
International childcare comparisons

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About this report

This report was prepared to support Israel's Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality Innovation Team, supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, in their decisions about childcare provision in their area. It was funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Since its inception, the Bernard van Leer Foundation has worked in more than 50 countries and invested over half a billion dollars toward their mission: to improve opportunities for young children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage

We selected ten case studies based on priority areas identified by the team in Tel Aviv-Yafo and the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Most case studies link to several of these priorities. The priority areas are:

- ▶ Home-based childcare
- ▶ Childcare as a small business
- ▶ Multi-purpose use of space
- ▶ Workplace childcare
- ▶ Reducing provider costs
- ▶ Municipal management of childcare

The case studies are not intended to be representative of choices made by different central and local governments, but to provoke thought and discussion. They include both longstanding projects with a significant evidence base, and newer projects which are continuing to develop.

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Parent-led childcare cooperatives, Canada

Topics: childcare as a small business, workplace childcare

Parent cooperatives are a form of childcare where parents volunteer or play a role in the management of a childcare setting. In Canada, they account for around 9 per cent of childcare provision. They are based on the notion of creating family-like relationships in communities, where parents help one another to care for their children. Parents can either act as an addition to paid staff, alongside paid staff or entirely in place of paid staff.

Cooperatives are particularly well supported in Canada by professional associations, such as the Parent Co-operative Preschool Corporation (PCPC). Cooperatives have also been well researched by government. This has helped to integrate cooperatives in to the childcare market to a greater extent than elsewhere, though there is still a great deal of room for improvement.

One successful Canadian parent cooperative is the Dandelion Daycare Co-op. This started as an informal arrangement between parents to share caring responsibilities, so that they could continue to work. The parents involved in this co-op wanted to play an active role in their children's early lives, which this setup facilitated. This arrangement was later formalised and Dandelion now cares for up to six children, five days a week for nine hours a day.

Benefits

Cooperatives offer potential cost savings for parents, depending on whether parents are volunteer as an addition to staff members or used instead of staff, and may increase quality. Parents have stronger relationships with the staff who care for their children, which is thought to reduce staff turnover. Parental volunteering also supports skills development which may help with future employment.

Challenges and issues

Changing demographics are making it increasingly difficult to get parents to volunteer, as an increasing number of families have two parents in work or a single working parent. Parent-led settings can sometimes be seen as socially exclusive, which can be down to a lack of awareness of cooperatives in some communities, or middle-class dominance in cooperatives. The cooperative approach can work very well on a small scale, however as numbers grow, there are potential issues with inconsistent staffing for children, and there is a danger of simply exploiting parent volunteers as unpaid staff, rather than valuing what parents add to childcare.

Key learning

- ▶ Parent cooperatives require commitment from parents to work effectively.
- ▶ Some cooperatives have adapted to parents' decreasing motivation or ability to volunteer, by allowing parents to opt out of some of their responsibilities for a fee.
- ▶ Careful management is required to ensure that parent cooperatives are not socially exclusive.
- ▶ Some parents may feel excluded if they think they lack the skills or confidence to volunteer. There is therefore a need to emphasise the unique value that all parents can bring to a childcare setting.

Norway: management of fees

Topics covered: municipal management of childcare

In Norway, children up to the age of six attend kindergartens, with a policy focus on creating a childcare system that helps parents return to work. The Norwegian government provide central funding to local municipalities and implement a national price-cap on kindergartens, currently set at 6 per cent of a family's income. Municipalities have a statutory duty to provide sufficient childcare for all local families.

In 2015, a national free entitlement was announced for three and four year olds. Outside of this statutory requirement and below the national cap, local municipalities are able to adjust fees below the 6 per cent level. This is often done on a sliding scale dependent on family income. Under this system, parental fees make up around 15–18 per cent of kindergarten running costs. Local municipalities then provide subsidies to cover the remainder.

Eligibility criteria are applied to providers who receive subsidies. Firstly, kindergartens must operate at no more than a reasonable profit. Secondly, wages must be paid at the same or higher rates than municipal-run settings. This is done to prevent private wages being suppressed in order to increase profits.

Benefits

The fee cap system manages childcare costs for parents – this contributes to Norway's notably high maternal employment rates. The strict rules around conditionality of subsidies allow the government to prioritise quality delivery and support consistently good working conditions for staff. The introduction of the free entitlement in 2015 was found to increase the uptake of childcare by minority language children, whose language and numeracy skills were boosted.

Challenges and issues

Before 2015 and the introduction of the free entitlement, the cap on childcare costs stopped high earning families over-paying but meant that low-income families were sometimes spending a much greater proportion of their income on childcare. In countries where there is great income variation, this could be a barrier to low-income families accessing childcare. An adequate income-related price banding system or free entitlement would help to address this. A clear challenge for government is the high level of subsidisation required as a result of the fee cap and free entitlement, to ensure that kindergartens are still able to deliver a high quality service.

Key learning

- ▶ The Norwegian government have been successful in using regulation to influence the childcare market, whilst allowing municipalities to retain some influence over childcare in their region.
- ▶ The implementation of price caps and criteria for subsidies has helped to reduce costs for families whilst maintaining sufficient levels of staff pay.
- ▶ Ongoing monitoring is important to ensure that childcare policy is tailored to the needs of the population and is not having an adverse effect on particular sections of society.

France: multi-purpose childcare centres

Topics: childcare as a small business, multi-purpose use of space, reducing provider costs

French children up to the age of three may be cared for informally, by childminders or in crèches. Most crèches are run by local government, and fees are set centrally according to parental earnings. About 18 per cent of French under threes use a crèche for at least part of the week, and they are generally available from the age of three months. Since the early 2000s, most municipally run crèches have been located in *multi-accueil* centres, now more commonly known as *établissements d'accueil du jeune enfant* (centres for young children's care) or EAJE. These co-locate full-time crèches with sessional or part-time care, and sometimes also with childminding support centres (*relais assistance maternelles* – see separate case study).

Sessional or part time care is generally run by the main centre staff, but in some cases other providers also deliver care from the same building. This may include centre-based childminders, who in some cases are employed directly by the municipality, and 'stay and play' groups for parents. The centres are open for at least ten hours a day during the week, and in some cases offer longer and/or weekend hours. Some have places reserved for children referred by social services.

Benefits

Multi-purpose care settings make managing childcare easier for working parents, as they can arrange a series of different types of care to meet their needs throughout the day. Many are also able to offer short-term, short notice care at the same high quality as full time crèches, which support parents who are looking for work or work irregular hours. They may also offer financial savings through reduced building maintenance and back-office costs.

Challenges and issues

Although a key purpose of EAJE is to offer non-routine care to support parents, this has often proved difficult in practice. In some centres, the proportion of non-routine care dropped significantly in the few years after opening. This is partly financial: because French childcare settings operate to strict staff-child ratios, holding places open for children who do not attend regularly comes at a high cost. Because parents pay for childcare at an hourly rate, this is hard for centres to recoup. Some professionals feel that non-routine care is not in the best interests of children, and centres sometimes find it harder to meet the development needs of more deprived children, who tend to be from families who do not work full time, and are therefore more likely to need non-routine care.

Key learning

- ▶ It is possible for different types of care to operate from the same building, but careful consideration must be given to funding models.
- ▶ Payments for non-routine care must reflect the additional costs associated with unfilled spaces and the need for extra administration: this could be a higher rate per hour or a flat fee paid by parents or government.
- ▶ It is worth considering additional funding for children with higher needs so that providers are not incentivised to prioritise children who are perceived as easier to care for.

USA: Patagonia workplace childcare?

Topics covered: workplace childcare

Description

Patagonia, the US outdoor clothing and equipment company, provides on-site childcare at its two major US sites in California and Nevada. Their Child Development Centers are available for babies and children up to age eight, staffed by qualified teachers, and with an emphasis on outdoor play. Parents are encouraged to visit their children in the childcare centre during the day, and breastfeeding mothers can go to the centre to feed their babies as needed. Buses are provided to bring older children back to the centre after school, so they can be cared for and then travel home with their parents.

The centres form part of Patagonia's suite of family friendly policies, including paid maternity and paternity leave well above federal and state statutory requirements, childcare support for parents who work in the company's retail stores (where on-site childcare is not possible) and the option for parents of under ones who travel for work to bring their baby with a relative or a childcare professional from Patagonia to care for them.

Benefits

Patagonia finds that its childcare support significantly improves retention – 100 per cent of women who have a baby return to work after their maternity leave, well above the US average. The company reports that the majority of the costs of their provision are recouped, both through federal tax credits and through better retention and engagement.

Challenges and issues

The company believes that the success of its scheme is down to its culture as much as formal regulations: if formal regulations are not in-line with workplace values, there is a danger that employees will not use their entitlements. In practice, it is important that senior managers are seen to support the Child Development Centers, for example by attending their festivals and events.

Setting up a new childcare facility has significant upfront costs, even where parents will be paying fees. When Patagonia built a new Child Development Center at its second site in Nevada, it started by offering care for children under two, so that parents could breast or bottle feed their children while at work, and later extended to older age groups.

Key learning

- ▶ Senior management must support, and be seen to support, family friendly policies – otherwise there is a risk that parents will not use their full entitlements.
- ▶ Where resources are limited, companies may wish to start by providing childcare for the youngest children.
- ▶ Businesses can play an important role in advocating for family friendly workplace policies and programmes including on-site child care at with local and national government.

Japan: intergenerational care

Topics covered: multi-purpose use of space, reducing provider costs

Intergenerational care involves older people's care and childcare being provided in the same location. In some cases, care for adults with disabilities is also available. Older residents are usually able to volunteer with the children, which is thought to be mutually beneficial. However, the bulk of childcare is delivered by professionals.

A widely referenced model of intergenerational care is the Japanese Toyama model. This uses a small-size, multi-care approach. The first facility was established in 1993, called Konoyubi Tomare in the city of Toyama. This was set up as Japan faced the emerging challenge of an ageing population and a population decline. The facility cared for children, the elderly and the disabled in the same setting. Since then, over 1400 facilities have reportedly adopted the intergenerational model used by Toyama.

Benefits

There is some evidence to suggest that the mood and mental health of elderly residents is improved through regular interaction with children. There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that the children benefit from increased social interaction with older people, although this has not been proved in academic work.

Families with both older relatives and young children benefit from being able to source both types of care in one location, freeing up time for families to spend together and reducing stress. Providers may benefit from reduced overhead costs such as rent, electricity and back-office staffing.

Challenges and issues

Early implementers found that caring for children, elderly people and people with disabilities together initially meant they were ineligible for certain subsidies under Japanese legislation. However, this has now changed as the government recognised the benefit and need for intergenerational facilities in the face of an ageing population. A more general challenge in Japan was filling care giving roles, due to a shortage in the labour market and the need for staff to have multiple skills for working with different groups: foreign workers were recruited to fill these roles and to ensure that the specific needs of different groups were addressed at all times.

Key learning

- ▶ It is important to think about the recruitment processes and training that need to be in place to provide high quality care for children, elderly people and people with disabilities – it is hard to realise cost savings from intergenerational care if staff cannot move between groups.
- ▶ As care for the elderly and children are often considered separately, there is a need to consider any legislative barriers or issues with government subsidies.

Australia: nanny pilot programme

Topics covered: home-based childcare, childcare as a small business

The Australian government is currently piloting a programme which offers partial subsidies for parents using nannies (in-home childcare professionals), where their family requirements make it difficult for them to access other types of childcare. Regional provider organisations working under contract for the government are matching eligible families with nannies – families retain the final say on employment but do not need to find a nanny or check their suitability to work for themselves. These organisations are also responsible for paying the nannies, and for collecting fees above the subsidy level from the parents. The programme is expected to involve around 3000 families, and an evaluation report will be delivered in 2018.

To be eligible for the programme, families need to earn less than AUS\$250,000/year (about US\$190,000 in December 2016) – the amount of subsidy available declines with income up to this maximum – and to be working or studying. They must have a child aged 13 or under, or an older child with a disability. Families are eligible if they are geographically isolated from childcare, if they currently use a mix of childcare arrangements which are hard to manage, or if there are not adequate childcare and early learning services available in their local area. During the pilot, not all eligible families are being offered a nanny, and the government is seeking a representative group of parents to support effective evaluation.

Expected benefits

The Nanny Pilot Programme was developed in response to the Australian Productivity Commission's report on childcare and early childhood learning, which found that some parents were unable to access childcare as standard centre-based models did not suit their atypical working hours or were inaccessible from their homes. Australia has particular issues with people living in very remote areas and with fly-in/out jobs where employees are expected to work on a remote site away from home for a number of days or weeks, followed by a rest period at home.

Initial challenges and issues

The pilot scheme is still running and has not yet been fully assessed – the Australian government has committed to publishing an evaluation. There has been some negative media feedback about low take up of the scheme and parents paying high rates even after the subsidy, which has resulted in changes to the maximum subsidy offered by the government.

Early learning

- ▶ While it is too early to assess the success of the scheme, it is notable that as well as providing subsidies (a common element to many childcare systems) the Australian government is also offering, through intermediary organisations, to 'match-make' families with potential nannies, to check the nannies' eligibility to work, and to manage the employment relationship.
- ▶ This appears to be relatively unusual in the international context and may be an interesting model for other areas, even where subsidy rates are relatively low.

France: childminder support services

Topics covered: home-based childcare, childcare as a small business

Childminders supply a significant amount of childcare for under-threes in France: they are the primary childcare arrangement for 18 per cent of under threes, rising to 37 per cent where both parents work. Childminders are particularly important in rural areas, where they sometimes provide the majority of local care. Historically, childminders in France have tended to have low pay and relatively low levels of qualifications compared to other providers: since 2004, they have been required to have at least 120 hours of training in order to be registered.

In an effort to improve the quality of care delivered by childminders, the French government encouraged local authorities to set up *Relais assistances maternelles* (RAMs), or childminding support centres. These are tax-payer funded and free at the point of use. They offer childminders the opportunity to meet with other childminders, get advice and support from experts (*educatrice*) on child development and on employment matters, and take part in activities along with the children they care for. Activities can be centre-based, or involve trips to local museums or events. RAMs also have a role in providing advice to parents and as brokerage centres for parents who are looking for childcare. There are around 500 RAMs in France (roughly one per 130,000 people).

Benefits

RAMs are highly valued by childminders: a 2008 evaluation by research organisation CRÉDOC found that 73 per cent had used a centre in the last 12 months, with a significant group using them at least once a month. The most significant benefits recorded by users were feeling less isolated and better trained or equipped to deal with their work; activities for childminders to take part in with the children they look after were also very popular. Even if they did not use them regularly, childminders tended to agree that RAMs were a useful source of information and professional support.

Challenges and issues

Because the RAMs are run by local government, there is considerable variation in how they operate, with centres open for anything from 17 to 63 hours per week and average childminder visits per hour ranging from less than one to more than six. Some childminders report that they do not use their local RAM because it is too far away, or because its hours are too restricted. Although some offer advice to people interested in a career in childminding, evaluation results suggest that RAMs are generally less effective at reaching childminders early in their careers.

Learning

- ▶ Government can provide support for childminders which is popular and well used, and this can support a vibrant and active home care economy.
- ▶ It is important that the support is accessible, both in terms of location and opening hours, and that childminders are able to bring children with them.
- ▶ Offering activities (either within the centre or locally) for groups of childminders and children to participate in together may be an effective way to increase use of advice services and at the same time support children's wellbeing and development.

Brazil: FURNAS/Eletroras employer-supported childcare

Topics covered: workplace childcare

A Brazilian energy company called FURNAS (a subsidiary of Eletroras – a state-owned energy company) ran an employer sponsored childcare service, which involved the reserving of spaces in existing childcare settings for employees, close to the company's offices. Childcare settings were chosen for their quality of care and then accredited by FURNAS for use by employees. Subsidies of up to US\$750 a month were then given to female employees with children up to age seven who use their accredited childcare. Extra funding was also made available for parents of children with additional educational needs or disabilities on an ad hoc basis. Furthermore, FURNAS made financial contributions to the Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI), a Brazilian worker welfare organisation, who provided after school and holiday care.

National Brazilian policy on childcare is focused on helping women return to work and originates from a drive by women's labour movements to support breastfeeding in the workplace. Employer sponsored childcare has been encouraged through legislation calling on employers with thirty or more employees to provide or subsidise day-care. However, this has been poorly enforced and monitored, which means this practice is not widespread. Whilst the majority of employers only part subsidise childcare, at the other end of the scale some employers are voluntarily going beyond their statutory duty to extend their childcare benefits packages to fathers or other carers.

Benefits

The FURNAS approach gives childcare providers greater financial security, and a side effect is that there is increased competition between local childcare settings to gain accreditation which raises the quality of childcare in the area. This may also provide greater retention of staff as childcare arrangements are secure and well-funded. The stress of trying to find a childcare place close to their place of work and that suits their hours is removed from parents, which may improve focus at work.

Challenges and issues

Arrangements like this are most common in industries or companies where there are strong trade unions holding employers to account. Otherwise, employers may be less likely to provide this level of extra benefit to their employees (above their statutory duty). Brazilian working culture is such that employees are more accepting of receiving lower pay in return for generous benefits packages, this in turn helps to fund such benefits. This may not be as viable elsewhere where attitudes to pay and benefits vary. This childcare scheme is targeted at female employees as part of a drive to boost female employment in Brazil. It would be better practice to include all parents or carers.

Learning

- ▶ There is little data available on the specific impact that the FURNAS scheme has had.
- ▶ However, as a potential model for workplace provision of childcare, the scheme demonstrates how employers could help to drive up the quality of childcare in their local communities, whilst supporting their employees.
- ▶ More evidence and in depth research would be needed to determine if this model could be successful on a smaller scale

England: children's centres

Topics covered: multi-purpose use of space, municipal management of childcare

Children's centres were introduced in England in the early 2000s with the overall policy aim of improving outcomes for young children and reducing the attainment gap between deprived children and their more advantaged peers. They deliver a range of services under one roof, including parenting support, 'stay and play' sessions (where parents and young children take part in activities together, supported by professionals) and health services.

Some centres run childminder networks, or coordinate with other agencies which deliver such networks, in order to provide a more joined-up service for parents. At peak activity levels, about 80 per cent provided on-site childcare for pre-school children. Many also offer crèche provision for parents attending specific activities. Childcare services and 'stay and play' activities tend to be available to all families, sometimes including drop-in sessions for childminders, whereas parenting and health support are often targeted at parents with higher need.

Benefits

Children's centres have been shown to have a significant positive impact on families, particularly in relation to the home learning environment and parental skills. In addition, delivering a range of family services under one roof may offer the opportunity for cost savings through shared back-office functions and premises costs – particularly if the centres are part of a local school, as is the case for a significant minority.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that children's centres can be effective at encouraging parents who were initially reluctant to use formal childcare to do so, because they are able to see it operating when they come to the centre for other activities. Where centres support 'blended' models of care (childminders plus setting based care) they can be particularly effective at supporting parents to return to work.

Challenges and issues

Because they deliver a wide range of services, some of which are provided by experts and are expensive to deliver, the overall running costs of children's centres are high. Most have not been able to generate any significant fees from parents, so they are reliant on government funding. As such, they have been vulnerable to cuts made by the last two British governments as part of austerity programmes. The hourly cost of childcare delivered through children's centres has been estimated as higher than in some other types of childcare, although this may reflect a higher level of disabilities and learning difficulties among the children who use them, or the generally higher qualification levels of staff.

Learning

- ▶ Co-locating childcare and other services for parents and families in the same setting can be positive for families.
- ▶ There are particular advantages to offering a mix of universal and targeted services, as this can build a sense of community ownership while offering additional support to the children and families who need it most.
- ▶ Mixed-use settings are expensive to run and their ability to raise revenue from families may be limited. They are therefore reliant on taxpayer income and vulnerable to funding cuts.

New Zealand: supply side childcare funding

Topics covered: reducing provider costs, municipal management of childcare

In 2002, the New Zealand government launched a policy document to reform their childcare system, *Pathways to the Future*, in a bid to improve quality, value for money and access to childcare. A supply-funded approach is now used, through the provision of a free entitlement to all three, four and five year olds for 20 hours a week.

In order to encourage childcare settings to employ higher qualified staff and increase quality, public funding to settings is arranged by 'quality funding bands' that reflect staff's level of qualification and the ages of children in attendance. The aim of this approach is to encourage childcare settings to go beyond their minimum requirement of 50 per cent of staff having qualified teacher status, increasing this to up to 100 per cent. By using such a model, the New Zealand government are able to influence the quality of care and achieve better value for money, by carefully targeting their funding in a way that supports their aims.

Benefits

This scheme means high quality care is incentivised, by ensuring that staff are appropriately funded. It also leads to reduced costs for parents: upon implementation, The Consumer Price Index measured a 32 percent fall in the cost of childcare. As costs declined, national participation levels in childcare before reaching school age increased from 90 per cent in June 2000 to 96.2 per cent in June 2015. These figures may partly be due to an increase in parents returning to work after having children.

Challenges and issues

This approach requires high levels of sustainable funding. New Zealand has one of the highest levels of public expenditure on childcare, with expenditure per full time childcare place rising by 70 per cent between 2002 and 2013. There is a need for governments to be realistic about what their investment can achieve. In New Zealand, initial targets to have 100 per cent registered teachers in the sector had to be reduced to 80 per cent, as a boom in the childcare market and a rapid expansion of the workforce made this target difficult to achieve.

The research base of the *Pathways to the Future* policy has been criticised by some academics for overlooking the role of parents in caring for their children. Historically in New Zealand (particularly in the 1990s), governments have taken a non-interventionist approach to childcare, which may explain this tension with the sudden increase of state involvement.

Key learning

- ▶ It is possible to make large scale, rapid changes to improve an existing childcare system, so long as they are well researched and properly financially assessed.
- ▶ From the experience of New Zealand, an additional important factor is to understand what parents/carers want from their government regarding childcare and the level of state intervention that they prefer. This is crucial for determining how well government intervention in the childcare market will be received.

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