



Quality employment and quality public services

Quality of employment in childcare

# Country report: Italy

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**Note:** educators is used to refer to the staff in 0-3 years services; teachers to refer to the staff in 3-6 years services. Nido or nidi is referred to services for 0-3-year-olds. Scuola or scuole dell'infanzia refers to the services for 3-6-year-olds.

### Childcare facilities

Childcare facilities in Italy are divided between services for children up to 3 years of age and children between 3 and 6 years. Public provision for 0-3 year-olds is usually run by regional government while services for 3-6 year-olds are run by national government.

There are three types of service available for children up to 3 years. The *nido d'infanzia* (nursery school) was established in 1971 (Law 1044/1971) and the *servizio integrativo* (supplementary service) was established in 1997 (Law 285/1997). The latter kind of facility is aimed at the vast majority of children, with a range of services such as play areas, centres for children and families and home-based small facilities, where a trained adult takes care of 3-5 children. The third type – *sezione primavera* (spring class) was established in 2006 (Law 296/2006) and is a special class within preschool facilities for children between 24 and 36 months.

In 2016, there were 10,559 *nidi* (Fortunati & Parente, 2018), with 6,443 (61%) private and 4,116 (39%) public, however, 735 of the public facilities were entrusted to private management, mainly in the third sector. These types of *nido* hosted up to 315,683 children, with an average enrolment rate of 21.7%. The *servizi integrativi* consisted of 2,551 facilities – 2,703 private (81.3%) and 478 (18.7%) public. They could host up to 29,866 children, with an average enrolment rate of 2.1%.

Levels of enrolment of 0-3 year-olds vary significantly across the country. In the nine regions of Northern Italy the enrolment rate is between 24.3% and 43.5%. In the four central regions rates vary between 28.1% and 44.4%, while in the six regions and two islands in the South the range is from 6.8% to 25.0%.

In 2014, there were 15,378 public *scuole dell'infanzia* (infant schools) and 8,137 private ones (total: 23,515; ISTAT, 2017). In 2015, there were 1,599,77 children in 23,576 schools, with an enrolment rate of about 91% at age 3, and about 95% at age 4 and 5 (OECD, 2017).

### Childcare arrangements

	< 3 years old	> 3 years old
<b>Use of formal childcare</b>	25.1%	93.7%
<b>Use of other arrangements (family, friends, home based care)</b>	74.9%	6.3%

## Tasks of childcare workers

Occupation	Present in facilities <3 years old	Present in facilities >3 years old	Tasks
Coordinator	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he coordinates and is responsible for the economical and educational aspects of the service.</li> <li>- S/he supports the educators and assistants in taking decisions about the educational and organizational aspect of the day activities.</li> </ul>
Educator	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he plans, together with the coordinator, and realizes the organization of spaces and materials, and the everyday activities (routines linked to food, nappies and sleep, educational sessions, day trips in the neighbourhood or special places, etc.).</li> <li>- S/he takes care of the children: greets them in the morning, plays with them, cleans them and changes nappies, put them in bed for the nap, comfort them when crying, etc.</li> <li>- S/he takes care of the group of peers, facilitating the relationships and interactions among the children.</li> <li>- S/he takes care of the relationship and communication with the families, through everyday short talks and through programmed meetings.</li> </ul>
Assistant educator	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he cleans the spaces (rooms and toilets).</li> <li>- S/he supports the educators in realizing the everyday activities.</li> <li>- S/he supports the cook in putting food in the dishes and in cleaning the dishes and the kitchen.</li> </ul>
Auxiliary personnel	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he cleans the spaces (rooms and toilets).</li> <li>- S/he supports the cook in putting food in the dishes and in cleaning the dishes and the kitchen.</li> </ul>
Office manager	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he buys what the service needs (food, drinks, cleansers, etc.).</li> <li>- S/he manages the application and registration of new children/families.</li> <li>- S/he checks the families are paying the early registration amount and the monthly costs.</li> </ul>
Cook	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- S/he checks the quality and quantity of the food in the pantry and of the fresh food coming to the service everyday.</li> <li>- S/he cooks the food following the menu prepared by a nutritionist.</li> <li>- S/he cleans the kitchen.</li> </ul>

## Gender balance

In pre-primary education, covering children aged between 0 and 6 years, 99% of the workers are women (OECD, 2017). Across the whole economy, in 2015, 50.4% of women were in work, against 70.6% of men (ISTAT, 2017a). Average working hours 6.6 a day for women and 13.5 for men. Men have higher personal earnings than women: the OECD reports an index of gender inequality of 1.13 in favour of men, with 1.00 meaning equal conditions (2018).

## Social standing of work in childcare

The social standing of work in childcare is low. There are limited possibilities for career development. Some educators and teachers choose this work because they like it but for others it is a second choice. Moreover, the older the children, the higher the social standing of the work: being a teacher in high school is more prestigious than being an educator. It is possible that recent changes in the law will gradually change this social stereotype: now, people have to choose a specific university programme to become educators and teachers, and a university degree is required, as it has been for becoming a secondary school teacher.

## SECTION 1: ANCHORS OF EMPLOYMENT QUALITY: HIGH ROAD VS. LOW ROAD

### Childcare policy

The main objectives of the childcare policy in Italy are addressed by four Laws (Bulgarelli, 2018).

1. The *nido d'infanzia* was established in 1971 by the Law 1044: the *nido* was a municipal facility, supported also by national funding. The law explicitly stated that the *nido* was meant to take care of children to support families and to facilitate women's return to the labour market; moreover, it aimed at involving qualified professionals and at fostering children's harmonious development.
2. In 1992, Law 104 aimed at the integration in schools of persons with disabilities; the *nido* was mainly described as a crucial means to guarantee the children's full cognitive, affective, social and relational development.
3. In 1997, the Law 285 aimed at supporting the rights, the quality of life and the socialisation of infants and adolescents, favouring families as the principal environment for their development. This law allocated a national budget to create the *servizi integrativi*, where children were meant to stay together with the adults who usually took care of them (parents, grandparents, etc.) in order to facilitate inclusion.
4. In 2015, Law 107 reformed the national education system and established an integrated system for children from 0 to 6 years, that aimed to guarantee equal opportunities of education, relationships and care for all children and to reconcile parents' life and work duties. In line with the economic and structural resources available, the integrated system aimed at involving all children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC); Legislative Decree 65/2017 aimed at enrolling at least 33% of children under 3 years of age in at least 75% of the Italian cities.

The main laws regulating childcare provision (1044/1971 and 107/2015) see the *nido* and the *scuola d'infanzia* as means to foster child development and to support family and working life. Gender equality is generally addressed under the guarantee of equal opportunities for all children. The state organises and funds the education system and families are seen as crucial partners who have to be involved in their children's education.

Childcare policy has partly achieved these objectives: in the regions where ECEC facilities are present, they have a positive effect but their distribution varies hugely across the country.

There has been a positive effect on women's employment with Brilli, Del Boca, & Pronzato, 2016, noting that "a percentage change in public child care coverage increases mothers' probability to work by 1.3 percentage points". Nevertheless, in 2012, 22.4% of women who worked during pregnancy lost their job within two years of giving birth; this is an increase from 20% in 2000 and 18% in 2005 (Istat, 2014). Younger, less educated women in the South of Italy, where the provision of centre-based care is limited, were more likely to lose their job (Istat, 2014).

As to child development, the international literature generally reports a positive effect of centre-based care on children's linguistic and cognitive outcomes during school years (for a review, see Bulgarelli & Molina, 2016). One of the first studies carried out in Italy about the effect of maternal education levels and types of care on child development reported that centre-based care seemed to play a protective role with respect to maternal education: differences among children due to maternal education were observed in children who had been mainly involved in home-based care, but not in children who had been enrolled in facilities (Bulgarelli & Molina, 2016).

Some services are public, financed by municipal, regional and national budget, some are public but with management entrusted mainly to social cooperatives and some are private but by law, all services have to meet certain standard quality criteria.

For children from 0 to 3 years, the 29.1% of working mothers whose children did not attend a childcare facility said they would prefer to have access to centre-based care. Among the reasons given for not having access to childcare, 50.2% of mothers mentioned affordability and 11.8% said that no more places were available (Istat, 2014). In 2013, Da Roit & Sabatinelli reported that the waiting lists for *nido d'infanzia* were estimated at 25% on national average. The situation has changed recently with the impact of austerity and people losing their job and the family incomes in decline. Childcare services became less necessary but also more expensive for families on lower incomes. For instance, in Turin and Rome, childcare facilities now have vacant positions (Carlini, 2017) while ISTAT (2017c) also reported that falling household incomes and the rising cost of services have led to a decrease in applications for nidi places. However, most children aged 3 to 6 have access to childcare places, with an enrolment rate of about 94%.

There is also an informal market for childcare which usually consists of women who provide care at the child's home, for few hours or up to 8-9 hours a day. Many of them are not legally employed (Sarti, 2010). However, home-based childcare is traditionally important (Saraceno, 2003), mainly for children up to 3 years of age.

In 2016, between 56% and 97% (depending on the region) of children were at home with their mothers and, very often, with their grandparents. In 2014, 51.4% of two-year-olds in home-based care were looked after by their grandparents (Istat, 2014). Only between 3% and 9% of children between 3 and 6 don't attend child care facilities. While it is mainly the government that supports childcare provision, private supply is also very important to meet demand.

### **Parental leave and childcare allowances**

Mandatory maternal leave consists of five months (two before and three after the child's birth), with pay based on 80% of salary. Fathers can use the maternity leave if the mother dies, is severely sick or if the father has the exclusive custody of the child. Parental leave is optional and consists of a period of 10 months (overall for two parents) within the first 12 years of the child; if the father takes more than three months off then the leave can total 11 months. Within the child's first six years of the child, there is the right to six months' leave (overall for the two parents), paid at about 30% of salary. For children born on or after 1 January 2016, families can request a bonus of a maximum of 1,000.00 euros per year from the INPS (national institute of social welfare) to support the *nido* costs or to support children with disabilities who cannot attend the facilities (Circolare INPS n. 88/2017).

### **Affordability of childcare**

The non-profit Italian organization Cittadinanzattiva has compared the cost of public *nido* and *scuola d'infanzia*, estimating the fee paid for full-time attendance by a family of three (two parents and one child under 3) with a gross income of 44,200 euros per year (Cittadinanzattiva, 2017). The average monthly cost of a *nido* is 301 euros, but it varies hugely across the country: from 167 euros in Molise (South Italy) to 472 euros in Trentino Alto Adige (North). The most expensive public *nidi* are in Lecco (Lombardia, North), where the monthly fee is set at 515 euros. The average household's net-adjusted disposable income per capita is about 21,770 euros (OECD, 2018), thus, *nidi* are considered to be quite expensive in Italy. The public *scuole dell'infanzia* are much less expensive. The average yearly cost is 720 euros; the lowest fee is paid in Sardegna (South, 564 euros) and the highest in Emilia Romagna (North, 937 euros).

### **Quality of childcare**

In 2003, the UNI (*Ente Italiano di Normazione*, Italian Authority of Regulation) published the norm UNI 11034 "Services for infancy. Requisite of the service" that is still in force for the facilities that host children between 0 and 6 years (ISPESL, 2005).

The quality framework requires that:

- The service prepares a public document to describe its educational objectives and the practices and procedures to achieve them. The services have to be child-centred and to have strong relationships with both the families (through individual and group meetings; moreover, representatives of parents officially take part to the service organizational committee) and the territory (through excursions, joint projects, etc).
- The service defines the procedures and the indicators to verify the goals achievement.
- An initial phase of *ambientamento* or *inserimento* is necessary; during this period, the child gradually spends more time in the services; one of the parents has to be with the child, to support his/her adaptation to the new environment; one educator should be the referee of the child and the family. In the *nido*, the *ambientamento* usually lasts 2-3 weeks; in the *scuola d'infanzia* about 2-3 days.
- The personnel must have an adequate degree and has to be constantly trained. Starting from May 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, a university degree in education is necessary to work as educator within the services for children from 0 to 6 years (Legislative Decree n. 65/2017). In the past, the required degree to work as educator in services for children from 0 to 3 years varied across the Italian regions, whereas the degree to work as preschool teacher was nationally set; basically, at least a high school degree in education was required.
- The spaces, toys and materials have to be organized according to their function (play, activities, meals, toilet, cupboard area, etc.) and of good quality. Outdoor spaces included in the service are mandatory.

- The ratio between educators and children varies from 1/6 for children up to 12 months, 1/8 for children from 13 to 24 months, 1/10 for children from 25 to 36 months, and 1/13 for 3-6 year-olds.

To become operative, a service needs to be receive certification that confirms a number of factors including the size of the facility, the educators/children ratio and staff qualifications. There are also quality criteria relating to annual training, the presence of an educational coordinator, procedures to evaluate the quality of the service and users' satisfaction, family participation in the educational project of the service and availability to host children with disabilities (Centro Nazionale di Documentazione e Analisi per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza, 2013). Regional authorities are responsible for authorisation and accreditation.

### **Impact of austerity**

The austerity did not have an impact on childcare policy objectives. The Law n. 107/2015 reformed the national education system and established an integrated system for children from 0 to 6 years. I think this is the result of a long-lasting reflection about the importance of guaranteeing continuity between the services 0-3 and 3-6, and this change was not negatively influenced by the austerity. In fact, the Legislative Decree n. 65/2017 aimed at enrolling at least the 33% of children under 3 years of age, and the 75% of the Italian cities, allocating budget on this goal. Moreover, the expenditure on early childhood educational institutions grew: in 2012, Italy allocated on that about the 0.4% of the GDP (OECD, 2015); in 2014 about the 0.5% of GDP (OECD, 2017).

Cittadinanzattiva (2017) reported that the cost of the services has changed in the last 11 years and, specifically, in the last couple of years a fee decrease was observed. For the *nido*, in 2005/06 the average monthly expenditure was 281 euros; in 2014/15 it was 309 euros and in 2017/18 it was 301 euros. For the *scuola dell'infanzia*, in 2005/06 the average yearly expenditure was 717 euros; in 2016/17 it was 736 euros and in 2017/18 it was 720 euros. Moreover, in some big cities as Turin (a big city in the North-West) and Rome, *nidi* have now vacant positions (Carlini, 2017): families find it difficult to afford the fee and less families are asking to access the service.

A core group of pedagogists is working, since many years, on the theme of early childhood education at academic level. Every year, a fixed amount of hours to train the educators and teachers is mandatory by law. Once a year, a national congress of the "Gruppo Nazionale Nidi Infanzia" (National Group Creche Infancy) takes place in Italy, involving educators, coordinators and researchers. In my opinion, these are all indicators of a good standard quality of the services across the country.

In the last two-three years, in some big cities as Turin (a big city in the North-West) and Rome, early care facilities have now vacant positions (Carlini, 2017). This is also reported by ISTAT (2017). This means lower children's group size. Moreover, some years ago, the period of *inserimento* (during which children are entering the facilities) mainly took place in September and October; now Turin has 4 periods in a year to accept new children within a service.

The *inserimento* is a hard period because children have to get used with the new environment, to create new relationships with the people in it and to deal with the separation from their parents: they usually cry a lot, and this is quite a stressing phase for the children and the educators. Nowadays, this change means that, on one side, a smaller number of children are inserted in the same period within service, facilitating the educators and the children themselves; on the other

side, the educators “never get through” the *inserimento*, and this hard phase continues to happen throughout the year.

### **Training and recruitment**

As from 31 May 2017, a university degree in education has been necessary to work as educator within the services for children aged 0-6 (Legislative Decree 65/2017). To work in the *nido*, a three-year university degree is now necessary, called *Scienze dell’Educazione nei Nidi e nelle Comunità Infantili* (Educational Science in the Creches and Infancy Communities). The courses cover education, psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy, with a specific focus on early childhood and families. Three hundred hours of practice within the service are required to get the degree. In the past, the qualification needed to work as educator in services for 0-3-year-olds varied across regions, whereas the requirements for preschool teachers was set nationally; basically, at least a high school degree in education was required.

To work in the *scuola dell’infanzia*, a five-year university degree is now necessary, called *Scienze della Formazione Primaria* (Primary Training Science). The courses are divided into basic skills (education, psychology, sociology and anthropology); specific subjects (language, maths, geography, history, biology, arts, music, sports); and training about inclusion of children with disabilities. 600 hours of practice within the services are required to get the degree. In the past, a high school degree in education was necessary to work in services for children from 3 to 6 years. For the public services for 0-6 year-olds, educators and teachers have to pass a national or municipal selective call. For the private services, educators and teachers usually pass a job interview.

The training of the educators in the *nidi* is mandatory and should be ongoing (Legislative Decree n. 65/2017); it is organized at Regional level (Bulgarelli 2018). The coordinator is responsible for the training contents provided to the staff.

To be definitely hired in the public *scuola dell’infanzia*, each new teacher passes a one-year testing phase (made of 180 days of work); the new teacher is tutored by an old one, who gives his/her opinion to the coordinator, who follows some criteria defined by the Ministry of Education and finally approves or rejects the one-year testing phase (Law 107/2015).

From the kindergarten to the secondary school, the teacher training is “mandatory, permanent and structural” (Law 107/2015, art. 124). In public services, every teacher can spend up to 500 euros per year to support her/his ongoing training, attending conference or training, buying books and software, participating to cultural events, etc.

Educators and teachers have a concrete perspective of promotion or career (see also Camerino et al., 2011). Very few, after some years of work, can become coordinator or director of services, after applying to a public selective call. Some primary school teachers are detached to the University to take a Ph.D degree maintaining their job, but this is quite uncommon among the 0-6-year-olds’ educators and teachers. Of course, the old ones (or the smartest ones) can assume organizational role in their class, can participate in the organizational committee of the school itself or in some educational committees at municipal level and, for some of these jobs, they can obtain a little amount of money at the end of the educational year. But wages increase regularly for everyone according to the length of service. According to me, this is quite an issue in Italy:

teachers are treated the same regardless of the actual quality of their work so, basically, they should rely on their intrinsic motivation to do a high quality job.

Education of childcare staff in university is based on hard skills; a training of 300 or 600 hundred hours within the services is meant to develop soft skills (see also the answer to the Question 4 “National training systems”).

Educators and teachers are mainly women. In my opinion, a stereotype exists: to be a good educator or teacher, one just need to have the basic skills of a good mother. The younger the children, the stronger the stereotype. In general, the professions related to taking care of others (nurse, psychologist, etc.) suffer from the stereotype that personal attitudes are sufficient to make a good professional.

With respect the ongoing training for educators and teachers who already work in the services, usually, it focuses on helping the staff to build on and become aware of the specificity of their professional skills: deep knowledge about child development, evidence-based practice to interact with children, expertise in organizational issues, expertise in interacting with the parents, etc. Also, educators and teachers are supported in finding strategies to tell the children’s parents they are professionals and the roles of educators and parents are complementary with respect to the child (Foni, 2016).

#### **- The general societal attitude towards the skill level of childcare workers**

Nowadays, at societal level, childcare workers are not recognised to have a high skill level. Part of the oldest educators and teachers who are still working had a basic training: while many of them balanced this thanks to their great experience, some of them had poor skills with respect to child development and education. But a big change is happening: many old educators and teacher are retiring, and the younger ones usually have a university degree, testifying a high level in skills. Thus, also at societal level, a positive shift a could be foreseen.

#### **Role of trade unions and collective bargaining**

CGIL (<http://www.cgil.it/>), CISL (<https://www.cisl.it/>) and UIL (<http://www.uil.it/>) are among the most important trad unions in Italy and several educators and teachers are registered in their lists. The right of union assembly is regulated by the Law n. 300/1970; up to 10 hours per year could be dedicated to such meetings. Moreover, since 1991, a “unitary union delegation” (RSU, *rappresentanza sindacale unitaria*) should be present in each company with at least 15 workers. These unions encompass workers registered in different trade unions.

Trade unions protect the workers’ rights by signing binding agreements with the state or the industry about the national types of contracts. They also provide legal advice (for instance about salary, payment of taxes, layoff), and they organize training, also to support the participation in national calls for work positions.

#### **Labour market regulation**

Two main types of contract are present: temporary and permanent. With respect to dependent workers, in Italy the collective national work contracts are the main tool to regulate the labour market; they are agreements between the trade unions and the associations of hirers in the industry, etc. These national contracts aim at settling on wages and defending the right to participate in the trade union activities.

The Law 196/1997 established that 40 hours per week are the standard. The Legislative Decree n. 66/2003 introduced some changes: currently, the maximum working hours per week can be 48, extra hours included. If the worker exceeds this amount, the hirer has to notify this information to the provincial direction of work. A maximum amount of working hour per day is not set, and the worker has the right to rest for at least 11 continuative hours every 24 hours.

The article n. 18 of the Law n. 300/1970 regulated the firing without just cause. The Law n. 183/2014 cancelled this article, that is currently still in force only for the contract stipulated before March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The article n. 18 was replaced by contract with growing protection: in case of firing, the worker receives a reimbursement that is directly proportional to the length of service.

## **SECTION 2: OUTCOME: WELL-BEING OF CHILDCARE STAFF**

### **Work-related stress and burn-out**

Very few studies were conducted in Italy.

Camerino et al. (2011) examined 110 public services for 0-6 year-olds working in the Venice and surroundings and reported that problems were observed related to assignment of administrative tasks without appropriate support from the “middle management” offices; shortage of temporary educators/teachers and auxiliary personnel and, limited to some facilities, lack of adequate physical space devoted to educational activities.

Converso et al. (2015) reported that psycho-social distress in educators and teachers was related to the deep emotional involvement with the children, and the awareness that following and supporting children in their development is a great responsibility.

Converso et al. (2015) administered a questionnaire to 335 educators and 441 teachers in Torino (Italy) and collected data about three indicators of burn-out:

- About half of the sample reported to suffer from emotional distress.
- About 1 out of 4 persons stated to feel depersonalized.
- About 1 out of 5 persons stated to experience a low professional realization and, in general, teachers were more satisfied about their work than educators.

### **Job satisfaction**

Converso et al. (2015) reported that the 8.1% of the educators and the 46.2% of the teachers felt a high professional realization; 22.7% of the educators and 21.8% of the teacher felt a medium professional realization; the 19.8% of the educators and the 17.6% of the teacher felt a low professional realization. The 49.4% of the educators and the 14.4% of the teachers did not reply to this question.

### **Absenteeism and sick leave**

Each Italian city has to publish online the data about the absence of the municipal staff. This is a datum about the absenteeism of the public workers in childcare facilities.

As a comparison, during October 2017, the staff of the services for children from 0 to 6 years was absent:

- the 6,08% of the working days in the city of Torino (North-East of Italy); <http://www.comune.torino.it/amministrazionetrasparente/personale/assenza/2017.shtml>)
- the 11,67% of the working days in the city of Milano (North-East of Italy); [http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/amministrazione/trasparente/personale/tassi di assenza](http://www.comune.milano.it/wps/portal/ist/it/amministrazione/trasparente/personale/tassi_di_assenza))

- the 14,82% of the working days in the city of Firenze (Centre of Italy; <https://www.comune.fi.it/sites/www.comune.fi.it/files/2018-04/2017-Assenze.pdf>)

Napoli, Bari, Palermo and Cagliari (all cities in the South of Italy) only published aggregated data and the percentage of absent days of the childcare staff is not available.

### **Staff turnover**

Staff turnover varies between public and private services. In public services positions are more stable. In the public services in general (health, school, etc.), recruitment has been restricted with only one new hire allowed for every four retiring and this has created problems in relation to stable staffing levels. Recently, Law 107/2015 tried to resolve the issue of temporary contracts for teachers, leading to many school teachers obtaining stable positions (ARAN, 2017) but it is unclear the extent to which teachers in *scuola dell'infanzia* have been affected and the law doesn't apply to *nido* educators.

### **Strikes and other social conflicts**

There is some evidence of strikes action by educators and teachers in recent years with eight actions in 2017 involving school staff according to the Strike Guarantee Commission (<https://www.cgsse.it/web/guest/home>). Often strikes, mostly lasting one day, have been carried out to secure permanent contracts for colleagues who work as substitutes or to protest against the trend in many municipalities of transferring *nidi* management to private cooperatives. In the latter case, families have been called on to join demonstrations. Although, formally, educators and teachers should not give parents advanced warning, they often inform them the day before so that they can organise to keep the children home during the strike. It is unclear whether these strikes are successful as they are often too short to really make a difference. There has been some success in obtaining more stable positions through trade union negotiations. The trend to privatise management continues.

### **Childcare staff with a second job**

Usually educators and teachers do not have a second job: their salary is quite good and the job is demanding on both the psychological and physical sides. However, auxiliary personnel are more likely to have a second job, and the less the hours of work per day, the easier a second job (some of the auxiliary personnel work 15 or 20 hours per week, with very low salaries). For instance, they do black market jobs as babysitters or cleaning women for few hours a day.

## **SECTION 3: EMPLOYMENT QUALITY OF CHILDCARE WORKERS**

### **Tasks of childcare workers**

Surveillance, play, education and caring are all tasks of the educators and teachers. These tasks are carried out both through specific activities and routines during the day. In the 0-6 services, the typical day is made of: arrival, free play, snack with fruits, structured activities (manipulation, drawings, taking care of the vegetable garden, playing with water, sand, etc.), routine in the toilet, lunch, free play, nap, free play, afternoon snack (*merenda*), structured activity, leaving.

As an example, during lunch, the childcare staff performs several tasks: they are at the table with the children, guarding them; they chat with the children (about food, family and friends, weather, etc.), they pass the good rules about 'staying together at the table' and this is a way to make an educational intervention during an everyday routine. Another example: during the toilet routine, the adult talks to the children about body, cleaning, etc.: this is an educational intervention that

fosters knowledge and linguistic competence; moreover, especially in the 0-3 services, this is also a moment for diadic interaction between the child and the adult, a way to specifically taking care of the child.

Educators and teachers are trained to assume a child-centred approach, this means that they accompany the children along their development, respecting their individuality. This is the main challenge to learn from.

There are some educational strategies or routines that work fine with most of the children, but once one of them shows some specific issues (the child who doesn't speak yet, the child who can't sleep or eat, the child who shows aggressive behaviours towards the peers, etc.), the staff tries and finds out customized solutions. The services pursue an inclusive approach and this also means that children with disabilities or children with special needs are included, and this put the staff in the condition to find new ways to interact with children or to implement new inclusive activities. Also, the staff has to maintain a relationship with the families: sometimes this is challenging and the staff tries to find strategies and solutions to communicate effectively. Moreover, foreign families access the services, and specific ways to fruitfully interact with parents with very different cultural backgrounds should be built.

Moreover, usually "vertical" classes are present: in the *nido*, this means that in the same class, children from 12 to 36 months are present; in the *scuola dell'infanzia*, children from 3 to 6 years are in the same class. This means that, every year, some old children are leaving the class and new little ones are entering: thus, the groups are changing every year and, consequently, the group needs may change as well.

Finally, the work group in the *nido* are usually made by 2-3 people, up to 4-5 colleagues in the same class; the composition of the group may change over the years: new configurations usually allow the educators to exchange thoughts and practices and to learn new things.

By law, the staff and the coordinator have to prepare, each year, a public document to describe the educational objectives and the practices and procedures to achieve them so, at the beginning of the year, the staff plans what to do, and realizes the activities along the year. The educational planning changes every year, and each service usually chooses a common theme to link all the activities. This is a creative process and it guarantees variability in the way to fulfil the work tasks.

For educators and teachers' work activity: for them similar activities are present everyday, but also opportunities of novelty are present. On the contrary, the assistant educators are mainly occupied in cleaning the spaces: these are similar short-cycled actions made over the weeks.

Usually, the relationships between the educators and teachers and the parents are good: everyday, they devote few minutes to share some communications about the child and the activities in the service or at home. But sometimes parents find difficulties in respecting the opening time of the service (arriving too late in the morning or in the afternoon) and childcare staff complain about this. Sometimes, parents argue when they feel their children are not attended in the way they expect to. When parents do not speak or understand Italian, the staff face difficulties in overcoming this barrier.

### **Autonomy of childcare workers**

Usually, the method/approach of the service is shaped by the coordinator, who is present in the service almost everyday, and makes monthly meeting with the staff to discuss the educational approach and take decisions on how to proceed with the work. When the service is part of a network (because it is public or it belongs to cooperatives that manage many services), the coordinator works to make the services similar with respect to their educational approach. Besides this, during the everyday activities, the childcare workers are quite autonomous and usually take decisions within the small group of people working in the same class. The possibility to work in team depends on the size of the organization. Usually, in centres for 0-3-year-olds, the educators work in team and one adult is alone in the first half hour in the morning (7.30-8.00) and in the last hour/half hour in the afternoon (16.30-17.30). In the centres for 3-6-year-olds, usually one teachers and one auxiliary person are with the children (and an adjunctive teacher could be present when children with disabilities are in the class). In the *servizi integrativi* usually two adults are present, also for children's safety reasons.

### Information

The organization of the service is quite stable and the yearly educational planning is shared at the beginning of the educational year. Thus, there is no need to update about the daily tasks. Besides this, the public educational systems usually have a municipal unit that takes decisions about new trends in the educational approach; the private cooperatives also have a director or a small group of experts who take decisions about the way the services should work. The coordinator of each service is the person to introduce to the childcare staff the decisions taken by these educational units.

### Social support

The relationship between the workers and the coordinator is almost daily. Thus, when the relationship is positive, the childcare staff can really feel supported by the first line supervisor. The middle management staff usually do not come into contact with the workers; the middle management support towards the childcare workers is mediated by the coordinator: I think the workers' perception of this support strongly depends on the quality of the relationship they have with the coordinator.

Usually, in Italy, workers do not feel supported by the governors: they are an easy scapegoat. In Italy, we use to say: "Piove: Governo ladro!" that sounds like: "Rain falls: blame it on the Government!".

### Participation in decision-making

In my opinion, the childcare workers can participate in decision-making about the everyday educational activities in their service. The smaller the service, the easier to participate. The possibility to participate in decision-making about the general educational approach of the service is quite low, both in public and private services. The feeling of exclusion from the decision-making process is stronger in the public services.

### Conflicts at work

Conflicts can happen:

- between the coordinator and the staff. Sometimes the educators/teachers ask the coordinator to discuss something they do not agree upon. Sometimes, the coordinator feels there are misunderstandings. A training managed by an external expert is useful to help the coordinator passing some new educational approaches to the staff. Sometimes, an external supervisor can help the staff to elaborate dissatisfactions.

- between the colleagues in the same class. Usually the conflicts are solved through meetings and discussions about the issue; the coordinator can mediate among the colleagues.
- between the educators/teachers and the assistant educators. This kind of conflicts are less easy to be expressed: the two types of workers complain with the colleagues about the other type of workers and open talks are difficult to set up, because the two groups feel they are not in a symmetric relationship. The coordinator is an important mediator in these situations.

Even if the work contracts protect the workers, in the public services the coordinator cannot fire the staff; while, in the private services, this is possible. Thus, in the private services it is easier for the workers to express open conflicts towards the coordinators. On the other hand, in the private services the staff can participate more in the decision-making process and this could be a protective factor.

### **Working environment**

In 2003, the UNI (*Ente Italiano di Normazione*, Italian Authority of Regulation) published the standard UNI 11034 “Services for infants. Requirements of the service” that is still in force for facilities that host children between 0 and 6 years (ISPESL, 2005). This standard regulates the working environment. Usually, services for 0-6 year-olds consist of spaces that have to be organised according to their function: entrance with one cupboard per child, classrooms where play and do activities and also have lunch if a refectory is not included in the service), separate toilets for children and adults, room for sleeping (that can also be used as laboratory for specific activities), kitchen and storage area, outdoor spaces with green areas and an administrative office. Each service has a security representative and the security of the facilities is regularly checked by the local health service.

Most facilities were built in the 1970s and classrooms are usually big open spaces. Noise is an issue for both the adults and the children. For childcare staff working with 0-3-year olds, back ached is one of the main work-related health problems: workers have to hold children in their arms for long periods of time and have to sit and stand continuously. This is the most problematic issue for older workers. Sometimes facilities lack comfortable seating for adults and training is sometimes focused on ensuring comfortable seating to promote wellbeing.

### **Health and safety**

Legislative Decree 81/2008 regulates health and safety and is based on European Union legislation. The employer, worker and various suppliers have specific obligations. Each company should have prevention and protection service and workers nominate a health and safety representative. The local (municipal) health service is responsible for monitoring. All new employees are required to attend a health and safety course that is based on the specific tasks of their job. Private and public services are organized in the same way and have to respect the same laws and norms.

### **Wages**

Overall since 2010, there has been a freezing of wages, even taking account of length of service. In fact, there has been a negative trend, with a decrease of 0.5% per year (ARAN, 2017). The wages of dependent workers in Italian schools is in line with other state employees (ARAN, 2017). There are differences between the contracts of educators and teachers in private service and in public

services. Public childcare workers work 36 hours per week while in private services, full-time work is 40 hours per week and workers are more likely to have part-time contracts.

Private contracts vary as well: for instance, the national collective agreement covering services that depend on the administrative authority (AGIDAE) includes higher wages than the national agreement covering private services affiliated to the FISM association, which again are slightly higher than the salaries in the agreement of the (details: <http://www.flcgil.it/contratti/contratto-scuola-non-statale.flc>).

### **Working time**

To avoid irregular working hours, educators and teachers could work more hours to cover the vacant place when a colleague is missing, and very often they are asked to regain these hours staying at home in other days, not to pay extra-hours of work. Public services have waiting lists to call substitutes to cover colleagues' absence for one or more days. Private cooperatives managing childcare services can call a person to work on demand; sometimes an "all-rounder" or a "jack of all trades" person is hired, to cover the absence of a person in different services each day. Irregular working hours are not as common as in other types of job.

### **Temporary contracts**

Law 183/2014 and eight legislative decrees published in 2015 introduced some changes to temporary contracts. A temporary contract can last up to 36 months and can be renewed up to five times within the 36 months. At the end of the temporary contract and for the following 12 months, a temporary contract of at least six months gives priority to access a permanent position within the organisation. The *co.co.co* (coordinate and continuative collaborator) is another form of temporary contract but, in this case, the worker is autonomous and so not an employee of a public or private organisation. There is no precise data but some evidence of temporary work in childcare services for 0-6-year-olds. Self-employment is rare. Usually individuals would own a small private service and work in it as coordinator or educator, together with other staff. It is more likely that a *servizio intergrativo* is private.

### **Equality issues**

The Legislative Decree 276/2003 (art. 54-59) regulates the employment of disadvantaged persons, including women. Through a specific contract (*contratto di inserimento*), hirers can reduce social security taxes by up to 25% when they employ (among others): a woman in places where the women's occupational rate is 20% lower than the men's one; or the women's unemployment ratio is 10% higher than the men's one; or a person over 50 years of age.

### **Trade unions and representation**

As in other sectors there are consultative bodies established by law. A "unitary union delegation" (RSU, *rappresentanza sindacale unitaria*) should exist in each company with at least 15 workers. Both public services and cooperatives usually have more employees but some private facilities have fewer workers. The RSU consists of elected worker representatives with three per workplace with fewer than 200 employees and six for organisations with up to 3,000 employees, etc. Their mandate lasts three years and they participate in bargaining together with trade unions.

RSU meetings depend on the company: it meets at least twice a year, and it can ask for extraordinary meetings if needed. It can organise assemblies and referenda to consult workers on

specific issues and can call strikes. Private childcare organizations are more likely to be small, with less than 15 workers.

### Other issues

Law 107/2015 and Legislative Decree 65/2017 have established an integrated system of services for children from 0 to 6 years but it will require time and resources to realise this. Childcare workers are very interested in the integrated system, as they strongly value the continuity in education.

In the last couple of years, cases of maltreated children have been highlighted in the press, with some educators and teachers facing trial for their actions which have been confirmed through recording with hidden cameras.

These cases reflect a greater awareness among parents and institutions about the fact that the quality of a service should be maintained. However, these are rare episodes that result from a lack of the training and inadequate professional control of educators and teachers both during training and once hired. Usually coordinators and other colleagues have a monitoring role but may be less effective in small workplaces.

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### - **Employment protection (redundancy rules & occupational health and safety)**

To fire workers, an objective reason is needed, such as the suppression of the position or individual dismissal. In case of mass layoffs, specific procedure should be followed, basically aiming at communicating to the workers and the trade unions the necessity to fire personnel and the reasons for that; this measure aims at facilitating the possibility to use the workers in different ways. Usually, people with shorter work length of service or having fewer dependent family members are more likely to be fired.

The Legislative Decree n. 81/2008 regulates the workers' security and health during the work time, by common accord with the European Economic Community legislation.

### - **Labour law**

The workers' statute was released in 1970 (Law n. 300).

The Laws n. 196/1997 and n. 30/2003 regulated the "*lavoro interinale*", the provisory work, that is quite common in Italy.

The Law n. 183/2014 and eight Legislative Decrees released in 2015 introduced some updates: a permanent contract with growing protection, the establishment of a national agency for work, the introduction of an unemployment support to temporary employees, etc.