



Partnerships for childcare

For the worker or would-be worker with children, a major problem is how they will be looked after while he or she is at work. If there is no relative available (which is increasingly the case), other options are needed. This Information Sheet looks at concrete examples of how childcare has been made available, focusing particularly on the question of resources.

The Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities (No. 156, 1981)

Article 5

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), calls for measures to take account of the needs of workers with family responsibilities in community planning; and to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as childcare and family services and facilities.

Types of arrangements

Care needs depend on the age of the child: from the toddler who needs almost constant care, to the pre-school child who needs social and cognitive preparation for school, to the school child who needs supervision after school until a parent returns from work. Childcare arrangements may be classified as follows:

- care by household employees (nanny);
- childminders who look after children in the minders' homes;

- group facilities, such as crèches or pre-school institutions.

Having a household employee who looks after a young child is perhaps the most convenient for working parents, but unaffordable for many. Childminders who look after children in their own homes constitute an arrangement that has been promoted and formalized in some countries. Examples below concern France and Peru; the remaining examples concern group facilities.

The crucial role of resources

Implementation of measures related to childcare depends crucially on the availability of resources. And, under any given level of resources, there is a basic tension between, on the one hand, keeping costs down so childcare can be affordable and available to a maximum number while, on the other hand, ensuring minimum quality through "decent" salaries for competent care employees and reasonable child-to-carer ratios.

Resources to cover the cost of childcare can come from:

- the family of the child;
- central government;
- municipalities, local government;
- NGOs, religious organizations, trade unions;
- international organizations and bilateral donors (UNICEF, OXFAM, EU);
- employers.

In a few advanced welfare states (e.g.

Sweden), most of the resources are provided by the central government. At the other extreme, in most poor countries, government budgets do not allow for any significant contribution. Many private institutions — of varying quality — have mushroomed, the cost being entirely borne by parents. In most developing countries, arrangements to provide childcare, particularly for the more disadvantaged, are often dependent on establishing partnerships among the various actors mentioned above.

Partnerships

Even in developed countries, central governments usually do not run childcare facilities themselves but provide support through subsidies, often to the providers (municipalities, NGOs at the community level, private businesses, as well as unions and employers) and sometimes to the users, who can then choose their provider.

In developing countries, partnerships are particularly important, not only for implementing appropriate arrangements, but crucially to mobilize resources. The examples provided in this Information Sheet show the importance of strategic partnerships between organizations in the community and in the workplace in order to make childcare more available to workers.

Examples of community arrangements

Pre-primary schools in Kenya

Primary schools in Kenya are required to have a unit for pre-school education, known as Baby Classes, where parents can leave children from the age of 3 years, and pick them up on the way home from work. The Government has adopted a policy of partnership which allows parents' associations, religious and welfare organizations, private firms and individuals to cooperate with local authorities for the creation, financing and management of these units. These partners have also played a key role in training pre-school teachers.

Source: R.G.K. Karega: *Work and family study in Kenya: Implications of combining work and family responsibilities*, unpublished report (Geneva, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, 2002).

Municipalities conclude partnerships for pre-schools in Brazil

In 1998, about half of the children aged 4 to 6 years and 8.7 per cent of those aged 0 to 3 years attended a pre-school in Brazil. With responsibility for pre-school education, municipalities have concluded varied agreements with society-based initiatives, and most institutions combine various types of financing simultaneously. For example, there are community pre-schools that have emerged from associations of informal groups and receive support from NGOs and public authorities. Also, as an alternative to their legal obligation to provide in-firm facilities, employers can now make agreements with public or private providers. In some cases, with a "payback cheque", employee-mothers can opt for the pre-school of their choice.

Source: B. Sorj: "Child care as public policy in Brazil", in M. Daly, (ed.): *Care work: The quest for security* (Geneva, ILO, 2001).

Official childminders in France

In France, there is a formal system for the local registration of childminders (*assistante maternelle*) who care for children in their own homes. For children under 3 years of age, this is the most popular care arrangement: of those in childcare in 2001, 46 per cent were kept by a mother's assistant, 24 per cent were in a crèche and 30 per cent were at home with a household employee. A means-tested allowance (AFEAMA) is available to families employing an *assistante maternelle*. Parents of older children in kindergarten or in school also use childminders to cover the out-of-school time when they are still at work.

Source: F. Leprince: *L'accueil des jeunes enfants en France: Etat des lieux et pistes d'amélioration*, Rapport pour Le Haut Conseil de la population et de la famille (Paris, 2003).

Children's homes in Peru

In Peru, the Wawa Wasi (children's homes) programme seeks to provide quality integrated care for children under 3 years living in extreme poverty without setting up costly institutions. The programme was initiated in 1993 with UNICEF and financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the European Union and the World Food Programme to cater for the needs of the many working poor. It consists of a low-cost day-care programme whereby, for a small fee, working mothers can leave their children under 3 years in either a home-based centre, which can take from six to eight children, or community-based centre, which can take up to 24 children. The programme has created day-care facilities in 20,000 homes, and a major impact of this scheme is the creation of employment for local women.

Source: B. Sadasivam: "Widening women's choices: The case for child care", in G.A. Cornia (ed.): *Harnessing globalization for children* (Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2002), at www.unicef-icdc.org.

El Salvador: Municipal childcare for market vendors

An initiative of the Mayor's office of San Salvador provides childcare for women who work as market and street vendors through a network of centres located near municipal markets. There are seven centres open on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., each serving about 60 children and employing about ten caregivers. The municipality pays staff salaries and daily operating costs are covered, in part, by fees paid by parents.

Source: B. Sadasivam: "Widening women's choices: The case for child care", in G.A. Cornia (ed.): *Harnessing globalization for children* (Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2002), at www.unicef-icdc.org.

Examples of workplace initiatives

Some employers have found it in their interest to facilitate childcare. Employers often prefer to offer referral services to help workers find a suitable independent care centre and, in some cases, to subsidize the fees rather than have an on-site crèche. Employees, in any case, may prefer to leave their children near home rather than transport them to work. An example of employer support to community facilities is provided in the case of Sri Lanka (see below)

Some enterprises do nevertheless provide an on-site crèche. For parents, childcare provided at the workplace avoids many of the problems of opening hours of outside facilities and has the advantage of facilitating breastfeeding of babies after maternity leave. For employers, the major advantages are to attract and retain women workers as well as to reduce absenteeism (see examples of Singapore and the United States below).



Employers invest in village facilities in Sri Lanka

Some garment manufacturers in Sri Lanka have invested in social development programmes in the village where the factory is located, such as the construction of schools and maintenance of day-care centres for workers' children. Such companies tend to have lower absenteeism and turnover.

Source: S. Kelegama and R. Epaarachchi: *Productivity, competitiveness and job quality in garment industry in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi, ILO, 2002), p. 202.

Workplace crèche in Singapore

A rubber plant with a largely female workforce was experiencing high turnover and recruitment difficulties, because it was located in a new town and mothers had no relatives living nearby to look after their children. After consulting with the union, the management set aside a room for a crèche for babies and young children and for breastfeeding. The cost was limited by workers looking after the children themselves on a paid, volunteer roster system. The firm estimated that the savings in costs of recruitment and training, and of mothers' absenteeism, paid for the facility after one year of operation.

Source: K. Kogi, W.O. Phoon and J. E. Thurman: *Low-cost ways of improving working conditions: 100 examples from Asia* (Geneva, ILO, 1989).

Bringing children to work in the United States

A small American insurance agency encourages all employees to bring their children to work on school holidays or when they are sick. The enterprise accommodates the children in the office lunchroom. The owner says he has no problem with his employees taking their children to work: "I want people to work rather than worry about where their kids are and what they are doing".

Source: "Balancing act: More dads taking kids to work, raising familiar gender-gap issue", in *Miami Herald*, 11 February 2004, at www.miami.com.

India: Mobile crèches on construction sites

Mobile Crèches is a voluntary organization that operates childcare centres for workers on construction sites, taking children from birth to 12 years. It reaches about 13,000 children per year through 13 permanent centres and 56 on construction sites.

Mobile Crèches approaches builders at potential construction sites with a view to opening a centre for the children of its workers. If the builder agrees, he provides accommodation, electricity and water. The crèche only lasts as long as construction on the site. About 13 per cent of financing comes from construction contractors, 31 per cent from local grants and 29 per cent from foreign donors, the remainder coming mainly from fund raising.

Source: Mobile Creches, www.mobilecreches.org, 3 March 2004.