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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN HUNGARY

TEXTBOOK FOR ERASMUS STUDENTS

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Early Childhood Education and Care in Hungary: Challenges and Recent Developments¹

History

The history of nurseries and kindergartens is quite long in Hungary. The first kindergarten was founded in Buda¹ in 1828, to provide protection for children from poor families. Its task was “nevelés” (upbringing): developing skills and emotions, by creating loving relationships, setting good examples, and singing. The first nursery was opened in Pest in 1852, in order to look after children of poor mothers while they worked. The task was to nurse and care for the infants and to contribute to the improvement of family life in this way. Working mothers could leave their child in the nursery early in the morning, where the children were bathed and checked by a doctor. During the day they were given meals and could play under the supervision of adults. Their mission was modern at the time, addressing child protection and family support.

During the years of socialism after the Second World War until 1989, early childhood education and care service provision became a state responsibility, and were highly centralized and uniform for a given age group. Supporting women’s equality, rights to employment, and public role required different types of state support and the expansion of nursery and kindergarten places. Employment was compulsory, but during the 1960s childcare leave and allowance became available until the third birthday of the child. Consequently, the demand for, and the number of nursery places was low since most childcare was provided in-home. At the same time, more kindergartens were needed to achieve full coverage of children between the ages of three and the onset of mandatory schooling. The first national guidance for working with children in nurseries and kindergartens was published in 1954 and 1953, respectively. Even though nurseries and kindergartens came under different auspices (health and education), the idea of providing a full-time service for children to cover the work hours of parents was the same. Traditionally, the authority for childcare for children under three was with the ministry responsible for health, whereas the authority for children between three and six years of age was with the ministry in charge of education.

¹ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/2288-6729-2-2-43> [Letöltve: 2019. 09. 23.]

The year 1989 brought the end of socialism. The ensuing transition years were not only the times of political changes but also the beginning of the move from a planned economy to a market economy. Decentralization (establishing a system of local governments and dividing responsibilities and authority) took place during the transition years. The responsibility for service provision was placed with the county and local authorities, within the three-tier system of government (national, county, and local). As a result, today's central government provides financing for all services for young children through local governments and the disbursement of universal and insurance-based financial support, tax benefits, and the financing for provisions-in-kind. The relevant ministries develop the legal framework and the system of public administration ensures and inspects legal compliance. County and regional governments finance public services that pertain to several settlements and which are not the duty of local governments. Local authorities have the duty to provide services, as well as financial and in-kind provisions. Children's services (both nursery and kindergarten) became the responsibility of local authorities following decentralization.

The political changes also brought about the dismantling of state property, the modernization of economy, and the mushrooming of private enterprise, resulting in an increase of employment in the private sector. Compared to the previous socialist system which provided universal full-time employment, there are now different work structures, unusual work hours, different demands on the part of employers, and different needs in terms of public services. Employment rates declined substantially as a result of the decrease in activity rates and a rise in unemployment, with inflation being quite high. The polarization of society happened fast. The changes in the political system and the economy affected the population, especially families with children. It became a priority to balance out these trends by supporting those segments of society which were getting poorer.

None of the successive governments developed childcare services as much as they could have. Demographic goals seemed to override other considerations, and one of the measures intended to address declining birth rates was the development of an extended system of long, paid childcare leaves. Until recently, gender equality has not entered the debates about leave policy and achieving a balance between work and family life. Organizations calling for equal rights for women in the 1990s and the early 2000s focused on reducing domestic abuse, equal pay for equal work, and women's representation among

decision makers. Nonetheless, there is an uneven division of labor between men and women in the home. In order to raise the labor force participation of women it has become important to provide more affordable and more diverse services for children.

The reasons for changes in childcare policy and services were numerous. Some of these were related to ideology, some to financing issues, and some to new or unmet needs. The overwhelming majority of locations are still in public centers. Whereas companies previously maintained a substantial share of places for childcare, their involvement has dropped significantly, and now represents a fraction of all child care places. Providing services is possible for non-governmental organizations, however, their involvement is still limited. Emerging flexibility and diversity can be seen (e.g., flexible opening hours, different additional services offered, parent involvement, etc.), and family day care has emerged.

Today, Hungary, as a member of the European Union, is expected to meet the Lisbon and the Barcelona targets (whereby childcare places should be available for 33% of children under three years old), related to women's employment, and services for children, respectively. However, there are many challenges and problems that are rooted in the inherited system, financial constraints, and policy making (including the perceptions and attitudes of decision makers). Birth rates have been falling for a long time, the society is aging, and these trends are coupled with low activity rates, especially pertaining to women's employment.

Status and Issues Today

Legislation and licensing

The system of children's services in Hungary is split. Policy responsibility for children under the age of three comes under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour². The Ministry of Education and Culture has responsibility for the services for children three to six years old, which is now seen as the first stage of public education (kindergarten). Schooling age in Hungary is six, and kindergarten is compulsory for five year olds, as preparation for school.

The 1997 Act on the Protection of Children, and the 1993 Education Act are the relevant pieces of legislation for nurseries and kindergartens. Regulations govern the system

of administration and inspection, define minimum criteria, set educational content, establish quality standards and access to childcare, respite care, long term care services, kindergarten, and after school care. Both pieces of legislation focus on children's rights, equality, and the involvement of parents in the programs. Licensed family day care and home childcare were also included in the 1997 legislation as basic services to be provided for families with young children. A family day care provider can look after a maximum of five children between the ages of 0-14. The laws define the duties of local governments also, and state what basic services they are required to ensure for the population in their area of authority. These duties can be fulfilled by the localities by setting up and operating programs either directly or in partnerships, as well as by contracting out the services. Nurseries and/or family day care and kindergartens are examples of such basic services. Licensing regimes vary according to the type of service, and are based on the criteria set in legislation for the different services. Local authorities are the issuing agents for operating licenses.

Inspection is done by the county guardianship offices (part of the public administration system) once every four years and by the licensing local authority once a year for nurseries and family day cares. The inspection of kindergartens is the duty of the maintainer, which are mostly local authorities. The maintainer also evaluates the professional work in the kindergarten on the basis of the pedagogical measures and evaluations of pedagogical service, the expert opinion of persons in the national register, the report written by the institutions of public education, and the opinion of supervisory body of kindergartens. Registered professionals have to be asked to comment on plans for setting up or closing down services.

Financing

Financing of childcare services is mainly the responsibility of the central government in the form of earmarked funding, and of the local governments by complementary funding. Between 30 and 40 percent of funding for nurseries and kindergartens is from central government, 10 per cent from parents' fees, which are lowered or cancelled completely for those with low incomes, and the rest is covered by local government. For families receiving a supplemental child protection allowance, meals are free. Since 1996, kindergartens are eligible to receive a double normative grant for each child with a speechbased need or mild mental disability, and a triple grant for each child with a physical or sensory disability, autism, or moderate to severe disabilities.

The decentralized system has disadvantages over full state funding because local governments have many duties to fulfil, and the financing available for these tasks is often not enough. In particular, smaller local authorities tend to have financial difficulties in meeting childcare obligations. Although it is possible for them to contract with private and voluntary sector providers, services are almost entirely public. The reason is the discrepancy between the cost of delivering services and the combined sum of earmarked funding and parental payments. The average income level is low in Hungary, which makes it impossible for most families to cover the full cost of care.

Access

Most of the children under the age of three are cared for at home by the mother, due to the availability of extended maternal and parental leaves. Non-parental childcare for children between the ages of 20 weeks to three years is provided almost entirely in nurseries. Those children whose development is assessed to be lagging behind can receive care in nurseries until they are four years old, and those with disabilities, up to age six. Since 1984, however, both the number of child care centers and their places have dropped by about 60 percent. Today, only about 1520% of the settlements have nurseries, and most of these are bigger towns. In 2006, there were 24,255 nursery places, providing for 31,153 children, or about 10.7% of the age group. As the data indicate, the number of children admitted was higher than the places nurseries are licensed for, thus the utilization rate was high. Most children attending were in the 24-35 month age range, and about a third were older than 36 months. Special needs children can be integrated into mainstream childcare settings.

Family day care, as a new form of childcare was introduced in 1993. However, upscaling has been slow, due mainly to financing difficulties.

Kindergarten coverage is much better, since childcare leave and assistance are available for parents only until the child's third birthday. Therefore, the demand for places providing for children older than three years has always been much higher. Kindergartens were developed extensively during the 1960s and 1970s, and survived the transition years with only some closures. As a result, most of the settlements in the country have a kindergarten. In the 2006/2007 school year, there were 351,825 kindergarten places, providing for 327,644 children comprising about 85% of the 3-6 year old age group.

The ratio of private (non-profit and for profit) providers is about 5% for both types of centers (nurseries and kindergartens), while the rest are public services.

There are several challenges that have to be met. Perhaps the biggest ones are the difficulties in implementing policies arising from the decentralized nature of Hungarian administration. There are more than 3,100 local authorities. Many of them are small with a population of less than 2,000 people, with the same duties as the bigger ones, but with small budgets, which are not enough to finance services. Another challenge is the divergence of interests between central and local governments, which has consequences for the implementation of policies and the operation of child care centers. Whereas access issues are important for the central government due to plans to increase women's labour force participation, and to meet the Barcelona targets, local authorities often have other priorities. Consequently, access to places in nurseries is uneven, with rural areas usually lacking services. The division between early education and care provision (nurseries and kindergartens coming under the authority of different ministries) makes the provision of children's services even more difficult. Improving access to childcare and kindergarten for children in under-served rural settlements, for children with disabilities, and for Roma children were recommended by the OECD (2004).

Features

Both nurseries and kindergartens provide full time care and education. Opening hours are usually from six in the morning to six in the evening, with some local variations. Children get four meals a day: breakfast, mid-morning fruit, hot lunch, and afternoon snack. Centers usually close altogether for six weeks during the summer and Christmas holidays. However, closing times during the summer vary among centers in a given area, so those children whose parents cannot take leave for those specific days (and whose grandparents cannot look after them either) can attend another nearby center during this time. Both are comprehensive programs, addressing children's total needs by providing an integrated package of services in healthcare, nutrition, and psychosocial stimulation. There are regular visits by health visitors and, according to need, both nurseries and kindergartens can use the services of other professionals, such as psychologists, special education teachers, speech therapists, etc.

Since the political changes from state socialism to democracy in 1989/1990, diversification of the previously uniform services has been taking place. Ways of breaking the uniformity included the introduction of flexible opening hours, offering additional services (such as mother-toddler groups, parent groups, take home meals, special events for children and families, etc.), opening up to parents and the community, involvement of parents, and reformation of the curriculum.

Hungary has national standards for both nurseries and kindergartens, which cover basic principles of care and education, minimum criteria for the environment, staffing, health and safety requirements, and necessary documentation. These regulations aim to have a core standard while providing enough flexibility for institutions to shape their service to meet local needs. Pedagogy, is practice-oriented, and is designed to support the process of becoming autonomous and independent. The tasks and roles of practitioners also relate to children's play and other activities, relationships with families, drawing children to the centre, communication between workers and children, telling nursery tales and poems, etc. Nursery workers, as well as kindergarten pedagogues believe that the most possible time should be left for playing. Nevertheless, there is some difference in approach that reflects the characteristics of the two age groups. While nursery workers give priority to teaching the children how to do everyday tasks and become self-reliant and autonomous, kindergarten pedagogues also emphasize passing on cultural values and preparation for school. Careworker to child ratios are 1:6 in groups of 12 in nurseries, and 1:11 in groups of 22 in kindergartens. The ratio is better for groups with special needs children. Professional support for nurseries is provided by appointed nurseries, whose staff: (a) monitor other services in a given geographical area, (b) organize ongoing training, conferences, exchange visits, etc. (c) provide consultation and guidance, and (d) circulate information.

The main challenge today is related to growing admission rates to the same number of places. Group sizes have become bigger, and the ratio of children per adult have become worse in nurseries, as there has been a growing demand for places, and no other solution is easily available to local authorities. Consequently, flexibility cannot be ensured in many places, and additional services might no longer be provided because of the high utilization rates putting greater demand on staff. Part-time care for children has been cancelled in favour of full-time care, for the same reasons. Work with special needs and disadvantaged children

has been gaining more attention. Their numbers in services have been growing ever since the transition years due to set policy priorities. This poses many challenges both for nurseries and kindergartens, related to further education of staff about working with such children, securing the services of specialists, necessary alterations in the environments, acquisition of toys and equipment, etc.

Flexibility in opening hours to cover parents' unusual work hours is practically non-existent, particularly when the parents must work at nonconventional times.

Workforce

The name of workers in nurseries is childcare worker, meaning a person looking after/taking care of children. There were 5,514 childcare workers in 2006 (see Table 1). The name of workers in kindergartens is "kindergarten pedagogue". There were 30,550 kindergarten pedagogues in 2006. More than 90% of the practitioners in both centers are qualified. In addition, there are assistants in both types of centers, helping the qualified staff responsible for the work with children. The different names of the workers in the two types of service for young children imply different understandings and approaches to work. However, the difference in practice is not that great anymore. Pedagogy is the overarching link, and supporting children's overall development is the main aim of both professions.

Education for nursery workers and kindergarten pedagogues is not only at different levels, but are offered in different institutions. Both include a substantial amount of practice. The professional qualification is on the upper medium level for childcare workers, and at the tertiary level for kindergarten pedagogues. The orientation of the two types of education is somewhat different. Nursery workers were traditionally taught many health and medicine-related subjects and only a few dealing with the psychology and pedagogy of children. This ratio has been changing over the years, but practical subjects still dominate. Theoretical aspects have been stronger in the training for kindergarten pedagogues. No qualification is required for family day care providers but they have to attend an introductory course and have to meet certain criteria required for obtaining a license. Qualified workers both in nurseries and kindergartens have to participate in accredited continuing education and collect

a certain number of credit points within five years in order to remain registered. Legislation describes the system of accreditation and registration.

Children's services and elementary education are dominated by female workers. There are no men at all in nurseries, and their number is negligible in kindergartens. Those few men who work with young children report facing many difficulties but believe they can bring something new and unique to the lives of children and to traditional female-dominated services.

The average age of the workers is 41 years in both in nurseries and kindergartens, which forecasts problems. The aging of the childcare workforce is clearly not a recent development, though. One may speculate about the reasons why fewer people are entering the profession: maybe the popularity of the profession declined, maybe working with children is not seen as a "profession", maybe more young people choose to study for higher education degrees, maybe the prestige of the work is not high enough. There are no clear answers. Career opportunities are usually linked to the structuring of the workforce and its training. In Hungary, advancement is limited to being the director or deputy director of a nursery or kindergarten even if workers complete further training courses. Moving to other services is quite limited, due to the specialized nature of knowledge and skills.

Labor shortage is a big problem for the whole ECEC sector and the main cause is the extraordinarily low wages. All these workers are public employees and their salaries are based on a unified wage table. Radical steps have to be taken in order to make the profession inviting for young people. The prestige of the work in society should be raised, and the conditions (including pay, education, and work conditions) should be improved for ensuring the recruitment of new professionals.

Directions Today

In line with European developments, contemporary demographic goals have less importance than in the earlier decades, and there has been a growing interest in leave policies closely related to the attention paid to increasing female labour force participation and balancing work and family life. This change in focus has raised questions about the length and payment level of available maternal, paternal and parental childcare leaves and about the

right mix of paid leaves and ECEC services. Economists have been warning that extended leaves are counter-effective to the return to paid work. The longer the period the mother stays home with the child, the smaller the chance that she will be able to return to and reintegrate into the developing labor market. (Balint, M. & Köllő, 2007; Scharle, 2007). The OECD (2007) recommendations for Hungary suggest that extended leaves ought to be cut back from three years to maximum 12 months, and the savings should be used to fund increased support for childcare services. Sociologists, on the other hand, demonstrate the poverty alleviating effect of the benefits tied to leaves in poor families, and argue that long paid leaves are sometimes their main (or only) source of income (Bass & Darvas, 2008).

The present structure of the Hungarian leave system has been shaped through changes influenced by very different approaches during successive governmental cycles. Probably due to the lack of overall consensus about the function of childcare leave (whether to promote childbirth, children's development, women's labour market participation, women's equality, etc.), there is now one strand (GYES) that is available universally for those who have not had the necessary number of insured days (work) before giving birth, and another one (GYED) for those who had been insured. GYES is paid at a flat rate, equal to the amount of the minimum old age pension. Payment for GYED is at 70% of earnings up to a specified ceiling. Overall, the prevalence of financial support for families has not changed. None of the governments developed ECEC services for children (especially nurseries and family day care) as much as they could have.

Structures have changed quite often and dramatically during the transition years, but the perceptions of women's role in society and within the family have been changing to a lesser extent. A study (Pongracz, 2008) looking at expectations concerning paid work and family responsibilities internationally indicates that the transformations in Hungarian society had no influence on the nostalgia felt for the traditional gender values and the traditional division of family commitments. Nevertheless, there was also agreement that the family cannot afford to forgo the woman's salary. Others (Brayfield & Korintus, 2008) found that both men and women increased their support for women's employment over time, but fulltime employment was clearly not desirable for women with children under three. These are in line with the argument (Blaskó, 2005) that the acceptance of the male-breadwinner model after 1989 was mostly due to massive unemployment in the early nineties. The overall picture

emerging from another survey (Korintus, 2008) 3 indicates that the respondents favoured the mother staying home with a young child. Respondents to this survey also thought that nurseries are used mainly because the mother needs to have a job in order to have enough income for the family and were of the view that a wife would rather work part time, or not work at all, if the husband earned enough to support the family's needs. But the responses have to be interpreted carefully, given the widespread lack of nursery and/or family day care places, and the difficulties to return to the labor market because of a general job shortage and prevailing working-time rigidities, in particular the low availability of part-time jobs.

There are arguments (Ignits & Kapitány, 2006) that during the transition years, the emergence of unemployment and growing social inequality forced the support system of family policy to take over more of the tasks of social policy. Therefore, the effects of the family support system (including childcare leaves and allowances) on alleviating poverty are sizable. Hungarian Central Statistical Office data show that social transfers can effectively decrease child poverty, from 48% to 20%. Even though supporting parents' labour market participation and developing services for children – including developing and better organizing childcare – have been identified as the main means of reducing poverty in a recent government program, the effects of cutting back on leave periods (and therefore, the benefits tied to them), especially the universal one, might worsen the situation of the great portion of those families whose income very much relies on this form of support. According to the data of the 2006 TÁRKI Household monitor (Szívós & Tóth, 2006), about 12% of the population in Hungary can be considered poor. Children and youth are the two age groups with the highest risk of poverty. Compared to the average of 12%, the poverty rate among 0-15 year olds is 15%. In view of these data, affordable childcare services available at times consistent with parents' working patterns and of a high quality are also of high importance, along with parental leave entitlements, both to address poverty and to help bring more mothers into the labour force.

The government set out to ensure the fight against child poverty. In 2007, the Parliament passed the National Strategy called "Legyen jobb a gyermekeknek (Making Things Better for our Children)" for the years 2007-2032, the goal of which is to reduce child poverty and improve lifelong prospects for children. The strategy considers supporting parents' labour market participation and developing services for children, including developing and better organizing childcare, as the main means of reducing poverty. However, issues about

implementation and scaling up have emerged. Legislation is in place, but questions of financing, insufficient number of qualified workers, training needs, and capacities have to be solved. Otherwise, the legislation will not be implemented as intended on the local level.

One possible way forward is the integration of nursery and kindergarten services. The issue arose within the scope of the discussion about shortening the leave periods and increasing the number of available places for children under age three. Local authorities, especially the smaller ones, do not have funds to build new nurseries. While family day care could be a solution with some funding from local authorities, or with higher parental payments, neither of these seems to be realistic on a wide scale. Therefore, other options must be explored, such as making space available for a nursery group in kindergartens, and changing the legislation to admit two year-olds. These options might be a solution to greater access, but questions about the sufficiency of the workforce would remain. Presently, there is an aging workforce and no one knows who will replace them. The job is not prestigious and it is low paid, so young people are not likely to find it a good career option.

Conclusions

International acknowledgment of achievements is always appreciated. Services for children are finally in the long deserved focus of attention. Hungary, just as other EU countries, is making efforts to provide good quality, affordable child care places for all children who need them, not just to help women's employment but also to support children's development. Additional efforts are made to include those families who are disadvantaged and whose children need the extra support nurseries and kindergartens can provide. New initiatives have been launched to establish programs, which can help those children in poverty and who live in areas without services for children. However, the progress is slow and the road ahead is full of challenges.

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Notes

1 Buda and Pest were separate cities at the time, and were united as Budapest only later.

2 At times, this task was the responsibility of the primary healthcare for children. Later, since the beginning of the 1990s childcare was considered to relate more to social welfare. Law 31 of 1997 currently places responsibility for the 0-3 year old children under social welfare.

3 The study used data from the omnibus survey collected by TARKI in 2005

4 Parliamentary Resolution 47/2007 (V. 31) OGY

The system of early childhood education and care²

In Hungary, the system of early childhood education and care is bisectoral. The first stage lasts for 0-3 years of age (nursery, ISCED level 010) the second stage from the age of 3 to the age of schooling (kindergarten, ISCED level 020). The institutional system of both areas is managed by the Ministry of Human Capacities [1], but different state secretariats share its responsibility. Nurseries are under control of social sector (State Secretariat for Social Affairs and Social Inclusion) while kindergartens are under control of educational sector (State Secretariat for Education).

The daytime care for children under the age of 3 is done in nurseries. The nursery is an institution providing care and education for children from 20 weeks to 3 years of age. If the child has reached the 3rd year of age but not yet achieved the necessary level of physical or mental development, he can stay in a nursery until he is 4 years old. The nursery may also provide the care of children with special educational needs and also, of children entitled to early development and care, up to the age of six. In addition to basic care, the nursery can help families with special counselling, periodic childcare, a children's hotel or other child rearing services (for example, parent-child playgroup, games and equipment rental for families). These services can be used until the child's sixth years of age.

Nursery care can be organised in „mini nurseries”, „workplace nurseries”, and „family nurseries”. All three forms of care are based on the nationwide basic program of nursery care and the staff have the special qualifications required by the law. Mini nurseries provide professional care in a range of smaller groups (up to seven children / groups), in simpler personal, physical and operational conditions. "Workplace nurseries" primarily provide kindergarten care of the children for parents engaged in occupational activity at the employer. The "family nursery" is a service accommodated in the home of the provider.

The kindergarten provides institutional full-day care for 3-6 year-old children. Participation in kindergarten care is obligatory for children of three years of age (according to law, the child must go to kindergarten from the first of September of the year, when he reached the age of 3 until August 31st). The children attend at least 4 hours a day in

² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/index_en.php_en [Letöltve: 2019. 09. 25.]

kindergarten, but in case of a request of the parent, the local registrar (for ecclesiastical and private institutions, the maintainer) may give exemption for the child from compulsory participation until the age of five. This can be justified by family circumstances, the development of the child's abilities, and his / her particular situation. The permit can be issued with the consent of the senior kindergarten teacher and the health visitor.

Policy and objectives

There are several strategic documents guiding the policies concerning early childhood education. Between 2014 and 2017, as a result of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the employment of women significantly increased compared to other countries (by 8.5%). This trend was accompanied by the systematic development of early childhood education provision. The government's key objective is to reach 60,000 seats for children under the age of 3 by 2020, therefore they are continuously increasing the capacity of the nursery institution system. For the 2014-2020 development cycle, a budget of 100 billion HUF was devoted to the development of nursery and kindergartens. Also EU-funded programmes aiming at improving the accessibility and quality of early childhood education institutions were established.

The Regional Operational Programmes within the New Széchenyi Plan – which is responsible for the regulation of the allocation of EU funds – provided financing for infrastructural development. Since September 2015, in line with the principles set out in the document “Hungarian Social Inclusion Strategy II – Permanently Deprived Persons – Children Living in Poor Families – the Roma” (2011–2020), children must be provided early childhood education from the age of 3.

In the Széchenyi 2020 Development Plan, the Educational Authority has led a national project to support early childhood education. The aim of the program is to raise opportunities and to increase the capacity for disadvantages for early childhood education institutions. Until 2018, the program attained kindergarten teacher training, vocational mentoring of kindergarten teachers' work and training of civil servants responsible for kindergarten care.

The **Public Education Development Strategy** focuses on the health development based on sports activities in the entire educational system, including kindergartens; furthermore, the complex personal development aspect of sports is also stressed.

The required infrastructural developments (eg. gymnastic room) are part of the infrastructure and equipment development program of the early childhood education (TOP-1.4.1-16). According to governmental commitments, about two thousand kindergartens are being built or rebuilt in the Carpathian Basin in the kindergarten development program between 2014 and 2022 (the concept of Carpathian Basin refers to the fact that the Government intends to support institutional early childhood care for the Hungarians beyond the borders).

An important aspect of the quality improvement of services is that from school year 2013/2014, state financed kindergarten psychologists support the work of educational institutions, which also contributes to prevention in the fields of child protection.

The early childhood education system is also a tool for combating child poverty. Children living in families with at least three children receive meals in crèches and kindergartens free of charge. Furthermore, the so-called “kindergarten milk” programme provides 0.25 litres of dairy products four times a week to every child (beneficiary). Between 2010 and 2018 the free meals programme was expanded by 150% to children under the age of 6. In 2015, as a pilot programme, the free meal programme was extended to school holidays for disadvantaged children (142,000 children used this opportunity). From 2016, the free meal during school breaks became a mandatory task for local municipalities, so it is generally available. As a result of the government's efforts, nursery and kindergarten allow 90% of children get to eat for free.

The rolling out of the Sure Start programme in Hungary supports early childhood care for children living in disadvantaged families. The core of the programme is to establish a strong cooperation with parents (or future parents) and other partners (workers in health care, social care and early childhood care) in order to promote the physical, mental and social development of young children and their parents. The government finances the establishment of the new houses, alongside the expansion of the children's house network and their services, furthermore, they have added additional training requirements for the workers in the children's homes. The Sure Start Children's Houses support the development of children aged 0–3 in the most disadvantaged micro-regions, in settlements with segregated areas and ghettos.

Nurseries in Hungary

According to data from May 31, 2017, there were 40,040 places for children in 754 nurseries. The number of children enrolled was 37,977, which corresponds to 95% occupancy. In line with the demands, 42% of the available rooms are located in Budapest and Pest County. Under the age of 3, every third children lives here, and furthermore, the highest employment rate for women is also present in the area. Statistics show that only approximately 17% of children receive care in crèches, which should be compared with the 20% employment rate of 15-49 year old women with children. Young children are traditionally taken care of by the mother, at home, with the use of family support benefits. The Hungarian family support system, if compared to the systems of other countries, is highly generous. State financing enables mothers to stay at home with the child until the age of 3.

In order to achieve an optimum geographical coverage, it is obligatory for local municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants to operate a crèche. The coverage may be further improved from January 2017 onwards, when every settlement will be obliged to provide some form of care (crèche, minicrèche or family day care facility), provided that there are at least 40 children under the age of 3, or the parents of at least five children request it. The law will make it possible to create the conditions that are compliant with the regulations until the end of 2018. National development policies and the government continues to focus on capacity building and infrastructure development in order to further improve geographic availability of supply and to make territorialisation more balanced. The establishment of new institutions, the increasing of the number of nurseries as well as the expanding possibilities of their applications significantly increased the available capacity. In 2010, 10 children was on the waiting list for 1 place, while in 2017 this number has reduced to 6 from the 3 year old age group.

Increasing professional criterias for nursery care and improving the quality contributed to the fact that in 2017, there were no available adequate daytime care for a total of over 70,000 children (26% of children affected). National development policies will develop the territorial availability and professional content of care in the coming years. (See the section on "Policy and objectives").

Admission requirements and choice of ECEC institution

Children between 20 weeks and three years may be admitted by crèches or up to five years if the child is disabled. With the consent of the parent the district nurse, family paediatrician or family doctor, social worker or family worker, child welfare agency, court of guardians may also initiate the admission of the child by the crèche.

Upon enrolment, parents have to provide a certificate issued by the family paediatrician or family doctor on the fact that the health condition of the child makes it possible to attend a crèche. Where there is no room for the child, nurseries are clarifying the enrolment. Priority is given on social basis to those parents, who enrol their children into nurseries. Others require an employer's certificate (a letter of intent from an employer) to enrol their child. With this system the institutions can take the needs for social care and the need for employment into account.

If the child is over 3 but based on his physical or mental development he is not suitable for kindergarten education and the physician of the crèche does not recommend his enrolment to kindergarten, he may stay in crèche till 31 August following his fourth birthday.

In addition, the specialist giving help to the rehabilitation of the child with special needs may also initiate the admission of the child if the crèche is able to provide early intervention for the child concerned. A child with special needs can be enrolled until the age of five.

There is a detailed and strict regulation concerning children with disabilities. The enrolment of a disabled child to a special nursery group possible if the expert committee provides an official opinion (according to the provisions of the Act on the Public Education) and proposes early admission to the nursery. The expert opinion will be reviewed until the early childhood development and care is given to the child. Children with disabilities can also be included in kindergartens where the conditions for early development are given. Early development between 0 and 3 years is at least weekly, up to four hours a week. In addition to the nursery care services, children's hotel offers up to twenty-four hours of care for a child whose parents can not take care of his / her temporary. The service may also be provided on a weekend and on a holiday, but the duration may not exceed ten days per an educational year.

Another institutional service is the playgroup. In this group parents and children can play together with the help of the nursery.

Child day care services can be organized for non-educational purposes in the daytime care of children. Therefore care, education, catering and employment can be offered especially for children who do not receive nursery care. This service may be provided after short-term training for children whose parents (legal representatives) are unable to provide day-care for their children because of work, fulltime education, training, illness or other reasons.

Age levels and grouping of children

The crèche primarily undertakes the daytime supervision and professional care of children under 3, with the objective of promoting the harmonious physical and mental development of the children taking their age and individual needs into account.

One nursery group consists of a maximum of 12 children. However, if all the children are over 2, a maximum of 14 children may be cared for in one group. Up to seven children in the "mini nursery" and "work nursery" and five children in the "family nursery" can be brought up in one group.

If the nursery group also includes a child with special educational needs, a maximum of 10, if it includes two children with special needs, 8 children can be brought together. While in a group caring for 3-6 children with special needs, the maximum number of the children to be developed and cared for is 6. However, adjusting to the needs of these children, the number of children to be educated could be set in a lower amount.

In special crèche groups providing care to children with disability, one care giver can look after up to 3 children, in case of a family nursery, up to 2 children.

The organisation of care in crèches follows the principle of personal stability; a part of group of children (approx. 5–6 children) belong to the same care giver.

It is a professional standard to let the child attend the same group in the entire duration spending the crèche. There are both homogenous and mixed aged groups in crèches. According to professional point of view, same-age groups are more beneficial.

Organisation of time

According to law, the crèche is open for at least 10 hours a day. The opening hours of the crèche are specified by the maintainer taking into consideration the working hours of the parents. According to the relevant law, children obtain care in crèches for a minimum of four hours and a maximum of twelve. The educational year in nursery – as well as in school and kindergarten - starts on September 1 and ends on August 31st.

The provider defines the duration of the summer holiday (when the crèche is closed), which can be of maximum of 5 weeks, but institutions typically only close for 2 or 3 weeks in the summer. In larger settlements, institutions take turns in closing, so there is always at least one crèche open throughout the summer.

In order to ensure a gradual introduction to crèche, the mother can stay with the child in the crèche for a period of time (usually two weeks) to allow the child to get used to the environment. During this period, the time spent in crèche continuously grows and the time spent there by the mother decreases.

Organisation of the day and week

The daily routine in crèches is continuous and flexible in order to meet the needs of children and provide safety, reliability as well as opportunities for being active and learning to be independent.

The daily schedule of crèches depends on the age, development level and needs of children in the groups but it is also influenced by the weather and the number of children in a group. A further aspect is ensuring emotional security and the consideration of the child's life in his family, if possible. The schedule provides a variety of healthy diets corresponding to the age and the conditions for playing, moving, activity in the open air and resting.

Within the agenda, the needs of each child should be met in order to have a transparent system in the life of the group, allowing the children to get acquainted with the expected events, and eliminating unnecessary waiting times. These also ensure the inner tranquillity of the group.

Types of activities in nurseries

In 2012, a Methodology Guidance Letter was published by the National Family and Child Protection Institute provides a regulatory framework on the minimum criteria and professional aspects of the education in crèches.

Education in crèches is based on playing, which helps children to learn about the world around them and facilitates their physical, mental, emotional and social development.

According to the National core programme of education and care in crèches the following principles are observed:

1. The respect for the primacy of family education
2. The respect for the child's personality
3. The unity of education and care
4. The individual treatment
5. The security and stability
6. Promoting activity and self-reliance
7. Uniform educational influences.

Nurseries play a role in respecting and supporting the primacy of family education. For this reason, the Association of Hungarian Nurseries has developed the "Child Rehabilitation Advisory" program: once a week, nursery professionals, paediatricians, teachers, special educators, social pedagogues, social workers are available to parents who need to be assisted in education, lifestyle, care, and parental competence. They get the motivation, help, and a pattern to implement the maternal role that enhances the maternal behaviour in their relationship with their child. All parents are free to use this service.

The responsibilities of nursery education and care include the promotion of:

1. **a healthy lifestyle** (food must be provided in line with the provisions of the ministerial decree on the nutrition and health requirements of food provided in public institutions) Exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries [3]: „Salt-room use”: from autumn to spring to prevent respiratory diseases and strengthen the immune system. It is organized twice a week. In the salt room, group play is performed by singing-rattling games,

conversations, "breathing games", for intensified inhalation and exhalation, to better utilize the vitality of the lungs, with their own caregiver.

2. **emotional development and socialization** (creating a happy, inspiring and loving environment) Good exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries [3]: „baby theatre service”: with the tools of experience pedagogy, creative toys, the play of puppetry and the power of dramatic art, the "baby theatre" provides joyful, positive intercourse for children and their parents. Good exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries [3]: „summer brotherhood camp”: they provide camps for the summertime closure of nurseries up to 0-10 years old with the siblings. Children can take part in a week or two. A variety of programs and diets suitable for different ages are provided throughout the day.

3. **cognitive processes** (providing opportunities to children to take part in activities that they are interested in; supporting self-expression.) Good exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries: „games in foreign languages”: German and English play for pre-school children during the mornings with the lead of a tutor with a degree in language teaching and a language exam. German games have methodological exercises developed for the nursery school age.

The forms of activities include:

1. **Care** (primary purpose is to satisfy the child's physical needs)

2. **Play** (helps to get to know the world, and promotes physical, emotional and social development) Good exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries [3]: „Playhouse service”: provides opportunity for families who cannot or do not wish to access to nursery and kindergarten care. The playground can be used during opening hours or on duty days. Parents can request ticket for a week or a month can be bought, but the service can be used for one hour too. Separate meal is also available.

3. **Story, poem, rhymes and singing, creative activities** (experience of multiple musical experiences, emotional, intellectual and social development; developing speech, thinking, memory and imagination; processing and expressing emotions, self-expression) Good exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries: „Babymusic”: they chose valuable musical material for children: the folklore, the adult play with the child. They usually listen to folk songs. This is an opportunity for the children: adult sings and plays with them. Musical skills - sensitivity,

music, and developing the sense of rhythm do not require special exercises because these skills are free to develop while playing or listening to the song.

4. **Movement** (the basic forms of movement development) Exercise of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries: „Tinytraining”: In a training organized by the nursery teachers, who develops a sense of balance, walking safety, coordination ability, and movement skills. In the form of the games, children can practice different modes of motion with gymnastics.

5. **Learning** (all learning processes that causes a lasting change in behaviour and / or thinking.) The most important driver of learning is personal curiosity and interest.

Teaching methods and materials

The framework is provided by the national basic program of nursery education in kindergarten education. The selection of methods and professional documents is the responsibility of the caregiver.

The crèche may keep documentation for monitoring the progress of the child. (There are methodological recommendations available for this process). The documentation is not meant to classify the children in any way. The documentation is kept to ensure the best possible caring for the child, and to ensure the development of children. For disadvantaged children, the aim is to reduce disadvantages and their consequences.

When the methods and tools are selected for documenting progress, special attention is paid to the needs of small children (steadiness of the personal and physical environment, providing similar life situations accepted by the children, in accordance with their needs).

The consent of parents is needed for keeping such documentation, which is handed over to the parents upon request.

The **children’s medical registry sheet** is a document to record the child’s health condition. It consists of three parts, such as anamnesis, affiliation status and development in nursery. The registry sheet is complemented with a development sheet.

The task of the **message booklet** is to mutually inform both the parents and the educators. It contains the data, availability, medicine and food allergy of the children and the parents.

The **development sheet** follows the involvement of the personality and the ability system of the child. Its aim is to show the progress of the child in comparison with himself, the timing and direction of the changes for the educator, because comprehensive knowledge of the child is an indispensable information for individual treatment. The development sheet will truly fulfil its function when co-operation with the families is continuous and regular, the parents will be notified of the memorandums.

Keeping a **nursery group agenda** is compulsory, and both the educator and the nurse have to take part in logging. The group agenda informs about planning and realising educational tasks. It lists the absences, contains the daily diet, current events in the group and all happenings that affect the individual or the group. Keeping the agenda for daily occurrences is a task of the nurse when the educator is not present in the nursery.

Monitoring the development of children with special needs

The early development and education of children with special needs is based on **an individual and annual development plan**. The individual development plan is drafted by the special needs teacher (or therapist) who provides or supervises the child's development and education, based on the expertise of the Expert Committee.

The individual development plan must contain the following elements: tasks related to intellectual development, audio and visual development, adaptation training, physical development therapies and psychological development. The special needs teacher (or therapist) who provides development and education keeps records of the child's development in a log form issued by the competent central authority.

The special needs teacher (or therapist) who provides the development and education evaluates the child's development on a form issued by the competent central authority. He/she sends the individual development plan and a copy of the evaluation form to the Expert Committee and the parents; one copy is kept in the institution.

Kindergartens in Hungary

According to the State and the Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education, a public education institution or kindergarten can be established by a local government, an ecclesiastic-legal person registered in Hungary and other organization or person if he has acquired the rights to continue the activity.

Providing public education in kindergartens for all is a local government task. In the 2017/2018 school year, a total of 4579 kindergartens were in function. The number of enrolled children was 322,7 thousand, - mostly because of the population increasement of the affected age group - their number was 5,3 thousand higher compared to the previous year. On a national level we have a little above 85 children to a 100 head accommodation, while on a settlement level utilization over 100% may occur. Lack of accommodation occurs mostly in agglomeration and in areas that are registered with higher birth rates (such as the Hungarian middle region). In order to divide the accommodation according to demand, aimed expansion programmes have commenced for institute renewal, group accommodation expansion and new constructions, or accommodation termination, organised on a Government level.

Following the past year's tendency, in the 2017/2018 school year out of the population between 3-6 years, the rate of children attending kindergarten is 84.55, which is 0.7% higher than the year before. The number of teachers employed in kindergartens is 31,5 thousand, about equal to the year before. The increase in the number of teachers and kindergarten groups was smaller than the growth of the child population, this is why the number of children attending a kindergarten group slightly increased. On a national level approximately 10,3 children come to one teacher, and 21,7 children to a group. There are 9200 children with special need, 580 more than a year before. The majority (82.2%) takes part in integrated education.

If in a settlement there are at least eight kindergarten-aged children with permanent residence and if (based of demographic data) it can be assumed that their number will remain unchanged for at least another three years, the local municipalities must provide kindergarten care locally (if requested so by at least eight affected parents).

Geographical accessibility of kindergartens can be assessed on the basis of the estimated time to get there. Approximately one-third of children can get to the kindergarten

within 5 minutes, 40% between 6 and 10 minutes, and the remaining one fourth between 11 and 20 minutes. (Typically, those living in larger towns need more time.)

In micro villages and farms there is a bus collecting the children. In such areas maintainer associations (several villages) often operate a joint kindergarten.

In the 2017/2018 school year, there were 127 job placement centres in the developmental education system for the care of serious and cumulative disabled children. The development of more than 2,4 thousand students is provided by 381 teachers. The proportion of children attending a group session is 60.7%, with a total of 1463 people. Number of children per development group is 8,1.

Admission requirements and choice of ECEC institutions

Children may be admitted to kindergarten upon application. (Children are admitted to kindergarten after reaching the age of 3, and are in kindergarten until they start school). Parents are obliged to enrol their children who are required to attend kindergarten under law on the date defined. The local government publishes the nursery enrolment area and its opening hours. The obligatory enrolment of children of the age of 3 is controlled by the notary of the settlement. (The enrolment to the nursery is usually between the 20 April and 20 May).

The head of kindergarten decides about admission.

The parent may ask for the admission of his/her child at any time, since the admission of children is continuous throughout the year. In conformity with the principle of the free choice of kindergarten, a parent may apply for admission to any kindergarten. Research data evidence that 50% of parents are in the position to choose kindergarten freely. (In towns with county rights, their rate is 85%, in Budapest, 45%, while in small settlements, it is 28 %.) The key aspect taken into consideration when selecting a kindergarten is the distance between the home and the kindergarten. As shown by relevant data, in big towns approximately one-fifth of children are enrolled to a kindergarten outside their kindergarten admission district.

Besides the principle of the free choice of kindergarten, a district system is in use. The system ensures that every child has access to kindergarten care. The kindergarten is obliged to enrol and take over the child who is compulsory to go to kindergarten and if his / her

residence is located in the kindergarten's district. The local municipality defines admission districts for kindergartens; in micro villages, a district may consist of one or two settlements, while in towns it is a smaller geographical area. (Hungary's whole territory is covered by kindergarten admission districts.)

If a kindergarten that has complied with its obligations of care provision (i.e. have admitted all applicants) has remaining spaces, then it may admit further applicants. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of children to be admitted, the head of kindergarten or, if the operator of the kindergarten operates more than one kindergarten, the operator convenes a committee to make a proposal for admission. Thus, on the basis of the capacities available at the specific locations, a proposal can be made on admission, transfer or rejection.

Age levels and grouping of children

The head of kindergarten decides about the placement of the children admitted to the kindergarten into groups, taking the opinion of the parents and the kindergarten teachers into consideration.

The kindergarten can also enrol a child over 2,5 years of age in the area where every 3 years of age and older children's application for admission has fulfilled.

The kindergarten also carries out the tasks related to child day care as defined in the Act on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration [2] for every 3 years old child.

On average, kindergartens in Hungary operate four groups; however, in this respect, kindergartens may vary significantly, Kindergarten groups are organised in a way that the number of children in one group does not exceed the maximum number defined in the Public Education Act (25 children). In 2017/2018 the number of children per group was 21,7.

The institutions may place the enrolled children in various groups. The head of kindergarten decides about the placement of the children admitted to the kindergarten into groups, taking the opinion of the parents and the kindergarten teachers into consideration.

As evidenced by a 2015 survey, 39% of the kindergarten groups are homogeneous in terms of age, 17% consist of two age groups, and 43% consist of more than two age groups.

Organisation of time

The maintainer of the kindergarten decides on the opening hours of the institution. As a rule, daily opening hours fall in line with the parents' working hours. On average, kindergartens are open 10.44 hours a day (deviation: 1.03). The daily schedule is defined in a manner that enables parents to bring and collect their children without disturbing kindergarten activities.

During the summer holiday, when kindergartens are closed (the duration of this period may vary by operator; normally, it is 2-6 weeks), a more central institution provides day care service for those parents, who cannot provide their child's home care. On working days when no kindergarten education is offered (maximum 5 days per year), while the nursery teachers participate in professional programs, kindergartens also provide day care at the parent's request. Until February 15th, parents must be informed about the closing days of the kindergarten, and at least seven days before the working days without education.

The kindergarten year starts on 1 September of each year and lasts till 31 August. However, children can go to kindergarten in the middle of the year if they reach the statutory age limit (3 years of age). The kindergarten education takes place in the context of occupations involving the entire kindergarten life necessary for the child's education, so the children are cared in all groups of the kindergarten during the entire time. There are different kindergarten teachers in the morning and afternoon time with the children. In a group, they alternate with a total overlap of two hours per day.

The institutional order of the kindergarten year is specified in the local kindergarten schedule prepared by the head of kindergarten. The head of institution asks the opinion of the pre-school board and the parents' organisation on this issue prior to making the schedule. . The schedule must specify:

- the dates of the working days without kindergarten education,
- the purposes for which such days are used;

- the duration of breaks, the dates of the celebration of the national, kindergarten holidays;
- as well as the dates of the kindergarten teachers' meetings,
- parents' meetings,
- teacher office hours provided for parents
- open doors days

In addition, the schedule discusses all pedagogical nursery events and any other issues deemed necessary by the teaching staff.

Organisation of the day and week

Kindergarten education can be implemented on the basis of an approved pedagogical program, which is controlled by experts. Education can be organized in the context of activities involving the whole kindergarten life, with the absolute presence and involvement of the kindergarten teacher. The weekly agenda of each kindergarten group is prepared by the kindergarten teachers in accordance with the principles of the local education program and the institutional organizational rules.

The schedule contains the plans for differentiated activities that may be performed parallel. Kindergarten teachers organise group activities of gradually increasing duration (5-35 minutes) that improve the children's cooperative skills and task orientated attitude. The daily schedule falls in line with the various activities and the children's individual needs, while taking into consideration local culture, customs and demands. Regularity, along with recurring aspects, offer emotional stability to the children.

In the organization of kindergarten life, care (taking physical needs into account) has a prominent role. The kindergarten teacher educates even during the care process, builds relationships with the children, and helps to develop their autonomy. The kindergarten teachers are supported by nurses who are employed by the institutions.

In terms of pedagogy, the schedule is continuous and flexible, and takes the key role of play into account.

Steering documents and types of activities

- Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education
- Ministerial Decree 17/2013 (III. 1.) (Minister of Human Capacities) on issuing the directive on kindergarten education for national minorities
- Government Decree 363/2012 (XII. 17.) on the Core Programme of Kindergarten Education
- Ministerial Decree 32/2012 (X. 8.) (Minister of Human Capacities) on issuing the directive on kindergarten education of children with special educational needs
- Ministerial Decree (Ministry of Human Capacities) 20/2012 (VIII.31) on the operation of educational institutions and on the use of names of public education institutions
- Government Decree 229/2012 on the implementation of the Public Education Act

The National Public Education Act defines the responsibilities, competence and operating conditions (personnel requirements, employment requirements and requirements related to material facilities) of kindergartens, and gives authorisation for a professional regulatory framework.

The general professional, legal and quality-related frameworks for kindergartens are defined at the governmental and ministerial levels. Furthermore, the operation of kindergartens is affected by the Budgetary Act in force.

The National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education defines the content of the kindergarten education. It was introduced in 1996 (Government Decree 137/1996 (VIII. 28.)). The minister responsible for education, in cooperation with a committee set up by him or her, evaluates the National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education on a regular basis, but at least in every five years, and proposes necessary modifications. The National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education applies to each kindergarten regardless of the maintainer. It is a core curriculum providing a general framework for the general pedagogic principles and objectives of kindergarten education and care. The staff of kindergartens is responsible for developing the local educational programme (i.e. local curriculum) of the kindergarten in line with the National Core Programme. Kindergartens provide local education programs that detail the tasks of kindergarten education, the methodological principles of development, the order and time of the documentation of pedagogical work. Institutional planning and adaptation of the basic program to local needs is a professional task of the nursery school

Ministerial decrees regulate the directive on kindergarten education for national minorities (Ministerial Decree 17/2013 (III. 1.)). If at least eight parents of the same nationality initiate national kindergarten education, they must be organized in a system that is upgraded after the date of the application. (Given that at least eight students actually enrol in kindergarten.)

Ministerial decrees regulate the directive on kindergarten education for children with special educational needs (Ministerial Decree 32/2012 (X. 8.)). The purpose of the Directive is to bring the national education program in kindergarten education and the special educational needs into line by:

- expectations are aligned with the progress of child development
- their development is carried out in the areas that are appropriate to them
- do not override the children's education and development
- rehabilitation development lessons become elements of the nursery education programs.

The governing principle makes it possible to select the framework of development, the applied special method and toolkit are determined by the individual requirements of the child. **Associated education** in majority kindergartens – in accordance with the professional judgement of the authority board – needs individual decision according to the child's requirements. Law determines the mode of the validation of the **right for special care**, the concept and content of habilitation and rehabilitation.

The implementing regulation of the National Public Education Act (20/2012. (VIII. 31.)) sets out that kindergartens also have child protection duties. The educational programme of the kindergarten has to provide assistance in reducing or eliminating any threats to the development of children. This regulation controls the way in which nursery psychologists perform pedagogical tasks in the kindergarten, and the work of kindergarten teachers.

The kindergarten organises development programs for disadvantaged children complying with the character developing, ability attending, integrating program discharged by the Secretary for Education. Within the framework of the kindergarten's development program the kindergarten guarantees the educational tasks in accordance with the development of the child, educational activity concerning the moderation of social

disadvantages and the establishment of co-operation with the services that support the parents in their kindergarten education and provide services for the children.

An increasing number of kindergartens undertake to provide education and care for the children of foreign citizens.

The Public Education Act specifies that a minor who is not a citizen of Hungary becomes entitled for kindergarten care and may use kindergarten services under conditions that are similar to those applying to Hungarian citizens, if

- as per the provisions of Asylum Acts,
- he or she is entitled to rights identical to those held by Hungarian citizens,
- he or she is a person with the right of free movement and residence (a citizen of an EU member state), and exercises his or her legal rights of entering into and residing in Hungary as per the act on entry and residence,
- he or she falls under the scope of the act on the entry and residence of third-country nationals, and his or her legal status is “immigrant” or “established”, he or she is a holder of a permit that permits him or her to stay in Hungary.

Teaching Methods and Materials

Education in kindergarten is child based, receptive, and aspiring in facilitating the **evolvment of child personage**, observing that the place of education for children attending kindergarten is primarily the family. The aim of education is to facilitate versatile, harmonic development, the evolvment of the child’s personality, decreasing disadvantages, taking the individual properties and **altering development measures** (including alignment of children requiring emphasized attention) into consideration.

The main feature of **learning conception** facilitated in kindergarten is that learning is considered a continuous, mainly imitating, spontaneous action that assist the development of personality as a whole. It is not reduced to obtain knowledge, it materialises in attitudes happening during the workday, natural and simulated situations, excursions, actions indicated by the teacher in a structural timeframe. The basic aim of learning in kindergarten is the development of the child’s capabilities, **expansion and organisation of experiences**. The kindergarten educator relies on the experiences, observations and knowledge of the children during the creation of the skill promoting environment. A premise of learning is the **activity**

of the child, experiences that employ many sensory organs directly, assuring the opportunity to discover and strengthen creativity.

Kindergarten education takes care of:

- Satisfaction of the child's **needs**, creating an emotionally safe background and a cheerful, loving atmosphere;
- Forming physical, social and age-specific intellectual **capabilities**;
- A colourful action performed in a filial **community** – compliant with age and maturity with emphasized attention to games that are not substitutional;
- Through these activities, the content of literacy adapted to the age and the individual's abilities, to the transmission of human values;
- Necessary personal and objective environment essential for the **healthy** development of the child.

The unique characteristics of Hungarian kindergarten education is that **playing is considered to be the most important tool of kindergarten education**, which is the most effective for the development of children. The kindergarten teacher uses game activity in the process of acquiring knowledge. The significance of playing has to be reflected in the daily timetable and schedule of the kindergarten. The prevalence of free play in the kindergartens is important.

Kindergarten education is mainly based on the following activities:

○ **Poems, stories**

Nursery rhymes, songs, verses, mostly combined with playful motion assent emotional safety and mother tongue education. Tales are especially suitable to form the child's outlook and view of the world. It confirms the distress and at the same time offers solution. Creation of poems and tales by children combined with movement and/or illustration is a way of self-expression. Telling tales and versing is an inevitable item of child mental hygiene. Folk, classic and contemporary literature are all on the menu in kindergarten.

○ **Singing, music, singing and playing**

Observation of the sound of the surroundings in kindergarten, lap-plays, folksongs, singing, vocal games, music offers delight for the children, and at the same time arises musical interest, forms of musical taste, aesthetical sense. During the common musical actions that

are a treat, children discover the beauty of melody, rhythm, the fun in collective singing. Singing and listening to folk songs, dancing to folk music and playing folk games assist cognition and living on of tradition. Efficient accomplishment of music teaching in kindergarten substantiates, facilitates the emergence of the musical native tongue.

○ **Drawing, modelling, craft**

Drawing, painting, modelling, building, picture forming, handwork and different kinds of representation is an important tool in developing a child's personality along with getting to know items of folk art, and aesthetic objective surroundings. It is the task of the kindergarten teacher to acquaint the children with the usage of appliances, with different materials, with the basic elements and methods of drawing, painting, modelling and handwork. The kindergarten teacher ensures various appliances and ground for illustrating actions through the day.

○ **Physical exercise**

A periodical and healthy exercise, games and assignments that go by the individual maturity of the children are the tools of forming and expanding psychomotor skills and abilities. A periodical application of games, activities, assignments that include movement that positively affect conditional capabilities, especially the development of strength and endurance, which benefits the young organism's persistency and health progress. Activity done in the framework of spontaneous free play is complemented with directed motoric actions. Kindergarten aims to applicate the cooperative motional games that supremely develop children.

○ **Learning actively about the external world**

During his activity and interest, the child acquires experiences about his narrower and broader quantities and field relations to his natural, human, subjective neighbourhood. It is the task of the kindergarten teacher to make it possible for the child to recognise his environment in an active way. The teacher should:

-Guarantee enough occasion, time and space and devices for spontaneous and organised ways to acquire knowledge shape environmental culture and to conduct a secure lifestyle.

-Promote the creation of the child's own opinion, development in the ability to make decisions, in a contemporary connections and formation of surroundings, furthermore in the interest of maintainable development, emphasize the formation of environment conscious behaviour.

Worklike activities

Worklike playful activity is an important device in character formation – self-service, helping kindergarten teachers and other grown-ups even along with other members of the group. Worklike activity is an action done readily and with pleasure by the child; an important prospect for obtaining skills, recognition of the surroundings, features needed to work such as endurance, self-reliance, responsibility, and purposefulness; - tools to format communal connections and fulfilling obligations. Work done by children requires calculated educational organisation, cooperation with children requires a continuous, specific, realistic valuation calculated to the individual child.

The kindergartens' teachers can choose the materials and methods used for the educational work. Within the framework of the National Development Plan, the Human Capacities Operational Program was developed a **competence-based kindergarten program** package that offered new alternatives to pedagogical innovation taking the legal regulators into account.

During their education in kindergarten for **children belonging to a nationality** must be insured of the conservation, attendance, strengthening, transmitting their self-identity, be guaranteed the possibility of multicultural tutoring based on integration. Children of families that are **forced to leave their countries** (migrants) must be assured of conserving, attending to, strengthening their self-identity and social integrity.

By the end of kindergarten children are mature enough to attend school. A physical, psychic and social matureness is required to attend school:

a, **A physically** fit and developing child is capable of elderly, harmonious movement. The child can voluntarily manage his movement, behaviour and the satisfaction of physical needs.

b, A **mentally** fit and developing child is interested and ready to enter school by the end of kindergarten. The necessary capabilities to learn makes him apt to begin school studies. (Besides automatic imprinting, recollecting and immediate reminiscing, intentional recollecting and reminiscing appears. Purposeful attention appears, which is a base for learning and basic conceptual thinking is evolving.) Maturity of field cognition, visual and acoustic differential, field awareness three dimensional navigation maturity, evolvement of body pattern is of special importance.

c, By the end of kindergarten the child is **socially** mature to attend school. A socially mature child is: capable to adjust to an increasing amount of regulations, can delay his psychical needs. His duty consciousness is evolving, which manifests in understanding the task, keeping it, and solving them in a more effective way. Formation of his endurance, work speed, self-reliance, and self-discipline assures this activity.

Assessment in Programmes for Children over 3 years

The National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education's aim is to register the child's developmental pathway in detail. There are various mandatory and not mandatory documents that promote the kindergarten education plan and the understanding and developing of children, and contribution to the follow-up of their development. Based on the child's development tracking system, every step from the kindergarten to school, all children get a planned professional overwatch and support. Based on the developmental test, it can be determined that how and to what degree individual children achieve the development level specified in the Core Programme. The core program considers the child's development to school life as a target value.

Kindergarten teachers choose the **follow-up documents** from available professional papers, in consideration of their local educational plan, or, alternatively, they can prepare them by themselves.

As specified by legislation, the documentation that monitors the child's development contains the following documents (Section 93/A of Ministerial Decree (Minister of Human Capacities) 20/2012 (VIII. 31.):

- the child's health history,

- the indicators of the child's development (the data of his or her emotional, social, intellectual, speech and movement development, recorded in every 6 months as a minimum),
- other observations related to the activities defined in the kindergarten's pedagogical programme,
- observations made and measures taken to promote the child's development,
- the results achieved,
- if the child, in the event of a suspicion of a disability or a special need, was examined by an expert committee
- the conclusions of the examination,
- proposals for measures taken by the child development teacher,
- the conclusions of the regular reviews performed by the expert committee,
- notes on the information provided to the parents.

The kindergarten records the indicators of child development, such as the results of mental, speech, hearing, vision and movement skills, as needed, at least every six months. Measures, findings and suggestions for the development of the child should also be fixed. The kindergarten teacher informs the parents of the child's development on a regular basis. Typically monitored psychological development factors in development diaries are:

Movement development:

- **body scheme development**
- **improvement of move**
- **space orientation**
- **dominance**
- **fine movement**
- **the development of the child's drawing**
- **movement coordination**

Speech development:

- **willingness to talk**
- **speech fault**
- **speech rhythm**
- **vocabulary**
- **picture interpretation**
- **text comprehension**

Intellectual development:

- **visual perception**
- **acoustic perception**
- **space orientation**

- **features of attention and imagination**
- **cognitive operations**

If necessary, the children's expert committees are responsible for the course of expert pedagogical activities which include, among others, the examination of abilities to professionally identify special needs and disabilities. In order to monitor the supply of services, an integrated traceability system has been applied for each child since 2015. an integrated follow-up system makes possible to keep track of all expert pedagogical services received by the child (all events of the care procedure), ensures his or her path of development (or changes). The advantage of the system is that the child's career can be monitored regardless of change in education institutions.

National core programme for kindergarten education³

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The National Core Programme for Kindergarten Education (hereinafter referred to as the 'Core Program') defines the principles of pedagogical work in kindergartens in Hungary based on traditions, values, national characteristics of kindergarten education in Hungary, on results of pedagogical and psychological research, internationally recognized practice of education and taking into account the values of the Fundamental Law of Hungary and the commitments entered into by international agreements signed by Hungary,.

By defining the pedagogical principles of kindergarten education, it has to be assumed that

- a) the child, as a developing personality, is entitled to a loving care and special protection;
- b) the education of the child is primarily the right and duty of the family, in which the kindergartens play a complementary, sometimes disadvantage reduction role;
- c) kindergarten education should be tend to help the full development of the child's personality, while respecting human rights and the rights of the child; in such a way that all children have equal opportunities to receive high-quality education.

According to the Core Programme, different kind of pedagogical endeavours, including innovative ones, may appear in kindergarten education, as the Core Programme ensures the implementation of pedagogical views, values and methodological freedom of kindergarten teachers, and contains restrictions only in interests of children.

The kindergarten's educational board prepares its pedagogical program: either takes over and adapts a ready pedagogical program, or prepares its own pedagogical program, which must comply with the provisions of the Core Programme. The sequential, professionally coordinated system of the Core Programme and the corresponding kindergarten pedagogical programs guarantees that the general professional needs defined by society for the harmonious development of children against the kindergarten education are met in addition

³ <https://magyarkozlony.hu/dokumentumok/cbecb91aaa99eec67948809d18a02b6923cc1ef9/megtekintes>
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to the professional independence of individual institutions and the diversity of kindergarten education.

2. In addition to the Core Programme, the following should be taken into account when preparing a kindergarten pedagogical programme:

a) ethnic minority kindergarten education directive if the kindergarten carries out minority education;

b) kindergarten education directive of children with special needs, if the kindergarten carries out the education of child with special educational needs.

II. IDEA OF CHILDREN AND KINDERGARTEN

Idea of children

1. The Core Programme's starting point is the human personality, it assumes that man cannot be replaced by another and is a spiritually, morally and biologically unique personality and social being at the same time.

2. Children are developing individuals; their development is determined by genetic conditions, the specific laws of maturation and the spontaneous and planned environmental effects. As a result of combined effect of these factors, children have specific physical and mental needs varying by age (age stages) and individuals. In the free development of personality, the role of the personal and material environment surrounding the child is decisive. Kindergarten education is child-centred and inclusive, and therefore seeks to help the development of children's personality, ensuring that all children receive equally high-quality and loving education and that their existing disadvantages are reduced. It does not give rise to any kind of prejudice.

Idea of kindergarten

1. Primary stage of educating a preschool child is the family.

2. Kindergartens are professionally independent educational institutions of the public education system, a supplement to the family education, from the third year of the child to the school. Kindergarten's pedagogical activities and material environment ensure the best conditions for the development and education of preschool children. In kindergarten, while fulfilling its functions (protector, social, educator, personality developer), the inner psychic conditions of transition to the next stage of life (to the age of primary school) are established in the children.

3. The aim of kindergarten education is to promote the versatile, harmonious development of kindergarten children, the development of childhood personality and the reduction of disadvantages, taking into account the age and individual peculiarities and the different rate of development (including the care of children requiring special attention).

4. Principles of kindergarten education are:

- a) The childhood personality is surrounded by acceptance, respect, love, honour and trust;
- b) Education enables and helps the personality development of children, the development of individual skills and abilities of children;
- c) The pedagogical effects of kindergarten education should be adapted to the children's personality.

5. In order to ensure the implementation of principles, kindergarten education provides for: satisfying the needs of children, creating a cheerful and loving kindergarten atmosphere providing emotional security; individual and age-specific shaping of physical, social and intellectual abilities; a diverse range of activities in the community of children, appropriate to their age and level of development, with particular regard to play that cannot be replaced; through these activities, about literacy and human values that are adapted to age and the individual abilities of the child; the personal and material environment necessary for the healthy growth and development of the child.

6. Preserving, nurturing, strengthening, transmitting, linguistic education and possibility of integration based on multicultural education should be ensured in kindergarten education of children belonging to ethnic minority.

7. Preserving, nurturing, strengthening and social integration of identity should be ensured in kindergarten education of children of families forced to leave their country (hereinafter referred to as migrants).

III. TASKS OF KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION

The task of kindergarten education is to satisfy the physical and mental needs of preschool children, including:

- developing a healthy lifestyle,
- emotional, moral and value-oriented community education,
- implementation of native language and intellectual development and education.

Developing a healthy lifestyle

Educating to a healthy lifestyle, developing the need of a healthy lifestyle, and promoting the child's physical development at this age are of particular importance. Within this, tasks of kindergarten education are:

- caring for children, meeting their physical and movement needs;
- promoting the development of harmonious, coordinated movement;
- promoting the development of children's physical abilities;
- protecting, training and preserving the health of children;
- stimulating healthy lifestyle, body care, personal hygiene, meals, in particular reducing the consumption of foods and beverages high in sugar and foods high in salt and unsaturated fat, stimulating the consumption of vegetables, fruits and dairy products, developing habits of brushing, dressing, resting, disease prevention and health preservation;
- providing a healthy and safe environment for the growth and development of children;
- developing habits related to the protection and preservation of the environment, establishing environmentally conscious behaviour;
- with the involvement of appropriate specialists - in cooperation with parents and kindergarten educators - performing special care, preventive and corrective physical and mental education tasks.

Emotional, moral and value-oriented community education

1. One characteristic feature of preschool children is the emotional stance of their behaviour. It is essential that children are surrounded by emotional security, constant values, and cheerful, balanced and loving atmosphere in kindergarten. This requires that

- children experience positive emotional effects when entering kindergarten;
- the relationship between kindergarten employees and children, children and kindergarten employees is characterized by a positive attitude and emotional charge;
- the kindergarten can simultaneously promote the development of moral and social sensitivity of children, the development of self-consciousness, and allow space for self-expressing aspirations;
- the kindergarten educates the child to accept and understand that people are different.

2. From the point of view of socialization, the exercise of activities based on common experiences and the foundation of the children's moral qualities (such as compassion, helpfulness, selflessness, attentiveness), will (including self-dependence, self-discipline, perseverance, task and rule consciousness) and habits and norms are decisive.

3. The kindergarten builds on the openness of children and helps children to get to know their narrower and broader environment, which is the basis of national identity, Christian cultural values, patriotism, attachment to homeland and family, to be able to wonder at and appreciate the good and beautiful things of nature and the human environment.

4. From the point of view of the development of children's behaviour, the communication, treatment and behaviour of kindergarten educators and all employees of the kindergarten play a model role.

5. In the case of children requiring special attention, the cooperative role of the kindergarten with the specialists with special preparedness specified in the sectoral legislation is especially important.

Implementation of native language and intellectual development and education

1. Native language education is a task to be implemented in all forms of activity. Development of the native language and development of various forms of communication, with a talking environment, good example and rule mediation, are present throughout the whole kindergarten education activity. While educating to the knowledge, appreciation and love of mother language, attention should be given to the maintenance and encouragement of children's natural speech and communication, to listen to children, to support children's issues and to seek answers.

2. Kindergarten education provides children with a variety of activities based on their individual interest, curiosity, as an age-specific feature, and existing experiences and knowledge, through which they can gain further experiences about the surrounding natural and social environment.

3. Further tasks of intellectual education include: systematizing and expanding the children' spontaneous and planned experiences and knowledge and practicing them in different activities and life situations, and developing intellectual skills (sense, perception, memory, attention, imagination, thinking, creativity), as well as providing an environment that stimulates the development of all intellectual skills, in particular imagination and creativity.

IV. PRINCIPLES FOR ORGANIZING KINDERGARTEN LIFE

Personnel conditions

1. In kindergarten, children are the centre of educational work.

2. In kindergarten, the key person of educational work is the kindergarten teacher, whose personality is decisive for children. The kindergarten teacher's presence is an important condition for kindergarten education throughout the entire period of education. The kindergarten teacher's accepting, helpful and supportive attitude is a model and an example for children.

3. The activity of kindergarten teachers and the co-ordinated work of non-teaching employees supporting the operation of the kindergarten should contribute to the effectiveness of kindergarten education.

4. The development of children with special educational needs requires the involvement of a specially trained specialist.

5. The task of those working in kindergarten also educating children belonging to a minority is to achieve the objectives of minority kindergarten education.

6. The task of those working in kindergarten also educating migrant children is to give children the opportunity to learn about each other's culture and mother language.

Material conditions

The kindergarten must have the material conditions necessary for the implementation of pedagogical program. The kindergarten's building, yard, garden and equipment should be designed to serve the safety and comfort of children, to conform to their changing body size and to ensure the preservation and improvement of their health. Make it possible to satisfy their needs for movement and play, and to surround children with colours, shapes and materials that create harmony. Equipment used by children must be placed in a manner accessible to them and with due regard to their safety. At the same time, the kindergarten should provide a suitable working environment for kindergarten employees and create opportunities for receiving parents.

Organising kindergarten life

1. For children's healthy growth and development showing in activities, a daily and a weekly schedule provide the conditions, that are differentiated activities of adequate duration, can be carried out in parallel, and are implemented by planning and organising group activities of increasing duration (5-35 minutes) developing the children's ability of cooperating, task consciousness. The daily schedule adjusts to the different activities and

individual needs of children, and has regard to the local habits and needs. Regularity and repetition establish emotional security for children.

2. A good daily schedule is characterized by continuity and flexibility. It is important to create harmonious proportions between activities, bearing in mind the prominent role of play. The daily and weekly schedules are developed by kindergarten teachers of the child group.

3. In the organization of kindergarten life, care also plays a prominent role. Kindergarten teachers also educate in the care process, build relationships with the children and, at the same time, help to develop their self-dependence in cooperation with the caring staff.

4. Various mandatory documents serve the planning of kindergarten education, the learning and development of children and the monitoring of their development. Kindergarten education can only be carried out on the basis of an approved pedagogical program and can be organized within the framework of activities involving full-time kindergarten education in the presence and participation of kindergarten teachers.

Connections of the kindergarten

1. Kindergarten education together with family education serves the children's development. An essential condition for this is the cooperation with the family. The forms of cooperation are diverse, from personal contact to various events; they include opportunities created by the kindergarten and the family. Kindergarten teachers take into account the peculiarities and habits of the families and, during the cooperation, enforce the intervention practice, i.e. the solutions of assistance adapted to the family.

2. The kindergarten maintains contact with institutions playing a decisive role in the children's life before kindergarten (crèches and other social institutions), during kindergarten life (institutions of pedagogical service, child welfare services, children's homes, health care and public education institutions) and after kindergarten life (schools). The forms and methods of contact adapt to the tasks and needs. The kindergarten is open and proactive in establishing and maintaining relationships.

3. Kindergarten educating also children belonging to minority maintains contact with the relevant minority self-governments and organizations.

4. In order to develop educational space between Hungarian-speaking institutions of the Carpathian Basin, the kindergarten aims to establish contact with Hungarian crèches abroad and maintains a professional relationship as far as possible.

V. FORMS OF ACTIVITIES OF KINDERGARTEN LIFE AND TASKS OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

Play

1. Play is the most important and most developing activity of early childhood, and is therefore the most effective tool of kindergarten education. Play - free playing process after free associations - is the primary psychic need of young children that has to be satisfied every day in a periodic and long-lasting way and smoothly if possible. Young children express their inarticulate impressions from the outside world and their own inner world in their play. In this way, playing becomes a prominent informative activity that develops psychics, movement and personality and provides experience.

2. First real playmates of young children both in the family and the kindergarten are adults - parents and kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers give an imitable example to playing activities, and when the free playing process is established, they remain playmates, or become assistants or initiators if the game process gets stuck. The presence of kindergarten teachers also enables the development of play relationships between children.

3. Games require a suitable place and simple, shapable materials, tools and toys supporting the development of children's fantasy. The task of the kindergarten and kindergarten teachers is to provide the appropriate group atmosphere, space, time, tools and experience opportunities for the different forms of games, practice games, symbolic games, constructive games and rule games.

4. In the course of the game, the conscious presence of kindergarten teachers ensures the adventurous, intense play of children. In addition to their activities creating conditions, kindergarten teachers achieve this by their co-playing, supporting, encouraging, stimulating and indirect reactions.

5. In kindergarten, predominance of free play should be emphasized. The particular importance of game should be reflected in the daily schedule, time management and the playful organization of activities of the kindergarten.

Poems and tales

1. Nursery rhymes, children songs and poems linked to mostly playful movements contribute to the children's emotional security and native language education. With their rhythm and the unity of movements and words, they give the child sensual-emotional experiences.

2. Hungarian children's poetry, folk and nanny traditions offer a rich and good opportunity, a strong foundation for everyday nursery rhymes and poetry. Fairy tales are one of the main contributors to the children's emotional, intellectual and moral growth and development. Fairy tales, in visual and concrete form, possibly with the means of puppeteering and dramatization, reveal to children the main emotional relationships of the outside world and the human inner world and the possible and appropriate behaviour.

3. Fairy tales are especially suitable for developing the attitudes and worldview of kindergarten children. They confirm the anxiety of young children and also offer release and solution. Their inspiring approach illustrating the material world and the associated magical worldview with miracles and transformations that unlocks the strict casual links, make children realize the deeper sense of psychic reality and understanding aspirations toward the outside world.

4. Personal relationship with the storyteller makes children feel emotionally safe and shows a lively inner world of images in the intimate state of listening to fairy tales, like game activity. This process of internal imaging is one of the most important forms of children's experience processing.

5. A child's own poems and fairy tales, combining them with movements and/or images is a way of self-expression.

6. Everyday storytelling, nursery rhymes and poetry are inevitable elements of the mental health of young children.

7. In kindergarten, folk (folk tales, rhymes and poems representing folk traditions, elements and tales of legends processing the history of Hungarians), classical and contemporary literary works also have a place in line with the age characteristics of children aged 3-7.

Singing, music, singing games, children dance

1. In kindergarten, observing the sounds of environment, playing games on the lap, folk children's songs, singing, singing games and playing music will delight children and, at the same time, attract their musical interest and shape their musical taste and aesthetic sensitivity. During joint singing and musical activities providing experience, children discover the beauty of melody, rhythm and movement and the joy of singing together. Singing and listening to folk music, children and folk dances and traditional games help to learn and keep alive traditions. The successful implementation of the tasks of kindergarten singing and music education establish and facilitate the basis for development of mother language of music.

2. Singing folk games and contemporary artworks selected with high standards are important tools in shaping the children's musical abilities (equal pace, rhythm, singing, hearing, movement) and musical creativity.

3. When choosing material for listening to music, kindergarten teachers also take into account the ethnic minority of children in the case of ethnic minority education.

4. Singing and playing music is part of children's everyday activities by spontaneous imitation of the adult pattern.

Drawing, painting, moulding, handwork

1. Drawing, painting, moulding, construction, image creation and handwork as different types of representation, as well as getting to know artworks, folk art elements, customs, traditions, national symbols and aesthetic material environment is also an important tool for the development of childhood personality. Children's artwork is based on the

enrichment of internal images. Efforts should be made to present children's works at community events and to encourage talents.

2. Kindergarten teachers provide space and a variety of tools for depicting activities throughout the day. The activity itself and the joy of it are important, as well as developing the need for creation, creative self-expression, aesthetic shaping of the environment and the reception of aesthetic experiences.

3. In line with individual development and skills, these activities help the development of visual-plastic expressive ability, compositional, spatial orientation and organizing skills, enriching the children's experience and fantasy world and its visual expression: the enrichment of children's space, form and colour imagination, the development of their visual thinking, their aesthetics sensibility, their openness to their beauty and their sophistication.

4. It is the kindergarten teachers' task to familiarize children with the use of tools, different materials, basic technical elements and procedures of drawing, painting, mounting and handwork.

Physical activity

1. Regular health-enhancing physical activity, as well as motion games and tasks adapted to the level of individual development of children are tools for establishing, shaping and developing psychomotor skills and abilities. Preschool age is a period of intensive learning of natural place-, situation-changing and fine-motor skills, as well as of intensive development of movement coordination, which should be facilitated with diverse, varied and joyful, emotionally safe practice forms and games. This ensures a positive interaction between physical activity and intellectual development.

2. The regular use of motion games, activities and tasks positively affects the ability of conditional skills, especially the development of strength and endurance, which affect the body bearing capacity and healthy development of the children's body. They play an important role in the development of muscle balance necessary for good posture, amplify and supplement the effects of care and education to healthy lifestyle.

3. Motion activities performed during spontaneous and free games are complemented by directed motion activities. Complex physical activities are also embedded in other activities of kindergarten life, while influencing the development of the children's personality - positive self-image, self-control, emotional regulation, compliant social behaviour, cooperation, communication, problem-solving thinking.

4. Opportunity for motion activities appearing spontaneous - in game, within that in free game - and health-enhancing physical activities should be provided for all children on every day of kindergarten education, taking into account individual needs and abilities. Widespread use of cooperative motion games that best develop children and exploit of free air should be sought.

Active learning of the outside world

1. Through activity and interest, children will gain experiences of formal, quantitative and spatial relationships of the narrower and broader nature-human-material environment. In the course of discovering reality, they develop a positive emotional relationship with nature and human creations, and they learn to protect them and to preserve values.

2. While discovering their environment, children gain experiences that are necessary for proper orientation in the environment according to their age. They learn the experience of homeland, people living there, domestic landscape, local and folk traditions, customs, belonging to the community, the values of national, family and material culture, and learn to love and protect these.

3. While discovering the environment, children acquire experience and knowledge of mathematical content and use them in their activities. They recognize the quantitative, formal, magnitude and spatial relationships: their judgment is developing and their space, plane and quantity approaches are evolving.

4. It is the task of kindergarten teachers to enable children to learn the environment actively. They should provide enough opportunity, time, space and tools to gain spontaneous and organized experience and knowledge and to shape the habits of environmental culture

and safe lifestyle. They should promote the children's independent opinions, the development of decision-making abilities in contemporary relationships and in shaping the environment, and in the interest of sustainable development, emphasize the foundation and shaping of environmentally conscious behaviour.

Work-related activities

1. An important tool of personality development is work and work-related activity that is identical in many respects to games and acting experience - self-service, assistance to kindergarten teachers and other adults, performing casual orders carried out later as independent activities together with classmates or for them, community and other work undertaken, environmental, plant and animal care.

2. Work-related activities of children:

- active activities performed with pleasure;
- an important opportunity for gaining experience and learning the environment and shaping attitudes and abilities, skills, qualities needed to work, such as perseverance, independence, responsibility, purposefulness;
- community relations are means of shaping the fulfilment of duties, one of the forms of recognition of oneself and others.

3. Children's work requires a conscious pedagogical organization, cooperation with children and continuous concrete, realistic, that is, development assessment compared to the children oneself from kindergarten teachers.

Learning through activities

1. In kindergarten, learning is a continuous, largely imitated, spontaneous and organized activity that supports the growth and development of the whole personality. It does not narrow down to the acquisition of knowledge, but takes place in situations that occur throughout the kindergarten day, in a natural and simulated environment, on excursions, in forms of activities initiated by kindergarten teachers, in organizational and time frames.

2. Primary objective of kindergarten learning is to develop the skills of kindergarten children and to expand and organize their experiences. Kindergarten teachers build on the experiences and knowledge of children when creating an environment that supports learning.

3. Active activity of children, providing opportunity for direct experience and discovery involving many sense organs and strengthening of their creativity are conditions of learning.

4. Possible forms of learning in kindergarten:

- imitative example and model following behaviour and conduct learning, developing habits
- spontaneously gaining experience through games;
- playful, active learning;
- acquiring knowledge based on children's questions and answers;
- observation, experience and discovery guided by kindergarten teachers;
- practical problem solving.

5. In the course of learning management, kindergarten teachers help the development of the children's personality with personalized, positive assessment.

VI. CHARACTERISTICS OF DEVELOPMENT BY THE END OF KINDERGARTEN AGE

1. As a result of the children's inner maturation and the process of family education and kindergarten education, the majority of young children reach the stage of development required for starting school life by the end of kindergarten. At the end of kindergarten, children enter into the state of a slow transition in which at school they will socialize from kindergarten to schoolchildren. Flexible school enrolment while taking into account age provides an opportunity to start school according to the level of development.

2. Following conditions are required for starting school: physical, psychical and social maturity, which are both necessary for effective school work:

a) Physically healthy children are about to undergo the first deformation around the age of six. Their body ratio changes, tooth eruption begins. Their body is proportionally advanced

and bearing. Their movement is more coherent and they are capable of more harmonious fine movement. They can deliberately control their movement, behaviour and physical needs.

b) Psychically healthy children are ready to go to school with an open interest by the end of kindergarten. The skills needed for learning make them suitable to start learning in school. Their detection and perception are further differentiated. Development of spatial perception, visual and acoustic differentiation, spatial orientation, spatial motion development and development of body scheme are of particular importance.

By psychically healthy children:

- in addition to involuntary memory engraving and recall, as well as direct recall, deliberate engraving and recall are appearing, the duration of preservation increases; besides recognition, the role of recall is becoming more and more important,
- deliberate attention underlying learning is appearing, the content and scope of attention gradually increases, its sharing and transfer becomes easier,
- In addition to acting-expressive and visual thinking, elemental conceptual thinking is also emerging.

Children developing healthy:

- -communicate and speak clearly and continuously, can express their thoughts and emotions in a form understandable to others, at an appropriate pace and emphasis in accordance with their age, use all part of speech, create different sentence structures and sentence types, pronounce vowels and consonants clearly by the possibility of large individual deviations associated with tooth eruption, can listen and understand the speech of others,
- have basic knowledge of themselves and their environment; know their name, address and occupation of their parents, recognize the times of day; know and apply in practice the basic rules of pedestrian traffic; are familiar with their narrower home, plants and animals living in their surroundings, their care and protection; recognize the relationship between dressing and weather. They know the basic rules of behaviour, the forms of behaviour and habits necessary for the appreciation and preservation of

the natural and social environment are emerging; they have elementary quantitative knowledge.

c) By the end of kindergarten, children become socially mature for school. In a favourable school atmosphere, children developing socially healthy are prepared to accept school life and teachers and are able to gradually developing cooperation and to establish contact with adults and other children.

Socially mature children:

- can adapt to more and more rules and delay to satisfy their needs,
- their task consciousness is evolving, and this is manifested in the understanding of tasks, in the increasingly effective performance of tasks, possibly creative performance; the development of their persistence, working pace, self-reliance and self-discipline ensures this activity.

3. During the period of compulsory kindergarten from the age of 3, purpose and task of the education process is to promote the harmonious physical and social development of the children's personality.

4. In the case of children requiring special educational needs, the above-mentioned development can be achieved only with the help of continuous pedagogical work with the help of specialised professionals.

5. The school maturity criteria for children requiring special attention reflect the expectations of the reception institution towards children entering school.