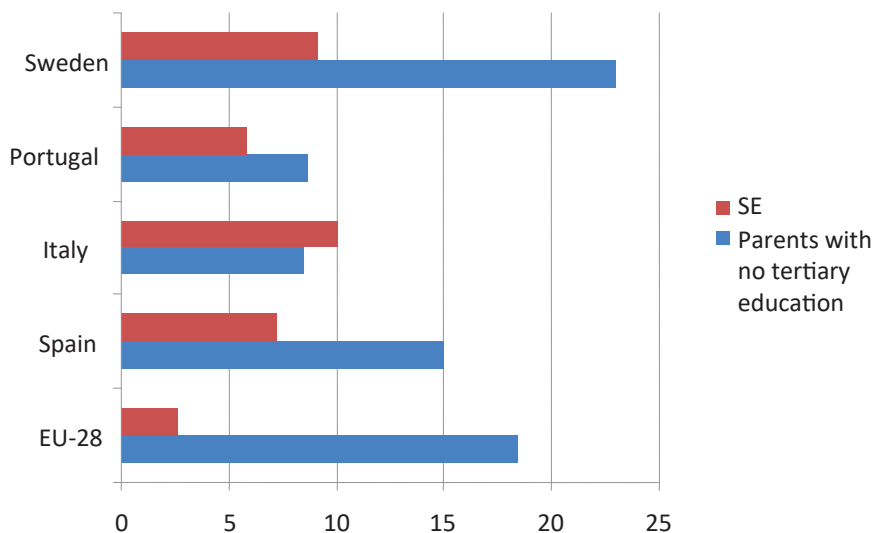
Country	<=1 year / EE	1 to 3 years/ EE	> three years/ EE
EU-28	511 / 2.03	525 / 1.04	548 / 2.44
Germany	508 / 7.57	540 / 2.97	523 / 3.88
Denmark	522 / 8.21	544 / 3.05	549 / 2.52
Spain	493 / 5.72	505 / 3.01	522 / 2.47
France	516 / 20.31	514 / 3.43	524 / 2.82
Italy	527 / 8.73	530 / 3.13	549 / 2.24
United Kingdom	*	*	*
Portugal	527 / 4.69	544 / 3.10	549 / 5.52
Sweden	518 / 7.40	536 / 2.98	551 / 2.35

Explanatory note: PIRLS used the central point of the scale (500) as a reference point which it maintains constant from evaluation to evaluation. Cells with less than 50 pupils (unweighted data) have been allocated as missing. The United Kingdom does not offer data on pre-school education. SE – standard error.

Source: IEA, PIRLS 2011 Database.

The data also reflect the educational benefits of attending pre-school education through the scores obtained by 15 year-old pupils in mathematics (see Table V). The results displayed in the following table point to a significant link between having attended pre-school education for over one year and the performance in mathematics, according to the data provided by PISA (2012). These data show that for all countries, but particularly Germany and France, attending infant schools for at least one year has a major positive impact on the mathematical competence of 15 year-olds when compared to others who did not attend such schools. In the case of Spain, it can be seen that the difference in mathematics scores between those who attended such schools and those who did not is significant (45.5 points) and is above the European average (35.3). Data also reveal that the link between the scores obtained in mathematics and access to this kind of education rose from 2003 to 2012 as a result of increased schooling rates for children under three years of age (OECD 2013). The main methodological problem involved in these data in the case of Spain is that there

might be a bias in the access to such schools in favour of children from families who enjoy a higher socio-economic position, which might add to educational inequalities should governments and local authorities fail to invest in order to foster universal accessibility for all children to educational programmes of this kind (OECD 2014).



Graph 2. Mean score in reading of fourth-year primary school pupils who attended pre-school education for more than one year depending on parents' level of education, 2011

Note: SE – standard error.

Source: Authors' own findings based on IEA, PIRLS 2011, database.

Table 5. Mean score point difference in mathematics associated with attending ECEC for more than one year, 15-year-olds, 2003–2012

2012									
	EU-28	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Portugal	Sweden
SPD	35.3	62.5	43.5	45.5	73.3	35.6	46.3	41	
SE	1.33	4.75	2.97	2.78	5.61	4.31	2.95	3.91	
Period 2003–2012									
	EU-28	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	United Kingdom	Italy	Portugal	Sweden
SPD		–12	4.9	30.6	4.7	*	40.8	19.7	7.3
SE		13.8	16	7.8	17.2	*	11.3	5.9	8.6

Explanatory notes: SPD – score point difference significant; SE– standard error.

Source: Authors' own findings based on OECD, PISA, 2012, database.

Conclusions

The results presented in this paper seem to suggest that access to pre-school education to children aged from 0 to 3 has a positive impact on educational attainment in Spain, and helps to reduce the educational inequalities that stem from socio-economically disadvantaged family contexts. In addition, the findings indicate that access to pre-school education differs depending on the family's socio-cultural status, although to a different degree depending on the country in question. Spain stands in an intermediate position in this ranking although it is children whose parents have a lower level of education who, in comparative terms, have less access to pre-school education. Northern European countries evidence the highest percentage of children from disadvantaged families who are able to access public pre-school education. In this regard, and in line with international literature, data show that children in Spain who have spent longer periods in this kind of education obtain higher scores in reading comprehension and mathematics, thus reflecting the beneficial effects of such schooling.

Finally, the findings obtained suggest that pre-school education in Spain has an extremely beneficial effect for economically and socially disadvantaged children, and that it is therefore an effective tool for reducing the educational inequalities brought about by family origin. Specifically, the difference in Spain is 15 points in educational attainment (reading comprehension) of disadvantaged children who have attended pre-school education compared to children of the same socioeconomic and family status who have enjoyed access to this kind of infant education. In sum, the results presented in this study would seem to underscore the importance of infant education policies vis-à-vis reducing the educational inequalities of children and teenagers throughout their life-cycle, particularly in the case of children from families that are the most vulnerable in economic and cultural terms.

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Mothers' employment and its consequences for investment in children¹

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Introduction

The increasing labour market activity of women in the last three decades of the 20th century triggered a public debate on potential consequences caused to a child by her/his mother's absence from home. Nowadays, when the economic activity of mothers has become quite a common phenomenon, both across countries and social groups, the question of the consequences has returned. The increased interest in this subject is mainly due to a lively discussion on the question: *What does it mean to be a good mother?* The term "intensive mothering" was formulated by Sharon Hays (1996), and it is regularly addressed in media, and public and academic debate. Mothers' employment has become a bone of contention in the so-called *mommy wars*. Another reason to intensify discussions on the impact of mothers' employment on children's development is the implantation of social investment perspective in the debate on the direction of changes of the modern welfare state. Nowadays childhood is regarded as a period the consequences of which individuals will experience throughout their lives. The key experiences are those related to cognitive and non-cognitive development as they are of the utmost importance to individual's future welfare. In this context, everything that parents forsake when their children are young may have significant implications for the future of their offspring.

The paper focuses on child care as a way of investing in children. It does not address issues related to financial investments. The aim of the paper is to use the available empirical studies in order to analyse mothers' employment consequences

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for their children's development. Relying on the literature, I aspire to answer the following question: Does mothers' employment have negative consequences for children's development?

Intensive mothering

The term "intensive mothering" was formulated by Sharon Hays (1996) to describe the belief that good mothers should first and foremost be caregivers intensively raising their children. According to intensive mothering ideology, mothers are expected to invest vast amounts of energy, time, money and emotional labour for the good of their children (Elliott et al. 2015). Intensive motherhood consists of three elements. Firstly *mothers are required to be the main and the most important carer for their children*. It is based on an assumption that the child needs constant care provided by the primary caregiver and the mother is the person for whom this role is best suited. However, if for some reason the mother is unable to fulfil the role assigned to her, she may be replaced by another woman. Secondly, intensive motherhood requires mothers to devote their time and energy for the good of their children. As a result, the mother's life is to become subordinated to the welfare of the child. Child care absorbs emotionally, requires significant expenditures of time and energy, commitment and substantial preparation. Thirdly, and most importantly in the context of this paper, it is assumed that the intense mothering implies that the mother should resign from her professional career. She has to care for children, who deserve to be in the centre of her attention, and should treat them with absolute devotion. Under this approach woman is expected to be an ideal mother. She has to adapt her life to be caring and fully committed to her children. A woman with a child is primarily perceived as a mother, and when she works, the role of employee is only an addition to her identity. As women are employed not always by choice, intense motherhood is presented to them as an ideal to which they should aspire.

Social investments

The last decade of the 20th century marked the beginning of a debate about why and how parental behaviours contribute to children's welfare. Economy based on knowledge and services required a change in the approach which had developed in the initial years after World War II. It was indicated that the main goal of social investments was to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty and to prepare new generations of employees to the requirements of the changing labour

market. The market where the need for knowledge and skills would be increasingly high, job security would decrease, and the new non-standard forms of employment would develop and widespread. Social investments also aimed to make individuals responsible for their welfare as well as welfare of their families, and thus relieve the social security systems. The latter has become particularly important in terms of progressive aging of the population in rich countries. All these aspects emphasised the importance of investments in children and development of human capital. As Esping-Andersen wrote in 2002: A concerted child-focus is (...) *sine qua non* for a sustainable, efficient, and competitive knowledge based production system. The coming working-age cohorts will be small, and they must sustain huge retirement populations. The income security of pensioners two or three decades down the line will in large measure depend on how much we can mobilize the productive potential of those who today are children. More generally, the only real asset that most advanced nations hold is the quality and skills of their people (Esping-Andersen 2002: 28). Social investment, as a new paradigm of the welfare state, makes focusing our attention on childhood as a period of accumulation of skills and capacity development necessary for success in adulthood. In their calculations for Sweden, Klevermarken and Stafford (1999; based on: Hallberg, Klevmarken 2003: 207) estimated that the total investment in children had the same potency on economic growth as the total investment in machinery and buildings. Nowadays children are expected to be productive in the future, therefore it is necessary to use childhood for the purpose of the future. While this approach may give rise to concern (Michoń 2014a) there is no doubt that the discussion on social investments revived a discussion on the relationship between working mothers and development of their children.

Investments in children are sometimes defined very broadly as "economic, cultural, social and interactive resources that parents provide for their children" (Hamilton et al. 2007). Researchers capture the concept of parental investment in different ways, however most of them agree that the resources and parenting practices are crucial for educational and professional achievements of the child. With an increase in the female labour force there were concerns that their employment will significantly reduce the time spent on child care. In other words, using modern terminology, it will decrease the level of parental investment in the child. It is easy to list arguments for this way of thinking. Activities such as paid work and child care usually are mutually exclusive. The time devoted to one of them cannot be dedicated to the other. In the case of the working mother, we must accept the fact that her ability to perform direct child care will be significantly reduced. In addition, according to the theory of opportunity costs, time devoted to caring reduces the time spent on making money, thus it is simply expensive. It is true especially for well-educated individuals with opportunities to find well-paid work. Next to time, energy is another resource that is used in the labour market. In the literature on work-life balance (Michoń 2014b) a conflict of fatigue is indicated: a person who is very active on the labour market may be simply too tired to actively care for her children.

The ideas of intensive mothering and parental investments are regularly subject to empirical verification. This paper presents an overview of the empirical findings. It also aims to answer the question: does mothers' employment harm children's development (as it is suggested by the intensive mothering approach)? The main assumption of intensive mothering ideology according to which mother is the parent that is primarily responsible for child care (as a form of investment in child) is investigated in this paper.

Working mothers bad for children?

Studies carried out mainly in the USA, Australia and the U.K. partly support the conclusion that mothers' employment can be detrimental to the development of their offspring. Children of mothers who are employed have been found to perform worse in tests in the field of cognitive abilities (Bernal 2008; Baum II 2003; Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002; Gregg et al. 2005; Hill et al. 2005). The fact that many mothers are active on the labour market and it is not always a matter of their choice may raise concerns about the quality of future generations. On the other hand, other studies show that employment of mothers during early childhood of their children has no impact on the children's behaviour in adolescence. Aughinbaugh and Gittleman (2004) indicated that there was no connection between risk behaviours, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, using marijuana and other drugs, sex and crime, observed in adolescents, and employment of their mothers when they had been very young (aged under 3 years).

Mothers' employment might be harmful to development of their children. However, relevant studies show that negative effects of the mothers' work occur only if their children are very young. The negative effect of lower results in tests of cognitive skills was identified but only in the cases where mothers had returned to work soon after birth. Baum II (2003) suggested that detrimental effect occurred if the mother went back to work before her child's first birthday. Similar results were presented by other authors (Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002; Hill et al. 2005). Ruhm (2004) extended that period to three years and stressed a minor negative impact of the mothers' employment on verbal abilities, reading and math achievements. However it must be added that the negative effect of mother's employment to child development reveals itself mainly when mothers work full-time (over 30 hours per week) (Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002; Hill et al. 2005; Bernal 2008; Gregg et al. 2005). For part-time workers no relationship of this type has been observed. Additionally, the negative effect of mothers' work has been mainly observed in the case of the best-educated mothers, and children who have the largest potential of growth (e.g. Gregg et al. 2005). The observation gains on importance where best educated mothers are most likely to return to employment relatively sooner than their less-educated

counterparts. While most studies tend to indicate the positive role of parents' education for the child's cognitive development (e.g. Campaña et al. 2016) they do not take into consideration the fact that well-educated mothers are more likely to return to employment than the low-educated. In this case the problem seems to be caused by an insufficient use of high potential rather than arising difficulties. In the case of children belonging to disadvantaged groups, employment of their mothers (part-time employment in particular) has led to positive implications for the development of children (Ruhm 2008). Zaslow and Emig (1997) carried out a review of research on the impact of taking up employment by mothers to their children in poor families. The main conclusion was that the children rarely experienced any negative effects of employment of their mothers; more often positive effects, in the area of cognitive development in particular, were observed.

The literature suggests that mothers' employment leads to negative consequences (in the form of underused potential) to children of mothers with a high level of education, while no such consequences have been observed in children of mothers with a low level of education. Low level of maternal education is often associated with a poor material status. Mothers' paid work significantly increases welfare of their families which to some extent compensates for the loss resulting from their absence. A similar explanation is related to the stability of marriage. In the countries surveyed, less educated women are more likely to get divorced and become single parents. As a result the income earned by the mother compensates for possible losses (Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002). Additionally, women's income from work reduces stress levels resulting from family difficulties to make the ends meet (Khanam, Nghiem 2016). Another possible explanation is that child care provided by an educated parent may bring more benefits to the cognitive development of a child than care provided by a low-educated one. Bonke and Esping-Andersen (2011) suggest that the positive effect of parental education on children's cognitive development has its origins in a relatively greater amount of time spent on care, less traditional forms of care exercised by both parents (and not just the mother), more intense care and more equally shared between the parents. The higher the parents' education, the more time spent on educational child care (Campaña et al. 2016). Guryan and colleagues (2008) pointed out that in the United States, better educated parents spend more time with their children than people without higher education. It is partly surprising, since better educated people also spend relatively more time doing professional work (Guryan et al. 2008). Better educated parents spend more time caring for their children also in various groups: unemployed women, employed women and employed men. It is suggested that highly educated parents spend (actively) more time with their children while they are more aware of the link between time devoted to child care and the level of investments, they are also less likely to accept substitutes for parental time, and they are highly motivated to conform the norms of involved parenting (Sayer et al. 2004).

The idea of limited substitution of parental care and its impact on children's development can be perceived from the perspective of efficiency of non-parental

care. The merits of intensive mothering would be relatively lower if non-parental care brings the same or similar effects on children as care provided by parents. A recent longitudinal study conducted in Australia involved a sample of more than 5,000 children and showed that children aged 4–5 years who had never experienced the non-parental child care had lower vocabulary scores than those who had been covered by the non-parental care from birth through the age 3 (Lee 2016). The author of the study stresses, however, that non-parental child care has positively influenced the results achieved by children due to regulatory standards which result in quality control. Children who do not participate in organised forms of non-parental care were exposed to more risk factors (Lee 2016). Maternal characteristics primarily contribute to this association. Women who were looking after their children at home were more likely to have lower education, be unemployed single parents with lower income. Children who are subject to more risk factors (poverty, low maternal education, poor parental health or single parents) benefit more from receiving non-parental care. Numerous studies show that using external child care arrangements has positive effect on children's cognitive, language and motor skills, behaviour, school attendance, college advancement, attitudes towards education, and future wages (for review see: Brilli et al. 2013).

It is necessary to mention some significant limitations of some of the studies used. When analysing the impact of mothers' employment on their children's development, most authors assume homogeneity of child care. In other words, it is assumed that the following factors impact child's development: presence / absence of the mother, and the way how the child is cared for when the mother is at work. However it seems that this approach is only partly relevant. Studies conducted in the UK showed that the majority of children under 18 months of age were cared for by friends or relatives of their parents. Authors of the study stated that care exercised by persons without proper qualifications contributed to the slowdown of cognitive development of the children (Gregg et al. 2005). Quality of care and the home environment may be the factors mitigating the negative impact of mother's employment (Brooks-Gunn et al. 2002). Another important limitation of the research is application of tests which check children's cognitive abilities. Many authors find them controversial and their credibility is regularly criticised (Currie 2005). One should also be careful in terms of generalization of results as the effect of employment of mothers on their children's development may be different depending on the child and his or her family variables.

The role of fathers

According to the traditional family model woman is responsible for caring and housework while the man's role is to earn money to ensure the material welfare of the family. Thus as mother becomes employed her child "loses" his/her most important

carer. It is worth noting that this reasoning is based on two assumptions: other carers do not have equally good effect on the child as does the mother; and no one is able to substitute mother in the process of investing in her children. A brief overview of research on the involvement of fathers in child care questions both these assumptions. It is shown that the care exercised by the father is extremely important for the development of the child, and at the same time, fathers increasingly play the role of carers, which is of significance.

The role of the father in the child's upbringing has already been recognised by researchers (see an overview Allen, Daly 2007; Lamb (eds.) 2010). Although I do not intend to make a comprehensive review of research in this subject, I would like to refer to the role fathers' care might play in investing in children. In various ways: by stimulating activity, physical care, showing parental warmth, and other activities related to taking care of the child; fathers reduce the risk of delays in the child's cognitive development (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz, Kinukawa 2008; Lamb, Lewis 2010). Children of fathers who often interact with them, as early as 6 months of age, are at a relatively higher level of cognitive development (Allen, Daly 2007). The involvement of fathers increases the chances of educational success of a child (Allen-Meares et al. 2010). Boys, whose fathers were more involved in care are less likely to have behavioural problems (Allen-Meares, Blazevski, Bybee, Oyserman 2010; Flourie 2008) and more likely to have pro-social behaviours (Flourie 2008; Lamb, Lewis 2010).

One could assume that the care of the father brings such positive results since we are dealing with the effect of selection (only some, the best fathers look after their children). However the studies indicate that while women spend more time on caregiving than men, currently the difference between them is much smaller than it used to be in the past (Michoń 2016a; McGinnity, Russell 2008; Raley et al. 2012). In the mid-1960s, American mothers used to spend on child care four times more time than fathers, and at the turn of the century, this ratio decreased to two (Bianchi 2006). Recent research indicates that fathers are more likely to spend relatively more time caring for their children than they did historically. Additionally mothers engage in a different kind of child care tasks than fathers (Michoń 2016a; 2016b). They are more likely to be responsible for more routine and physical care than fathers. However, even in the routine tasks and physical care (feeding, bathing, changing nappies, etc.) the growth of fathers' child care involvement has been significant.

Although at the end of the twentieth century, American women still spent twice as much time doing basic tasks than their partners, considering the fact that in the sixties, this ratio was seven to one, we can consider this as a significant change (Bianchi 2006). Women's employment has contributed to increased involvement of fathers in the following aspects of physical care in particular: feeding, dressing, bathing, etc. Fathers are also more involved in the management of care. They drive their children to school or simply stay with them at home (Raley et al. 2012). Fathers whose wives work professionally, often care for their children alone (Raley et al. 2012). The increasing share of fathers in the care of the child rarely translates

into mothers' leisure time. Studies suggest that men do not replace women in caring, they do it together or there is more care provided to the children (Hallberg, Klevmarken 2003). Parents of both genders differ also in terms of forms of spending time with children. In comparison to mothers, fathers spend relatively more time interacting with their children (playing, talking, learning) (Michoń 2016b; Bianchi 2006; Craig et al. 2010; Bianchi, Milkie 2010).

It would be wrong, however, to assume that all fathers are actively involved in the care of their children. Studies conducted in Canada indicate (Pacholok, Gauthier 2010) that at least some of the fathers do not take care of their children. The fact that distinction between caring and non-caring fathers is not determined by time constraints is interesting in this context; amount of time spent working does not determine whether fathers care for their children. Thus, according to Pacholok and Gauthier (2010), these are not the long working hours that prevent fathers from caring for children. They result in less time spent on care, however this is not the reason not to care. The differences between fathers involved and not involved in care are mainly demographic and socio-economic.

Does employment reduce the time for care?

Employment reduces the time that can be devoted to other tasks. Thus it is often assumed that paid work leads to a proportional reduction of the amount of time devoted to housework (laundry, cooking, cleaning, etc.), leisure and care. Thus if for example housework consumes 30% of women's time, it should be assumed that in case of working mothers it will be still 30% of the time left after paid work. In other words, paid work reduces the time available for other activities but the structure of the time remains the same.

Moreover, it is often assumed that child care should be included in the scope of housework, whose performance is disliked by most people. Theoretical models of the division of housework in the family are usually based on the partially justified arguments, assuming that chores are unpleasant, and as a result, each partner would prefer to avoid them. As a consequence, the partner with a lower wage, less power, and more time available should be responsible for the routine housework. Therefore, it is reasonable and then empirically confirmed that working women aim to reduce the time dedicated to housework. And since according to the theoretical models caring for children is treated simply as one of many chores, mothers' employment is expected to lead to reduced involvement in the child care-related activities.

Results of empirical studies also suggest that the amount of time spent by women on their careers only slightly affects the amount of time spent on child care. In contrast to mothers, fathers who spend more time at work spend less time caring

for their offspring (Hallberg, Klevmarken 2003). Also, Bianchi (2000) notes that despite the increase in the female participation in the labour market the amount of time spent on child care remains relatively constant. Household duties (or at least some of them), turn out to be significantly different for working women than child care. While working women reduce, at least some housework (Michoń 2015), they appear to spend with their children at least as much time as non-working mothers (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bianchi 2006; Hallberg, Klevmarken 2003). The higher parents' education level is, the time spent by them to perform household chores (other than care) significantly decreases. Inverse relationship has been observed in the case of care (Guryan et al. 2008). Why does it happen? Firstly, working women tend to devote a lot of time to their children. Hence, when the children are small they temporarily leave labour market or reduce their working time (e.g. working part-time). Secondly, the children of non-working mothers are increasingly provided with external care. Thirdly, the time during which the child is covered by various forms of non-parental care does not replace the time that parents spend caring for children. There are no significant differences in the allocation of time in families using and not using external forms of child care. Professionally active parents who would like to make time to look after their children must compromise on their rest, sleep and housework.

Investing in children, including the element of bringing them up in a family where mother is employed, leads to significant limitations in terms of time available to the family. However, female professionals usually do not reduce the amount of time devoted to their children, which is often done at the expense of their free time or by performing numerous tasks at the same time. As a result, many parents point to the difficulties in finding time for themselves and for their partner (Bianchi 2011).

It is often assumed that non-working mother devotes most of her time to child care, however this assumption also ignores some aspects. Bianchi (2000) suggests that we overestimate the amount of time non-working mothers actually devote to their children. In the past, the time the non-working mothers devoted to the active care of their children was often limited due to the need to perform household chores. In addition, in extended families, care is often provided by relatives or friends. In traditional families with clear division of roles for each partner, the woman is relatively more responsible to perform household tasks than working women. In households with two breadwinners, these differences exist but are relatively smaller. Responsibility for the provision of care often involves / is closely related with responsibility for doing housework.

It also significantly impacts the way of caring for children. Numerous studies dedicated to investments in children accept the amount of time spent on child care as an independent variable. The more time parents devote to their children the greater the level of investment and the higher opportunity costs are. If an hour of care may be more or less productive, it can produce fewer or more benefits for the child's development, i.e. investments in children can be more effective when

a parent devotes less time, however provides high quality care (e.g. learning) than a lot of time, providing low quality care (e.g. watching TV). One of the distinctions used by researchers is a division of activities related to child care into: care performed as primary activity or care as secondary activity (Folbre, Yoon 2007). The primary care activities are characterised by high quality while the other type by lower quality. Thus if a parent cares for the child reading to him or her, or playing with the child etc., he or she provides high quality care and effectively invests in the child's development. However, if caring for children is mostly passive and done in combination with other tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, washing and performing minor repairs, the same activities represent low-quality care (Kalenkoski, Foster 2008; Bianchi 2000).

The nature of childhood is changing, so is the family model. In most developed countries families have fewer children than they used to have in the past, and the birth of the first child is usually delayed in time. Thus the decline in the number of children also reduces the total number of years during which families include small children (who require more care), which is a natural consequence of this trend. In addition, children increasingly more often are covered with organised care regardless of the status of their mothers in the labour market. Additionally, changes in the use of leisure time by their parents may also play a part. Nowadays, children can often accompany their parents in a variety of activities. The amount of time devoted to child care is also indirectly a consequence of growing concerns about children's safety child and social changes that are expressed in stressing the need to be "a good parent".

Availability of easy-to-use and effective methods of contraception means that parenting today is more voluntary, depending on the individual decision of the person, than it was in the past. Having a baby is more an expression of preferences, and hence, the parents are a selected group of adults (Sayer, Bianchi et al. 2004).

Limitations

The literature on the relationship between mothers' employment and children's cognitive and non-cognitive development contains a lot of materials that concentrate on the time devoted to child care (the amount of care), and the type of care (care as a primary or a secondary activity; educational care, routine care, physical care). Research materials document that the employment of both mothers and fathers leads to reduction of time devoted to child care, but the effect is more vivid for mothers than fathers. However, there are some non-care related explanations which may shed light on the level of investments. First of all, children face very different opportunities of success in life depending on the circumstances of their birth. Children born in relatively richer families, on average, have better achievement than

children with a low socioeconomic status (Kalil 2015). Secondly, most of the studies on the effect of mother's employment on children's outcomes refer to the cognitive and behavioural but not to emotional outcomes. Thirdly, the studies do not take into consideration different family forms. Obviously, parents differ based on the amount of time, effort, attention or money they devote to their children. According to evolutionary explanations parents invest more in children if they are genetic parents (especially in case of men) (Apicella, Marlowe 2004) and according to the similarity-attraction phenomenon, people generally prefer others who are similar to them. The studies show that the perceived physical resemblance (Apicella, Marlowe 2004; Dolinska 2012) and personality similarity (Heijkoop et al. 2009) enable to predict parental investment in the child. For example in case of men who are no longer in the relationship with the mother of their children, resemblance appeared to be a strong predictor of investment (Apicella, Marlowe 2004). Future studies shall focus more on the consequences of family forms on parental investment. Fourthly, the amount and the effect of investment in children can be different in different countries. The differences can be rooted in the level of development of a specific country, the number of hours spent in paid work, values regarding gender roles and postmaterialistic values (Gauthier, DeGusti 2012). Fifthly, the last of the limitations is related to the nature of the social investments idea itself. One must not forget that the investment perspective does not take into consideration children's and parents' right to be cared for and to care. As human beings, children have the rights to the fundamental conditions for pursuing a good life (Liao 2015).

Conclusion

The time availability perspective rests on the assumption that individuals perform child care to the extent that they have available time, as determined by competing demands (such as paid work, child care, housework, and leisure). Thus, the time demands necessary for paid work lead to limited availability of time that can be devoted to caring. Research materials document that both mothers' and fathers' employment leads to reduction of time devoted to parental care, but the effect is more vivid for mothers than fathers. While parenting time impacts the investment in children's "quality" many observers have expressed concerns about the future generations.

The review presented in this paper suggests that although working mothers have less time available, it does not seem to influence the level of parental investment. Although the negative effect on children's cognitive development has been observed, it was mainly in case of mothers with a high level of education, mothers working full-time and during the first year after the birth of their child. In the case of children belonging to disadvantaged groups, employment of their mothers (part-time

in particular) has led to positive implications for the development of children. Working mothers are likely to reduce the time devoted to household tasks, leisure or even sleep, to care for their children. It seems to be justified to say that in most cases, care for the child is the desired activity for both parents, especially in countries where parents do not feel a strong time pressure related to paid work. Time spent with children, especially when it is intended for recreation or education, is often indicated as one of the most pleasant activities performed during the day (especially compared to household chores). The differences between working and not working mothers with respect to child care become smaller and smaller. Nowadays children of non-working mothers are likely to participate in organised non-parental form of care (cliché, kindergarten). Both investment and consumption provide the motivation to spend time with children. As many parents care for children together, it suggests that it is an expression of common preferences (Bonke, Esping-Andersen 2011). Although it is usually mother who plays the role of main carer the role of fathers has significantly increased. Mostly fathers with a high level of education are more likely to care for their children, and so are the fathers, whose female partner works. The negative effect of mothers' employment might also be alleviated through high quality external child care arrangements. It has been shown that the external child care has positive effects on children's cognitive, language and motor skills, behaviour, school attendance, college advancement, attitudes towards education, and future wages. The argument that it is better for a child to stay at home with mother is based on the assumption that non-working mothers focus mostly on their children, however the studies show that mothers who stay at home have to perform many different tasks, and ultimately do not concentrate on their children as much as expected. From the perspective of parental investment, child care as a secondary and not primary activity, is of a lower efficiency.

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Understanding early childhood truancy: the influence of life course studies on evidence-based interventions

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Purpose

This chapter demonstrates how a study on juvenile justice reform in Louisiana led to a multi-million dollar, evidence based, and early childhood truancy intervention program. As such, we walk the reader chronologically through the history of the Louisiana Truancy Assessment and Service Centers (TASC) program from inception in 1999 until program closure in 2013. In the following sections we describe the single juvenile justice reform study that prompted a deeper look into the lives of juvenile offenders. This led one researcher, accompanied by a small team of research associates, to conduct qualitative life histories with inmates on death row and those serving life sentences. Next, we describe how the life course information derived from these narratives served as the impetus for the creation of an intervention program. In this context, we walk the reader through one case history presented to the Louisiana State Legislature, who subsequently funded the program for over a decade. The TASC program will be presented and described along with the process and outcome evaluations conducted internally. We then review external efficacy studies conducted on the intervention as well as additional research currently being conducted on the holistic impact of this innovative program for youth and families. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the ramifications of program funding cuts that came about due to state budget restraints that eventually led to the closure of the program.

Introduction

Laws pertaining to school attendance have been in place in the U.S. since the early 1900's. Historically, chronically absent or truant students were dealt with individually, either through school or court referrals for the student and parent(s). Intervention practices often took truancy at face value, as the root problem, rather than a symptom of greater underlying issues. Truant youth were dealt with in a multitude of ways. For example, token economies have been a popular intervention, as have school suspensions and even incarceration for parents of chronically truant youth (Gandy, Schultz 2007). Although the effects of truancy are now widely known, this was not always the case. More than 6 million children in the U.S. experience truancy or chronic absenteeism annually (Civil Rights Data Collection Center 2016). Truancy has been glorified by the media as a rite of passage in television and movies, such as the *"The Little Rascals"* and *"Ferris Buehler's Day Off"*. These flippant representations of truancy fail to recognize the potentially serious consequences linked to truancy, consequences with cascading effects and ramifications that persist across the life course. Truancy was once considered to be a problem primarily affecting older youth, however, students from every grade experience chronic absenteeism. In fact, early childhood truancy is a particularly critical and often overlooked social problem. Students who are chronically absent are more likely to fail a grade level and eventually drop out of school (Alexander, Entwisle, Kabbani 2001). Adults who lack a high school diploma are more likely to be un- or under-employed, live in poverty, have poor physical and mental health, and become reliant on the American welfare system (Lochner, Moretti, 2004).

The consequences of truancy are not confined to the individual. Local labor markets and the overall community suffer when the pool of job candidates is bloated with undereducated and unprepared individuals. Employers must develop expensive and time consuming remedial and on the job training opportunities to compensate for the unpreparedness of applicants. Lastly, lifetime earning potential is significantly attenuated for individuals who do not graduate high school. In addition to influencing the lives and opportunities of individuals and their families, lost earning potential compounds and leads to a significant loss in tax revenue. Communities in which a large number of residents have failed to graduate high school are also less capable of facilitating attachments among residents, particularly youth, and mainstream social institutions. This institutional isolation becomes endemic in some communities and has been recognized a seminal issue facing researchers and practitioners in the social work and criminal justice disciplines (Lauritsen, Rezey, Heimer 2016; Lubben, Gironda, Sabbath, 2015; McCall, Land, Brooks-Dollar, Parker 2013; Thomas, Drawve, Thomas 2018; Thomas, Shihadeh 2013).

Juvenile justice reform

As the U.S. crime rate reached an all time high in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the federal, states and local governments, began to recognize the social and fiscal impact of juvenile criminality and incarceration. There was also a growing concern over racial disproportionality in the justice system. The extreme over representation of minorities in the justice system or disproportionate minority contact (DMC) is crucial as youth that come into contact with the system at an early age have been shown to have significantly more negative outcomes over the life course (Leiber, Fox 2005). A number of prior studies have identified explanations for DMC ranging from selective enforcement (Huizinga, Thornberry, Knight, Lovegrove 2007), differential administrative practices (Bridges, Steen 1998), institutional racism (Bishop, Frazier 1988), poverty (Pope, Snyder 2003), differential offending (Pope, Snyder 2003), and the discretion afforded to juvenile justice system officials (Pope, Feyerherm 1990).

In recognition of the overlapping consequences of system involvement, particularly for minorities, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) made analyses of DMC a core requirement of the 1992 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). Effectively, states must identify, assess, and address potential causes and remedies for DMC. Despite federal and state efforts, minority youth continue to be detained at rates greater than their White counterparts (Knoll, Sickmund 2010; Leiber 2002). For example, between 1983 and 1997, 4 of 5 new detainees were minority (Justice Policy Institute 2002) and the relative presence of Black youth among detainees increased by 11% between 1990 and 1999 (Harms 2003). Moreover, in 2007 Black youth accounted for 17% of the population and 51% of juvenile arrests for violent offenses and 32% of arrests for property offenses (Puzzanchera 2009).

Beyond DMC, youth have historically been charged and tried as adults with many receiving life sentences or even capital punishment. Both researchers and citizens began to recognize this as a growing social problem that could overwhelm the justice system. This led to a change in the sentiment of the general population in which the punitive nature of the juvenile justice system became unpopular while initiatives for juvenile rehabilitation were increasing. As juvenile justice reform efforts expanded, cross-disciplinary professionals were invited to assist with reform efforts, including social workers. Professionals worked collaboratively to collect and analyze data, inform policy, and design evidence based interventions and best practices for juvenile justice systems across the country. These collaborative working groups began examining underlying risk and protective factors associated with youth who had been incarcerated as a mechanism of informing prevention and intervention efforts.

Louisiana: A case study for reform

Juvenile justice reform efforts for many states arose due to court orders requiring the examination of juvenile justice systems, practices, and outcomes with emphases on DMC, successful reentry, and recidivism among justice involved youth. In order to facilitate timely analyses, researchers were asked to retroactively examine juvenile data so as to shed light on risk factors linked to the mass incarceration of juveniles. One such study examined a cohort of, primarily Black, male juvenile offenders in Louisiana who had been incarcerated at any point during 1977 (Guin 1991). It is important to understand the social and economic context of Louisiana during this time period. This was decade during which the state poverty rate increased from 18% to 23%, making it one of the five poorest states (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993). Schools were among the worst in the nation, especially those in New Orleans, with more than three-quarters of 4th grade public school students reading below grade level (Currie 1998). In 1980, nearly one-third of state residents identified as Black (Louisiana Department of Administration 1990). Between 1970 and 1995 the homicide rate in New Orleans increased 325% and state incarceration rates increased five-fold (Currie 1998).

Data were collected retrospectively from institutional files on a cohort of 817 male delinquents exiting the Louisiana Technical Institute facilities in 1976, which was the only housing for adjudicated and sentenced juveniles in Louisiana. Researchers analyzed detention files to assess demographic information, school history, intellectual functioning, psychiatric history, mental health diagnoses, age at first contact with the police, most recent offense, and highest charged offense (Guin 1991; Thomas, Thomas, Burgason, Wichinsky 2014). Youth ranged in age from 11 to 22 and racial minorities comprising over 70% of the sample. About three-quarters of the youth were either erratically or not attending school. Over 70% came from disrupted family structures and 60% had family members with an official criminal history. The youth had been housed in detention centers for both property (59%) and violent (17%) offenses and more than a quarter had previous convictions.

Utilizing state and federal databases, data on adult offending were collected during a follow-up period in 1988 for 508 of the individuals in the initial sample (Guin 1991). Among the youth in the follow-up sample, 87.6% were charged with another crime and 27% were charged with a violent crime. In fact, 17 cohort members were charged with homicide, 154 with burglary, 158 with robbery or theft, and 53 with armed robbery. Among those charged with murder, 3 were subsequently executed. Further, age at first contact with the criminal justice system varied between 5 and 17 but more than half had their first contact prior to age 14, the traditional cutoff for early onset delinquency (Tibbetts, Piquero 1999). Clearly, individuals exhibiting early onset delinquency and those who went on to violent and chronic adult criminal careers were over-represented in the follow-up sample.

Examinations of criminal trajectories over the life course have long been a staple within the criminological literature. Although minor delinquency is common among juveniles, theoretical perspectives have attempted to develop indicators to identify which youth are likely to become violent or chronic adult offenders. The distinction between adolescent limited and life course persistent offending trajectories is critical to intervention and prevention efforts, which have limited resources and are more effective when targeted toward the most at-risk individuals (Moffitt 1993). The longitudinal data compiled by Guin (1991) provided a unique opportunity to refine the understanding of risk factors associated with life course persistent offending and spurred a series of life course studies.

Life history narrative: the case of Sam

The aforementioned study prompted the researcher and her team to delve deeper into the histories of male juvenile offenders serving life sentences or who were on death row. Each of the inmates agreed to have their narratives recorded and used for the purposes of creating an intervention for juvenile offenders. Many interviewees expressed a need to have their stories told and used to hopefully keep young men out of the justice system. Life histories were recorded both as narratives and in timeline format with the assistance of the individual and their Department of Corrections case files, which contained information about the inmate, their family, DHS involvement, schooling, and justice system involvement.

Sam's story is just one of the life course narratives collected. Sam was born prematurely in 1976 to a single mother of a large family, however, his father never played a role in his life. Sam's mother did not finish high school and was suspected of having a low level of intellectual functioning. The family lived in dire poverty in a structurally disadvantaged and deteriorating neighborhood. Sam began kindergarten at the age of 5 in 1981, which was the first of six elementary schools he would eventually attend (See Figure 1). Sam accumulated 32 absences in kindergarten or 6–7 full weeks of school. In first grade (1982), he missed 29 days of school, another 6 weeks of school. Sam repeated first grade (1983) at a second elementary schools, and missed 34 days that year as well. Sam entered second grade (1984) at his third elementary school and changed schools again mid year. Over the course of second grade, Sam missed 43 days and was again retained (1985). He repeated second grade at school number four and only missed six days of school the entire year. It was during this time that Sam was placed in the care of his grandmother who ensured he was regularly attending school. However, he was placed back with his mother in third grade (1986), moved to his fifth elementary school, and missed 25 days that year. Sam passed third grade and moved to his sixth and final elementary school. By fourth grade (1987), he was overage for grade at nearly 11 years old. During

fourth grade, Sam missed more than three and a half months of school (78 days). Because of his age, Sam was socially promoted to sixth grade (1988) at the first and only middle school he attended. He missed 103 days of school that year, missing more days than he attended. During sixth grade it was discovered that Sam was illiterate, he was diagnosed with mild mental retardation (IQ-65), and had severe deficits in visual motor functioning that had never been addressed. Sam effectively dropped out of school in the sixth grade when his involvement with the criminal justice system began (1990).

Sam and several friends decided to go swimming at a locked neighborhood pool one evening and the police were called. Sam was charged with criminal trespassing, entering and remaining after forbidden, and returning to property without authority. Over the course of the next two years Sam was in and out of detention centers, correctional facilities, group homes and behavioral institutes. Sam was often moved for his inability to follow rules and poor behavior in these institutions. Sam reported he was often unable to follow rules because he was illiterate and instead of being verbally informed of institutional expectations, he was handed paperwork outlining rules and regulations. His other behavioral difficulties were due to his low intellectual and motor visual functioning. Over approximately the next two years Sam neither attended school nor had any additional juvenile adjudications.

The year Sam turned 18 (1994) he and two friends were charged with two murders. Sam and his friends attended a party where drugs and alcohol were present. At some point during the evening he and his friends murdered two other partygoers while attempting a robbery. He spent the next two and a half years in county jail before being sentenced for first-degree murder, at the age of 21, and sentenced to life in prison at Louisiana State Penitentiary. In 1999, it was estimated that if Sam lived to be 68 years old it would cost the state \$383,783, which did not include legal fees. As of 2017, with inflation and without legal fees, the estimated cost to the state has increased to approximately \$559,756.

Life histories highlighted a crucial risk factor, truancy. Looking at the timeline, it is relatively easy to recognize the numerous missed intervention points. Beyond missed educational opportunities, chronic absences made it difficult to spot Sam's disabilities and appropriately intervene. It is easy to understand how schools, which are charged with a multitude of responsibilities for numerous youth, would view absences as *the problem* rather than a symptom of greater issues, such as those taking place in his home and his community. The researchers carefully compiled all of the men's timelines and printed all of them on poster board as graphical aids during their testimony to the Louisiana State Legislature. They lined the halls with these timelines quite literally forcing legislatures to examine them one by one. The graphical display of timelines clarified the intervention point. Research to this point had demonstrated a clear link between education, truancy and criminal activity. By funding an innovative early truancy intervention, returning youth to school and maintaining their attendance, perhaps the criminal justice system

could be avoided all together for many young men. As such, the Legislature agreed to fund the Louisiana Truancy Assessment and Service Centers (TASC) program at approximately \$1 million for the first few years and \$5 million at the height of the program.

The TASC program

The original juvenile delinquency study and the life course narratives clearly indicated that intervention for chronic truancy in middle and high school was both insufficient and too late for many at-risk youth. The TASC program creators learned that truancy intervention must be introduced in elementary schools in order to engender attachment to school. As such, researchers worked with stakeholders across the State, including teachers, school administrators, local school boards, county prosecutors and judges, to ensure the program would meet the needs of students and the families. Stakeholders took part in creating the TASC referral process, the risk assessment tools, and even the intervention itself.

The purpose of the intervention was to engage elementary children and their families with the goals of increasing attendance and school attachment. The intervention was designed to treat truancy as a symptom of deeper problems in the lives of children and families (Rhodes et al. 2010). That is, the program was designed to address both truancy and the underlying contributors to chronic absenteeism. Two theoretical frameworks shaped the intervention. One is the social development model, which focuses on risk and protective factors across the life-course. The second is ecological theory, which assesses risk across multiple domains including the family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner 1977; Richman, Bowen, Woolley 2004). In line with these theoretical perspectives and with an emphasis on elementary age youth, TASC was created as a community-based, intensive case management program for children in kindergarten through 5th grade (Rhodes et al. 2010). The TASC program was housed and managed by the School of Social Work at Louisiana State University. The School was responsible for implementation and evaluation of the program as well as budget distributions for TASC sites across the state. An advisory board managed each site. The program was piloted in 2 school districts for 2 years before officially opening in 2001 and then rapidly expanding across the state. At its peak, TASC operated in 28 counties and served more than 10,000 families across 500 schools each year. TASC offices were located in the community, primarily schools, school board offices, and the District Attorney's office. The individual TASC offices employed case managers who served the child and family while working as a liaison between the school and referred families (Rhodes et al. 2010).

The TASC process

The TASC program defined chronic truancy as five or more unexcused absences during a school year (Rhodes et al. 2010). The threshold for problematic absenteeism was purposefully set low in an effort to rapidly address truancy and any underlying issues before absences became disruptive to the child's education. Once a child reached five unexcused absences, a teacher or attendance officer referred the child to the local TASC office. The referral provided demographic and educational information about the child, such as age, grade, race, gender, free/reduced lunch, previous grade retentions, suspensions, expulsions, and the number of excused and unexcused absences and tardies. The teacher was also asked to complete an instrument designed for the TASC program, the RISK-Indicator Survey-I checklist (RISK-I). The RISK-I examined behavioral, academic, and family-related risk factors using 42 items across 12 categories. These categories included externalizing (e.g. aggressive and attention-seeker) and internalizing behaviors (e.g. isolated and unmotivated) as well as family-related risk factors (e.g. poor parental attitudes and unstable home life). The RISK-I was found to be both reliable and valid for assessing ongoing risk for truancy among elementary age youth (Kim, Barthelemy 2010). Based on information collected at referral and the RISK I instrument, case managers assessed the child's risk for continued truancy as either low or high.

When students were assessed as having a low risk for continued truancy, the TASC office mailed a warning letter to the child's home indicating the child was flagged for truancy and further absences would be monitored for the remainder of the school year. A copy of the state compulsory school attendance law was also included. In contrast, a family conference with a TASC case manager was scheduled, within 21 days of referral, for those youth assessed as a high risk for continued truancy (approximately 50%). Approximately 45% of TASC cases were deemed low risk while 50% were screened as high risk. The remaining 5% of cases were considered "very high risk" for continued truancy. Approximately 60% of youth who participated in the program were African American. Gender was nearly evenly split with boys slightly over represented at 55%. Students in kindergarten and first grade accounted for about 43% of referrals. Slightly less than 25% of children had been diagnosed with a special education status. The majority of program participants were promoted to the next grade level (86%), which was on par with state rates of academic promotion.

Over the course of the program, TASC case managers met with approximately 92% of all referred families (Rhodes et al. 2010). During the family conference the child's truancy was discussed along with any factors the family felt might be contributing to the child's truancy. The TASC case manager also completed a second instrument created for TASC, the RISK Indicator Survey II checklist (RISK-II). This instrument consisted of 47 items across 6 areas (e.g. medical, family social support) and was used to gauge the service needs of the child and family. Using the referral information, the RISK I and II, and any other pertinent information,

case managers developed a case plan tailored to the family's unique needs across seven broad categories of services (e.g. mental health, basic needs, medical). At the conclusion of the conference the family was asked to enter into a 6 month case management plan that addressed the identified needs and service referrals. This Informal Family Service Plan Agreement (IFSPA) was a voluntary, legal, contractual agreement (Rhodes et al. 2010).

TASC participants were monitored for further unexcused absences for the remainder of the school year. Continued absences triggered a change in their risk status. Low-risk youth could be elevated to high-risk and provided with case management services. Families in the high-risk group who failed to follow the IFSPA or if the attendance problems persisted, parents could be petitioned to court. However, this option was rarely utilized with only 3% of cases petitioned to court (Rhodes et al. 2010). At the end of each school year, case managers closed cases as either successful or unsuccessful. A case was deemed successful when the family adhered to the IFSPA case management plan and the attendance improved. An unsuccessful case was characterized by ongoing difficulties following the case management plan and continued unexcused absences.

Internal process and program evaluation

From 2001 until TASC ended at the University in 2013, mandated internal process evaluations were conducted to monitor sites, data, and intervention quality. Information from referral, RISK I, RISK II, case management plan, and services for each participant were recorded both in paper files and in a statewide web-based database. Using these data, university-based TASC program evaluators were able to generate monthly reports and an annual process-evaluation report for each TASC site. Monthly reports measured 11 performance standards to assess whether individual sites were meeting program objectives. Program auditors also met with representatives of each program site twice per year to assess quality of case management and data entry.

Results of the uncontrolled internal evaluations indicated children served by TASC swiftly re-entered school and maintained attendance for the remainder of the school year (Rhodes et al. 2010). Rudimentary outcomes for truancy reduction were measured by comparing the proportion of unexcused absences before and after referral. Truancy rates from the time of referral to the time of case closure showed a dramatic attenuation in truancy year after year, with an average reduction of approximately 35% among participants (Rhodes et al. 2010). The ongoing success of the program led the main program director to seek out researchers with experience in program evaluation in order to employ a rigorous quasi-experimental design to assess the efficacy of the TASC intervention. The evaluators chose

a Regression Discontinuity design (RD) to assess the intervention, making TASC the first truancy intervention of its kind to move past process and outcome evaluations to using a rigorous evaluation technique (Thomas, Lemieux, Rhodes, Vlosky 2011). The RD design was selected, as it does not require the withholding of treatment, which was preferred over a randomized controlled experiment so that children could immediately access needed services (Shadish, Cook, Campbell 2002).

Efficacy of the TASC intervention

RD is a rigorous, quasi-experimental methodology that employs a cut off score to assign participants to a control or treatment group (Shadish et al. 2002). Items on the referral and RISK-I were assigned point values based on their importance as a risk factor for continued truancy. Together, these two instruments were used to assign each child a risk score. Two previous years of data were retroactively scored to assess the mean risk score. The mean risk score then became the cut-point between the low and high-risk groups. Students who scored 26 or less were assigned to the low risk group and those assigned a score of 27 or higher were assigned to the high-risk group. The RD analysis was used to empirically test the impact of the TASC program on truancy among high-risk students, as measured by the change in truancy between referral and the end of the school year. The RD was employed in one urban, inner city TASC site.

The external program evaluation took place in two parts, with the first evaluation assessing a single cohort of students (2006–2007) (Thomas et al. 2011). The second part of the evaluation included three additional cohorts (2007–2010) (Thomas 2017). Findings from the first evaluation indicated TASC was effective for reducing truancy among high-risk students. Overall, truancy was reduced by 6% in the treatment group. However, results indicated that non-White program participants actually experienced an increase in truancy by about 5%. Students who had been retained at least one grade level also saw a 2% increase in truancy. Neither gender, grade level, nor special education status were significant predictors of change in the rate of truancy. Students whose cases were closed successfully saw nearly a 9% increase in attendance. Lastly, the effectiveness of the TASC intervention was not linear. Specifically, a significant interaction effect between risk score and treatment group indicated students with scores closer to the mean cutoff score experienced less truancy than participants with higher scores. Students with risk scores two standard deviations above the mean experienced a 3% increase in truancy, whereas truancy was reduced by 6% for those with scores at the mean (Thomas et al. 2011).

As program administrators learned of the results of the external evaluation, they quickly addressed issues related to culturally competent intervention practices for

minority participants as well as service and case management needs for the most at risk youth. A replication of the RD with additional cohorts reported mixed results (Thomas 2017). First, the intervention was not found to be effective for the 2007–2008 cohort. However, the following two years of the intervention were again found to be effective for participants in the high-risk treatment group. For the 08–09 cohort, it appeared the intervention was able to address the disparity in truancy reduction among White and non-White students as race was no longer a significant predictor of change in the rate of truancy. The interaction effect was again found to be significant, indicating students with the highest risk scores were not receiving the same benefits from the intervention as those with scores closer to the mean cutoff. Grade level was also a significant predictor with older students experiencing about a 5% increase in truancy. Again, students whose cases were successfully closed in the treatment group had a 5% decrease in truancy. In the 09–10 cohort, neither race nor the interaction effect were significant. The only significant predictor of change in the rate of truancy was successful case closure. It would appear that addressing some of the main barriers to attendance, based on findings from the initial external evaluation, benefitted students in the treatment group.

In addition to the findings discussed above, the change in attendance for participants of the high-risk intervention group was substantial. Participants of other intervention programs often experience a drastic reduction in truancy during the relatively short intervention period. However, truancy often quickly increases as the program concludes (Gandy, Schultz 2007). In contrast, TASC participants exhibited program benefits that endured throughout the school year. Approximately 25% of high-risk participants never had another unexcused absence after referral, 75% accumulated 6 or fewer unexcused absences, and 85% had 10 or fewer unexcused absences (Thomas 2017). This suggests that the rapid response to low initial rates of truancy is key to returning students to school and maintaining their attendance. Although 10 unexcused absences after referral appears excessive, it is critical to consider the risk and barriers to consistent attendance confronted by students and families and how a drastic decrease in truancy for students like Sam may be key to keeping youth in school and out of the justice system.

Beyond truancy: the continued impact of the TASC intervention

Chronic truancy has been linked to academic outcomes at all grade levels, including retention, suspension, expulsion and even dropout (Sutphen, Ford, Flaherty 2010). Academic success and school dropout are often viewed only as educational issues, which is a limited perspective as these are general social problems with crucial implications for individuals and communities (Burrus, Roberts 2012). Prior

research suggests educational outcomes are not evenly distributed across subpopulations as racial minorities and those from impoverished families and neighborhoods are disproportionately less likely to graduate from high school. Highlighting the critical nature of this social problem, up to 70% of incarcerated individuals have not completed high school (Western, Petit 2010). As such, there is an acute need for additional research examining predictors of academic success. Unfortunately, the data necessary to address such research questions is often unavailable or difficult to attain.

A secondary advantage of the TASC intervention is the amount and breadth of data collected over the course of the intervention. As such, the multitude of variables that were collected may be used to assess risk factors for diverse outcomes. Just as a review of Sam's scenario revealed multiple points of interest and factors that influenced his life course trajectory, researchers have begun to assess diverse research questions utilizing data collected as part of the TASC intervention. In particular, recent studies have conducted analyses centered on the associated concepts of staying in school, progressing in school, and grade retention.

Truancy is one of the primary risk factors for academic failure and school dropout (Bartholomay, Houlihan 2014; Sutphen et al. 2010). Due to the numerous deleterious impacts of truancy, school districts often adopt policies wherein students can be retained a grade for accumulating too many absences, regardless of academic ability (Louisiana Department of Education 2017). For perspective on the potential impact of chronic absenteeism, Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001) reported that kids who missed less than 7 days of school during first grade were significantly more likely to graduate high school. In addition to the negative effects of truancy and grade retention on the individual, retaining students for even single grade is prohibitively expensive for most school districts.

Research indicates that, rather than being the sole cause of academic failure, truancy is a proxy for a host of social and psychosocial factors that influence academic outcomes (Henry, Knight, Thornberry 2012). Recently, Rhodes, Thomas and Liles (2018) assessed diverse risk and protective factors linked to on-time grade attainment among high-risk participants of the TASC intervention 3 years post intervention. TASC participants were followed for 1 academic year, which necessitated an archival longitudinal approach by which participants during the 2004–2005 school year were matched with records in the State Department of Education database for 2007–2008. Of the 12,644 TASC participants during 2004–2005, over half (6,719) were identified in the DOE database for 2007–2008. Among the youth matched between the two databases, approximately 42% (2,861) had received the TASC high-risk intervention. Rhodes et al. (2018) included 30 predictor variables in their analyses of on-time grade attainment including: race, gender, grade, suspensions, previous grade retention, special education status, number of unexcused absences at referral, psychosocial risk factors, services, and community level factors. Results of logistic regression analyses indicated factors at various levels which simultaneously influence on-time grade attainment. However, as a testament to the

complexity of predicting academic success, this combination of factors explained about 10% of the variance in on-time grade completion. Noteworthy findings included a significantly attenuated likelihood of on-time grade attainment for youth in disadvantaged communities, those assessed as unmotivated, those referred to the program at an earlier age, and racial minorities.

Practitioners are most concerned with profiles of cases they encounter rather than combinations of characteristics they may rarely or never observe (Bellamy, Bledsoe, Traube 2006). Conjunctive Analysis of Case Configurations (CACC) has emerged as an alternative case-oriented approach that facilitates the examination of unique combinations of factors (i.e. subpopulation profiles) as they relate to an outcome (Miethe, Hart, Regoeczi 2008). CACC has been applied to a variety of criminal justice outcomes (Drawve, Thomas, Hart 2017; Rennison, Addington 2015). In contrast, CACC has gained little traction in other social science disciplines. The value of the conjunctive approach is that it provides an easily interpretable visual display of the relative frequency of configurations of relevant attributes. This allows for a description of similarities and differences in the configuration of cases based on a visual examination of tables created in Microsoft Excel. As such, it is a useful tool for exploratory and confirmatory analyses and the development of tailored case management. This approach has the potential to provide researchers and practitioners working with diverse populations with insights into interrelated factors that operate synergistically to influence outcomes.

Thomas, Thomas, Drawve and Rhodes (unpublished) utilized CACC to compare combinations of risk and protective factors that influence on-time grade attainment among the sample of former TASC participants assessed by Rhodes et al. (2018). Specifically, they developed a matrix of overall and grade-specific situational or subpopulation profiles based on the categories of each variable included in the analysis. CACC allows for the identification of the frequency of occurrence for all possible subpopulation profiles or combinations of factors within individuals. Based on the variables considered in their analyses, 3,840 unique subpopulation profiles could potentially be observed in the data. However, analyses focused on identifying dominant subpopulation profiles and assessing distinctions in the likelihood of on-time grade completion among dominant profiles (Miethe, Regoeczi 2004).

Comparisons of dominant profiles revealed substantial contextual variability in the influence of race, gender, service completion, psychosocial risk factors, and truancy as they relate to on-time grade attainment (Thomas et al., unpublished). Results indicated non-White youth were much less likely to be progressing on time three years post intervention. However, the influence of race was dependent on gender with no racial distinctions between females, but a 40% disparity in the likelihood of on-time grade completion between White and non-White males. Psychosocial risk factors also aid in explaining racial disparities as they are most likely to co-occur among non-White males and are associated with a 60% reduction in the likelihood of academic progress among this group. Moreover, grade-specific

analyses indicated race is not influential across all grades and appears to be dependent on truancy level. Minority status in conjunction with chronic truancy severely attenuates the likelihood of academic success.

Beyond the influence of race, Thomas et al. (unpublished) reported a strong association between truancy and on-time grade completion that was robust across race and gender groups. They reported a 30–35% reduction in the likelihood of on-time grade completion between youth with low and chronic levels of truancy. Across diverse subpopulation profiles and grade levels, students with 0–5 unexcused absences were more likely to be progressing on-time, whereas youth with a seemingly small number of additional unexcused absences (6–10) at referral performed much worse. Further, the likelihood of on-time grade completion is markedly low for chronically truant youth (11 or more absences). This suggests swift intervention (0–5 absences) is paramount to long-term success and, as efficacy studies suggest, underscore the importance of intervening when absences appear to be relatively “low”. Overall, the subpopulation profile perspective offered through CACC allows researchers and practitioners to better understand and assess risk and protective factors influencing diverse outcomes and may potentially facilitate the development of tailored case management.

Conclusion

In Summary, the TASC early truancy intervention is an innovative approach to serving youth at risk of chronic truancy. The TASC program was created as a direct result of a widespread identified need in Louisiana. Findings from both process and empirical evaluations underscore the effectiveness of the intervention at reducing truancy amongst high-risk elementary school students. Although the TASC program was funded at approximately \$5 million per year, an internal cost-benefit analysis revealed that if just 12 of the 10,000 children served annually went on to graduate from high school the program would more than pay for itself. This is in addition to the substantive influence that educational success will invariably have on individuals and families. Data from the program consistently demonstrate the benefit of early and swift truancy intervention. Students who receive intervention after only 5 unexcused absences are much more likely to be academically on time 3 years post-intervention, one of the most robust predictors of high school graduation. Moreover, data from the program continues to inform case management practices for truancy intervention and school based truancy policies across the country.

Despite documented success for individuals, schools, and communities, the TASC program was, for the most part, eliminated in 2013 due to State budget restrictions. When the TASC program closed at the University, the problem did not subside. Annually, more than 10,000 families and 500 schools across Louisiana no

longer have access to the evidence based services offered by the TASC program. It is unfortunate that evidence based social programs, particularly those addressing the needs of youth, are often eliminated as a means of reconciling economic hardships emanating from national or regional level calamities (i.e. disturbances in the stock market or oil / gas industry). Legislators rarely choose to invest in people and programs that have the greatest potential, albeit over the long term, to benefit both the local and State economy. While benefits of the TASC program were evident immediately, a full accounting of the long-term efficacy of the program was not possible until the first cohort of students had the opportunity to graduate high school. Further, the full impact of removing funding for both the educational and judicial systems will remain unknown for years to come. One goal of program assessments, including the current review, has been to empirically establish the efficacy of the TASC program and to provide an accounting of what Louisiana residents and communities stand to lose by eliminating the program. If not Louisianans, perhaps residents of diverse communities and nations will benefit from assessments of how a comprehensive truancy intervention program may be designed from the ground up, assessed, and updated so as to best serve the needs of their constituents.

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The book contains inspiring work on multiple innovative solutions focused on improving well-being of children and youth in the children-focused perspective with reflection in academic theory, research and publications, and social policy documents and tools. It presents papers prepared by authors representing international academic institutions (i.e. Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work, University of Łódź), public policy entities (i.e. the European Commission, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Poland) and non-governmental organizations (i.e. Eurochild, European Social Network). The book presents the discussion of such problems like: children's rights, child poverty and social exclusion, early years care and education, children in alternative care, children's health and family, parental and children support.



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