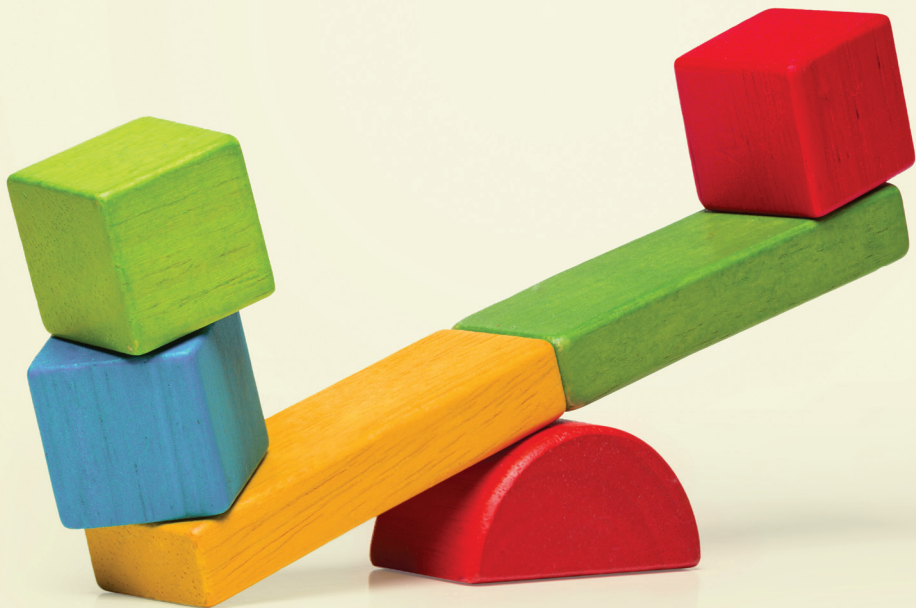




BORJANA MIKOVIĆ

THE ROLE OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE PROVISION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES



Borjana Miković
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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Sarajevo, 2019

Title: The Role of Pre-school Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities

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Publisher: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)
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Responsible: Marius Müller-Hennig
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Proofreading: Slobodan Stajić and Borjana Stajić

DTP: Filip Andronik

Print: Amos graf

Printing: 50 copies

CIP - Katalogizacija u publikaciji
Nacionalna i univerzitetska biblioteka
Bosne i Hercegovine, Sarajevo
373.2.014(497.6)
MIKOVIĆ, Borjana
The role of pre-school education in the provision of equal
opportunities /
Borjana Miković. - Sarajevo : Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung : Forum
lijeve inicijative,
2019. - 247 str. : graf. prikazi ; 25 cm
Bibliografija: str. 223-233 ; bibliografske i druge bilješke uz
tekst.
ISBN 978-9958-884-76-4 (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)
ISBN 978-9958-9949-4-4 (Forum lijeve inicijative)
COBISS.BH-ID 27297798

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Sarajevo, 2019

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„Children and youth are to the human community what foundations are for a palace. If they are granite, strong and resistant – the building will defy the centuries; if they are weak, poorly connected and unresisting – the building will fall under the curse of its own children; the fall shall be the more horrific the larger the building.“

Vidaković, 1932:31

ABBREVIATIONS

2011 Survey – Household Budget Survey in BiH

APOSO – Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education

Barcelona Objectives - Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council of 15-16 March 2002

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

BPC – Bosnian Podrinje Canton

CBC – Central Bosnia Canton

CRC – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD – UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

ET 2020 – European Union Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training

EU – European Union

EU Council – European Union Council

EU Council Conclusions, 2011 – Conclusions of the European Union Council on Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow

Eurydice and Eurostat – *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, European Commission/EACA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014.

FBiH – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Framework Law – Framework Law on Pre-school Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

FSI – FBiH Statistics Institute

General Comment No. 17 – General Comment of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts

General Comment No. 7 – General Comment of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child No. 7 (2005): Implementing child rights in early childhood

Guidelines – Guidelines for the implementation of common core curriculum based on learning outcomes

HNC – Herzegovina Neretva Canton

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law (2017) – Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law on Pre-school Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

K10 – Canton 10

Ombudsman Institution Analysis – Analysis of the conditions in the area of child rights and their implementation in pre-school upbringing and education, Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH

PC – Posavina Canton

PIRLS – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

Platform – 2017-2022 Platform for the development of pre-school education in BiH

PSE – Pre-school education

SC – Sarajevo Canton

SC PSE Law – Law on Pre-school Education in Sarajevo Canton

SC PSE Pedagogical Standards and Rules – Pedagogical standards and rules for pre-school education of SC

TC – Tuzla Canton

TC PSE Pedagogical Standards – Pedagogical standards for pre-school education, shelters for children of TC

UN – United Nations

USC – Una-Sana Canton

WHC – West Herzegovina Canton

ZDC – Zenica-Doboj Canton

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FOREWORD BY THE EDITORS

Education is a key factor in any conceptualisation of a beneficial society: Its purpose is to convey knowledge and values to new generations of citizens, with the aim of laying the foundation for these citizens to play a constructive role in society, economy and politics. For a long period of time the focus has been on primary, secondary and tertiary education. Pre-school education, however, had often remained neglected.

In many countries, over the most recent two to three decades, there have been improvements. In various countries worldwide, societal values have been undergoing substantial changes, with an increasing proportion of women aspiring to combine family and work life. Recent research has shown the positive impact that pre-school education can have on the development of children and their academic and social progress once they start school. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, a combination of traditional family values and an education system facing serious challenges at all levels, thus far, has kept the issue of pre-school education off the agenda. Recent dynamics, however, show increasing demand for pre-school education as well as rising awareness concerning the benefits of quality pre-school education.

In paying close attention to these developments, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Forum Left Initiative took the decision to support this research project on pre-school education in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Based on extensive desk research and a comprehensive set of focus group discussions, it analyses the current state of the pre-school education system in BiH and the needs of its main stakeholders: that is, parents and pre-school education staff. We hope that it will provide

useful orientation and both quantitative and qualitative evidence to inform the policy debate. The project's findings and recommendations also have the potential to contribute productively to the developing spectrum of evidence-based research into education policy in both BiH and in the region.

Merima Ejubović and Marius Müller-Hennig

December 2018

INTRODUCTION

Today, as never before, there is scientific proof and general acceptance that early childhood, the first years of life, constitutes a period in which a socially organised pre-school education (hereinafter: PSE) can contribute immeasurably to the positive development of the child. The approach relies on the fact that early childhood, unlike any other period of human life, includes rapid growth, development, progress, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Simply put, in addition to experiencing rapid physical, intellectual, emotional, social and other developments, in early childhood, the human being acquires experiences and habits that can have a great impact on overall growth and development throughout his/her life. For these reasons, to a lesser or greater extent in all countries of the world, pre-school education is organised to serve as a special link or a bridge to connect the family setting of the child with the outside world. Therefore, institutions which perform this type of social activity and organise and implement various PSE programmes represent a very important environment for every child. Such an environment can never serve as a replacement for the family setting, albeit it focuses, in addition to care and education, on socialisation - which is primarily developed through time spent with peers, joint and mutual learning, games, responsibility-sharing etc. This approach, based on the support of parents and teachers, is characterised by a caring education and a safe environment. As international standards stipulate, early childhood care and education is one of the fundamental human rights of the child, and it also constitutes an irreplaceable opportunity for the social inclusion of groups of children at risk and marginalised groups of children, especially those with developmental difficulties.

As well as having a positive impact on the development of the child, the role of PSE is particularly important because it performs different functions and has different effects on society and its development. The following three functions of pre-school education are particularly important: pedagogical, social, and economic (Vandekerckhove, A et al, 2013:11, 12). Each of the functions, which are mutually intertwined and overlapping, impacts not only the development of the child but also on the family of the child. This primarily refers to the opportunity provided to parents, when children are in the care of a pre-school institution during parental working hours or education, to create conditions to maintain the social wellbeing of the family without being anxious about the safety of their child. PSE also contributes to social cohesion and social justice, and by extension to improvement in the functioning of a society as a whole.

A growing awareness of the importance of PSE exists in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter: BiH) which has a decades-long tradition of PSE as part of its overall care and education system, together with other areas of specific social importance. PSE includes programmes of care, upbringing, and education. However, the institutional set-up of PSE, as is the case with the entire BiH education sector, reflects the state set-up, as defined by the Constitution of BiH, the constitutions of the Entities and cantons, and the Statute of Brčko district BiH; this area and the competencies thereon are defined by different documents and regulations.

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter: FBiH) PSE is regulated by cantonal laws¹ which should be harmonised with the provisions

1 The FBiH Entity comprises the following 10 cantons: Una-Sana Canton (USC), Posavina Canton (PC), Tuzla Canton (TC), Zenica-Doboj Canton (ZDC), Bosnian Podrinje Canton (BPC), Central Bosnia Canton (SBC), Herzegovina Neretva Canton (HNC), West Herzegovina Canton (WHC), Sarajevo Canton (SC) and Canton 10 (K10).

of the Framework Law on Pre-school Education in BiH² (hereinafter: Framework Law).

The overall unfavourable situation in PSE in the country is made more complex by wide-spread poverty and the high unemployment rate. The result is that due to high numbers of unemployed mothers, pre-school children remain in the family setting and lack the opportunity to be included in PSE. Since the introduction of compulsory pre-school education in the year before children start school, this situation has begun to change. It seems, however, that, despite the gradual progress, we can still rightfully say that there is a link between the number of children not in PSE institutions, especially kindergartens, and the number of unemployed women/men. In other words, cantons with the lowest number of children included in PSE have the lowest number of employed women. In addition, the low number of children in PSE is significantly affected by: the insufficient number of pre-school institutions; particularly in suburban and rural areas; the insufficient availability of places in public pre-school institutions, primarily in large towns and cities; high prices for PSE services charged to parents; insufficient number of professionals, especially teachers, employed in PSE; lack of compliance with/implementation of the legal provisions; inadequate awareness of the importance of PSE amongst parents and in society in general.

The need for this research was identified as a result of the pursuit of answers to the following questions: how can the inclusion of children in PSE be increased, especially through raising social awareness of its importance?

2 The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, at the 16th session of the House of Representatives held on 11 and 30 October 2007 and the 9th session of the House of Peoples held on 29 October 2007, adopted the Framework Law which was published in the Official Gazette of BiH, no. 88/07 of 20 November 2007 and entered into force on 21 November 2007.

How can financial problems be resolved? How can more teachers be employed? How can legislation be improved?

Therefore, the main goal of the research study is to contribute to finding ways for as many children as possible to be included in PSE in order for equal opportunities to be given to all children. Given that the accession to the European Union is one of the key strategic objectives of BiH since the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in 2008, the reference point for the research study is primarily the European Union (hereinafter: EU).

PART ONE

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS AND IN THE LEGISLATION OF THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION POLICIES IN THE DOCUMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Pre-school education is increasingly one of the key public policy areas, the development of which receives great attention, especially at the European level. In this regard, social investment and the participation of children in quality pre-school education (PSE) programmes are considered to be a key pre-requisite for opportunities later in life, and in this context, the costs of these programmes are seen as an investment, with multiple positive effects, not only for the child, but also for society as a whole (Jensen, 2009:15).

In addition to developing the skills of the child, through joint and complementary teaching, the positive impact of PSE is also reflected in its invaluable contribution to social integration: i.e. social inclusion and the mitigation of certain impacts; such as, for disadvantaged children; or in cases of child poverty. On the other hand, the social benefit of organised PSE is also manifest in the creation of opportunities for both parents to achieve greater participation in the labour market or to pursue adult education. It is also manifest in the reduction of the social cost of (child) poverty and its effects; in higher levels of employment (of staff in pre-school institutions and of parents); and in improved investment in future human capital etc. (Esping - Andersen, 2009:125). In Europe, this approach has been reaffirmed, especially over the past two decades, by forms of co-operation in the area of early childhood education policies that identify different political problems in this area. These include a range of issues from those concerning access (how to help parents, mostly women/mothers to (re)integrate into the labour market) to those concerning the quality of services provided by early childhood education and care institutions, that focus on the child, his or her family, and their wellbeing. In this context – depending on the historical era – a range of economic, cultural, and social interpretations of differences

in the policies were made. These included ideas such as: that pre-school education institutions are particularly useful for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, or that mothers who work contribute to tax revenues. “Currently, in international (and European) debates economic arguments seem to prevail, although there is an increasing tendency of giving more room for social interpretations” (Milotay, 2014:5).

However, if we go back more than 20 years, then it could be concluded that the main consideration of early childhood education and care policies at the European Union level (hereinafter: EU) was to promote women’s participation in the labour market. In 1992, the European Union Council (hereinafter: the EU Council) adopted a Recommendation on Child Care, which foregrounded the importance of the development of accessible and quality pre-school institutions, which, as far as possible, should have the flexibility and diversity to meet, the preferences of parents and their children (Article 3, Paragraph 2). Also in 1992, a second document was adopted by the EU Council – the Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth and are breastfeeding. These documents can be linked indirectly with the inclusion of children in PSE at the earliest age that allows for a woman to keep her job and, by extension, contribute both to the economic development of the society and improved social wellbeing and welfare of the child and the entire family.

Following the adoption of these two documents at EU level, a number of other documents have been adopted, most notably the Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council of 15-16 March 2002 (hereinafter: the Barcelona objectives). In this document, all Member States are called upon to remove disincentives to female labour force participation, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns

of provision, to provide by 2010: childcare to at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years of age (paragraph 32). It follows from this, that the Barcelona objectives are in fact part of the European Employment Growth Strategy. This strategy particularly emphasises the need to increase the employment rate of young parents, thereby contributing to a greater gender and employment equality between women and men. Also, by increasing and developing care for children of pre-school age, parents will be free to decide and organise their lives in order to achieve a better work-life balance. This primarily refers to women/mothers who, due to the lack of provision of adequate and safe child care, have withdrawn from the labour market or have worked in employment that is below their capabilities.

The requirement imposed on the Member States to comply with the targeted participation of children in early childhood education and care, as set out in the Barcelona objectives, has been reiterated by the EU in its document entitled Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women (2006-2010), which “aimed at helping achieve the Barcelona targets on childcare and the development of health care facilities through the structural funds and exchange of best practices.” According to these objectives, the structural funds should be used not only for co-financing measures to help balance work and family life, but also to establish facilities for child care, to train employees and provide pre-school services to job-seeking parents. Set out like this, the Barcelona objectives have had a major impact on national policies and on policy-makers in terms of improving the quality of pre-school institutions.

On the other hand, despite their efforts, most European countries failed to achieve the Barcelona objective of providing childcare by 2010 to at least 33% of children under three years of age. This situation is best accounted for in the report *Key data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe* (hereinafter:

Eurydice and Eurostat), which claims that in 2011 only ten European Union countries had reached the Barcelona target. Denmark is in the lead with 74% of children under the age of three years old in early childhood education and care (hereinafter: ECEC). In contrast, ECEC attendance among children under three years old was especially low (approximately 10% or less) in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Slovakia. On average, in the 28 EU countries participating, 93% of children attend ECEC before starting compulsory primary education (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:13). In this context, the EU Council adopted the Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (hereinafter: ET 2020), a benchmark which states: “By 2020, at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education.”³

According to available data for 2012, the implementation of this benchmark has led to a general increase in the average participation of this group of children in early childhood education in the EU countries. Whilst some of the countries are still far from the target, others have a participation rate of above 95%, e.g., France and Malta have 100%. Of all the European countries, the lowest participation rates were noted in Macedonia (31.3%) and Turkey (44.1%).⁴

In recent years, the widespread activity of the EU, inspired by various documents that specifically incorporate the EU policies on ECEC, has

3 This benchmark should not be considered a concrete target for individual countries to reach by 2020. The Member States are invited to consider, on the basis of national priorities and whilst taking account of changing economic circumstances, how and to what extent they can contribute to the achievement of the said benchmark (Annex I ET 2020).

4 <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00179>, Accessed: 27 April 2018.

resulted in an increased demand by the Member States for special attention to be paid to the quality of ECEC at the European level. In this regard, the EU Council adopted several documents that stated that early childhood education and care have the potential to bring about the highest rate of return over the whole life-long learning process, especially for the most disadvantaged (Conclusions of the EU Council on efficiency and equity in education and training). Furthermore, cooperation in the design of education policies, including ways to ensure access to high-quality ECEC services, should be a priority (Conclusions of the EU Council of 21 November 2008 on preparing young people for the 21st century: an agenda for European cooperation on schools). Along the same lines, the ET 2020 includes the priorities for the period 2009-2020, such as promoting and raising the level of quality of opportunities and support to ECEC service providers.

Also, the Conclusions of the EU Council on Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow (hereinafter: the EU Council Conclusions, 2011), in addition to confirming the aforementioned demands, primarily foregrounds the child, his or her development and the well-being of the family as central issues for policy consideration. To this end, this document invites all EU Member States to analyse their existing ECEC services, paying special attention to availability, quality and investment in the creation of new ECEC facilities. The document also recommends that the Commission should support the exchange of information about best practice; the expansion the database of ECEC facilities; and the monitoring and reporting to the Council on progress towards the EU benchmark targets.

All these efforts suggest that the ECEC policy in the EU in the last 20 years has been focused on increasing the quality of ECEC, primarily the beneficial effects of early participation, and that investment in ECEC brings

immeasurable benefit to society in terms of the return on investment. Particular emphasis has been laid on: the availability of high-quality pre-school institutions and investment in an increased number of such institutions; participation of as many children as possible in ECEC, as specified in the Barcelona objectives; the quality professional staff, including their continuous professional development, better working conditions, higher initial qualifications, salary increases, etc. One of the priorities stemming from the EU Council Conclusions of 2011 is the need for increased cooperation and exchange of ECEC policies at international, regional, and local levels of all EU Member States.

THE RIGHT OF THE CHILD TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS AND IN THE LEGISLATION OF THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

International human rights standards are nowadays established at the following two levels: the international - within the framework of United Nations (UN) - and the regional e.g., European - within the European Union or the Council of Europe. At the UN level, in addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the other two essential and legally binding documents are: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) (hereinafter: ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) (hereinafter: ICESCR). Together with other UN standards, most importantly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (hereinafter: CRC) they also contain provisions which, to a greater or lesser extent, relate to education. A key principle contained in all international human rights standards is the enjoyment of all rights within the

territory of a state, including the right to pre-school education, which must be ensured without any discrimination.⁵ In this regard, the right of everyone to education, an aspect of which is the right of the child to ECEC, is specifically emphasised in the ICESCR: “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (Article 13, Paragraph 1).

This citation clearly shows the obligation of Member States to ensure their citizens the enjoyment of the right to education, which is a key prerequisite not only for the preservation of human dignity of every individual, but also for its most useful role in society, which can best be achieved by early participation of the child in pre-school education.

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter: CRC), which BiH adopted by the succession notification of 23 November 1993, is the key international document whose provisions guarantee the highest standard of education for every child.⁶ Since the CRC is an international document that became legally binding on the signatories following its ratification, its

5 See Article 2, paragraph 1 of ICCPR; Article 2, paragraph 2 of ICESCR; Article 2 of CRC.

6 “Official Gazette of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, 25/93.

provisions are almost entirely incorporated into all the relevant laws of the Federation of BiH concerning the rights of the child. Accordingly, the State undertook: "...to ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision" (Article 3, paragraph 3 of CRC).

The rights contained in the CRC are intended for each child individually, not for children as a group, thus the individual exercise of these rights must be based on adherence to the various principles, also contained in this document. Although all the rights enshrined in the CRC are interdependent, indivisible, and universal, in terms of children of early i.e. pre-school age, on the other hand, the principle of common responsibility can also be identified. It is the common responsibility of both parents for the upbringing and development of the child, with the State being responsible to provide those parents – as the primary rearers of children – with the appropriate assistance and to ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care and protection of children (Article 18, paragraphs 2 and 3). In the same context, it is possible to distinguish other rights of invaluable importance for the child: the right to protection against violence (Article 19); the right to education (Article 28); as well as education objectives, the most important of which are: the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; the preparation of the child through education to lead a responsible life in a free society; the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, as well as respect for the cultural origin and values of others (Article 29); and the right of the child to engage in play, rest, and leisure (Article 31). It should be noted here that in the exercise of the right of any child, i.e. in everyday work and contact involving children

of pre-school age, the adults are required to respect: the right of the child to protection against discrimination (Article 2); the best interest of the child (Article 3); and the right of the child to participate and to have his or her views duly weighted “in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (Article 12). These three rights, together with the right of the child to life, survival, and development (Article 6) “transcend the nature of special rights enshrined in the CRC and have been raised to the level of principles without which no other rights of the child can be fully enjoyed” (Vučković-Šehović, 2000:85). Therefore, the principles above must be made integral to everyday work with children in all pre-school institutions, with the employees fully aware that “they need to influence everyday life and educational work in institutions as well as the ways in which everyone involved in the educational process (children, teachers, parents, legal guardians, employees in pre-school institutions, local community representatives, etc.) should relate to each other” (Vandekerckhove, A and others, 2013:14).

Since the rights of children of pre-school age are not specifically indicated in the CRC, but rather subsumed in a set of universal rights intended for each individual child “below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Article 1 of CRC), the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in General Comment No. 7 (2005): “Implementing child rights in early childhood” (hereinafter: General Comment No. 7) provides additional guidelines concerning human rights of young children. One of the guidelines reads: “The Convention requires that children, including the very youngest children, be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view. For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and

learning. These requirements can best be planned for within a framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood, including a plan for implementation and independent monitoring, for example through the appointment of a children's rights commissioner, and through assessments of the impact of laws and policies on children" (paragraph 5).

This quotation cites the requirement that very young children should be respected as persons in their own right, despite the fact that, due to their physical and mental immaturity, they still need additional care and attention, an obligation which, in the case of children participating in ECEC, is shared between the parents and teachers in pre-school institutions. This additional care and attention also implies that the State is required to provide necessary assistance to parents, as primary rearers of children, through organised early childhood education and care. This approach – based on the right of the child to education (Article 28 and education objectives (Article 29) discussed earlier in this text – requires from the State the creation of preconditions, through education directed to the development of child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (Article 29, paragraph a.), for every child to participate in pre-school education. Another right of significance for young children is the right to engage in play. The relevance of this right, which is specified in Article 31, paragraph 1 of CRC, has been reiterated in General Comment No. 7: "Play is one of the most distinctive features of early childhood. Through play, children both play and challenge their current capacities, whether they are playing alone or with others. The value of creative play and exploratory learning is widely recognised in early childhood education" (paragraph 34).

Another document of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child outlines the significance of play for child development as not "a luxury", but rather one of the key needs of the child – General Comment No. 17 (2013)

on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (hereafter: General Comment No.17), which argues that “play and recreation are essential to the health and well-being of children and promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills. They contribute to all aspects of learning” (paragraph 9).

Based on knowledge and established scientific facts, this quotation highlights not only a range of positive effects that play has on the development of the child, but also of the impact of play on the ability of the child to integrate more easily into the world of adults and to enter into obligations that await him or her. The following guideline accords with this: “Both play and recreation can take place when children are on their own, together with their peers or with supportive adults. Children’s development can be supported by loving and caring adults as they relate to children through play. Participation with children in play provides adults with unique insights and understanding into the child’s perspectives. It builds respect between generations, contributes to effective understanding and communication between children and adults and affords opportunities to provide guidance and stimulus” (Paragraph 10, General Comment No. 17).

The significance of adults participating with children in play, during which adults gain direct insight into the intellectual development, wants, and desires of the child is specifically emphasised in the paragraph quoted above from General Comment No. 17. Yet, in the context of pre-school education, the significance of play may also applies in the relationship between children and their teachers i.e. teachers participating with children in play, which is undoubtedly one of the tasks of these professionals.

LEGISLATION OF THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as its fundamental document in the field of human rights, guarantees the highest standard of internationally recognised human rights and freedoms, as specifically provided in Annex I of the BiH Constitution. It also lists the additional human rights treaties that apply in BiH, particularly the following UN documents: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) etc. The BiH Constitution also indicates that the rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols “shall apply directly” in Bosnia and Herzegovina and “shall have priority over all other law” (Article 2, “Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”, paragraph 2).

The Constitution of the Federation of BiH in Chapter II: “Human Rights and Freedoms”, Article 2, Paragraph 1, in addition to guaranteeing the highest standard of internationally recognised rights and freedoms, lists the human rights guaranteed to all persons in the territory of the Federation of BiH, including the right to education (paragraph (m)). Also, according to the Constitution, both the government of the Federation and the cantons have responsibility for guaranteeing and ensuring human rights (Chapter III: “Division of Responsibilities Between the Federation Government and the Cantons, Article 2, Paragraph (a)), with each municipality being responsible for ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms listed in Chapter II (A), Articles 1 to 7, including the right to education (Chapter VI: Municipal Authorities, Article 1).

The Constitution of the FBiH regulates the division of responsibilities between the Federation government and the cantons, assigning the responsibility for “making education policy, including decisions concerning the regulation and provision of education” to the cantons (Chapter III: “Division of Responsibilities Between the Federation Government and the Cantons”, Article 4, paragraph (b)).

An education system regulated in this way requires a high level of coordination at the level of the Federation of BiH, i.e. at the level of the state of BiH in terms of coordination between the two Entities and Brčko District of BiH. In terms of PSE, this particularly refers to the implementation of the Framework Law, the adoption of which made possible the fulfilment of a key commitment contained in the document entitled “Strategic Directions of Development of Pre-school Upbringing and Education in BiH”, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2005. Most of the provisions of this document have been taken from the strategic directions and incorporated into the Framework Law, and the most significant innovation or change is the statutory requirement to provide compulsory pre-school education for all children in the year preceding the start of compulsory primary education. To date, this provision is by far the most concrete development in terms of the provision of equal opportunities for children of pre-school age in the Federation of BiH, in particular contributing towards the achievement of greater success in school and in life in general.

It is worth mentioning another strategic document in the area of pre-school education - “the Platform for the Development of Pre-school Education for the period 2017-2022” (hereinafter: the Platform), which the Council of Ministers adopted in late 2017. This document, which essentially follows the policies, goals, and practices of other European countries, combines the strategic goals of pre-school education and their inherent activities, grouped into five packages that relate to: increased coverage; quality assurance of

pre-school education; regular funding; inclusion; and sensitising society. As highlighted in the 2017 Information of the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs on the implementation of the Framework Law on Pre-school Education in BiH (hereinafter: information on the implementation of the Framework Law), in addition to reflecting the true commitment of BiH to further progress in the area of PSE, this document is also intended to serve the relevant education authorities in BiH as an interim basis for the development of their own strategies, plans, and other acts that are aimed at encouraging the development of this area—not only as a step “towards integration into the EU but also towards ensuring better preconditions for its own development” (2017:2 and 3).

The Framework Law, in Article 1, Paragraph 1, states its remit as: “the principles, aims & objectives, and standards for the preparation of a common core curriculum for pre-school care and education, as well as the management, professional standards, types of records, funding, supervision and other issues relevant to the organisation and establishment of pre-school institutions.” Paragraph 2 of the same Article reads: “The principles, aims and standards regulated by the Law and based on the Law shall not be reduced”, which indirectly sheds light on the complexity of the organisation of BiH and, thus, of legislating in the area of the pre-school education and care.

In addition to establishing the function of pre-school education and care, the Framework Law in Article 2 stipulates that pre-school education, in addition to being part of the BiH education and care system, is also its dedicated entry level, responsible for the upbringing of pre-school children, and should be understood as a broader issue, described by the concepts: upbringing, education, care, and protection.

Article 3 of the Framework Law establishes the primary obligations of the competent education authorities, stipulating that authorities responsible

for organising the education system in the cantons of the Federation of BiH are “required to comply and adhere to the principles and norms set forth in this Law and to provide care and education to all children on equal terms.”

The relevant authorities at lower levels of government in BiH, including the cantons in the FBiH, were required to pass the respective laws, aligning them with the Framework Law, within six months following the adoption of this Law, namely by May 2008 (Article 51 of the Framework Law). The data that follows vividly illustrates the level of compliance with this provision:⁷ two cantons (Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (HNC) and West Herzegovina Canton (WHC)) have not yet passed their respective laws on pre-school education and care; with the exception of Sarajevo Canton and Posavina Canton, most of the remaining cantons passed their PSE laws on average two years after the legal deadline. Central Bosnia Canton only passed its law on 17 July 2017. According to data contained in information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, Una-Sana Canton adopted its PSE law in 2010, but “it has not entered into force to date, which is why the obligations prescribed by the Law cannot be implemented” (2017:4). The rationale given by the canton for this situation cites the lack of finances available for PSE from the competent authorities.

7 Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Sarajevo Canton (hereinafter: PSE Law of Sarajevo Canton) was adopted in 2008 (Official Gazette of Sarajevo Canton, 26/08 and 21/09); Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Una-Sana Canton was adopted in 2010 (Official Gazette of Una-Sana Canton, 08/10); Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Posavina Canton was adopted in 2008 (Official Gazette of Posavina Canton, 08/08); Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Tuzla Canton was adopted in 2010 (Official Gazette of Tuzla Canton, 12/09, 08/11 and 10/13); Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Zenica-Doboj Canton was adopted in 2010 (Official Gazette of Zenica-Doboj Canton, 07/10); Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Bosnian Podrinje Canton was adopted in 2009 (Official Gazette of Bosnian Podrinje Canton, 15/09 and 07/14;) Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Canton 10 was adopted in 2009 (Official Gazette of Canton 10, 08/09) and Law on Pre-school Care and Education of Central Bosnia Canton was adopted in 2017 (Official Gazette of Central Bosnia Canton, 10/17).

All the laws that have been passed and aligned with the Framework Law share an almost identical wording on the right to pre-school education and care, the principles, standards and rules, the types of programmes, the management, the functions and oversight, and other issues related to the organisation and the establishment of pre-school institutions. Although, each of the cantonal laws contains regulation on the requirement to respect the best interest of the child and provisions on the prohibition of discrimination, as in the Framework Law, the fact that three cantons have no PSE laws in place, and / or, where they are in place, do not enforce them, suggests discrimination and the denial of equal opportunities to all pre-school children in the Federation of BiH. Since pre-school education is one of the key areas directly related to young children, it can be deduced that respect for the rights of the child to PSE is a basis for the development of healthy personality in children and the preservation of their dignity.

As mentioned earlier, the organisation and provision of PSE services in all cantons in the territory of the Federation of BiH are regulated by relevant laws and regulations, and all children of pre-school age have the right, but not the obligation, to use PSE services. In other words, the legal right of the child to PSE does not imply a free-of-charge provision of PSE service, even though public pre-school institutions in all the cantons are subsidised to make their services accessible to as many children as possible. To this end, the Framework law, aiming to ensure a greater accessibility to PSE and provide equal life opportunities to all children, stipulates compulsory participation in PSE for all children in the year preceding compulsory primary education (Article 16, Paragraph 1). This legal obligation is contained in all eight cantonal laws, but the level of compliance with it varies from one canton to another. The PSE Law of Una-Sana Canton was adopted in 2010, but due to lack of funding, it has not yet been enforced, thus making its provision, including the provision on compulsory PSE in the year prior to primary

school, a dead letter. The same applies in the cantons which, to date, have failed to pass their PSE laws (HNC and WHC). According to Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, children from Herzegovina-Neretva Canton have participated sporadically in this programme through “various project activities organised at the level of pre-school institutions, primary schools and non-governmental organisations” (2017:5). The same source claims that the programme of compulsory PSE has been carried out in the remaining seven cantons, with an average duration of 150 to 180 hours, distributed throughout the year, twice a week, which figures are considerably lower than the compulsory number of hours in most European countries, as will be discussed below.

At the cantonal level, differences in the implementation of compulsory PSE in the year preceding primary school are also evident, specifically where the regulation of the type of institution eligible to implement it is concerned. Thus, some cantonal laws stipulate that compulsory PSE in the year preceding compulsory primary education should be delivered exclusively by pre-school institutions (e.g. Zenica-Doboj and Bosnian Podrinje cantons), while others permit this programme to be delivered not solely by pre-school institutions, but also by primary schools (Sarajevo Canton). Without going into further analysis and reflection, it can be noted that in a smaller number of European countries (e.g. Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland), the participation of children in PSE prior to compulsory primary education may take place either within pre-school institutions or outside of them, often in primary schools (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:34).

PART TWO

STATISTICAL DATA ON KEY INDICATORS FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

STATISTICAL DATA ON KEY INDICATORS FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Early childhood is the phase during which high-quality PSE programmes can have the most positive impact on the development of every child, especially in the domains of language and cognitive skills, but also of the so-called non-cognitive skills such as: sociability, engagement in constructive interpersonal relations, self-respect, autonomy, self-control etc. In this context, the scientific and professional community expresses an almost unified view that PSE: “can have a significant positive impact on the development of all children; has a more positive influence on children from vulnerable groups (children from poor families, children from rural areas, children with developmental difficulties, children from ethnic minorities etc.) than on children living in better conditions, especially with respect to reducing the risk of failure in later school education; it can decrease the risks in educational achievements between children from vulnerable groups and those from wealthier families – early age is the best time for an intervention; if the intervention is of high quality, it brings excellent results; it can be of high quality only if employees in this field have adequate education and opportunities for continuous professional development” (Vandekerckhove, 2013:16).

This knowledge, which is based on various research conducted at the European level during the past twenty years, has served as the relevant benchmark in efforts to take a snapshot of PSE in the FBiH in this research. This study’s presentation of adequate statistical data, mostly by the FBiH Statistics Institute (hereinafter: FSI), is related to the above. Combined with a comparative analysis of the EU policies and children’s rights in international documents and national legislation in the PSE domain previously discussed, it will serve the

implementation of the objective of the study, paying special attention to the role of PSE in the provision of equal opportunities for all children in the FBiH.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF SIX YEARS OLD AND THE EXPECTED DECREASE IN THIS POPULATION IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, AND THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

In 2013 in Europe, according to available data, the number of children under the age of six years old was slightly above 32 million (32,003,394). In EU Member States (EU 28), children under the age of six years old on average constitute 6.3% of the total population. In most European countries, these children are also included in PSE and benefit from the services provided to them. Also, in more than one third of European countries, the percentage of this group of children was close to the aforementioned average (6.3%), and exceptions were recorded for the following countries: Turkey had the highest percentage of this educational group with 9.9% of children under the age of six years old, followed by Ireland with 9.6% and Iceland with 8.7% of children under the age of six years old in their overall populations. On the other hand, Germany had the lowest percentage, with 5.0% of children under the age of six years old, and this educational group was represented by less than 6.0% of children in the overall populations in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Malta, Austria and Portugal.

In BiH, the number of new-borns has decreased year on year, especially in the past twenty years, i.e. since the end of the most recent war (1992 – 1995), with a consistently negative growth rate of the population. In that regard, it should be noted that a gradual decrease in the number of children under the

age of 4 years old had been recorded for almost the last five decades, as illustrated by the figures for the following statistical indicators taken from the last four censuses in BiH.

Table 1: Number of children in educational group 0 – 4 in the overall population of BiH, according to the censuses of: 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2013

Census year	1971	1981	1991	2013
Total population	3,746,111	4,124,256	4,377,033	3,531,159
Children in educational group 0 – 4	405,505	365,332	332,422	174,064
%	10.8	8.9	7.6	4.9

Source: Agency for Statistics of BiH, Thematic Bulletin No. 02, 2017

The data presented in Table 1 clearly indicates that the percentage of children in educational group 0 – 4 years old in the overall population of BiH has decreased continuously since the 1971 census, yet the total population in all three (pre-war) censuses recorded continuous growth, which is likely to indicate a drop in the fertility rate of the population in the pre-war Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Compared to the census which took place before the beginning of the war (1991), the most recent census in BiH (2013) recorded an evident decrease in the number of children under the age of 4. It also showed a drastic decrease in the figures for the total population, caused primarily by the displacements from war and emigrations from the country. The decrease in the size of this educational group was recorded not only in comparison with the numbers contained in the three previous censuses in BiH, but also in comparison with the size of this educational group in other European countries. Today, BiH belongs to the group of countries with the lowest percentage of this educational group in Europe.

According to the data from the most recent census in BiH (2013), there were 2, 219, 220 inhabitants in the territory of the FBiH, of which 114,843 children under the age of 4, which represents slightly less than two-thirds of the total number of children of this age in BiH. Also, according to results of the last census (2013), there were 161,638 children under the age of six in the FBiH, which represents 7.3% of the total population in this Entity.

However, if we compare the total number of live births in the territory of the FBiH in the past seven years with the numbers of live births by canton, again the indicators show a continuous drop in the birth rate.

Table 2: Number of live births in the territory of FBiH by canton (2010–2016)

Cantons	Live births by year							Total
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
USC	2.673	2.496	2.351	2.174	2.154	2.096	2.105	16.049
PC	241	228	220	167	212	193	144	1.405
TC	4.826	4.417	4.587	4.323	4.069	3.888	3.903	30.013
ZDC	3.980	3.760	3.807	3.416	3.391	3.438	3.452	25.244
BPC	231	191	216	236	268	214	234	1.590
CBC	2.444	2.300	2.361	2.184	2.090	1.965	2.135	15.479
HNC	1.903	1.817	1.901	1.831	1.824	1.762	1.833	12.871
WHC	789	772	798	773	816	734	709	5.391
SC	4.704	4.722	4.682	4.550	4.566	4.619	4.774	32.617
C10	514	458	466	429	433	408	366	3.074
Total	22.305	21.161	21.389	20.083	19.823	19.317	19.655	143.733

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, numbers: 158, 170, 184 and 249, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2017

The data shown above can be indirectly correlated to the total number of pre-school children of the age of six or slightly older than six. It indicates that the highest number of live births in the relevant period was recorded in the territory of SC, and in TC and ZDC. This totalled 87,874 children or approximately 60% of the total number (143,733) of live births in all ten cantons in the FBiH. It is notable that only 6,069 (4.21%) of the total number of live births were recorded in three cantons (PC, BPC and C10) over the relevant period of seven years, and out of the ten cantons, PC recorded the lowest number of live births, a total of 1,405 (1%) children.

Table 2a: Number of deaths by canton (2013 – 2016)

Cantons	Deaths by year				Total
	2013	2014	2015	2016	
USC	2.265	2.103	2.197	2.190	8.755
PC	469	505	465	502	1.941
TC	3.761	3.503	4.093	4.053	15.410
ZDC	3.348	3.356	3.525	3.444	13.673
BPC	282	322	313	318	1.235
CBC	2.213	2.198	2.280	2.342	9.033
HNC	2.166	2.164	2.368	2.222	8.920
WHC	883	863	895	887	3.528
SC	4.031	4.215	4.469	4.295	17.010
C10	851	801	869	852	3.373
Total	20.269	20.030	21.474	21.105	82.878

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, Statistical Bulletin, number 249, 2017

A comparison of data presented in tables 2 and 2a shows that the total number of deaths in all 10 cantons during the relevant period (82,878) was higher by the figure of 4,000 than the total number of live births (78,878). However, 19,655 live births were recorded in 2016, which indicates an increase in live births by 338 children, when compared to 2015. In the same year (2016), there were 21,105 deaths, which is lower by the figure of 369 than in 2015.

Table 2b: Data on the number of live births, number of deaths, and population growth in FBiH (2013 - 2016)

Year	Live births	Deaths	Population growth
2013	20.083	20.269	-186
2014	19.823	20.030	-207
2015	19.317	21.474	-2157
2016	19.655	21.105	-1450
Total	78.878	82.878	-4000

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 249, 2017

The data presented in table 2b, which contains aggregate data mostly taken from tables 2 and 2a above, indicates that the FBiH recorded a continuous decrease in live births in the first three years of the relevant four-year period. It was only in 2016 that a small increase, over the figure for 2015, was recorded: 19,750 live births were registered, which indicated an increase of 338 live births, or 1.7%. Although further analysis of the data presented for all four years shows small variations in the decrease/increase of the number of deaths – where, for example, the number of deaths in 2016 (21,105) was lower by 369 people than in 2015, when 21,474 deaths were registered – population growth in all four relevant years was continuously negative.

It is clear that the continuous decline in the number of live births in the territory of the FBiH has a direct impact on the number of future PSE users. At the same time, there are few adequate demographic projections that offer relevant estimates for the next 10 years of the number of children in the educational group 0 – 6 years old. Additionally, not only are there no measures in place to encourage an increase in the birth rate, there are also no general family policies that are being implemented in the FBiH. For example: the extension of paid leave for child care purposes; increases in the child bonus; additional allowances for families with more than one or two children; free-of-charge and accessible PSE for all children etc. This is likely to result in a decrease in demand for PSE services in the future, despite the fact that, currently, the demand exceeds the available provision in this field. This decrease in the demand is likely even if the increasing number of young people and entire families with children leaving BiH is disregarded. In the EU Member States as well, due to the expected decline in the number of children under 5 years old, which, according to relevant estimates, will continue to accelerate, it is foreseen that the size of this demographic group will have decreased by 7.6% by 2030 when compared to 2012, which, in the EU, represents a total of 2.5 million fewer children in 2020 when compared to 2012 (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:25).

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANISATION OF PRE-SCHOOL INSTITUTIONS IN THE FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Pre-school education is organised in public and private pre-school institutions in all cantons in the FBiH where, in accordance with Article 18 of the Framework Law, public pre-school institutions are established by the

authorities with responsibility for education, whereas private pre-school institutions can be established by domestic and foreign natural and legal persons. Both types of institutions are established in accordance with the principles, standards and rules laid down in the Framework Law, as well as other laws and bylaws regulating education.

In terms of organisation, in all cantons, PSE is available in nurseries for children from the age of six months until they turn three years old, and in kindergartens, for children from the age of three until they enrol in primary school. The Framework Law also allows for the possibility of organising other types of special pre-school education institutions. Thus, “if pre-school children with special needs cannot be provided with education in a pre-school institution, they may partially or entirely be provided with such education in special pre-school education institutions” (Article 20).

In accordance with Article 21 of the Framework Law and the provisions of cantonal laws that have been harmonised with the Framework Law, the organisation of educational work with children in all pre-school institutions in the FBiH must be based on the establishment/application of the common core curriculum of integral development programmes for pre-school institutions. This should:

- guarantee and ensure quality education for all children and the achievement of a sufficient standard of knowledge, skills and abilities;
- ensure a consistent quality of educational standard in all pre-school institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- ensure the application of a curriculum appropriate for the developmental needs of pre-school children;

- through the education process, ensure development of a positive relationship with, and sense of belonging to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- ensure adequate co-ordination of programmes, as well as their ability to adapt to the specific needs of pre-school institutions and local communities;
- ensure freedom of movement and equal access to pre-school education.

In accordance with Article 24 (1) of the Framework Law, all pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH should implement education programmes for children from birth to pre-primary school age, as well as programmes intended for other users interested in development, education and the general well-being of children. The same Article (paragraph 2) of the Framework Law lays down that education programmes for children will regulate objectives and tasks, content and type, as well as the profiles and educational background of employees who implement the programmes, based on pre-approval granted by the competent authorities. In accordance with Article 23 of the Framework Law, the types of programmes that are used in pre-school institutions comprise:

- „integral development programmes;
- specialised development programmes;
- emergency, compensatory, and rehabilitation programmes;
- programmes to strengthen parental skills;

- programmes for pre-primary school children unless they are included in some form of pre-school education;
- programmes for children of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina living abroad.”

In order for pre-school institutions to function more effectively and provide a maximum level of protection to children – the end users of their service, and in addition to the aforementioned provisions regulating the establishment and organisation of such institutions, the Framework Law also lays down a series of obligations to be met by pre-school institutions: the development and implementation of certain programme contents; the adoption of annual work programmes; the submission of annual work reports to the competent authorities; the establishment of professional bodies, management and governance; the establishment of parent councils; the keeping of records and documents etc.

Table 3: The number of public and private pre-school institutions in FBiH (school years 2015/2016 and 2016/2017)

School year	Institutions		Total
	public	private	
2015/2016	110	80	190
2016/2017	112	85	197

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletins*, numbers: 234 and 248, 2016 and 2017

The data shown indicates an evident increase in the total number of pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH in the school year 2016/2017. When compared to the school year 2015/2016, the newly established private pre-school institutions outnumber the newly established public pre-school

institutions. This information is to be expected: firstly, because some cantons recorded the demand for the inclusion of children in PSE, which exceeded the availability of provision; secondly, because of the lack of interest of the competent authorities in some cantons, such as SC, concerning the opening of new pre-school institutions but also⁸ in the re-opening of the previously existing pre-school institutions that were devastated during the war. Except for registered playrooms that are treated as private pre-school education institutions, there are a large number of non-registered institutions providing PSE services in most cantons, especially in SC, and the competent SC ministry took action in early 2018 in order to regularise this situation in accordance with legislation.

⁸ Article 19(2) of the PSE Law of SC lays down: “Pre-school institution as a public institution... may be established pursuant to the Law on Institutions when the Municipal Council of municipalities from the territory of the Canton, City Council of the City of Sarajevo or the Cantonal Assembly finds that its establishment is in the public interest.”

Table 4: The number of public and private pre-school institutions in FBiH by canton (school years 2010/2011 and 2016/2017)

Cantons	Number of pre-school institutions in 2010/2011		Total	Number of pre-school institutions in 2016/2017		Total
	Public	Private		Public	Private	
USC	7	4	11	9	7	16
PC	3	-	3	3	-	3
TC	20	1	21	20	3	23
ZDC	18	3	21	13	20	33
BPC	2	1	3	1	1	2
CBC	7	10	17	9	8	17
HNC	10	6	16	18	9	27
WHC	5	6	11	4	14	18
SC	31	9	40	31	21	52
C10	6	-	6	4	2	6
Total	109	40	149	112	85	197

Sources: *Analysis of the situation of children's rights and their implementation in PSE domain, The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman, 2011, p. 41* and *FBiH Statistics Institute, Statistical Bulletin, number 248, 2017*

Comparative analysis of data presented in table 4 indicates that the total number of pre-school institutions had increased by almost one-third by 2016 when compared to 2011, where the number of newly registered private pre-school institutions more than doubled in just five years. Only three new public pre-school institutions were registered during the same period. The comparison of the presented data indicates that the number of pre-school public institutions has obviously increased in some cantons by 2016 when compared to 2011, e.g. in HNC by 8, and in CBC and USC

by 2 public pre-school institutions. Also, the indicators presented for some cantons illustrate an evident decrease in the number of public pre-school institutions by 2016, which are substituted by the increase in the number of private pre-school institutions. This especially applies to ZDC, where the number of public pre-school institutions had decreased by 5 in 2016 when compared to 2011, while the number of new private pre-school institutions had increased by 17. A similar situation is found in WHC, where the number of public pre-school institutions decreased by 1, and the number of newly registered private pre-school institutions increased by 8. In HNC, the number of public pre-school institutions increased by 8, and the number of private ones decreased by 3. The increase in the number of private pre-school institutions can be explained in a variety of ways: for instance, as a result of the decrease or increase in the number of children as potential PSE users in some cantons; or as a result of an increasing inclination on the part of parents to use PSE services provided by private pre-school institutions – apart from lack of space in public pre-school institutions in a number of cantons, the reasons for such a choice probably include better-quality programmes and adherence to adequate standards, especially concerning the number of pre-school teachers and other professional staff employed in these institutions.

This phenomenon is most prevalent in SC, where the number of public pre-school institutions has not changed in the relevant period, whereas the number of private pre-school institutions had more than doubled by 2016 when compared to 2011. Considering that available data indicates that the demand for PSE provision exceeds its availability in this canton, this is most likely to have been caused by the high percentage of small children who are potential PSE users. The organisation of public pre-school institutions in the FBiH, especially in large city centres, is structurally characterised by its division into several organisational units. These institutions function in the same way as private pre-school institutions, in that they provide PSE

services to children from all educational groups. Each institution has one management team and a standardised qualification structure for their staff.

Thus, for instance, four organisational units (Stari grad, Centar, Novo Sarajevo, Novi grad) function within PI “Djeca Sarajeva”, Sarajevo in SC, with the total of 31 kindergartens.⁹ Also, in addition to this public pre-school institution, there are three more public specialised institutions/centres in SC: Institute for Special Education of Children “Mjedenica”, Centre for Blind and Visually Impaired Children and Youth and “Vladimir Nazor” Centre.¹⁰

Some other cantons in the FBiH have an organisational structure of their public pre-school institutions similar to that of SC. For example, PI for pre-school education “Naše dijete” in Tuzla comprises 12 organisational units, while the city of Mostar has 2 public PSE institutions: PI “Dječji vrtići – Cici-ban” and Institution “Dječji vrtići”, and each of them comprises 5 kindergartens.¹¹ The purpose of such organisational structure of public pre-school institutions in a number of cantons is likely to be financial rationalisation and savings – with respect to the managerial staff, a single kitchen, single accounting, etc. This does not impact on the quality of service provided by the so-called organisational units, i.e. kindergartens.

9 <http://www.djecasarajeva.edu.ba/o-nama>, accessed on: 20.03.2018.

10 Article 14(7)a) of Pedagogical Standards and Rules for PSE SC lays down the following: “A child with severe developmental difficulties shall be enrolled in an educational group of adequate institution for special education to attend a special programme.”

11 <https://www.mostar.ba/gradska-poduzeca.html> i <http://www.vrtici-mostar.ba/o-nama/>, accessed on: 20.03.2018.

STATISTICAL INDICATORS CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

The Framework Law on Pre-school Education in BiH defines the obligation of the competent authorities for the stipulation of pedagogical standards and rules for PSE, which has been implemented in the majority of cantons. Appropriate regulation defines the maximum number of children in an educational group in pre-school institutions. This includes definition of levels of gradation in terms of optimal, minimum, and maximum number of children per educational group, subject to the age of the children, in order to differentiate between younger children (under three years old) and older children (from the age of three until starting primary school).

Considering that early inclusion in PSE is of significance for the overall development of the child, it can be concluded that high-quality PSE constitutes the foundation for successful life-long learning and for the social integration of every child, as well as contributing to their personal development. This perspective is based on the Conclusions of the EU Council (2011): emphasizing the importance of early inclusion of children in PSE, they reiterate that by 2020, at least 95% of children between four years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education. In BiH, including the FBiH, the official statistical indicators of the inclusion of this group of children in PSE illustrate that this target is far from being achieved, although the mandatory inclusion of children in PSE is likely to have increased in most cantons in the FBiH in the past few years.

Table 5: The total number of children in pre-school institutions, and the number of children who were not enrolled due to lack of capacity in FBiH by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Cantons	Institutions		Total	Children who were not enrolled due to lack of capacity		Total
	public	private		public	private	
USC	1.039	312	1.351	100	9	109
PC	160	-	160	9	-	9
TC	2.041	296	2.337	50	40	90
ZDC	1.024	869	1.893	20	2	22
BPC	92	54	146	20	-	20
CBC	655	315	970	44	-	44
HNC	1.258	842	2.100	128	140	268
WHC	435	416	851	-	56	56
SC	2.608	1.598	4.206	195	30	225
C10	270	121	391	9	8	17
Total	9.582	4.823	14.405	575	285	860

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

The data presented here indicates that in all 10 cantons in the FBiH, a total of 14,405 children were included in PSE in the school year 2016/2017, which, given the total number of live births (143,733) in the FBiH in 2010-2016 (see table 2), comprises 10% of the overall population of children under the age of six or children of pre-school age. This data varies from that which is contained in the Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law (2017), which says that 15% of children are included in PSE in BiH (2017:3). This is because it did not take into account an adequate indication of the number of children eligible for compulsory inclusion in PSE

one year before the beginning of primary school. Even if we assume that 15% of children are included in PSE in the territory of the FBiH, or potentially an even higher number when considering that this programme is not compulsory in the RS, such a situation leads to the conclusion that BiH is far from the European average when it comes to the inclusion of children under the age of six in PSE. It should be also borne in mind that the data contained in the 2004 Strategic directions for pre-school education development in BiH, shows that 9,776 children were included in PSE in the school year 2002/2003. The numbers recorded for the school year 2016/2017 show an increase of 4,629 children. However, one should keep in mind that the inclusion of children in PSE in the school year 2016/2017 increased primarily due to negative demographic trends, as elaborated above.

The data shows that a total of 860 children in the FBiH were not included in PSE in the school year 2016/2017 because there was no spare capacity, which figure best illustrates the situation in this field. It comes as a surprise that the number of children who were not enrolled in private pre-school institutions in HNC due to the lack of spare capacity is higher than the number of children who were not admitted to public pre-school institutions for the same reason. The total number of children who are not included in PSE in this canton (268) due to the fact that pre-school institutions are full to capacity, together with the total number of children who were not included in PSE in SC (225), account for over 50% of the total number of children (860) in all of the cantons who are not included in PSE because pre-school institutions are full to capacity. Although it may seem that the number of children who were not enrolled in pre-school institutions in the FBiH because they were full to capacity (860) is not high enough to be particularly worrying, the fact that each of the 10 cantons has a number of children ranging from 9 (PC) to 268 (HNC) who were not enrolled in pre-school institutions actually shows the opposite. This particularly applies if we observe the issue

Table 6: The total number of children included in PSE by year of birth and sex by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Year of birth sex						Total (f)	
	2010 and before (f)	2011 (f)	2012 (f)	2013 (f)	2014 (f)	2015 (f)		2016 (f)
USC	125(44)	372(169)	308(142)	255(133)	187(76)	101(43)	3(1)	1351(608)
PC	23(11)	40(27)	48(18)	27(14)	18(6)	4(1)	-	160(77)
TC	569(257)	560(252)	483(252)	375(163)	245(109)	104(52)	1(-)	2337(1085)
ZDC	247(118)	427(197)	433(204)	362(166)	275(157)	147(61)	2(2)	1893(925)
BPC	9(4)	33(17)	41(27)	44(18)	19(12)	-	-	146(78)
CBC	160(73)	226(115)	262(137)	183(86)	111(53)	28(11)	-	970(475)
HNC	229(107)	619(309)	599(308)	397(176)	172(87)	81(39)	3(3)	2100(1029)
WHC	115(72)	245(117)	180(91)	152(65)	120(48)	39(21)	-	851(414)
SC	395(163)	1188(527)	1119(534)	844(380)	418(191)	235(110)	7(3)	4206(1908)
C10	13(9)	120(57)	119(65)	68(35)	49(25)	22(11)	-	391(202)
Total	1885 (858)	3830 (1787)	3592 (1778)	2707 (1236)	1614 (764)	761 (369)	16 (9)	14405 (6801)

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, Statistical Bulletin, number 248, 2017

Table 7: The number of children included in PSE based on age and sex, and number of educational groups by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Age and sex of child in educational groups:					Total (f)	Number of educational groups
	under 3 (f)	age 3-4 (f)	age 4-5 (f)	age 5-6 (f)	mixed groups, age 3-6 (f)		
USC	320(137)	243(124)	208(86)	338(151)	242(110)	1351(608)	65
PC	19(6)	-	-	-	141(72)	160(77)	9
TC	409(186)	335(147)	410(199)	688(319)	495(234)	2337(1085)	89
ZDC	471(267)	339(163)	350(164)	384(185)	349(146)	1893(925)	89
BPC	29(17)	38(16)	40(27)	39(18)	-	146(78)	6
CBG	195(89)	220(95)	196(98)	242(117)	117(76)	970(475)	47
HMC	288(137)	302(150)	331(169)	364(176)	815(397)	2100(1029)	90
WHC	189(83)	164(81)	167(79)	199(106)	132(65)	851(414)	38
SC	745(331)	787(339)	939(461)	1130(506)	605(271)	4206(1908)	166
C10	86(45)	89(44)	118(62)	95(49)	3(2)	391(202)	19
Total	2751 (1297)	2517 (1159)	2759 (1345)	3479 (1627)	2899 (1373)	14405 (6801)	618

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

from the perspective of the objective financial capabilities of most parents, but also of the accessibility of pre-school institutions to all children. The number of children who were not included in PSE due to the full capacity of the institutions also testifies to the overall attitude of the society, especially of the competent authorities, in relation to this provision. Therefore, it should always be borne in mind that the inclusion rate in PSE remains low, which indicates that the authorities should be concerned. This should be the case even if there was just one single child excluded from PSE in any canton due to full capacity of the institutions. One of the indicators of the attitude of the society to PSE, and the level of awareness of the need for inclusion of the maximum number of children in PSE, is the fact that the FSI still does not keep records of the number of children eligible for compulsory inclusion in PSE one year prior to enrolment in primary school. In addition to the substantial differences between the numbers of children included in PSE in the different cantons, analysis of the presented data shows that the total number of children under the age of three, who are included in PSE, is much lower than the total number of children above three years old. Such a situation is to be expected, when one considers that many employed parents rely on relatives or other adults to provide day care for their children, and in families where one or both parents are unemployed, they – mostly mothers – care for the children themselves. According to the available data, e.g. drawn from the focus group discussions, one of the reasons for poor levels of inclusion of this group of children lies in the fact that pre-school institutions are full to capacity, especially in large cities where the demand generally exceeds the availability of places.

The data presented in table 7 illustrate concretely that a low number of children under the age of three were included in PSE in the FBiH, in the school year 2016/2017, a total of 2,751 children or 19% of the total number of children (14,405). This is also the case in most EU countries (see Eurydice

and Eurostat, 2014: 65, 66). Apart from the fact that demand exceeds the availability of places, this can be explained by fact that many parents decide to care for younger child at home, as elaborated in the analysis of the data provided in table 6.

Analysis of the total number of children above three years old (11, 654 children) who, depending on their age, are classified into three separate groups and one “mixed” educational group in the data as presented, shows that the inclusion of children in PSE gradually increases an increase in their age, with the inclusion rate at its highest when the children turn 5 years old. This data primarily indicates an increased awareness on the part of parents – albeit still a small number of them – of the importance of PSE for the pre-school age child. Of note, the presented data does not contain the number of children who were included in compulsory PSE one year prior to enrolment in primary school, because such children are not recorded, as yet, in the official statistics yet.

Further analysis of the data presented, concerning the number of children in educational groups and the number of educational groups in pre-school institutions by canton, indicates that the average number of children per educational group is 23, which is commensurate with to the number of children per educational group in the educational group of children above 4 years old in the majority of European countries. On the other hand, if we compare the number of educational groups with the total number of children who are included in PSE for each canton separately, the differences between cantons becomes evident. Thus, for example, the average number of children per educational group in PC is around 17, whereas in TC this number is significantly higher than in PC – an average of 26 children per educational group.

Table 8: The number of children in nursery educational groups based on age and sex, by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Age and sex of child in educational groups:			Total (f)	Number of educational groups	Number of nurseries
	under 1 (f)	age 1-2 (f)	age 2-3 (f)			
USC	6(2)	113(42)	173(68)	292(112)	19	15
PC	-	5(1)	14(4)	19(5)	2	2
TC	5(2)	115(56)	198(91)	318(149)	16	14
ZDC	14(8)	219(117)	241(134)	474(259)	39	24
BPC	-	-	16(6)	16(6)	1	1
CBC	12(5)	28(14)	106(50)	146(69)	11	11
HNC	5(5)	99(46)	149(72)	253(123)	17	14
WHC	9(5)	42(22)	64(26)	115(53)	9	8
SC	21(10)	257(120)	327(146)	605(276)	33	20
G10	4(2)	24(13)	25(11)	53(26)	3	2
Total	76(39)	902(431)	1313(608)	2291(1078)	150	111

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

The data provided in table 8 indicates that the number of children under three years old in educational groups in nurseries gradually increases with increases in the age of the child; whereby the number of children under the age of 1 is the smallest (76), or 3.3% of the total number (2,291) of children under the age of three. This is to be expected, considering that maternity leave lasts until the child turns one year old. The data about inclusion of 76 children under the age of one in PSE can be explained in part by the likelihood that their mothers returned to work before the expiry of the maternity leave to which mothers are legally entitled.

The data presented provides evidence that, in a group of children under the age of three, the largest number of children who are included in PSE are in the age bracket 2-3. Among the reasons for this is the fact that children of this age have developed immunity against a number of communicable diseases through compulsory immunisation/vaccination, and this is the most important factor for the majority of parents when they are deciding to send their children to a pre-school institution.

The data that only 111 nurseries were registered in all 10 cantons in the territory of the FBiH, in the school year 2016/2017, whereas 197 pre-school institutions were registered in the same period in the FBiH (see table 4), indicates that a large number of pre-school institutions (86), most of them likely to be private ones, do not meet the necessary pre-conditions for the enrolment of children under the age of 3. This situation is also one of the important reasons why the demand for the inclusion of children in PSE generally exceeds the availability of places for this educational group. The data shows that the total of 2,291 children under the age of three are classified according to 150 educational groups, which on average gives the figure of 15 children per educational group. This is the maximum number for this category of children, per educational group, which is in accordance with the existing pedagogical PSE standards and rules in the majority of cantons. However, as the data presented illustrates, there are significant variations between cantons. Thus, for example, the average number of children under the age of three in educational groups in pre-school institutions in PC is 8.5, which is below the minimum number defined by relevant pedagogical standards. Whereas, the average number of children of the same educational group in pre-school institutions on the territory of SC is 18.3 children, which is the maximum number according to existing pedagogical standards for children of ages 1 to 3. However, educational groups of children of age between 6 months and 1 year can include up to 14 children.

Compared to other European countries, where the maximum number of children per educational group is mostly determined per employee, the situation described here is more than unsatisfactory. The strictest regulations concerning small children in European countries apply in Ireland, Lithuania and Malta, where one member of staff is only permitted to care for a maximum of 3 children under the age of 1, whereas the United Kingdom applies this restriction to children under the age of 2. In Estonia, Croatia and Lithuania, when it comes to the number of children under the age of 1 in educational groups, a single educational group may not include more than 5 or 6 children under the age of 1 (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:43).

THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds face the risk of poor performance or premature dropout from school due to a variety of adverse conditions, which in this case, drawing on the available statistical data, especially applies to children who live with one parent or in families of vulnerable socio-economic status. Therefore, in order to prevent these eventualities, this group of children requires adequate support in order for them to achieve their full potential. The common characteristic of this group and all other groups of disadvantaged children is their vulnerability to potential social exclusion, which can be prevented and mitigated, together with the risks of poor performance in education, through early inclusion in PSE programmes. Such an approach, which is one of the important challenges for PSE, is particularly emphasized in the Conclusions of the EU Council (2011): “High quality early childhood education and care provides a wide range of short- and long-term benefits for both individuals and society at large. Complementing the central role of the family, ECEC lays the essential foundations for language

acquisition, successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and employability. If solid foundations are laid during a child's formative years, later learning becomes more effective and more likely to continue throughout life, increasing the equity of educational outcomes and lowering the costs for society in terms of lost talent and public spending on welfare, health and even justice." (point 1)

Considering that the quoted conclusion is one of the key objectives of EU education policy, improved access to PSE for all children and improvement in PSE quality pose particular challenges, not only for Member States, but for all other European countries as well. Against this background, most European countries have introduced, to greatest degree possible, a range of different measures in order to provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with early inclusion in PSE. This is the basis for laying the necessary foundations for their future achievement in school and later in life, as specified in the quoted conclusion.

In trying to shed some light on the realisation of such approach in the FBiH through the analysis of measures taken primarily aiming at improved access to PSE and ensuring higher inclusion, primarily that of disadvantaged children, one can say with confidence that according to the existing data, their inclusion rate is lower than the European average. This assertion is based on data that, in the 28 EU countries, on average, 93% of children aged 4 to the age required for the start of compulsory education are already included in PSE, which also holds true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:63).

The implementation of the programme of compulsory inclusion of children in PSE in the year preceding enrolment in primary school that is already in place, although not yet comprehensive, constitutes the most important

Table 9: The number of children included in PSE by socio-economic status and type of family by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Both parents employed	One parent employed: mother	One parent employed: father	Both parents unemployed	Parents - individual farmers	Total	Single parent: mother	Single parent: father	Total
USC	1048	106	180	17	-	1351	33	12	45
PC	122	17	15	6	-	160	7	-	7
TC	1723	282	263	58	11	2337	53	17	70
ZDC	1440	108	298	19	28	1893	31	4	35
BPC	137	2	5	1	1	146	1	3	4
CBC	765	35	138	20	12	970	19	3	22
HMC	1456	154	421	62	7	2100	22	3	25
WHC	636	32	177	6	-	851	14	2	16
SC	3585	189	373	55	4	4206	63	18	81
C10	312	8	68	1	2	391	5	2	7
Total	11224	933	1938	245	65	14405	248	64	312

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, Statistical Bulletin, number 248, 2017

achievement in the FBiH. This is especially true because the main objective of this programme is to give the chance to every child, on a level-playing field, to master the content of the curriculum as successfully as possible, and to be ready to participate in schooling and the obligations of schooling.

In view of the fact that, according to the Framework Law, this programme is compulsory for all children one year prior to their enrolment in primary school, two groups of children can be singled out: children who were included in PSE at an earlier age and children who were not. This is of significance in the context of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, given that only few of these children were included in PSE at earlier age in the FBiH, which is partially confirmed by incomplete/inadequate official statistical data.

With regard to disadvantaged children, the data presented indicates that at least 3,181 children, or more than 20% of the total number of 14,405 children who are included in PSE, can be assumed to belong to a disadvantaged group. This especially applies to children who are likely to live in poverty, e.g. the children of unemployed parents; children from families where only one parent is employed, especially if that one parent is the mother; and most children whose parents are farmers. Grounds for these assumptions are most clearly confirmed by data on the widespread poverty in BiH, according to which: "17.8% of the population lives below the established poverty threshold, while one-third of the population lives near this threshold; almost half of people who live in abject poverty (680,000, according to estimates) receive social welfare, e.g. families with three or more children live below the poverty threshold in the country. In 2011, 23.4% of children were affected by poverty, which is an increase of 5% on the figure from 2009" (Bubić, 2015:14). Considering that, in the context of indicators mentioned previously regarding the increase of poverty among children,

we do not have relevant statistical data on the actual number of pre-school children living in poverty, the following questions arise: why do the official statistics fail to record separately children without parents; children of the recipients of social welfare; children of civilian victims of war; Roma children etc.? In other words, why are statistical records not being kept for all the groups of children, whose inclusion in PSE is co-financed/provided by the competent social welfare authority i.e. the founder, in accordance with the law?¹² The precedent for such record keeping is there because at least a small number of children in these categories is included in the records of pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH.

The data presented in table 9, showing a total number of 312 children who live in families with one parent, and who are also included in the estimated total number of disadvantaged children (3,181), speaks for itself, because this group of children in the FBiH faces an increased risk of poverty. According to data contained in the 2011 Household Budget Survey in BiH (hereinafter: 2011 Survey), of the total number of single-parent households that accounted for 8.3% in the FBiH in 2011, single-mother households accounted for 86.8% of this number. In 2011, poverty of single-parent households stood at 17% (2011 Survey: 18, 19 and 66). Therefore, if we correlate the aforementioned indicators to the data presented in table 9, we can clearly illustrate a higher poverty rate in the category of single-mother households; of note, the number of mothers from these families whose children are included in PSE is almost four times higher as compared to the number of fathers. This can be explained by the fact that in our culture, for example after divorce or breakup of common law marriage, the majority of children continue living with their mothers. These mothers tend to be less well-educated and paid lower wages on the labour market. Although we

12 See Articles 44 and 46 of the Framework Law.

do not have the exact data, according to the relevant legislation, it can be assumed that a portion of the costs for the use of PSE services by the children of these mothers is financed by the competent social welfare authority.

Table 10: The breakdown of numbers of children included in PSE in relation to the total number of children per family by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Number of children in the family:					Total
	one	two	three	four	five	
USC	640	600	99	11	1	1351
PC	53	74	29	4	-	160
TC	993	1240	93	11	-	2337
ZDC	809	965	110	7	2	1893
BPC	57	76	9	4	-	146
CBC	243	493	196	35	3	970
HNC	709	975	324	74	18	2100
WHC	237	417	145	42	10	851
SC	1702	2115	325	41	23	4206
C10	104	209	61	10	7	391
Total	5547	7164	1391	239	64	14405

Source: *FBIH Statistics Institute, Statistical Bulletin, number 248, 2017*

According to the data contained in the 2011 Survey, the poverty rate grows as the number of children within a households grows: it stands at 12.7% with one child; at 15.7% with two children; and at 19.7% with three children (2011 Survey: 66). Data presented in table 10 indirectly supports the above information; according to this data, the smallest number of children who were included in PSE come from families with three and/or more children. The data that is the exception shows that the largest number of

children – a total of 7,164, or almost 50%, of the total number of 14,405 children who were included in PSE – come from families with two children. Apart from the fact that most pre-school institutions offer lower prices to parents who have two children attending PSE simultaneously, this can also be related to prior positive experiences on the part of parents whose older child was previously included in PSE. Setting aside that the price is high for most of these parents, when compared to the first two groups presented in the table, the main reason for the low number of children from families with three or more children who are included in PSE relates to the employment status of the parents, mostly mothers, who are in most cases unemployed, and therefore the majority of these children stay in the home environment until they start primary school. Although the number of children included in PSE in the territory of the FBiH is unsatisfactory and below European standards, it represents a striking illustration of the overall picture of the society and its attitudes, particularly towards children from families with many children, even through the number of such families is not high in the FBiH.

THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTIES

Children with developmental difficulties, or “children with disabilities”, as this group of children is described in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter: CRPD), are actually children who, in the Framework Law, are referred to as “children with special needs.” Primarily focused on avoiding the stigmatisation of children in this group to a maximum extent, neutral terminology is utilised in both the everyday practice of different experts and in the scientific and professional community. They use various terms to describe this group of children, mostly determined by their scientific or professional field: “For example, in medical science, cause

of disability is taken as the main criterion, the level of social adaptation is the key criterion in social definition, whereas the basis for pedagogical definition of disability is child's ability to participate in the educational process" (Miković, 2016:119). Considering that PSE focuses its activities on the education, care and protection of children from birth until enrolment in primary school, as evidenced in the name of this socially-organized field, in the defined principles that characterise PSE, the Framework Law particularly emphasises the right of access for every child and the equal opportunity for participation in appropriate education without discrimination on any grounds. The Framework Law uses the term "children with special needs", which, in addition to children with developmental difficulties, includes other groups of children, such as gifted children. However, the provisions of this Law lead to the overall conclusion that this term is meant to refer to the group of children with some difficulties, primarily in their intellectual development (see Articles 12, 20, 44 point b and 46 of the Framework Law).¹³ Although several provisions of the Framework Law clearly emphasise the equal rights of all children to PSE, by laying down the possibility of establishing "departments for children with special needs at relevant institutions" (Article 46), such provision, apart from being in contradiction with CRPD, actually also negates the overall provision of the Framework Law as it relates to equal rights of all children. CRPD clearly stipulates: "States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with

13 According to Article 14(5) of Pedagogical standards and rules for PSE SC, developmental difficulties "include: autistic spectrum, children with behavioural disorders (complex and special syndrome), children with severe hearing and visual impairment, cerebral palsy, physical disability (motor system disorder), diabetes, epilepsy, cardiovascular diseases, chronic asthma, speech communication disorders, mental insufficiency, Down syndrome and other difficulties."

In the same context, this document uses the term "children with special needs" and lays down the following relating to organisational form of a pre-school institution: "Work with children with special needs can be partially or fully performed in special education institutions that can satisfy their educational and developmental needs and provide them with special treatment" (Article 5(3)).

disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.” (Article 7(1)). The same document emphasises the right of persons with disabilities, including children, to education without discrimination, and on the basis of equal opportunity, imposing the obligation on States Parties to “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.” (Article 24 (1)). The lack of respect in BiH for the rights of children with developmental difficulties is illustrated in the following quote: “Children’s integration in the regular work of kindergartens applies to less severe categories (visually impaired, hearing-impaired, mild psychomotor disorder, speech disorder etc.), while more severe disorders require a different organisation of their educational work” (Analysis of the situation of children’s rights in pre-school education”, The Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman, BiH, 2011: 51 – hereinafter: Ombudsman Institution Analysis).

This quote, although based on the Framework Law which stipulates that “integration programmes shall be developed and implemented for children with special needs”, actually favours educational work with these children to be carried out in specialised institutions, such as the PI Institute for Special Education of Children “Mjedenica” in Sarajevo, which includes a kindergarten for children with developmental difficulties.¹⁴ The Framework Law stipulates that children with special needs will be included in pre-school institutions in accordance with programmes adjusted to their individual needs, and that individual programmes adjusted to their abilities and capabilities will be developed for every child (Article 12(1)). This is hardly feasible in the

¹⁴ In the provision on the establishment of educational groups in an institution for special education, Article 14(7a) of Pedagogical Standards and Rules for PSE SC lays down the following: “A child with severe developmental difficulties shall be enrolled in an educational group of adequate institution for special education to attend a special programme.”

circumstances in BiH, as is concretely illustrated by the statistical data on the number of children from this group who are included in PSE.

Table 11: The break-down of the number and gender of children with developmental difficulties who are included in PSE by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Children with developmental difficulties by gender		Institution		Total
	M	F	public	private	
USC	30	12	40	2	42
PC	-	2	2	-	2
TC	7	8	15	-	15
ZDC	19	5	24	-	24
BPC	6	3	8	1	9
CBC	6	5	11	-	11
HNC	27	19	29	17	46
WHC	8	10	9	9	18
SC	83	34	87	30	117
C10	-	1	1	-	1
Total	186	99	226	59	285

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

The data presented in table 11 indicates that the number of children who were included in PSE in the observed period and who have developmental difficulties (285) is small compared to the total number of “typical” children (14 405) in the same period. This is also illustrated by the data contained in the Ombudsman Institution Analysis, which shows that 317 children (2011:43 and 44) were included in PSE in the FBiH in 2011, which means that the number of these children had decreased by 10% or 32 children in 2016 compared

to the number of such children registered in 2011.¹⁵ Considering that the data presented in table 11 clearly indicates that pre-school institutions in all 10 cantons included a number of children with developmental difficulties, ranging from 1 child in C10 to 117 children in SC, the data contained in the Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law 2017 causes certain confusion (2017:5) when it states that in 3 cantons (PC, BPC and C10), children with special needs are not included in pre-school institutions, and that in USC they are only occasionally included. This raises the question of the importance of the accuracy of the records of the inclusion of children in PSE, because the official statistics for such inclusion should be relied on, but, nonetheless, this data does illustrate the attitude of the competent authorities towards the group of children with developmental difficulties.

Further analysis of the data provided in table 11 highlights the breakdown of the figures for gender of children with developmental difficulties who were included in PSE in the school year 2016/2017, where the ratio between boys and girls is almost 2:1 in favour of boys. This data can be explained in part with still prevalent attitude held by a number of parents that female children do not need special education, and that people outside of the family should not know that a female child has developmental difficulties.

The data presented in Table 11 makes clear that the fact that around three-quarters of the children with developmental difficulties are included in public pre-school institutions is to be expected. One reason for this is the fact that the price of PSE services paid by parents to private pre-school institutions is higher than in public ones, despite the fact the law says that the

15 According to the data provided in the Ombudsman Institution, Analysis, the numbers of children with difficulties in psycho-physical development who were included in PSE in 2012 by cantons were as follows: TC: 94; CBC: 11; BPC: 9; WHC: 10; USC: 13, SC: 239 (2012: 43 and 44). The same Analysis reads that apart from 13 children "with special needs" in USC, "seven gifted children" were also included in PSE (p. 43).

competent social welfare authority should co-finance a portion of the costs for this group of children.

FINANCING

Article 40(1) of the Framework Law on Pre-school Education in BiH clearly stipulates: “The founder of a pre-school institution shall provide financial resources for founding, activities and implementation of the pre-school education programme in accordance with pedagogical standards and norms for pre-school education.” Article 41 of this Law also stipulates that pre-school education programmes, other than the compulsory pre-school education, may be financially supported by parents of pre-school children depending on their social status, and through donations. Article 42 of the Framework Law stipulates that “Funds for implementation of short-term and specialized work programmes and costs of children’s nutrition will be provided by users of services” and, according to Article 43, the competent education authorities are obligated to provide: funds for the procurement of some educational material; professional development of staff in the field of education; development and pre-school work programmes; evaluation of those programmes; a portion of funds for implementation of specialized work programmes; and publishing activities. Article 44 of the Framework Law clearly stipulates the obligations of the competent social welfare authority to co-finance the costs of: children without parental care; children with special needs; children of disabled persons; children of civilian victims of war; children of unemployed parents; children of single parents; children of social welfare beneficiaries; and children of full-time students.

Article 45 of the Framework Law stipulates the obligations of the ministry responsible for health and/or of the institutions to provide the following

in compliance with relevant cantonal laws: funding for the implementation of different programmes involving the provision of healthcare services to pre-school children; salaries of medical staff employed in PSE etc.

Article 46 of the Framework Law clearly defines the obligation of the founders to provide funds from the budget for: the development of PSE activities; the funding for departments of pre-school institutions to be provided in hospitals; departments for children with special needs at relevant institutes; for children of ethnic minorities, particularly Roma children; as well as other subsidies which are classified according to the categories of households.

The aforementioned sources of funding that are broadly set out in the Framework Law, with precisely determined obligations for different stakeholders, are for the most part defined in existing cantonal laws on PSE, but there is uncertainty as to their compulsory nature when it comes to their implementation. Analysis of existing cantonal laws leads to the conclusion that in practice the founder of a pre-school institution covers most of the financial obligation. In other words, cantonal laws have almost entirely copied the provisions of the Framework Law, but they do not specify the fixed obligations of other stakeholders to provide the funding required for the implementation of quality PSE programmes. This is confirmed by the data contained in the Platform: "If the competent ministry of education does not have sufficient budget resources, it will not fulfil its obligations towards pre-school institutions, or it will fulfil them only in part." This situation results from the fact that the founders of public pre-school institutions in most cantons are local self-government units. "Therefore, some cantonal budgets do not include PSE as an item at all – it does not have a core budget line, financially projected on the basis of criteria similar to those that apply to the funding of primary or secondary education." The same document

provides data indicating that across all ten cantons in the FBiH, only SC is a founder of public pre-school institutions, whereas some cantons allocate some funds, especially for the compulsory programme during the year that precedes primary school enrolment. However, these allocations are mostly arrived at as a result of discretionary emergency funds decisions, made by authorities above the local level and they are not binding. Considering that the funding of public pre-school institutions depends directly on the level of development and economic power of local communities, it is more than evident that poor municipalities allocate fewer financial resources for PSE than wealthier ones. This situation has an immediate impact on the price that parents pay for PSE services, and also contributes to a decrease in the number of children in pre-school institutions in poor municipalities. "This closes and additionally reinforces the cycle of poverty, causing great damage to the society, the family and individuals." (Platform, 2017: 14). The situation outlined and the attitude of the society towards PSE clearly show that children under the age of six do not have an equal opportunity to be included in PSE in the territory of the FBiH. This can indirectly influence their performance in school and later in life.

Variation is to be found not only between cantons, but also between municipalities within one canton. This is the effect of under-funding; different levels of funding responsibility by the founders; and different prices paid by parents for PSE. This is illustrated most concretely by the data which shows that e.g. in 2012 in HNC, the percentage of the total costs of public institutions met by the founder ranged from 20% in Čapljina municipality to 80% in Jablanica municipality (Ombudsman Institution Analysis, 2011:46).

Although the majority of public pre-school institutions in the FBiH are financed exclusively by the founder and from the payments of parents, a small number of public pre-school institutions are financed from several

different sources, e.g. PI “Djeca Sarajeva”, which will be elaborated below, in the part of this study that deals with qualitative research and focus group discussions.

Unlike public pre-school institutions, private pre-school institutions are in most cases entirely financed from the payments of the users of their service, and their operations and survival depend on them, which is again directly dependant on the number of children attending. Certain donations that are part of the financing of private institutions, whose foundation is related to religious communities, enable such institutions to function more easily. Nevertheless, the average prices for their services are higher than those in public pre-school institutions. This will be elaborated further with concrete indicators from the focus group discussions being presented in the part of this paper that deals with the qualitative research.

All the existing cantonal legislation in the PSE domain stipulates the obligation of different bodies to co-finance PSE services for some groups of children, thus relieving not only the founder but also parents from a portion of costs, and in some cases, they may be relieved of the payment obligation entirely. Unfortunately, such cases are very rare in practice, as illustrated by the following statistical data:

Table 12: The number of children in pre-school institutions based on the cost of PSE services by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Children who do not pay for PSE service	Children who pay for PSE service			Total
		up to 50% of monthly payment	more than 50% of monthly payment	full amount of monthly payment	
USC	16	56	104	1175	1351
PC	1	4	6	149	160
TC	1	10	180	2146	2337
ZDC	9	139	101	1644	1893
BPC	1	1	-	144	146
CBC	6	70	92	802	970
HNC	43	37	90	1930	2100
WHC	21	27	140	633	851
SC	118	163	350	3575	4206
C10	2	2	23	364	391
Total	218	509	1086	12592	14405

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

The data provided in table 12 illustrates that, of the total of 14,405 children who are included in pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH, only 218 children or 1.5% of the total number are entitled to the services free of charge. Of note is the fact that out of 218 children who are entitled to PSE services free of charge, 118 children or 54% are registered in SC. Despite being the second ranking canton after SC for the number of children included in PSE (see table 7), TC has the lowest number of children registered for PSE services free of charge —only 1 child. Further analysis of the data presented also shows that 509 children or 3.5% of the total number

of children (14,405) who are included in PSE in the territory of the FBiH are exempt from payment of up to 50% of the monthly cost of PSE services. The data presented illustrates that in all pre-school institutions in the FBiH, the majority of children whose parents are exempt from some percentage of the payment are the children whose parents still pay more than 50% of the monthly cost of PSE services: 1086 of them or around 7.5% of the total number (14,405) of children included in PSE. This data is likely to apply to parents with two or more children included in PSE simultaneously.

If we look at the data presented as a whole, it can be concluded that 13% of the total number (14,405) of children included in PSE in the FBiH pay a reduced price or use services in pre-school institutions free of charge, which, in view of the obligations defined by law, is unsatisfactory. Based on these and all the other data presented above, one can deduce that the number of children in the FBiH who are included in PSE, with the exception of the programme of compulsory inclusion in the year before the enrolment in school, is directly related to the ability of their parents/families to pay. This discriminates against this demographic of children, depriving them of equality, especially in terms of the lowering of equal opportunities for their achievement of optimal success in the future. Apart from the discrimination caused by general poverty, children under the age of six also experience discrimination on other grounds: e.g. place of residence (city – suburban area – village); health status (e.g. children with developmental difficulties); family status (children living in single-parent families, children without parental care etc.); the employment status of parents (whether employed or not); affiliation with certain ethnic groups (e.g. Roma children) etc. This logic of the situation within PSE is absurd: the majority of children who are in most need of PSE have little chance for early inclusion in PSE. On the other hand, at the level of the FBiH, and at the state level, there is no reliable/accurate data concerning the average percentage of total PSE costs

that parents/households pay. Apart from the cost of the monthly payment for the services of pre-school institutions, the total costs should also record other payments, such as meals; the inclusion of the child in a variety of programmes; transportation to the pre-school institution etc.

In contrast to the unfavourable situation regarding PSE at the entity and state levels, and the low levels of awareness about the importance of this social activity in BiH society, governments of European countries increasingly recognise the importance of investing in high-quality PSE programmes, accessible to all children, and many of them allocate significant amounts for funding of this field. A number of European countries rely on private pre-school institutions to provide PSE services to young children and expect parents to cover the costs, whereas in other countries, children are included in PSE from an early age, free of charge. Public pre-school institutions are owned by public bodies at central, regional, and local levels, whereas private pre-school institutions can finance themselves independently, with funds from private sources, or can be subsidized from public budgets. PSE is also financed both from public and private sources in most European countries, where private (self-financing) pre-school institutions enrol low numbers of older children (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:75).

Taking PSE financing in European countries as a whole, we can conclude that the combination of PSE financing at central and local levels is more prevalent in these countries, and, apart from these two levels, regional government as the third level, also contributes to the financing of PSE. In some countries like Croatia, Denmark, Poland, Iceland and Norway, local authorities constitute the only source of funding for the entire PSE provision. A shared feature of EU countries is that, in the EU, the average cost of PSE increased against GDP between 2006 and 2010. This means that average public expenditures on pre-school education in the EU increased

from 0.46% of GDP in 2006 to 0.52% of GDP in 2010 (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:79). Although the relevant data on total public expenditures on PSE in the FBiH is not available, we believe that they are lower than for other education levels. This illustrates the low level of social awareness of the importance and influence of this field, not only on the future of every child, but on the future of the society itself.

STAFF

Any kind of socially organised, professional and direct work with children requires high quality staff/professionals who obtained their knowledge and skills through a formal education process and are able to understand children, their differences, interests, abilities, vulnerabilities, need for protection etc., while respecting their dignity and their best interests. Pre-school teachers and other experts in different professional categories perform the educational work in the domain of PSE, as well as providing care, social and preventive health protection. Thus, the quality of PSE actually depends on their competencies. This approach is particularly emphasized in EU Council Conclusions (2011), where it is stressed that attracting, training, and retaining suitably qualified staff in the domain of PSE is a big challenge, considering that the range of problems that the staff encounter and the differences between children for whom this staff cares requires a constant development of pedagogical practice and a systematic approach to professionalisation. The provision of the Framework Law follows this directive: "Different programs of pre-school education in the public and private sectors shall be implemented by pre-school teachers, specialised experts in different fields (pedagogues, specialist pedagogues, speech therapists, psychologists, doctors, social workers) holding a university degree" (Article 29(2)). The Framework Law reads: "The health care and the health improvement of

Table 13 The break-down of the number of employees in PSE based on age and type of work by canton (school year 2016/2017)

Canton	Managerial staff (f)	Pre-school teachers (f)	Non-teaching expert staff (f)	Health professionals (f)	Administration staff (f)	Maintenance and operations staff (f)	Total (f)
USC	15(12)	90(89)	1(1)	17(17)	11(8)	64(52)	198(179)
PC	3(3)	13(13)	-	-	1(1)	9(7)	26(24)
TC	15(8)	116(112)	26(24)	38(38)	20(15)	63(51)	278(248)
ZDC	28(27)	116(115)	7(7)	40(40)	10(9)	57(49)	258(247)
BPC	2(1)	12(12)	4(4)	-	3(3)	10(7)	31(27)
CBC	13(12)	66(66)	4(4)	7(7)	6(6)	29(24)	125(119)
HMC	20(18)	152(152)	15(13)	13(13)	9(9)	54(47)	263(252)
WHC	9(7)	76(76)	-	2(2)	3(3)	19(18)	109(106)
SC	23(16)	287(285)	39(38)	40(40)	21(20)	143(124)	553(523)
C10	4(3)	28(28)	1(1)	2(2)	6(5)	13(12)	54(51)
Total	132(107)	956(948)	97(92)	159(159)	90(79)	461(391)	1895(1776)

Source: FBiH Statistics Institute, *Statistical Bulletin*, number 248, 2017

children between the ages of 6 months and pre-primary school age shall be performed by medical staff holding a university degree, a two-year college degree or secondary medical school qualifications” (Article 29(3)).

The Law stipulates: “Persons holding a university degree, a two-year college degree or a secondary school degree in the field of education and medicine may participate in the implementation of educational programmes as assistants and volunteers” (Article 30).

Given that, in this regard, the analysis of the relevant regulations of the existing cantonal laws on PSE shows that they in accordance with the Framework Law, one can conclude that these laws define the professional categories of staff who work continuously with children in pre-school institutions in the FBiH and that these are comparable, for the most part, with the educational/professional categories of PSE staff in most European countries. One of the differences is that “around half of the European countries employ childcare staff to work with younger children, whereas only five countries have childcare staff in institutions for older children: Germany, Hungary, Finland, Sweden and United Kingdom (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:96).

Differences exist concerning the legally permitted maximum number of children per employee in educational groups, which was explained earlier in this section.

Analysis of the data presented illustrates initially that the pre-school institutions in the FBiH employ almost exclusively women, as is the case with other low paid jobs. In this case, there are 1,776 women, who account for 94% of the total number of employees (1,895) in public and private pre-school institutions in the FBiH.

As the data provided in table 13 indicates, men work mostly in maintenance and operations (70), which is slightly below 60% of the total number (119) of men employed in pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH. In view of the discriminatory division of jobs into “female” and “male” jobs, this data unsurprising, as is the data that out of 132 employees in managerial positions, 25 are men, which is slightly lower than one-fifth, and 11 men work in administration, which is around 12% of the total of 90 administrative staff members. The fewest number men work as pre-school teachers or non-teaching expert staff - 11 out of 1,052, which is slightly above 1%. The data presented confirms the prevailing opinion of society that pre-school education is a “female” domain, i.e. that any form of childcare is a “female job”. Apart from BiH, this is also the case for many other European countries. This has led them to develop special programmes in order to increase the number of male pre-school teachers, which will be discussed further, in the part of the study that deals with qualitative research.

The information that all medical workers/professionals employed in pre-school institutions are women is also unsurprising. The equal numbers of employed medical workers in TC and SC (40) is worthy of note, considering that SC has more than double the number of pre-school institutions, and that almost twice the number of children are included in PSE in SC as compared to TC (see tables 4 and 5). In TC, the reasons for this situation may be found in the pedagogical standards and rules that stipulate the number of health workers required per educational group of children, or in

the surplus of medical staff most likely caused by a decrease in the number of children included in PSE.

Analysis of the data presented indicates that the numbers of employees in PSE institutions do not include assistants and volunteers, although Article 30 of the Framework Law and the existing cantonal laws allow for their engagement. Considering that inclusive education and early inclusion of children with developmental difficulties in PSE are advocated more than ever in BiH, i.e. in the FBiH, this data stands out. To rectify this, more assistants and volunteers, should be engaged. They should be tasked primarily with assisting pre-school teachers in the implementation of different programmes i.e. in greater inclusion of these children in different activities in order to achieve their social inclusion and integration to the maximum extent possible. In a context where the laws specifically insist on inclusion of children with developmental difficulties in pre-school institutions, according to tailor-made programs for their individual needs, and that an individual programme should be developed for every child, adapted to the capabilities of that child, the implementation of this approach, in practice, depends on at least two definitions:

Firstly, the term “children with special needs” in its full meaning, as well as children with developmental difficulties – who, according to the most recent, generally accepted scientific and professional terminology, refers to intellectually and mentally impaired children and children with different forms of sensory or physical disabilities – includes certain groups of other children, e.g. gifted children or hyperactive children. Secondly, if this definition of a child with special needs is put in the context of the legal term “children with special needs”, then the necessity of mandatory employment of assistants inevitably arises. It also implies the need for additional trainings of pre-school teachers in order to work with these two groups of children, especially with children with developmental difficulties and gifted children.

When using the term “children with special needs”, if the legislation applies only to children with developmental difficulties i.e. children with different forms of disability, then the employment/participation of assistants in the work with these children, primarily in order to respect their best interests, becomes an *obligation*, and not an option, as regulated by the Framework Law and existing cantonal laws. In this case, the option of “participation” in the implementation of educational programmes in pre-school institutions should only apply to engagement of volunteers.

Professional development and the continuous training of professionals employed in PSE constitute the key pre-condition for development of their competencies, through the upgrading of existing knowledge and the acquisition and development of additional skills in the work with children. This approach was recognised in different international documents, including the EU Council Conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence. These documents emphasize that, with regard to creativity and innovation; modernising of pedagogical approaches; teaching resources and the learning environment; in addition to initial training, continuous professional development of pre-school teachers “who need to ensure that they are able to nurture creativity and innovation in children by exemplifying these aspects in their own teaching” (point 4) is also required. Still with regard to creativity and innovation, the same document makes clear the need for the continuing professional development of “both teachers and ECEC professionals, with a view to ensuring that they develop the capacity, methodology and skills to promote the effective and responsible use of new technologies for pedagogical purposes and to support children in developing digital competence.” (point 7).

Article 43 point b of the Framework Law and the existing cantonal laws also stipulates the obligation for the professional development of PSE staff to

be provided by the competent education authorities. In practice, this is carried out collectively, almost without exception, through seminars organised by the competent pedagogical institutes and the Association of Employees of Pre-school Institutions, which has been established at the FBiH level. Given that the provision of funding mostly depends on competent local authorities, and not on the cantonal ministry of education, different cantons in the FBiH offer other possibilities for high-quality and ongoing trainings that, in the majority of European countries, are treated as a professional obligation on the part of pre-school teachers. According to the data provided in the Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, in addition to other obligations listed in Article 43 of the Framework Law, three cantons (TC, ZDC and BPC) finance the professional development of PSE staff, and PC and HNC fulfil this obligation in compliance with their financial abilities (Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, 2017: 6).

A number of PSE staff attend training to learn about new approaches through occasional inclusion in different project activities that are implemented in co-operation with well-known international NGOs, like *Save the Children* from Norway and the United Kingdom. Provided that it can be deemed as 'education' in general terms – which is also a requirement for obtaining the licence for independent work – internship programmes constitute perhaps the most concrete, legally stipulated form of education that pre-school teachers and other PSE professionals attend. Nowadays, one can notice a trend to define continuous professional development and the acquisition of new knowledge in the PSE domain as a requirement for re-licencing and continued work in this profession.

The lack of an adequate number of pre-school teachers increasingly affects not only BiH but most European countries as well. This highlights the need to finding potential solutions in order to retain existing staff and to

attract young staff, especially young men, to choose to train and work in PSE. Although Article 29(2) of the Framework Law stipulates that pre-school teachers must possess a university degree, Article 54(2), in the transitional provisions of this Law, defines that pre-school teachers with over 20 years of work experience and two-years of a college degree or secondary school degree may continue working in the education system until they retire. The situation in the FBiH causes certain difficulties in the implementation of the Framework Law, because not all cantons have harmonised their own laws with the Framework Law. When it comes to qualifications of pre-school teachers, this again results in different practices in the field of PSE in the territory of the FBiH. This is further complicated by the fact that the Framework Law, although setting the deadline for the adoption of the cantonal laws of six months from the date of the entry into force of the Law, did not define a time limit by which pre-school teachers, who do not meet the requirements laid down in Article 54 i.e. and who do not have a university degree, should obtain that degree. Due to the fact that the Framework Law entered into force before the so-called Bologna process was introduced in the majority of BiH universities, a need to amend the Law has arisen. This is required in order to incorporate adequate classification of the qualifications obtained by university graduates in line with the "Bologna" process.

It can be concluded that continuous training, primarily of pre-school teachers but also that of other PSE professionals in the FBiH, is not carried out adequately or in a way that would be acceptable according to international standards. Therefore, skills and professional competencies of pre-school teachers and other PSE professionals primarily depend on their initiative, their individual efforts and their wish/need to pursue lifelong learning. The higher levels of government remain almost indifferent to all this, relying on the local authorities to take charge of this activity and of PSE as a whole, while the cantonal authorities have the discretionary power to decide

whether and how PSE provision will exist. Society in general seems to be oblivious of the following: “Work with young children should be socially valued and properly paid, in order to attract a highly qualified workforce, men as well as women. It is essential that they have sound, up-to-date theoretical and practical understanding about children’s rights and development, that they adopt appropriate child-centred care practices, curricula and pedagogies, and that they have access to specialist professional resources and support, including a supervisory and monitoring system for public and private programmes, institutions and services.” (General Comment 7, point 23).

PROGRAMMES

An important characteristic of educational programmes in the domain of PSE in the FBiH is that they target all educational groups of children and, in addition to principles and objectives, the Framework Law contains provisions relating to types of programmes; the obligation to introduce common core curricula; the obligation of the authorities who are responsible for education to define and adopt standards and rules; and the development of annual work programmes and work reports by pre-school institutions. The same Law regulates governance, management of professional institutions, types of records, supervision etc., discussed previously.

Following the tradition and legislative experiences in other European countries, the Framework Law (Article 4 – Article 13) defines PSE principles and objectives, in two sets: a) basic principles and objectives that include: development principles, that recognise the development level of the child, and antidiscrimination; b) principles and objectives that ensure the basic rights of the child, as follows: ensuring best interests of the child; ensuring the personal values of the child; ensuring the optimal development of

children; the right to language; respecting religious freedoms; integration programmes for children with special needs; and the right of parents and children to choose an institution and to make decisions.

Both sets of principles and legally defined objectives are interwoven and complementary. Except for the objective social circumstances and opportunities, their fulfilment depends on the personal, emotional and social development of the child, as well as on the linguistic and communication skills of the child, which also constitute the PSE goals in terms of encouraging development and including the individual requirements designated during PSE for every child.

Although the provisions of the Framework Law are mostly aligned with international standards relating to PSE and children's rights, one can claim that the principles listed, together with the large number of other legal provisions, in practice, are either not applied at all, or are only applied in part. This is confirmed by examples of violations of children's rights, e.g. the right to compulsory inclusion of children in pre-school education during the year that precedes enrolment in primary school, which is currently only being implemented fully in five cantons (TC, ZDC, SC, BPC and C10) in the FBiH (Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law 2017:5). Considering that no pre-school institution in the FBiH organises educational work with children from ethnic minorities, e.g. Roma children, in their native language (Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, 2017: 4), the same applies to the right to language of the child.

The obligation to establish a common core curriculum of integral development programmes, stipulated in Article 21 of the Framework Law, is implemented in all pre-school institutions in BiH through the adoption of Guidelines for the implementation of the common core curriculum based on learning

outcomes (hereinafter: Guidelines), which were adopted by the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education only in 2015. The Guidelines contain a recommendation, to the authorities responsible for education, to ensure their application during the implementation of the Common core curriculum, based on learning outcomes in PSE development programmes in all public and private pre-school institutions in BiH. It is further emphasized that: "A development programme in pre-school education, intended for pre-school teachers, directors, non-teaching expert staff and parents, shall be founded in scientific research and capable of implementation." The Guidelines therefore recommend the following structure for this document: principles and objectives of the programme; elementary knowledge about child development and learning at the pre-school age, with focus on inclusion, learning objectives and outcomes for certain development areas; partnership with parents, school and local community; evaluation of integral development programmes; and quality improvement (point 3/ 3.1. – 3.5. of the Guidelines).

Each of the listed elements should be integrated into a programme for educational work with children in pre-school institutions, not only in the FBiH, but in the territory of BiH as well. An approach such as this is also in line with the Agreement on a common core curriculum of integral development programmes in pre-school institutions, which was signed by the representatives of the competent authorities of the Republika Srpska Government and the Government of Brčko District of BiH, and by ministers of all 10 cantons in the FBiH. The Agreement contains a provision stipulating that from the beginning of the school year 2009/2010, all pre-school institutions in BiH will provide education in accordance with the Common core curriculum of integral development programmes, which constitutes the basis for the development of concrete pre-school programmes. According to the data contained in the Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, this approach has been implemented in cantons that have

harmonised their own PSE laws with the Framework Law. This also applies to the adoption of education programmes and the methodology for the drafting the annual work programmes in pre-school institutions, which the authorities responsible for education were obliged to pass within 60 days of the date of entry into force of the Framework Law, pursuant to Article 53(1) of the Framework Law (Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, 2017:6).

The available data, obtained through direct contacts with a number of directors and employees of public and private pre-school institutions, as well as through the focus group discussions that will be presented below, indicate that, in accordance with Article 24 of the Framework Law, in the field of PSE in the FBiH, education programmes for children from the age of six months to pre-primary school age vary from those intended for other users interested in development, education and the general wellbeing of children. According to legal provisions, pre-school institutions should use the following programmes: integral development programmes; specialised development programmes; emergency, compensatory and rehabilitating programmes; parent skill-strengthening programmes; programmes for pre-primary school age children if they are not included in some form of PSE; and programmes for children of BiH citizens living abroad. The aforementioned types of programmes, except for programmes for children of BiH citizens living abroad, are listed in all existing cantonal laws.

Considering that PSE is treated differently in the territory of the FBiH depending on the existence or otherwise of cantonal PSE laws, this inevitably affects the quality of education programmes in pre-school institutions, which again leads to a range of discriminatory treatment of children.

Given that the analysis of the implementation of each of the listed programmes in pre-school institutions in the FBiH would require additional

and comprehensive research, which exceeds the scope and purpose of this study, we will briefly focus only on programmes that are implemented in all pre-school institutions, although some attention will be given to this issue during the presentation of the results emerging from the focus groups.

The integral development programme which, according to the Guidelines, is based on the implementation “of principles of equal opportunities and respect for differences between children, which is achieved by providing equal conditions for optimal development of every child, taking into account their individual differences in development and learning, which means broader and flexible, but also professional provision of conditions for continuous and occasional inclusion of children with special education needs in kindergarten groups” (point 3 of the Guidelines), constitutes the main education programme. It defines the content and scope of work, methodology and instruction in the teaching methodology for pre-school teachers. Its structure comprises the programme of care and educational work with children from the age of 6 months until the age of 3; the programme of educational work with children at the age of 4; the programme of educational work with children in the age of 5; encouraging the development of children who are developmentally delayed, as specified in the PSE Law of SC; and the compulsory education programme for children during the year that precedes their enrolment in primary school.

Apart from pre-school institutions, the integral development programme is implemented in social protection institutions for children without parental care, or in other educational institutions that work with pre-school children. Apart from the care and education programme, the integral development programme itself includes the programme of healthcare, nutrition, and social protection of pre-school children, and it is implemented in accordance with the curriculum prescribed by the competent ministry.

A child stays in a pre-school institution for maximum of 11 hours,¹⁶ mostly on working days, and some cantons have extended-stay programmes, intended for children in junior primary school grades, which is not foreseen in the law e.g. in ZDC, unlike the PSE Law of TC (Article 37(2)), which allows for this programme to be implemented.

Specialised development programmes are being implemented in all pre-school institutions in the FBiH. In most cantons, they are adopted by: the minister, following a proposal from a pre-school institution, e.g. as in SC; or a pre-school institution with the approval by the relevant minister, e.g. as in ZDC; or after obtaining the opinion of the founder and professional opinion from the pedagogical institute, e.g. as in TC. These programmes, which, in the majority of pre-school institutions, are paid for by parents, include continuous or occasional activities, and they can be organised once or twice a week, for one or two hours or more, depending on the needs and interests of the family and child. These include educational work in music, the fine arts and sports, foreign languages, puppetry, catechism and other areas.

According to existing cantonal laws, the programme for the year before enrolment in primary school is compulsory for all children who are not included in some form of PSE, which means that it only applies to children who were not included in PSE in any way, and in the FBiH they actually constitute the majority of all children of this age. Therefore, implementation of this programme aims at providing every child with the equal opportunity to be included in PSE. This enables them, in addition to socialisation, to prepare, as far as possible, for school and the obligation of schooling, and to develop and fulfil his/her potential and competences before the start of primary school. Awareness of the importance of this programme is

16 See Article 6(2)a) of Pedagogical standards and rules for PSE SC.

present in most cantons in the FBiH where the competent authorities have approved the particular document/programme related to the fulfilment of this legal obligation. In addition to the objectives and principles, each of these programmes includes other categories of teaching , e.g. sports and health education; speech development; communication and creation; mathematics; music and fine arts etc., as well as instruction in teaching method for pre-school teachers. The Compulsory PSE programme for pre-primary school age children which was adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of TC, reads: "Through integration of these categories of teaching, children will acquire self-knowledge and understand their identity. Through participation in everyday activities, a child acquires and develops skills that are important for school. And the child should: develop concentration, listen carefully, observe carefully, compare... Through the organisation of activities under this programme, the general aim is to develop the following in children: collectivism and collective spirit; working habits for learning and organisation; hygiene and cultural habits; a healthy lifestyle through the proper balance of work and leisure; skills for building healthy relationships with peers; each child's potential; a positive image of themselves..." (2010: point 5).

Similar content is included in PSE programmes have been adopted in most cantons in the FBiH for pre-primary school age children. Cantonal PSE programmes for pre-primary school age children also stipulate a similar number of hours for the implementation of programme tasks: a total of 150 hours on average, spread across the week, up to a maximum limit of 3 hours a day. This calls into question the irreconcilability of overly ambitious programme activities and their expected results with objectively low total number of hours under the provision. One of the conclusions it is possible to draw is that this situation actually reflects the expressed aspirations of the society which are impossible to achieve within the low total number of

hours under the provision. This is particularly true because: “Pedagogical and other experts do not think that even 300 hours would be enough to achieve the desired results” (point 1.5 of the Platform). The results of international research illustrate that the weekly average in the EU is 29 hours, but the programme lasts a whole year, or two years for children up to the age of 6, where the number of hours of free PSE is very different. Some countries like Ireland and Sweden, some federal units in Austria, all parts of UK and some cantons in Switzerland have a limited number of hours a week free of charge or, to be more precise, up to 20 hours. Unlike these countries, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia have the whole-day within PSE free of charge. However, most countries are in between these two ends of the spectrum (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:66, 83).

In the FBiH, the data concerning these indicators shows most concretely the insensitive and superficial approach to the compulsory inclusion of children in PSE during the year before enrolment in primary school. It must not be overlooked that pre-primary school education is not compulsory in two cantons (HNC and ZC), because they did not pass the laws in this field. The data that this obligation is still not implemented in all cantons that passed the relevant laws speaks for itself. For instance, in USC, the implementation of the programme only started 4-5 years ago. Depending on the canton,¹⁷ implementation lacks accurate records relating to the inclusion of children; organisation of transportation for children from remote areas; the ways of organising meals etc..

17 Programme of compulsory pre-school education in the year preceding the enrolment in primary school has been fully introduced (children are covered 100%) in TC, ZDC, SC, BPC from the school year 2015/2016, and in C10 from the school year 2016/2017 (Information about the implementation of the Framework Law, 2017:5).

Despite all shortfalls and the fact that the current (lack of) organisation of this programme in some cantons undermines its main goal – which is the purpose of the provision of equal opportunities – and results in discrimination against children, one can say, when compared to the baseline situation, that its implementation has brought about some progress and that hopefully it will create more equal opportunities and the achievement of more equal rights for this group of children. One of the overly optimistic objectives defined in the Platform states that children will be 100% included in PSE during the year preceding the enrolment in primary school by 2022, while ensuring continuous educational work, for a minimum of three hours (180 minutes) a day, throughout a pedagogical year (point 6.2 of the Platform). The Platform for PSE development in BiH 2017 – 2022 was adopted at a session of the Council of Ministers of BiH in December 2017, which indicates that its implementation was ongoing from 1 January 2017, although no significant progress was recorded up until the end of 2017, as compared to 2016, as discussed in this study. Therefore, it is more than unexpected that the implementation of tasks from *Activity package 1 – Increase inclusion* (which is related to the necessary analysis of the network of public and private pre-school institutions; analysis of the network of primary schools and their equipment for implementation of pre-school programmes; analysis of the breakdown in the number of professional staff in pre-school institutions; the establishment and continuous provision of a database for all pre-school children, including pre-primary school age children etc.) was planned for the beginning of 2017 (see point 7.1 of the Platform). Such an attitude indicates that it is unlikely to expect that, in addition to Activity package 1, any of the other four remaining packages (to ensure PSE quality; to ensure regular funding; to strengthen inclusion; to raise awareness in the society) that are defined in this document will be fully implemented in the next four years, since that will depend primarily on higher funding; greater infrastructure; an increase in the number of professionals; more equipment etc.

PART THREE

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

Researching the role of pre-school education, with a focus on equal opportunities for all children in the FBiH, is a very complex and multi-dimensional task. This is particularly the case because the research topic has required the combination of available statistical/quantitative indicators and qualitative research. This is due to its complexity and the aim that the study set itself, i.e. to cover as many aspects of the current context as possible and to propose relevant recommendations. In deciding on this approach to the research, the starting point was the conviction that it should both provide relevant statistical and demographic, normative, organisational, and other indicators, as well as data stemming from immediate experience/attitudes of both parents and professionals in this field. The qualitative research method made it possible to gather data from two separate focus groups – a) parents and b) professionals – to share and exchange their experiences and attitudes directly, but also to hear of the experiences of other people in their immediate environment. We would like to note at this juncture certain caveats in relation to this approach. These refer to the (in)adequacy of the respondents in the verbal expression of their attitudes/experiences, and to the fact that the focus group with professionals also included directors of institutions, which may have impacted on the readiness of the professionals to express openly their attitudes and opinions. These caveats have in part created the need for insights into the topic to be divided into sub-headings.

Irrespective of the above, the focus group method, unlike e.g. the random sampling method which provides a representative opinion, indisputably enables insights to be gained into the predominant opinions in relation to a given specific context and therefore constitutes a credible research method (Bašić, Miković, 2012:121).

Before the practical implementation of the research, separate protocols were prepared for the focus groups (parents and professionals), listing, in addition to the key research objectives, the sample and selection criteria, as well as the questions for the group discussions.

The research included a total of 8 focus groups, organised in the period December 2017 – January 2018 (4 with parents and 4 with professionals employed in pre-school institutions) in the four largest cities, which are also the respective seats of the four largest cantons in the FBiH: Sarajevo, Tuzla, Mostar and Zenica.

An independent Market and Opinion Research Agency (IPSOS d.o.o. Sarajevo), engaged by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung BiH, that commissioned the research, contacted the respondents i.e. recruited them for the focus groups and conducted the field research, using questions formulated by the author of this study.

In accordance with the protocols, respondents in both groups (parents and professionals) were asked a set of identical questions to make possible a comparative analysis of their responses, in order to identify indicators that would be as relevant as possible to the predominant concerns of parents and professionals concerns regarding the current of PSE. The focus groups discussions were recorded and then transcribed for the inclusion in the reporting of the research.

The main goal of the research was to encompass, as far as possible, the current situation in PSE in the FBiH, in order to be able to compare the data received with the relevant indicators in other countries or international studies, and to reach appropriate conclusions and recommendations that would contribute to an improvement in quality of PSE and its accessibility

to all pre-school children. These are the key pre-requisites for equal opportunities for this population. With this in mind, the focus of the research was on the following:

- Availability/accessibility of PSE services to all children;
- Cost and sources of financing;
- Staff qualifications and professional development;
- PSE programme quality with a special focus on the compulsory inclusion of children in PSE in the year preceding primary school;
- Organisation of activities in educational groups and inclusion of children with developmental difficulties;
- The impact of PSE on further education and life of the child;
- Sources of support for children at risk;
- Employment of male teachers in PSE institutions;
- Provision of PSE services at home.

In addition to the analysis of the above listed thematic units, the analysis of data/results obtained through the qualitative research, as defined by the protocol framework, also includes statements by parents and professionals who participated in the working groups.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH PARENTS – THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

In forming the focus groups, the criterion was that parents with children in public and private pre-school institutions from the above four cities would participate jointly in them:

- Sarajevo: PI Djeca Sarajeva (kindergartens: Lane, Skenderija and Rosica) with two parents each. Private pre-school institutions: Sveti Josip and Leptirić, two parents each.
- Tuzla: PI Naše dijete (kindergartens: Povjetarac and Sunčica) with a total of 6 parents. Private pre-school institutions: Maštaonica and Aladin, with two parents each.
- Zenica: PI Predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje (kindergartens: Radost, Dunja and S. Škrgo) with a total of 6 parents. Private pre-school institutions: Dječja Montessori kuća and Alem, with two parents each.
- Mostar: PI Dječji vrtići Mostar (kindergartens: Radobolja, Zvončić and Kuća od kamena) with a total of 6 parents. Private pre-school institutions: Čudesna šuma and Zemzem with a total of 3 parents.

Of the total of 39 parents, 5 parents have two children in PSE, among them, a pair of twins.

The number of parents in each focus group was 10 (with the exception of one focus group which had 9), whereas the number of parents with children in public pre-school institutions (6) was higher than the number of parents with children in private pre-school institutions (4).

The age-related criterion for focus group composition, which was met in most cases, was a ratio of 7:3 or 6:4 in favour of parents of children older than 3 years old. With respect to the breakdown of gender of the parents/respondents in the focus groups, they mostly comprised women/mothers – 38 of the total of 39 – therefore the criterion that had envisaged the inclusion of as many fathers as possible (at least one third) was not met, for obvious reasons (non-response of fathers). This fact speaks of the role of women in families, according to which, in every sense, caring for children is primarily their duty.

PARENTAL REASONS/MOTIVES FOR THE INCLUSION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

According to the available data, the inclusion of children in PSE in BiH is far below the European average. This is also supported by the data presented in the Platform indicating that, with regard to the number of children aged 3 to 6 who do not attend pre-school institutions, of all the Central and Eastern European countries, BiH ranked second, to Tajikistan (point 1.5 of the Platform). Despite widespread poverty, insufficient geographical distribution and availability of pre-school institutions close to places of residence of the children, financial unaffordability etc., this situation cannot be explained/justified only by these factors alone. This ranking is also impacted not only by the undeveloped social awareness concerning PSE but also the lack of awareness on the part of many parents about the importance and impact of PSE on child development and well-being. It defies belief that in most large cities, where pre-school institution networks are most highly developed, the demand for PSE services exceeds its provision, particularly in the case of the public pre-school institutions. In the light of this situation, it has to be assumed that parents who are financially better off enrol their children in

private pre-school institutions, whereas others decide to keep their children at home, as is the case for most unemployed parents, whose children most often remain at home until they start school. This sometimes the parental choice even when families can afford the inclusion of their children in PSE.

Although every parent has his/her personal reasons for (not)including their child in PSE, the phenomenon raised the following question for the parents in focus groups: What is the key reason/motive for your decision to include your child in pre-school education i.e. to enrol him/her in a pre-school institution?

“The key motive to put my child in kindergarten was a mistrust of strangers coming into my house or taking my child to a stranger... and it turned out great. I think nurseries are not very good because children are too small, they still need to be kept close....” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“If a child does not attend kindergarten there is no socialisation, they don’t learn songs, can’t hold a fork or a spoon in their hands... When my child started kindergarten, he found friends there, he comes home happy...” (father of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I decided to put my child in kindergarten so that my child can become independent, to be able to cope in life, be able to find their way and many other things; ultimately, to spend time with educated people” (mother of a 2.5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There was nobody in my family who could take care of my girl so I started with nannies when she was really young. That turned out to be a really bad choice. Then I decided to try kindergarten and I think I did the right thing. Today, she is a really happy child who loves to socialise” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

These quotes show that parents identify the socialisation of the child as the most important reason for enrolling their children in pre-school institutions. They explain that children need the company of their peers and benefit from a place in which they get to know the world through play and socialising. Parents also emphasise the positive impact of the pre-school education programme on children, their development and the continuous acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for a higher level of independence. From the discussion and the quotes, we can also conclude that the attendance of children in pre-school institutions has a calming effect on the parents, particularly as a result of the knowledge that their children are safe and appropriately cared for, content and happy and in the hands of “educated people”. The main reason that the children who are included in PSE early, as a rule, stay in the same pre-school institution until they start school is likely to be because of the feeling of safety, which primarily originates from the trust parents have in pre-school institutions or their staff.

REASONS FOR PARENTS TO OPT FOR PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PSE INSTITUTIONS

“I opted for this kindergarten because I saw they have 4-hour day-care available which suited me. Of course, the cost was also acceptable... I wanted it all to be gradual and I am very happy with the

kindergarten...” (mother of two children, 4 and 3 years old, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“After a bad experience with private institutions, I opted for a state-run kindergarten. They had a different teacher every 15 days, which seemed odd to me, let alone to the child... My girl was on the waiting list but we waited and we never thought of going back” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I will probably decide to enrol my third child as well, when the time comes for nursery, in a private kindergarten where the group is smaller. Then, before school, we will transfer to a public institution where they have a more educational approach to children. Children socialise, form bonds and start school together” (mother of a 5 five-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

From the outset of the focus group discussions, it was clear that parents are driven by a range of reasons when opting for a public or a private pre-school institution. It seems that all parents initially start with the interest of the child – with what is best for the child – focusing on the child’s adaptation to a new environment which is significantly different from the family context. This includes the need to form close, continuous relationships between the child and the educators, which is also a driver of parental trust, as was particularly emphasised for children of “nursery” age. It can be deduced from the discussions that, for children younger than 3 years old, parents prefer private institutions, especially when “nursery” groups in public pre-school institutions comprise a larger number of children. This approach has been noted in many European countries where “the private (self-financing) sector enrolls rather low percentages of older children” (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:75). In our context, this phenomenon cannot be

taken as the dominant factor for private and public pre-school institutions, as the experiences of parents were varied and their opinions divided. This is especially applicable in some cantons or larger cities, where the demand for public pre-school institutions is greater than the provision, e.g. in Sarajevo, Mostar and Tuzla, as we can see from the following quotes:

“There is insufficient capacity in public institutions. They have waiting lists” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“I think that the lack of capacity is a general problem. Both in nurseries and kindergartens. Lack of staff, lack of space, and there are many children” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“In Mostar, the demand for pre-school institutions for children is much greater than the provision” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I think that Zenica has a sufficient number of places in pre-school institutions for all children” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

The experiences presented by the parents closely match the official statistics (see Table 5) which demonstrate that 50% of the total number of children who have not enrolled in pre-school institutions due to lack of capacity are in SC and HNC. Accordingly, the perceptions of parents whose children are included in PSE in the Zenica area are also confirmed by official statistics, given that in ZDC only 22 children were not accepted into pre-school institutions as a result of the lack of capacity. It may be the

case that the perceptions of parents in the Zenica area as to the existence of sufficient capacity in pre-school institutions with no waiting lists does not in fact indicate the existence of the sufficient number of pre-school institutions when tabulated with the total number of children younger than six years old. It may rather be the case that many parents decide not to include their children in PSE. The possible reason for this situation should be sought, as well as in the cost of pre-school provision as paid by parents, in the high unemployment rate of parents, especially mothers, which results in the majority of children younger than 6 years old staying at home until they start school.

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS TOWARDS MONTHLY FEES FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION SERVICES

Pre-school education in all the cantons of the FBiH is implemented through public and private pre-school institutions. The current cantonal laws stipulate that the founders of pre-school institutions will ensure the necessary funds, both for the establishment of the institution, and for the implementation of appropriate PSE programmes, in accordance with the PSE pedagogical standards and rules. In other words, the source of financing for pre-school institutions in the territory of the FBiH depends on whether the institution is public or private – public pre-school institutions are mainly financed by the competent authority and private pre-school institutions by parents of the children who use their services. This leads to wide variation in the monthly fees that parents pay for their children's PSE; the cost of PSE services in private pre-school institutions is most often considerably higher than the cost of public pre-school institutions. The focus group discussions about this topic revealed the following attitudes:

“I opted for a public kindergarten mostly because of the cost” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Children get two meals and one fruit meal. I count this as BAM 8 per day and a pack of cigarettes is BAM 5” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“The cost in public institutions is acceptable – BAM 160 and they give a discount for two children” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“We are talking about Mostar kindergartens here, but if we were to go to other municipalities, e.g. Jablanica, where things are cheaper than in Mostar, or to Stolac things are even cheaper there. They fight for every child because they do not have enough children” (father of two children – 4 and 6 years old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“To be realistic, given inflation and the increasing prices of everything, the cost of BAM 160 for kindergarten is acceptable” (mother of two children, 2 and 4 years old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

It can be concluded from the discussions that the cost of PSE services in public pre-school institutions paid by parents is approximately the same in all of the four areas researched, but there are indications that, depending on the size of a place and the number of children included in PSE, in some places, it is lower than the usual average. Also, all respondents, as can be seen from their quotes, think that the charge that they pay for PSE services is entirely acceptable and for some of them the cost was a key motive for the decision to enrol their child in a public pre-school institution. Additionally,

it is likely that parents were aware that there is almost no difference in the charge for different educational groups – i.e. younger or older than 3 years old – in public pre-school institutions in the FBiH.

Given that the majority of private pre-school institutions in the FBiH are financed exclusively from private sources, i.e. fees paid by parents for the service, the respondents also shared the following attitudes in the focus group discussions:

“I am more than satisfied with the service I receive” (mother of a 4-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Private ones are a bit pricey. Because they are not financed by the state. If you opt for a private kindergarten, you are bound to pay more... There are kindergartens that cost BAM 500 or 600” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“BAM 250 is for one child, and I pay BAM 400 for two, including a discount” (mother of two children, 2 and 5 years old, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

These quotes indicate that using PSE services in private pre-school institutions is primarily conditioned by the financial situation of the parents and most probably by the existence of waiting lists for places in public pre-school institutions at particular locations. Namely, one can assume that in those places where public pre-school institutions have long waiting lists a number of parents, whose children use PSE services in private pre-school institutions, would opt for public pre-school institutions, if they were available, primarily for financial reasons. Even though, with the help of different donations, bequests, gifts, legacies etc, a number of private pre-school institutions,

especially those organised by religious communities, are trying to reduce the fee to approximate that of public pre-school institutions, the cost is still, on average, higher than the cost of public pre-school institutions. Added to this, some private pre-school institutions offer various international programmes, for which, in our context, they charge disproportionately high prices. It can be concluded that services that these institutions offer are most often beyond the capabilities of families with lower incomes to pay for them. The majority of families in Bosnia and Herzegovina would fall into this category.

PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS ABOUT THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN EDUCATIONAL GROUPS AND THE ORGANISATION OF WORK WITH RESPECT TO THE NUMBER OF EDUCATORS EMPLOYED

In accordance with the relevant legislation, public and private pre-school institutions in the FBiH can apportion children in their educational programmes into two groups, depending on their age – children from 6 months to 3 years old and children older than 3 years. Given that every canton, i.e. its competent education authority, defines the PSE pedagogical standards and rules, children younger than 3 years old are most frequently divided into 2 nursery groups, depending on the available capacity of the institution and enrolment category – nursery group one (from 6 months to 3 years old) and nursery group two (from 2 to 3 years old, but children often stay in this group until the age of 4 because of the lack of capacity).

Children aged 3 to 6 years are most often apportioned into the following educational groups: younger kindergarten group (age 3 to 4 years), medium kindergarten group (age 4 to 5), older kindergarten group (age 5 to 6). In some cantons, pre-school institutions also have school groups – extended day-care – for children in primary school. According to the

relevant pedagogical standards and rules, most cantons define the number of children in educational groups in categories of optimal, minimum and maximum number. Applying the same criterion, the permitted number of “typical” children is most often reduced by 2 if an educational group includes 1 child with developmental difficulties. In addition to the above groups, pedagogical standards and rules also envisage the possibility of creating so-called mixed educational groups, which can comprise children from the age of 6 months to 3 years old for nurseries, and also “mixed” education groups which combine nursery and kindergarten-age children. It is possible to create “mixed” educational groups for children from the age of 3 years to the age at which they start school but, as has been regulated by e.g. the Pedagogical Standards and Rules for Pre-school Education of SC (hereinafter: PSE Pedagogical Standards and Rules of SC), these can only be established in special circumstances and, for instance, in suburban or rural areas.¹⁸ In this respect and in accordance with the legislation, the number of children in educational groups varies from canton to canton, with an average maximum of 18 children per educational group below 3 years old and 28 children per educational group older than 3 years. Some of the perceptions of parents that they shared in the focus groups are as follows:

“I’ve seen all the kindergartens and they are all more or less the same. 28 children is the lower limit... All kindergartens have a large number of children” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Now there are 36 babies, and the group from age 3 to school age has 24 children” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

18 See Article 14 (4) of PSE Pedagogical Standards and Rules of SC.

“It is specific in our case – we have a mixed group of all ages; I don’t think they have a nursery group, there are 35 children currently and I think they even have two children with special needs” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“We have a group of some 27 children... and there is one child with special needs in the group” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The focus group discussions on the size of educational groups i.e. the number of children in educational groups in pre-school institutions, reveal that pre-school institutions mostly do not adhere to the stipulated pedagogical standards. Although the so-called mixed educational groups, which comprise various educational groups – from nursery to school age – are permitted by pedagogical standards, this lack of adherence was specifically commented on by the respondents. In public pre-school institutions, some educational groups include a small number of children with developmental difficulties and the standard that stipulates a reduction in the number of “typical” children to take account of this is not always met. Another aspect related to the number of children in educational groups is that, without exception, they are greater in size than the permitted maximum. Therefore, the size of educational groups in pre-school institutions most often depends on the demand for places – i.e. the number of children who applied and were enrolled. It is also of concern that, in the creation of educational groups that include children with developmental difficulties, pedagogical standards and rules are not being met, because such a failure can negatively impact on the quality and the implementation of the relevant programmes, especially on the individual approach to these children, which can in turn negatively affect the process of their integration and social inclusion.

The variety of educational programmes for children in all pre-school institutions in the FBiH are implemented by experts from various disciplines. Their number is regulated by the relevant legislation and is related to the number of children enrolled in pre-school institutions. In all cantons, it is stipulated that other specialist experts from various disciplines must also be employed in addition to the mandatory number of pre-school teachers, such as pedagogues, psychologists, speech therapists, special-needs teachers, social workers, etc. According to the law, they must all have a university qualification. Also, in accordance with the legislation, medical professionals with university, college or secondary education qualifications should provide care work and work on protecting and improving the health of children in pre-school institutions.

This specific focus of this research encompasses the educational and care work of pre-school institutions, including the teachers, whose everyday work and direct contact with children define, to a great extent, the quality of care and education. Therefore, discussions were initiated in the focus groups about the number of pre-school teachers working with different the educational groups and the perceptions of the parents thereon:

“Two teachers for thirty children, they work two shifts and they overlap for an hour and a half in the morning” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“In the morning and afternoon there is one person, and they have this shift overlap” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“There is an overlap in our case, in the morning there is one; from 11-13h there are two” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“One teacher is there in the morning for the drop-off and the second arrives at 11h. Then the one who covers the morning leaves at 15h and the other one stays to 17h until all the children have left” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“As far as I can see, there are always two teachers. One is there for the drop-off while the other one is in the classroom and they work together” (mother of two children, 4 and 5 years old, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There are two teachers per group and there is always the pedagogue, and there is an additional teacher to help if needed” (mother of a 2-year-old, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

These quotes reveal that, unlike private institutions, public pre-school institutions do not seem to adhere to the legally stipulated number of pre-school teachers for certain educational group. Namely, according to the relevant standards, most cantons have regulated that the optimum number of children in “nursery” groups is 14, whereas in “kindergarten” groups it is around 23. In full day-care (8 to 11 hours), two pre-school teachers should work with such groups, as is stipulated by e.g. PSE Pedagogical Standards and Rules of SC (see Article 15). However, in most public pre-school institutions, as the teachers do not work ten-hour shifts, one of the teachers works on her own for three to four hours in the morning with an educational group before the other teacher arrives for the afternoon shift. The sole reason for this situation is the impossibility of the employment, financed by the competent authorities, of the optimum number of teachers and of experts. Given that private pre-school institutions self-finance their staff and, due to the possibility of sanctions being applied, must adhere to the relevant standards and rules, the teacher-child ratio in educational

groups, in these private pre-school institutions, is satisfactory. The following statement illustrates this:

“Four teachers, plus the director as a fifth – she also jumps in – 40 children in two groups – older and younger, two teachers per group... As far as I know the director cooks, and the four of them work with children” (mother of a 4-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

This is perhaps the most vivid observation regarding the situation in private pre-school institutions. The fact that the director of the institution also does the cooking speaks more about the absence of competent inspection of PSE institutions than about the private pre-school institutions themselves.

ATTITUDES REGARDING THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Children with developmental difficulties are categorised in the group designated as children with disabilities. In addition to various forms of bodily disability, this demographic mostly comprises children with intellectual difficulties, which, in our context, are detected in early childhood only on rare occasions. According to international documents which BiH has incorporated into its legislation, this demographic has rights equal to those of so-called “typical” children. In other words, children with developmental difficulties have the same rights as other children in PSE. However, according to relevant cantonal legislation, the number of children in educational groups for children over the age of 3 years, e.g. in SC, is reduced in average by two “typical” children per one child with developmental difficulties. The situation is similar in HNC, where one child with mild developmental

difficulties can be included if the number of “typical” children in a group is reduced by two. A single educational group can include only one child with a severe or a combined developmental disability, only if there is an insufficient number of children to organise a separate educational group of children with special needs, and, in that case, the number of “typical” children is reduced by four.¹⁹ The legislation in all the cantons stipulates the participation of assistants and volunteers in the implementation of educational programmes, in order to enhance the individual approach and to implement programmes adjusted to the capabilities and needs of the children; however, this rarely happens in practice (see the attitudes of professionals in the focus groups). Although pre-school institutions in the FBiH include a relatively small number of children with developmental difficulties, their inclusion has been made difficult by a range of negative factors – not only is there a lack of the individual approach to the capabilities and needs of the children; and too few assistants, but there is also the problem of insufficient number of pre-school teachers. Furthermore, there is a perception, among the general public, that parents of “typical” children are prejudiced and do not support the idea that their child should be a member of an educational group which includes children with developmental difficulties. The focus group discussions revealed the following attitudes amongst the respondents, who were exclusively the parents of “typical” children:

19 According to the Pedagogical Standards and Rules for Pre-school Education of HNC, in addition to inclusion of children with developmental difficulties in educational groups comprising “typical” children, there is the possibility of organising separate educational groups with a special programme for children with developmental difficulties in kindergartens and special institutions, by their age and type of difficulty. In one educational group, the number of children with the same type of difficulty of up to two years of age may not exceed three, and ages 4 – 7 may not exceed six children per group. Educational groups of children with autism, on the other hand, ages 6-7, may comprise a maximum of three children (2008:19).

“I have nothing against it, inclusion is great, but there should be a person who is an expert in working with such children” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“The group my daughter attends has one child with developmental difficulties, and therefore the total number of children in the group fewer by one or two children than in other groups. The problem was that there were no additional teachers and this child needed a lot of attention. I mean, it was not a problem of communication between the children, they really liked their friend” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Children should experience diversity from an early age, see what kind of children they are and accept them as they are... It is important that they have an assistant of some sort in kindergartens...” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I think that every child should go to a pre-school institution, but a child with developmental difficulties should be supported” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

These quotes reveal that, in the focus groups, there was no discriminatory attitude or prejudice against children with developmental difficulties. It also shows the awareness of parents of typical children that all children have equal rights, needs and desires, which was anticipated. The respondents underlined that full inclusion of children with developmental difficulties requires additional support of professionals/assistants in order for them to master certain tasks and obligations; however, this is rarely the case in practice. During the discussions, as is apparent in the quotations, it is noteworthy that parents said that “typical” children do not differentiate; they accept

their peers with developmental difficulties without intolerance, on the same basis as they do others in their group. One of the conclusions arising from the focus group discussions is this: for equal participation in an educational group, as well as for full implementation of programme activities, children with developmental difficulties need the appropriate support of additional professionals and assistants, as is stipulated by the relevant cantonal laws.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The importance of quality programmes, as well as other aspects of the basis for successful PSE, has been recognised specifically by the Framework Law. In addition to introduction of a common core curriculum for all pre-school institutions (Article 21(1)), it stipulates: types of programmes (Article 23); programme purpose and contents (Article 24); as well as the obligation of the competent education authorities to adopt PSE pedagogical standards and rules (Article 25(2)). In the FBiH, the competent education authorities are the cantonal ministries of education, as stated earlier in this study. As the cantonal laws stipulate lists of different programmes, starting from the care and education programme for children from the age of 6 months to 3 years; to the educational programme for children ages 3 to 6 years; to programmes promoting development for children with developmental delays, a discussion was started with parents in the focus groups about the quality of the educational programmes implemented in pre-school institutions:

“I think that parents are not informed or made aware of everything that the children learn. I myself have little idea because my girl will not say anything at all...” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There are pre-school teachers that really try hard. To give you an example, my child visited a lab in the secondary chemistry school and a lab in the secondary technical school last month. I am really amazed by that...” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“There is a wide spectrum of possibilities, English, dancing, rhythmic gymnastics. There is everything you could wish for” (mother of 2 and 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“I would give a score of 4 for the quality of the pre-school education programme” (father of 4 and 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The quotes reveal that parents, although assessing positively the quality of educational programmes in pre-school institutions in general, they do not differentiate the integral development programmes from the specialised development programmes. Therefore, it was not possible to ascertain with certainty whether they are aware of the different programme types, their contents and to what extent these programmes are adapted to the educational needs of the children. The focus group discussions also lead to the conclusion that integral development programmes are implemented in pre-school institutions through group work: i.e. without attention being paid to specific individual approaches. This is most likely due to the insufficient number of employed teachers and other professionals.

A common theme in the discussions from all respondents was their awareness of the role and responsibility of teachers in implementing educational programmes—both those addressing care for younger children and those for children older than 3 years. The respondents emphasised the

positive impact of specialised programmes on children, their upbringing and education. This includes visits to various cultural and educational institutions and sites, as well as foreign languages, dance, rhythmic gymnastics etc. Even though the parents assess positively the quality of these educational programmes, the question can be posed as to what constitutes a 'quality educational programme' in our context. The answer to this question is a complex one and would require further research, as pre-school programmes, in addition to their educational content, should contain, objectives and outcomes, i.e. achievement levels, as well as guidelines for the pedagogical approaches, learning activities and assessment methods to be used. This is especially because the quality of the programme is always linked with the optimum staffing, primarily that of teachers and their skills, as well as the strategy for the implementation of programmes, which in the FBiH varies from canton to canton.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS

Continuous professional development, especially for PSE teachers, is indispensable for the development of their competencies and there has been a growing focus on this consideration in BiH over recent years. To that end, the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education (hereinafter: APOSO) has developed standards for the quality of work of pre-school teachers, pedagogues and directors in pre-primary education in BiH, as well as developing relevant Recommendations to improve the existing programmes and develop new integral development programmes. The standards are based on the professional competencies and are designed as a living document, to be amended and supplemented in line with the specific

characteristics of PSE. Despite these first, initial steps, there are grounds to say that, in BiH today, and in the FBiH as well, there are no mandatory, legally stipulated standards for the professional competencies of pre-school teachers, nor standards for their continuing professional development, both of which should be harmonised. The focus group discussions on competencies and professional development opportunities, particularly for employed pre-school teachers, have revealed the following:

“I think that most parents, either in private or public institutions, are of the opinion that the teachers are good and well-educated...” (mother of a 5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Our teachers often attend workshops after work and the institution makes that possible. Sometimes they even participate in some programmes that are projects of the ministry. They attend these workshops and trainings regularly... Every year, when new parents arrive, the teacher introduces herself and presents her qualifications and professional experience” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Teachers attend trainings regularly. They have the most opportunity to attend trainings, when compared to other fields, such as primary and secondary education. They even invite us, parents...” (mother of two children, ages 5 and 2.5, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Teachers’ education could be better. Their education is a reflection of the situation in the country. I know that teachers in public kindergartens attend seminars, but more of these could be held.” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

The quotes reveal that the perceptions of the respondents about the professional competencies and education of teachers are mostly positive. Given that it is hard to imagine that any parent would entrust the care and education of their child to a pre-school institution employing staff with inadequate competencies or education this is unsurprising. Their views also demonstrate that most parents believe that PSE staff, particularly teachers, do receive continuous professional development. It seems that some parents do not differentiate between formal education and professional development i.e. life-long learning. It seems that they believe that day-to-day work with children, experience in care work, combined with individual efforts by teachers to keep up with new theories, certainly provide appropriate competencies and expertise to the majority of teachers, even in cases when quality and organised/mandatory professional development is not possible. It therefore to be expected that perceptions of parents about competencies and professional development opportunities for teachers are completely positive.

IMPACT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION ON CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, due to unemployment or the instability of parental income; poor housing conditions; educational underachievement of parents etc., are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. When they start school, these factors can affect their ability to succeed and they might need additional assistance to meet educational expectations. The possibility of this happening requires additional engagement on the part of the society to include this group of children as early as possible in PSE programmes. Regarding the inclusion of this target groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, given that the majority of cantons have passed the necessary legislative measures for the protection of and assistance

provided to these children, by and large, these measures are being implemented. It seems that Roma children are among the groups at greatest risk and the levels of their inclusion in PSE programmes in the FBiH are very low. Despite the fact that the cantonal laws stipulate the obligation of competent ministries of social affairs to co-finance PSE services for these children, as was elaborated earlier in this study, the situation is the same with regard to the inclusion of other groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, e.g. children without parental care; children with developmental difficulties; children living in poverty etc. The focus group discussions about the perceptions of parents on early inclusion in PSE programmes and its impact on children from disadvantaged backgrounds have revealed the following:

“Kindergarten plays a huge role for every child, including children who are from poor families. It is easy here to become poor. We can all become poor if we lose our jobs” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Socialisation, hanging out, fitting in... Children of disadvantaged backgrounds will meet a variety of people in the kindergarten... They will grow and it will not be so difficult later in school to continue fitting in” (mother of a 4-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Socialisation, I think that is the key thing... When children start kindergarten, you can see the difference... When they realise they are with other children and they are all equal, that they will not get anything easily – they must deserve it, I think that is the key thing” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Whether kindergarten can make up for the lack of certain basic knowledge on the part of a child living in disadvantaged conditions,

or make up for what the child is not getting in the family, depends on the time the child spends in the family and in the kindergarten.... Of course, there are positive examples, but it is certainly true that neither kindergarten nor teachers are omnipotent" (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The quotes show that, based on their experience acquired from observing the PSE impact on the development of their own children, respondents think that the inclusion in PSE of children from disadvantaged backgrounds has a very positive influence on all the children and on their socialisation and the acquisition and mastering of certain knowledge, skills and habits. They acquire these within educational groups, through group activities which include such socialisation and the joint mastering and sharing of duties and responsibilities that have an emphasis on learning pro-social behaviour. Inclusion in PSE also has a significant impact on the mitigation of the negative consequences that many of these children experience. However, this will depend, in part, on their age and/or the duration of their inclusion in PSE. These perceptions are in line with the commitments and recommendations of various international documents and conclusions which stipulate that early inclusion into PSE of as many children from disadvantaged backgrounds as possible is one of the priorities of European policy.

IMPACT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION ON THE FUTURE EDUCATION AND LIVES OF CHILDREN

Various international studies show that early inclusion of children in PSE has a significant impact on the preparation of children for school and the obligations of schooling, because children who attended PSE perform better in school. The studies also demonstrate a link between the inclusion of

children in PSE and student achievement. This was in particular proven by two international studies on student achievement: the Programme for International Student Assessment conducted in 2012 (hereinafter: PISA), where the focus of the research was on knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in mathematics; and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study conducted in 2011 (hereinafter: PIRLS), which measured reading performance of 4th grade students, mostly 10-year olds (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:21). In addition to indicators concerning the usefulness of inclusion in PSE for children, these studies also showed: that those students who attended PSE for longer than a year achieve better results in mathematics than those who attended PSE for less than a year or not at all (PISA); that children who spent a longer time in PSE are better at reading when they start primary school; and that inclusion in PSE has a greater impact on the reading performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (PIRLS). The results of this research also showed that PSE can give all children, regardless of their background, a good basis for lifelong learning (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:71). The focus group discussions about the impact of PSE on the future education and achievements of children revealed the following:

“Learning is individual, but children who attend kindergarten achieve a much better level of socialization... Before this compulsory pre-school segment was introduced, the difference was huge” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“The difference is obvious from the outset. A child who attended kindergarten will have a much better start, some sort of acquired knowledge, some habits... Such a child will pay more attention during class than the one who was only at home with a family. I worked in a primary school, in which nine-year education had already been introduced, and after 15 minutes, a girl stood up and said:

‘well, ladies, time to go home’. She grew up with grandmothers” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Children from kindergartens arrive ready, for instance, knowing that their parents will leave them there, that they will stay with a teacher, and they expect structure and all that. I will give you an example of a boy who goes to class with my child. His father had to sit outside the classroom during the classes and the child kept asking the teacher to go out and check whether his father was still there. That is the benefit of kindergartens” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Children from kindergartens will be more independent. I think that children who haven’t attended kindergarten don’t keep up with those who have. Children from kindergartens have spent a lot of time with other children, they have developed immunity, they don’t become ill in school in the same way as those children who come straight into school” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

These quotes reflect the perceptions of respondents about the impact of PSE on children, not only from the perspective of the parents but also, in some cases, from the perspective of the education professionals. They underline the greater adaptation of children to school and school obligations; greater independence; acquired immunity to certain diseases; but they also underline an increased capacity of the mastery of educational content. In other words, it seems that parents see school enrolment and attendance for these children as a continuation of the previous responsibilities and the gaining of new knowledge that commenced in PSE. The attitudes expressed in the discussions and the quotes are supported with illustrative examples

the behaviour of children who have not attended PSE before school. All respondents expressed their support to compulsory inclusion of all children in PSE in the year preceding school. On the other hand, a few parents had some unexpected opinions in relation to the knowledge acquired during PSE, as is illustrated by the following statement:

“...teachers in schools have problems because children learn to write incorrectly in kindergartens... it is a bigger problem to correct these incorrect habits later once children in school” (mother of a 4-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

It seems that this quote, which, as it stands, is not fully comprehensible, particularly with respect to the statement “children learn[ing] to write incorrectly in kindergartens”, reveals more about the attitude of school teachers towards children starting school with some prior knowledge, e.g. in letters, numbers, simple mathematical tasks etc., than it does about the quality of PSE programmes. It is therefore possible to assume that school programmes for first graders are conceived and intended primarily for children who do not have any prior knowledge or skills, unlike the situation for those of their peers who have spent time in PSE. If we make that assumption, the quote may have some validity because it is not hard to imagine problems which first-grade teachers face in a classroom of children with very heterogeneous prior knowledge. In such cases, a number of them, probably only a few, are encountering letters, writing, addition etc. for the first time, and the majority of others are bored, waiting for them to learn the basics. It is expected that compulsory pre-school education for all children in the year before they start school will resolve the majority of these problems or at least mitigate them.

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS REGARDING THE COMPULSORY INCLUSION OF CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE YEAR PRECEDING SCHOOL

The inclusion of children in PSE in the FBiH in the year preceding school is a legal obligation, as stipulated by the Framework Law, as well as the relevant laws in most of the cantons in the FBiH, as previously discussed. However, the unharmonized implementation of this legal obligation, particularly in cantons that have not passed the relevant laws or are not applying them, results in the situation that children in those cantons, apart from experiencing discrimination, have poorer chances for a successful start to their primary education, which can, in turn, have an impact on their end-of-school-year performance. This is particularly the case because the obligation to include all children in PSE in the year preceding school refers to all children who are not already included in some form of PSE. This also applies to children attending private pre-school institutions that are not registered in the cantonal registries of pre-school institutions, because these might not be implementing the compulsory PSE programme.

The focus group discussions on this topic gave rise to following statement:

“I work as a teacher and I also worked before the compulsory pre-school education was introduced. There were situations in which a child would start first grade and would not know how to sit on a chair, literally cannot sit on a chair... I work in a rural environment where children do not have much opportunity to attend kindergartens. But since compulsory pre-school education was introduced, the children get used to it, they socialise and it is easier to work with them” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

This quote offers a strong argument in favour of the compulsory inclusion in PSE of children in the year preceding school and also illustrates the positive impact of this programme on children. In addition to children accepting school obligations more easily, The statement underline that better socialisation provides the basis for “easier work” on the part of the teachers, in this case, with children from rural areas who are most probably the majority group amongst the beneficiaries of the programme. However, despite the unanimous support for this programme, the focus group discussions have revealed other perceptions of respondents concerning a range of gaps and problems in its implementation:

“I think that in general it is not well organised because it is located in schools. These children should be put in kindergartens so that groups with at least two or three children can form in which children will continue into school together” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think it should be longer. I think it is too short” (mother of a 3 and a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“This canton does not have compulsory pre-school education... Not even the ‘little school’ that used to be organised in May when children enrolled and teachers held ‘little schools’ in June” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

Each quote addresses very specifically the relation of the cantonal authorities towards PSE, even in those cantons that implement the compulsory programme for children before they start school. A number of respondents started a discussion on the location where the programme is being implemented. As most cantons apply a mixed approach – pre-school institutions

and/or primary schools, they expressed preference for separate pre-school institutions explaining that it is most beneficial for the children. The statement of disappointment from a respondent concerning the non-existence of compulsory pre-school education in HNC, where not even the “little schools” that had previously been organised were available, is perhaps illustrative of the importance that respondents ascribe to this programme. The second theme which provoked a lively discussion in the groups concerned the varied and insufficient hours of compulsory PSE inclusion in the year preceding school in different cantons – most often the programme lasts for 150 hours, with two hours weekly during the entire year – which is far from the average number of hours in EU countries. Namely, these countries have an average of 29 hours a week, and the programme implementation lasts, depending on the country, one year or two for countries where compulsory PSE starts when a child turns 4 years old, e.g. in Luxembourg and in the majority of cantons in Switzerland. Compulsory PSE before school which starts when a child turns 5 years old is implemented in Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Austria and Poland. The minimum weekly duration of compulsory PSE “varies between 16 hours per week in Austria and 27.5 hours per week in Cyprus” (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:12).

ATTITUDES OF PARENTS REGARDING THE NEED TO HAVE MORE MALE TEACHERS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Professional staff, especially teachers, represent a key prerequisite for quality provision of PSE. A common characteristic of BiH and the majority of other European countries is that this field employs almost exclusively women, especially those caring for children under the age of 3. The available data indicates that a few European countries have somewhat higher percentages of men employed in pre-school institutions working with older educational

groups – 5% to 7% of the total number of employed professionals. These countries include Iceland, Turkey and Norway, where in Norway, men represent 10% of employed teachers. Denmark is unique in having 23% of its assistant positions, and 15% of teaching roles undertaken by men.

In order to diversify the ECEC workforce, Germany, Austria and Norway have developed special measures, focusing on raising the level of male employment in the sector. Germany, for instance, has set up a national programme 'More men in ECEC centres'. ECEC settings taking part in the programme explore different ways to incentivize men into the sector by improving the image of the profession, supporting men who wish to become educators and creating new paths into the profession. Austria has introduced an annual 'Boys' Day' at national level in 2008, designed to promote social careers among men, including career opportunities in the field of education. Norway uses a process of positive discrimination in favour of men applying for jobs in ECEC (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:98).

Given that PSE institutions in the FBiH, as in other places in BiH, almost exclusively employ women as teachers, as was earlier elaborated in the indicators, the focus groups discussed the need to employ more male teachers and the attitudes of the respondents were as follows:

"I think my boy would find that interesting" (mother of a 5 and 2.5-year-old, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

"It would be great to have more of them... They would be an example to children that men can also be educators. It would be a nice example. They would find it normal from an early age instead of learning that Jaca brings food, Lejla cleans etc. Only women educate them in our kindergarten. I think it would be great if the

practice changed” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“They asked me in the kindergarten: what would you think about having a male teacher? I said I was thrilled by the idea. Why not, especially for the boys, to make things and fix them. Even for girls, to have a male figure. Unfortunately, there are none” (mother of a 4-year-old, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“We have a male teacher... the children adore him. He devotes more attention to them than the female teacher” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think it would be nice to have male teachers too, maybe some children would find it easier to open up, connect, maybe some come from families that think a male role model is important, to look up to him” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution Zenica).

The quotes, coming from one segment of the focus group respondents, show that they find the employment of male teachers to be desirable and to be in the interest of the child. On the other hand, other respondents, in almost identical number and including the only father, expressed certain prejudices related to employing male teachers, as can be seen in the following:

“I don’t support the idea... I don’t believe I can give even 20% of what their mom gives them to my children, and I rely therefore on women educators” (father of a 4 and 6-year old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I would not enrol my child if there were a male teacher. I just don’t have the trust” (mother of a 3-year-old, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I can’t imagine a male teacher in a situation when a child needs to go to the toilet, what would he do?” (mother of a 4-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

It could be said, based on the quotes and the entirety of the focus group discussions, that the opinions of parents about the need to employ more male teachers are divided. Based on the analysis of the discussions, the atmosphere of the focus group and the overall opinion of the respondents, it was apparent that by a small majority, there was no support for male teachers to be employed in PSE, especially for the care of children under the age of 3 years. However, despite the fact that the opinions against male teachers slightly out-weighed the opinions in favour, the researchers think that appropriate programmes should be developed, as in other European countries, aiming to employ more men in PSE. Men should primarily be employed as teachers to work with children older than 3 years. If parents were to experience and gain direct insight into the work of male teachers with this group of children, there might be some change in their attitude, enabling them to view teachers of both sexes as equally capable of working with their children, irrespective of the age of the child.

ATTITUDES REGARDING THE INTRODUCTION OF A LEGAL POSSIBILITY FOR PROVISION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION SERVICES AT HOME

In the majority of European countries, in addition to organised care and education in pre-school institutions, the legal possibility is envisaged for

the provision of PSE at home, if all rules and quality standards are followed. These services can be provided in either/both the home of the service provider or the service user. European practice shows that this type of PSE service provision mostly takes place in the home of the service provider. However, home-based provision represents a significant proportion of ECEC provision only in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Finland, the United Kingdom and Iceland, and caters largely for younger children. In Denmark, for instance, around 40 % of 1-year-olds participate in regulated home-based provision; in France, the participation rates for the 0-3 years-old educational group are around 15%, whereas in Iceland more children under 2 years of age are taken care of by home-based providers than attend centre-based settings. In some countries, there is more than one form of regulated home-based provision. For example, in Hungary, there are two distinct systems, which target different educational groups and are subject to different regulations on the maximum number of children per provider. In Finland, home-based care is provided either by individual childminders, or as a group day-care service with two or three childminders. In the three Communities of Belgium, there are differences in the working status of childminders, who may be independent providers or providers affiliated to specific childminding organisations.

The most common approach to qualifications for home-based workers is to require them to undertake a special training course which is often quite short, but does vary greatly – between 18 and 300 hours. Some countries, such as Germany (where childminders courses comprise 30 to 160 hours), France, Hungary (course comprises 40 hours); Austria, Poland, Portugal, Finland, United Kingdom, Iceland and Switzerland do not legally require a minimum qualification in addition to the course; while other countries: Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, Scotland and Norway, require the same level of qualification for staff in home-based settings as in PSE settings. A few

countries, including Ireland, Slovakia, Liechtenstein and Belgium, require neither a minimum qualification nor specific training for childminders. The majority of countries set a maximum ratio of five to six children per childminder, including the childminder's own children (see Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:17, 35, 46, 102, 103).

Of the former SFRY Republics, three countries have regulated the provision of PSE at home: the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Serbia.

The focus group discussions on the need to introduce this type of PSE service have revealed:

“We can’t even discuss it... we are so far from it... it would not be a bad idea at all for nursery age children” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“It would be great, a family setting” (mother of a 2-year-old, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“We have those services, but they are not regulated... It is more of just looking after a child, often the person is not trained to do so... Those are the kids in homes 3-10...” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“If this is to be regulated then it should be done by trained staff. It does not sound bad to me. We should not rule it out” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I would support it for the sake of the women, the baby sitters; regulate it and there you go” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“It is a good thing for parents who work e.g. 15-19h; they cannot have their child in kindergarten but they would still like them to become socialised... There are parents who work until 9 or 10 in the evening...” (mother of a 6-year-old, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“If we had stricter control systems – fine. We can’t even control private kindergartens...” (mother of a 5-year-old, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

The quotes and the four focus group discussions indicate a need to regulate PSE services provided at home. In the opinion of the majority of respondents, this form of service provision is acceptable for younger children. The discussions have also underlined that baby sitters/childminders must be trained and that there should be an appropriate supervision system to monitor their work and other aspects in order to avoid any abuse and to ensure full safety of the child. A number of participants see the positive side of regulation in the fact that “illegal” service provision in homes would become legalised, as well as that parents working evenings or nights would be able to have appropriate care for their children, provided by a person meeting all the care requirements, especially when it comes to very young children. All of these factors, taken together with the fact that access to PSE provision is lower than the demand for it, represent the case for at least considering the regulation of PSE services at home, or the proposing of legislation with regard to baby sitters / childminders, as has been the case, for instance, in the Republic of Croatia.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH PROFESSIONALS – RESEARCH RESULTS

Pre-school education today, as an organised social activity, cannot be imagined let alone implemented without the professionals, especially the trained teachers, who work every day to provide care, upbringing, and education to children mostly under the age of 6 years. This activity is present in all European countries, irrespective of the level of development or their economic situation. Therefore, every country sees the investment in PSE and retention of professional and competent staff – the key prerequisite for quality PSE – as immensely important. The specificity of work performed by PSE professionals is attended by a range of problems, and also by the variation of need amongst the children for whom they have responsibility. This refers not only to the age of the children but also their social and cultural background, family status, developmental difficulties etc., requiring from PSE staff their continuous engagement in life-long learning and learning about new approaches in their everyday practice, all of which must serve the best interest of every individual child. This also requires an appropriate engagement of the society to support the best opportunities for the continuous professional development of staff, such as respects their experiences and their perspective, acquired through the work with different groups of children and their parents/guardians.

The invaluable experience, professional competencies and knowledge, combined with the daily challenges of the work they perform, were the main reasons for the decision to include professionals, especially teachers, in the qualitative research. We believe that their perceptions and opinions on certain topics discussed in the focus groups have provided valuable indicators regarding the current problems and the relation of society towards PSE in the FBiH. In forming the four focus groups, which were organised in

Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica and Mostar, as were those with parents, the same criteria were used for the number of respondents from public and private pre-school institutions, the total number of respondents per group, and the contacts with respondents, i.e. the method of recruitment, which was elaborated above. In forming the focus groups with professionals it was impossible to achieve a gender-balanced composition of the groups of respondents – the four groups included women only; a total of 39 rather than 40, as the group in Zenica had only 9 respondents. The educational composition of the groups was: of 39 respondents, 30 had a university degree, 5 had a 2-year post-secondary education degree, and 4 had a master's degree. The occupational composition, i.e. type of work they perform in the pre-school institution, was: 26 teachers, 9 non-teaching expert staff and co-ordinators, mostly pedagogues and speech therapists; and 4 directors of pre-school institutions. The average age of respondents was 38, and the longest length of service in a single pre-school institution was 23 years (a director of a (public) institution) and the shortest was 3 months (a teacher in the same pre-school institution).

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROFESSIONALS CONCERNING POSSIBLE CAUSES FOR THE LOW RATES OF INCLUSION OF CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Disadvantaged children, e.g. children living in rural or suburban areas; children with parents/guardians with poor socio-economic opportunities; national-minority children such as Roma etc., are often at risk of poor educational outcomes, including dropping out of primary education. Therefore, to achieve results that enable them to use their personal capabilities to the full, they often need additional support, which in most cases may not be necessary if they are involved at an early stage in PSE. In other words, participation in

early childhood education and care (ECEC) from a very young age, improves the likelihood that children from such backgrounds will achieve success in their education, and reduces the likelihood of social exclusion. Several Council of Europe documents emphasise the importance of equal access to PSE and equal opportunity for all children, regardless of their socio-economic, cultural or linguistic background. Having the best interest of the child in mind, improving accessibility to and the quality of ECEC have been included in the European education policy agenda (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:141).

Given that a low number of disadvantaged children are included in PSE in the FBiH, the discussions have revealed the following:

“Employed parents can enrol their children in the kindergartens within our institution – that is one of the criteria. What we have been noticing for years is that children from places, not part of the municipality or city, have no opportunity to achieve enrolment because of the criterion that the parents must be employed. The other thing is that parents who do not work cannot enrol their child because they cannot pay for the kindergarten despite the fact that the price for full day’s day-care is BAM 160. We are supported by the Canton as our founder, and the cost comes down to around BAM 320... The networks must be expanded, the provision of kindergartens needs to reach children that very much need them. As of next year, we will have a road-worthy bus that we have obtained in co-operation with Caritas Switzerland. We will thus be able to make a transport schedule that we will visit places without schools or kindergartens” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Low inclusion of disadvantaged children primarily occurs because of lack of funding, and the geographical location of kindergartens”

(non-teaching expert staff – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Economic reasons are the key” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Financial reasons are the problem” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Unemployment of parents” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

The quotes reveal that the most commonly cited reasons for insufficient inclusion, i.e. the low number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in PSE are: poverty; the inaccessibility; and the insufficient number of pre-school institutions in their places of residence. There is a paucity of legislation in the FBiH clearly defining the criteria for what constitutes a disadvantaged background. One of the respondents mentioned that a condition for inclusion in PSE is that both parents are employed, which indicates that the socio-economic criterion is treated almost as a private problem of the parents, and the right of the child to a pre-school education is treated as secondary. This is also underlined by the fact that children who are geographically distant from the city, and live in economically and socially under-developed areas, most often lack any opportunity for inclusion in pre-school institutions and thus in PSE. The conclusion can be drawn that there are no initiatives whatsoever in the majority of cantons currently addressing early inclusion of children in PSE. Sarajevo Canton might be an exception, as the public pre-school institution “Djeca Sarajeva” plans to implement a project in September 2018 entitled Kindergarten on Wheels. This project is supported by Caritas Switzerland and will provide a bus for two years, as

well as a driver, and one peripatetic teacher (Oslobođenje Daily, 17 January 2018, p. 13).

Perception of the respondents concerning the low inclusion in PSE of disadvantaged children, the focus group discussions have additionally revealed the following attitudes, albeit these are were minority opinions:

“The low level of awareness of people about the importance of pre-school education might be the most significant reason for the low inclusion of disadvantaged children in PSE” (pedagogue / psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think that parents are sometimes unaware. Sometimes they have the financial means, but simply do not feel the need to get their child involved. There is definitely that. There is insufficient awareness on the part of parents about what the child gains from a kindergarten – that’s another obstacle in our case” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“.. the attitude of parents towards pre-school care – that it is not as important as we know it is in the life of a child” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“...they think that we just watch over them in kindergartens and that they can teach them more, provide a better upbringing. Parents generally think that children learn more at home...” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

The quotes and perceptions of the professionals, in contact with parents of different groups of children every day, indicate a very sensitive aspect of

the possible causes of low inclusion in PSE of disadvantaged children. We cannot but agree with the respondents who think that a number of parents, particularly those with poorer educational achievement levels, are not aware of the importance of PSE for the child and its impact on future school performance, as well as the child's progress into further education and her/his socialization. It can therefore be assumed that these parents drawn on their own experience – they did not participate in PSE as children, so it is normal for the majority of them not to seek actively for their child to be included in PSE. It is likely that this refers particularly to many parents of children from rural areas; minority Roma children; children living in extreme poverty; etc. Under such circumstances, every child from the listed groups can be, and most frequently is, deprived of the opportunity of early inclusion in PSE as a result of a conscious decision on the part of their parents, even in cases when the family does not have financial problems. The onus for the insufficient awareness of parents about the importance of the early inclusion in PSE of every child, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, lies within society which, in our case, is doing almost nothing to inform and educate the public about the importance of PSE and its impact on children and their welfare.

REASONS FOR THE LOW INCLUSION OF EARLY AGE CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

In the FBiH, the demand for inclusion in PSE, especially for children under the age of 3 years, is greater than the availability of provision, which might seem surprising at first glance, given the cultural factors and traditional family values, in which one of the close family members, usually the grandmother, cares for the child after maternity leave ends. However, bearing in mind that the available data undoubtedly supports the above, the issues

to be addressed are: accessibility; the cost and quality of care, where the latter two are the most important in our context. This is supported by the following statements collected in the focus group discussions:

“I think there is an insufficient number of nurseries, that is the bigger problem. Nurseries are less profitable because fewer children and more teachers are involved... it is somehow more expensive, and then the parents cannot pay as much as the care for the baby actually costs” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We currently do not have the appropriate infrastructure to be able to cater for more children; the nursery infrastructure must be adapted to the needs of children... They need... more teachers, in fact, that is one of the problems. I think that parents are increasingly aware that such young children should be enrolled in kindergartens” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Infrastructure, in fact, the insufficient number of kindergartens and physical spaces specifically designed for younger children. The demand is much higher than the available capacity” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“...we have many children of nursery age on waiting lists. I think there are parents who only trust kindergartens. I was recently in touch with more parents who come and plead for a kindergarten place... They trust us, we are educated, we do that job and they trust only us. And they will wait as long as it takes to get a place” (teacher and coordinator, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“There is currently more demand for nurseries than for pre-school educational groups” (pedagogue/psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Demand for nurseries is three times higher than for kindergartens” (manager with a pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“In our case, the demand is higher for nurseries” (nursery teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“The problem in Mostar is that waiting lists have existed since 1984” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“In our case, the nurseries are full and parental demand outstrips the provision. We now have waiting lists in nurseries, although Zenica has enough private and public kindergartens that all children of parents in need can be accommodated in pre-school institutions” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

The statements above reveal substantial criticism and an objective assessment by the respondents regarding the current state of affairs, as to the reasons for the low inclusion in PSE of children up to the age of 3 years. In addition to their assessment, e.g. undeveloped infrastructure; lack of adequate physical space adapted to younger children; insufficient number of teachers etc., the respondents also underlined a number of subjective reasons: cost-efficiency; more space per child; smaller educational groups; engagement of more teachers etc., that primarily refer to private pre-school institutions which are mostly financially supported by parents.

The respondents also emphasised other reasons which mostly refer to the personal decisions of parents with regard to the inclusion of their children in PSE:

“Spending time in a group leads to the spread of infection... Parents find it hard to accept that their child must go through this. If the child does not experience this before 3 years old, then it will happen between the ages of 3 and 6 years, if not before the age of 6, then in primary school” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Parents simply think that their children are too small and only those that have no other alternative bring their children to us; they are afraid of flu, of viruses, of absolutely everything related to that little child... Honestly, I think that the main problem is parental fear and they bring their children when they must, when there is no one left to take care of the child or when they are preparing for school so they need some induction; but they prefer some other solution when it comes to a younger child” (non-teaching expert – speech therapist, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think that people with younger children find some solution, a babysitter or a grandma or some other childminder. Also, the nursery capacity in Mostar is really low. In our institution, we have 18 groups and only 4 are nursery ones” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

With reference to children younger than 3 years old included in PSE, the quotes have revealed different, almost contradictory, reasons to those stated previously. One of the most common reasons stated by the respondents was parental fear that children in nurseries, who are in direct contact with other

children, will be more exposed, than in the family, to the communicable diseases of childhood, especially respiratory infections. Relevant to this are the following personal experiences of some of the respondents:

“I did not put my children in kindergarten at an early age because when it comes to the period of building immunity I was very afraid and so I understand these parents...and I also think that the physical contact is inadequate – one, two teachers at most in a group is not enough for them to attend to every child... Children so young cannot say what happened, how it was and there is a deal of mistrust; therefore, it is easier to entrust the child to a person we are sure of” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think that children younger than 3 years old should be in their own home with their parents, primarily mother or guardian who take care of them; that is how important relationships are made and it is not too late after the age of 3 years for socialisation with other children” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

The common theme in these quotes is the fact that respondents/teachers employed in private pre-school institutions think that children younger than 3 years old should not be included in PSE. The opinion of one of them, based on her personal experience, is that the current ratio of teachers to children in nursery groups cannot secure an individual approach to the child. This is what influences the decision of a number of parents as to whether to include a child younger than 3 years old in PSE. The opinion of the second teacher, that a child younger than 3 years old should not be included in PSE, is explained by the belief that early childhood is the most sensitive period during which children and parents establish special closeness and mutual attachment, which may be disrupted by the day-care of the child

being carried out for several hours a day outside of the family home; this is partially based on the premise of attachment theory which is now gaining in importance. This approach, which aims to address the best interest of the child, is almost impossible to materialise today as it is hard to see how parents could be present with their children continuously until the age of 3 years. There are many international documents which support this observation, among them General Comment No. 7 which reads: “that young children are best understood as social actors whose survival, well-being and development are dependent on and built around close relationships. These relationships are normally with a small number of key people, most often parents, members of the extended family and peers, as well as caregivers and other early childhood professionals” (Article 8).

The quote clearly shows that in addition to parents, children should form close relationships with other people of importance as well, in this specific case, teachers. It is not solely the professional educational duties of a teacher that are important in the care of a young child. It is most likely that a person/professional, when they choose this vocational profession, will care for children with a degree of emotion, warmth and tenderness. The document imposes an obligation upon the states: “at all times [to] aim to provide programmes that complement the parents’ role and are developed as far as possible in partnership with parents, including through active cooperation between parents, professionals and others in developing the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” (Article 29(b)).

ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS REGARDING THE FINANCING OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND THE FEES PAID BY PARENTS

Investment in PSE is an important link in creating the basis for quality programmes and for their accessibility to all children. The investments in the FBiH, whether from public or private sources, differ from canton to canton and depend on the founder of the institution which takes on responsibility for the majority of the financial commitment. Given that in nine out of ten cantons in the FBiH, with the exception of Sarajevo Canton, the founders of public pre-school institutions are local self-government units, it is clear that the quality of PSE depends on the financial robustness of a municipality. The poorer the municipality, the lower the level of funds allocated for PSE and the greater the extent to which the costs of pre-school services are covered by parents. Such a situation and the relationship of the society towards PSE is reflected in the number of children in pre-school institutions in the FBiH. In the future, due to the general level of poverty in the country, this may even result in a decrease in the number of children included, especially in under-developed locations.

The relationship of the society, coupled with the discrimination towards children from poor families, violates the right stipulated in Article 3 of the Framework Law, which refers to the obligation of the authorities to provide care and education to all children under equal conditions. The fact that private pre-school institutions are mostly financed from fees paid by parents for the day-care of their children, also widens the gap and increases the discrimination, not only between public and private pre-school institutions, but also within private pre-school institutions. This is particularly relevant to those institutions, created as part of religious communities, which are also financed by donations. The focus group discussions have revealed the following:

“The fee paid by parents is BAM 160 or BAM 140 for a half-day... Our Canton covers 50% of the cost. We are an institution financed by the Canton, they set the fee. We pay the industrial price for electricity. Same with heating. You have to pay VAT on toys. All these things do not add up” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“I think that the fee currently paid for public institutions is something which will not increase for some time to come. Three years ago, in January, we raised the fee to BAM 160 and I think that it is a threshold which should not be breached in our context” (manager from a pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“...the fee in a child care institution should be the lowest possible on the planet. However, were it not for the founder covering all the costs, we would be forced, in this entire post-war period, to charge a fee of some BAM 6 or 7 per day. This would mean BAM 160 per month. The fees differ per programme, but they are still there. The fee is not something we are proud of. For instance, nurseries are cheaper by BAM 10 – BAM 150, and the kindergarten is BAM 160” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“The fees in the city kindergartens haven’t changed over the last seven years, but everyday life has changed... prices have generally increased. I really admire how private kindergartens have managed to survive..if you are to respect everything that needs to be respected, from hygienic standards, food control” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“...half a day’s day-care is BAM 120” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The quotes of the respondents have revealed that the fee paid by the parents for public pre-school institutions, in the four areas surveyed, is an average of BAM 160 per month for a full day's day-care. According to information received from direct contact with a number of employees in other public pre-school institutions, the same applies in most of the cantons in the FBiH. In most cantons, this fee is higher for nursery age children than for children in kindergartens, albeit there are examples of the opposite, e.g. in ZDC. The focus group discussions, as can also be seen from the quotes, have revealed that PSE staff, possibly dissatisfied with their salaries, think that the current fees paid by parents are "something that will not be increased for some time to come." It is evident that these attitudes on the part of the respondents are based on personal insights and experiences related to the financial stability or otherwise of families that use the PSE services. Maybe most illustrative is the statement from one of respondents: "The fee is not something we are proud of."

The focus group discussions regarding the sources of financing and the fees paid by parents in private pre-school institutions have revealed the following:

"In our case, in one way or another, 60 % of our children are subsidised by Caritas, depending on the needs of parents. If the parents pay 100 %, the fee for one child is BAM 250, the fee for two children is reduced by 20 % - which means for two children BAM 400, the third child attends for free" (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"Our fee is higher but the parents do not need to provide anything, we cover everything, from nappies to the rest, but we are forced to recycle. It has turned out well because our workshops are full

of re-usable things, as well as cans and toilet paper rolls” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“The private institutions need to increase their fees because the public kindergartens are subsidised. We are 100 % self-financing” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“In our case... the nursery is more expensive. Because we think that we need to invest more there... we think that the kindergarten service is priceless. BAM 160 KM is too little... we depend on parents who would find anything more expensive too expensive. And that would mean, unfortunately, fewer children for us” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“When the parents realise that the daily price is BAM 4... when you put it that way, they are taken aback and then they say – well, that’s really OK” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

One can immediately see from the quotes the difference between public and private pre-school institutions, both in terms of their sources of funding and the fees paid by parents of children included in PSE. Additional emphasis is also provided by the information which specifically illustrates the differences between the sources of financing of private pre-school institutions and the fee paid by parents in those institutions. This refers to private institutions which, in addition to fees paid by the parents, are co-financed by religious charities – in this case Caritas – as was mentioned in the quote. Therefore, the level of fees paid by parents can be anticipated bearing in mind the founder, and these fees also depend on the socio-economic situation of the parents and the number of children enrolled, even though the fees are higher than in public institutions and even if one or two children from the same family are enrolled.

As has been revealed in the focus group discussions, in all private pre-school institutions, as a rule, the fees paid by parents are higher than those in public pre-school institutions. This data could be anticipated, given that private pre-school institutions are self-financing so that in the majority of these cases the only source of revenue is the fees paid by parents. The focus group discussions have shown that the majority of private pre-school institutions are trying to keep the fees paid by parents aligned, as far as possible, to the fee paid for PSE services in public pre-school institutions. In the current context, and with the attitude of society towards private pre-school institutions being as it is, these institutions find themselves in a subordinate and unenviable position, because the necessary increase in fees for the service, brought about by the continuous increase in costs, may lead to a reduction in the interest/ability of parents to consider the inclusion of their children in such programmes. This would most probably lead to far-reaching consequences for those children but, even if the level of fees were to be maintained as it is currently, it could call into question the quality of PSE provided by these pre-school institutions in the FBiH.

The focus group discussions on sources of funding and the fees paid by parents for PSE services initiated exploration of the introduction of differentiated fees which would be means-tested, and decided on the basis of the financial situation of the family. We selected the following observations, particularly referring to the early inclusion in PSE of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, i.e. children from vulnerable groups:

“Children with special needs are subsidised by Caritas, children from families with one parent employed are subsidised, children of all our employees are also subsidised, and if a child is in hospital or if one of the parents is in hospital, they are also subsidised based on medical documentation” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Of the 2,800 children, only a 100 have subsidies. There are reductions by 30, 50 or 100 %, but applies only to a very small number, maybe 10 % of children” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have this programme that we are very proud of, it is the Leptir (Butterfly) kindergarten programme – it is intended for categories of disadvantaged families, those who cannot pay: two sessions a week of 2 and a half hours in kindergarten; English lessons and a visit from a speech therapist for BAM 30. However, our families are still reluctant to approach us and say: we need this programme for such and such a reason. We don’t even ask for any proof that someone needs to pay this lower fee. But, still, there are not very many children in this programme” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There are no children enrolled free of charge, except for those who are compulsorily enrolled” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“We provide assistance to others in every possible way. We don’t talk about it. This is not something you talk about. The parents get wound up, wanting to help us and those children we assume are in social need, but there is no discussion about it” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“The parents do not help with anything, except for contributing to petty cash...they also provide the nappies and clothes they bring for their children” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“No one helps disadvantaged children. As a rule, other parents pay for the day-care of these children and nobody even asks this of them... I think it is unfair that nobody’s come up with a solution for this funding, nobody’s thought of ways for paying for them; they only send packages for the socially vulnerable” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

These perceptions above of the respondents illustrate well the problems and obstacles encountered in the early inclusion in PSE of vulnerable groups. It seems that even when some of them are included in PSE, their situation is only fully comprehended by pre-school employees and parents of “typical” children. It is clear that, collectively, they try to help, especially by having equal approach/treatment to all children in a given group. It is the parents of “typical” children who most often bear the extra costs for disadvantaged children, for instance for field trips, procurement of some materials etc. In fact, it is the staff and the parents who want to avoid discrimination between the children as far as possible, at the same time teaching them pro-social behaviour.

Although legislation stipulates the obligation of the authorities to co-finance PSE for various groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, this is almost impossible to achieve in practice, due to limited finances. One of the quotes illustrates this specifically: in SC, of the total of 2,800 children included in PSE, only 10% are subsidised. This also indicates that only low numbers of children from vulnerable groups in the FBiH are included in PSE.

During focus group discussions, the issue was raised of the need to introduce differentiated fees for parents that depend on family income alone – a regular practice in determining fee reductions – however, in some European countries such as Latvia, Hungary, and Slovakia, free meals are offered to very poor families attending ECEC (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:87):

“I think that parents should be paying the amount they can afford for the kindergarten. If both parents are employed and have a decent income, they pay accordingly, and those with a lower income should pay less” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“In a regulated state, it can be done. There are families that say that the father is unemployed, and both of them work. How can you determine nowadays how much people should pay, and on the other hand there are no subsidies. Such parents should be subsidised by someone, such as the social welfare centre or some state or cantonal institution” (manager of pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“The problem is, for instance, that in the city centre, where both parents are employed and earn e.g. BAM 5,000 each, they pay the same price as someone from Ilijaš where the parents combinedly earn BAM 1,200” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“There was that law in Zagreb recently, everyone criticised it but it was passed. So, you have to bring your pay-check slip and that is how the fee is determined. It is not fair that someone with a normal salary and a senior official, a director, pay the same fee” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“It is very difficult to establish the actual financial situation of some parents. We’ve faced a situation where parents, registered as unemployed, have the highest income... It is very difficult to determine that nowadays” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

These quotes lead to the conclusion that respondents, although supportive of the introduction of differentiated fees being paid by parents and find this a just solution, express a certain scepticism regarding the collection of such differentiated fees in practice. According to them, as the entire social system is functioning poorly, there is a high likelihood that, in practice, parents who are well off could end up paying a lower fee than those who fairly and objectively report their income. It seems that the following attitudes of the respondents illustrate not only the current state of confusion but also the unresolved status of PSE with respect to financing:

“The entire system is not good. Both public and private. If the intention is to provide equal conditions and satisfy everything, then it shouldn’t matter, the society should provide the finance. This money would come from the parents’ taxes. The problem is that in our society nobody understands that it is all our money. That’s why I think that the entire system for financing is bad” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I would really like to see all kindergartens free of charge for all children. Because that would be the first education level and all children would be able to attend for free, no discrimination, no appraisal, we would have our salaries matching those in other parts of the world and all children would have the opportunity to be in kindergarten” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

It seems that the responses demonstrate the bitterness of majority of PSE employees caused by the discrepancy between the huge responsibility and hard work they undertake and the small wages they receive and the uncertainty related to financing of PSE, especially in private pre-school institutions. Based on the focus group discussions, one can get the impression

that the struggle for to retain each child in the institution is an everyday activity for a number of them, as their survival depends exclusively on payments from parents. The awareness of society regarding the accessibility to and the early inclusion of all children in PSE and its invaluable importance to them, seems to be non-existent in BiH, given that both the data presented in this study and the experiences of the respondents indicate that children whose parents are not financially well-off are only included in PSE in low numbers. Statements from some of the respondents that PSE should be free of charge for all children, although expressed with the best of intentions, sound almost utopian, given that even the richest European countries have very low numbers of children included in PSE where the parents do not have to pay some sort of fee. Simply put, in our context, it seems that consistent application of the law, which specifically protects the rights of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, would be the most just solution for all the children.

We should also emphasise that parents have to pay for ECEC for younger children in all European countries, except Latvia, Lithuania and Romania; in most of these countries the private (self-financing) sector predominates for this educational group. Parental contribution in the financing of PSE is required for all additional groups of children in Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Iceland, Turkey, and Norway. In addition, most countries offer fee reductions or even exemptions depending on certain criteria. Needs-based criteria are most commonly used, as well as the number of children in the family. Also, in most European countries, the cost of PSE services is different for different educational groups, meaning that, as a rule, fees for younger children are higher, due to the need to have more staff per group for smaller groups of children. Targeted support for families with respect to the reduction in PSE fees is provided also in the form of tax relief, subsidies or vouchers. Fees are not charged for older children in

most European countries for the last year or two of pre-primary education (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:14, 87, 88 and 89).

A similar conclusion can be drawn not only from the opinions of the respondents but also from an analysis of appropriate provisions within the relevant legislation as it relates to the financing of PSE. Therefore, the reason for the overall poor state of PSE should be sought in the failure to adhere to legislation; the arbitrariness of the cantonal authorities, especially with respect to the lack of passing and implementing adequate laws; and the fact that they accept no responsibility whatsoever for this situation. In all cantons, the obligation of different levels of governance in the financing of PSE should be established, as well as ensuring the consistent application of existing laws, and the passing of the relevant laws in those cantons where they do not yet exist. Drawing on the experience of other European countries, the relevant legislation should stipulate the obligation to take family income into account as a criterion in determining the PSE fee to be paid by parents, an idea supported by all the focus group respondents. The criteria should be clear and may not be different in different cantons. In other words, they require the establishment of a scale, with different fees paid by parents, depending on the defined income brackets.

THE APPLICATION OF AND THE ADHERENCE TO PEDAGOGICAL STANDARDS REGARDING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER EDUCATIONAL GROUP AND THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS PER EDUCATIONAL GROUP

In most cantons in the FBiH there are regulations stipulating the maximum number of children per group, as well as the appropriate number of teachers with respect to the type of educational group. For instance, according to the PSE Pedagogical Standards and Rules of SC, children aged 1 to 3 years are

categorised in four educational groups: a) age 6 months to 1 year; b) age 1 – 2 years; c) age 2 – 3 years; c) mixed group (ages 6 months to 3 years). The number of children in these groups is regulated in such a way that for every educational group, depending on the age of the children, there is a set figure for the optimum, minimum, and maximum number of children in a group. The group age 6 months to 1 year would optimally include 12 children (minimum: 10; maximum: 14). The same principle applies in the regulation of the other three educational groups: for children age 1 – 2 years (optimum: 14; minimum: 12; maximum: 18); for children age 2 – 3 years (optimum: 16; minimum: 14; maximum: 18); for mixed group (optimum: 13; minimum: 11; maximum: 17).

Again, the principle applies in the regulation of the number of children older than 3 years in educational groups, this increases progressively as the age of the child increases, in the three scales. The number of children in all educational groups is reduced by two, where a child with developmental difficulties is included. The number of employees per educational group is two (a teacher and a nurse, or two nurses for groups of age 6 months to 3 years, and two teachers for groups older than 3 years for full day's day-care, 10 – 11 hours).²⁰

The perceptions of professionals/respondents in focus groups regarding the number of children in educational groups and accordingly the number of teachers include:

“From 6 months to 3 years – 17 children. Two teachers and a nurse”
(teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

20 See Articles 14 and 15 of the PSE Pedagogical standards and rules of SC.

"...in our institution we have many children with developmental difficulties and we have therefore reduced the number of children by two and enrolled one or two children with developmental difficulties" (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"Children with difficulties are included in a half day's day-care" (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"Depending on the age... where the children are younger, there are 25 of them, and older groups are made up of 27 to 30 children with two teachers" (teacher and coordinator, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

"In the younger nursery group there are 12 children and as they get older it is 16, in the older nursery group the maximum number is 24. The mid-kindergarten group comprises 26, as does the older one. No canton has the same number. I think that in Sarajevo 28 is the maximum number" (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

"...according to the regulation, we have groups of 24 children, and an additional 3 children with special needs. Now you can imagine a day with these children. The problem is that there is one teacher until the second one arrives, then they overlap, and in the afternoon some of these children are still there. Where we have a problem is how to organise it, how to ensure everything's as it should be" (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

"...the nursery can take 12 children. Mixed groups 27, 26" (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Groups of older children 26 to 28” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Two per group. A health worker and a teacher in the nursery” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The quotes show that the number of children younger than 3 years in educational groups in public pre-school institutions varies, ranging from 12 (Zenica) to 25 (Tuzla) children in a group, and for the most, part two teachers and one nurse work with a single group. The situation in groups of children older than 3 years, in terms of their number, is somewhat different, as they include around 26 children. This is especially relevant for the inclusion of children with developmental difficulties, as some pre-school institutions, e.g. in Zenica, do not always adhere to the prescribed criterion for reducing the number of “typical” children if children with developmental difficulties are enrolled in a group. All the focus groups discussions with the professionals and with parents, as seen from the quotes, reveal that a high number of pre-school institutions practice “overlapping” of shifts due to an insufficient number of teachers. This means a period of time, mostly a few hours in the morning, when only one teacher is present to works with a group, and the second member of staff only arrives later in the day – most often around 11 a.m. This happens because teachers employed in public pre-school institutions are officially only able to work six hours per day.

This situation means that, in public pre-school institutions in the FBiH, even in cases where pedagogical standards are fully respected, the number of teachers per nursery group is far lower than in other European countries, as has previously been explained.

Among the European countries, the tightest regulations are applied to infants, for example, in Ireland, Lithuania and Malta, where one staff member is prohibited from looking after more than 3 children under the age of 1 year; in Norway, where the regulations set the maximum number of infants per staff member at nine, excluding the care staff, the overall ration of children per adult is lower. The maximum numbers double when children reach 3 years of age, although in some countries, e.g. Finland and the United Kingdom, the maximum number is still below 10 children per staff member in the year before entering primary education. Except for differences in the number of children per staff member, there are also differences between European countries concerning the maximum number of children in groups, particularly with respect to children younger than 3 years old. This number varies from 5 to 6 children, in e.g. Croatia, to 26 children in Northern Ireland, provided that a staff/child ratio of 1:3 is maintained. In most European countries, these differences in the numbers of younger children in groups almost disappear with the size of groups for 5-year-olds, with the maximum group size usually varying between 20 to 30 children. (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:43), which matches the pedagogical standards for 5-year-old groups in most of the FBiH cantons.

Unlike in public pre-school institutions which, taken as a whole, and most probably due to high demand, do not adhere to the relevant standards for group sizes and the appropriate staffing, the focus group discussions on the situation in private pre-school institutions have revealed the following:

“...every teacher has an assistant to help, from 9 to 10 in all groups where we have children with special needs; in the nursery we have three members of staffs, and for our number of children, we have a pedagogue and a psychologist available” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have to adhere to the rules. We can have up to 15 children, all older than 3 years. And for the babies – there can be 10, but with two staff members, one teacher and one health worker. And here we have 3 groups with 15 children and one teacher each” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“In the nursery, we have three professionals, a health worker and 2 teachers...per 20 children” (nursery teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

These quotes enable us to conclude that private pre-school institutions fully abide by the appropriate pedagogical standards with respect to the number of children in nursery and kindergarten groups, as well as to the professional staff – children ratio for groups; assistants are employed in groups with children with developmental difficulties. Respondents explain this in part by the belief that the appropriate inspectorate is much more rigorous, i.e. insists on the application of standards and rules in private pre-school institutions to a greater degree than in public ones:

“...they apply some regulations to us that relate only to state institutions: in other words, everyone interprets the law however they choose, so we’ve ended up in this system and it was a tougher journey, especially with the inspectorate, but in general, when it comes to the private sector and us, they are rigorous, they performed inspections several times” (pedagogue /psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“They tend to ask for something exceptional in a private institution, exceptional treatment; and the cap on the number of children that resulted from the inspection is a sufficient indication that we are also

complying with the wishes of the parents; more physical space for a smaller number of children so that they can have more freedom to roam” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

The heavy responsibility and the feeling of powerlessness, taken together with the endeavour to provide the best possible care and education to all children in PSE, whilst at the same time respecting the principles of equal rights and the best interests of children, seem to be characteristics of the teaching profession:

“We are used to over-working, more than anyone expects from us, we just want to. I think that all teachers are like that” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

Some of the quotes mention the more rigorous treatment of private pre-school institutions by the competent supervision/inspection services, especially in TC, but according to the focus group discussions, there is a range of problems in the work of PSE institutions with respect to public institutions as well:

“The currently applicable pedagogical standards in Tuzla Canton date from 1999 and, as far as I remember, the Rules of procedure for pre-school education in Tuzla Canton was passed in 2007. The ministry was supposed to pass new pedagogical standards within 6 months of that happening. That never happened... Because these standards, obsolete for some time now and never amended, protect certain employees, especially nurses who have permanent employment contracts, but with fewer and fewer children each year being enrolled in nurseries... we now need 6 not 12 nurses... So, these two things must be changed... Do we want to have slightly

larger groups or do we want to opt for lower standards? If we are to go low, then we have to compromise on something, not just one, maybe even three things... One thing leads to another... to try and save what can be saved, to prevent people from losing their jobs, and somehow reconcile all these aspects" (manager from a pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

The quote comments on a very complex problem, present not only in TC public pre-school institutions ; i.e. the decrease in the number of nursery groups, especially in smaller geographical locations, has led to a surplus in the number of health workers, i.e. nurses. In the specific case mentioned, it seems as if there is a conflict of interest between employees in public pre-school institutions in the city of Tuzla and employees in public pre-school institutions in smaller geographical locations in the canton, where the number of children included in PSE keeps decreasing. This situation, in addition to failure to pass relevant legislation, is characterised by certain contradictions – in the city of Tuzla, there are waiting lists for inclusion in PSE, as the demand is greater than provision, whereas in smaller geographical locations it is vice versa. This is illustrated by the following statement from one of the respondents:

"The problem is that, for pre-school institutions in smaller geographical locations, if the numbers are not adequate this will lead to their closure and they are therefore fierce fighters for the number of attendees. Yes, keep the number as low as possible to save the pre-school institutions... but a compromise must be made which will keep some pre-school institutions operational and will close others; whilst not causing damage to other pre-school institutions that work hard and want to make progress" (manager from a pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

A comparative analysis of Pedagogical standards for pre-school education and orphanages for children of TC from 1999 (hereinafter: PSE Pedagogical standards TC) and PSE Pedagogical standards SC from 2016 has shown that the authorised number of children younger than 3 years, in pre-school groups, in both cantons, is almost identical, with the number of children older than 3 years in pre-school groups in TC somewhat lower than in SC. Given the above, a possible solution could be pursued, which would, however, require additional commitment from the authorities, to find ways of reducing the fees for PSE paid by parents. This would most likely have the effect of increasing the inclusion rates in smaller geographical locations in this canton.

THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Equal access and equal opportunities for all, irrespective of their socio-economic, cultural or linguistic background, differences or difficulties, is the basic principle which must be applied to every individual child and to groups of children with developmental difficulties. Unfortunately, the application of this principle in practice is still a challenge, even in a number of most developed countries, and especially with respect to the early inclusion in PSE of children with developmental difficulties. Even though available data for pre-school institutions in the FBiH shows that only a small number of these children are included in PSE, the goal of the focus groups discussions with professionals was to arrive at relevant indicators, not only concerning the methods of work with this group of children, but also concerning the possibilities for the implementation of certain programmes, and the acceptance of children with developmental difficulties by their peers and parents of their peers:

“In general, these children are well accepted in groups. The biggest problem is the teachers who do not accept them and the parents of other children who think something untoward will happen because that child is there, while the kids themselves are fantastic in accepting them” (non-teaching staff – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think that the most important thing is to win the trust of the child and the parents. That is what we do first, win the trust of parents, then the teachers monitor the child for a while, a speech therapist gets involved and then we call the parents and update them. People see their doctors frequently” (pedagogue/psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“We cannot talk about inclusion when parents often refuse categorisation of their child and then you don’t know how to categorise the child; you don’t have a written document on which you can base your decisions, so you do things your own way, you adjust the programme to the child because he/she is not recognised, and the parents refuse to accept any categorisation” (pedagogue /psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“We don’t have a written document we can give out, so we can’t say to someone that they have special needs, but you can see that they do” (non-teaching staff – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“It is normal for our children, but I can tell you that last year was horrible, both for our staff and children, because they are in the habit of making fun of those with special needs, and the teachers, too,

did not know how to behave toward someone who is different...” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I am fascinated by this assistant, I pray to God some money comes from somewhere to get her involved. We have two children with special needs, Down’s syndrome. The progress of these children is very obvious...because we’ve got the opportunity to work with them. I don’t personally have it. As much as can be done is done” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Quality can be achieved if we have one additional teacher or volunteer in a group of up to 25 children” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Pre-schoolers, 6 year olds, really love helping children with special needs. There are three of them in the group and when they arrived they were accepted and got help from others without any problems. Many parents could not have imagined that... There are many things they learn in kindergartens that they do not learn in the family” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Inclusion can be achieved only if it is legally regulated and if resources are provided, and if the non-governmental organisations are involved; but it must be regulated by law, with a systemic approach, so that all things are clear. It is normal that support is needed, but most of it is provided by non-governmental organisations and that is not good, there must be a systemic solution” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

It is immediately clear from the quotes that the respondents shared their personal experience and opinions about working with children with developmental difficulties, which would indicate that a number of such children are included in the majority of pre-school institutions in the FBiH. The common theme in all these discussions and some possible conclusions are: children with developmental difficulties are entirely accepted by their peers, which is of invaluable importance not only for their socialisation and educational inclusion but also for their psycho-physical growth and development; some resistance in accepting children with developmental difficulties can be found both from parents of “typical” children and from a number of teachers, however, in both cases, with experience, this resistance decreases over time until the children are fully accepted; in accepting children with developmental difficulties in groups with other children, the key thing for parents of “typical” children is the relationship of their child towards children with developmental difficulties and because the “typical” children tend to accept them at the first encounter, the bias that the parents might have gradually disappears.

The degree of resistance shown by a number of professionals, as is illustrated by the focus group discussions and the quotes, can be explained in at least two ways: insufficient trust and a lack of necessary shared understanding between the teacher and the parents of a child with developmental difficulties – especially when the difficulties have not yet been medically diagnosed – can lead parents to refuse to accept advice, which would be in the best interest of the child, from the professionals, e.g. to take the child for an examination or consultations with a relevant expert. The refusal of parents to accept advice can create a gap between them and the teacher which may widen in certain cases; this, in turn, can result in further complicating of the situation for the child. The second cause of the resistance shown by teachers, which does not relate to any intolerance

towards a child with developmental difficulties, is, on the one hand, the excessive responsibility placed on the teacher and the fact that they often have to work without an assistant or volunteer, and on the other hand, lack of professional development training to work with this demographic. The quotes support this, as the respondents emphasise that the assistants, even when engaged for a short time, provide a great deal of support and relief to the teachers.

The focus group discussions indicated another problem: the need for the governmental and non-governmental sectors to connect with each other and to co-operate to achieve a greater degree of social and educational inclusion for children with developmental difficulties. This is because the focus of the activity of the teachers with children younger than 3 years is care of the child, his/her physical development and understanding of the world, whereas, at this age, less attention is paid to the personal, emotional and social development. Despite the fact that monitoring the child's progress and achievements and recognising the child's needs and possible difficulties is one of the obligations of teachers, practice shows that developmental difficulties are in most cases discovered only at pre-school age or after primary school enrolment.

THE ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Pre-school institutions in the FBiH implement different educational programmes for children of all ages. The Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education has passed the Guidelines for the implementation of the common core curriculum, based on learning outcomes, as was explained previously.

According to the Framework Law, all 10 cantons autonomously develop and define the types of educational programmes applied in the pre-school institutions in line with their own cantonal PSE provisions. The focus group discussions on the quality of and possibilities for the implementation of such programmes revealed the following attitudes:

“The problem generally present in both the public and private sector is that nobody has undertaken either quantitative or qualitative analyses of the programmes. There are educational and pedagogical institutes but they are just the inspectors. You do not have an analysis which tells us that “Djeca Sarajeva” achieves 85 % of quality, “Sveta obitelj” achieves...” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“If it were not for the quality of our work, the parents wouldn’t keep coming back, they would take their child’s hand and go looking for something else” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We work under an integral development programme. It is a programme which is a legal obligation set out by the Ministry of Education. For some time now, we have been working on a common programme, in terms of thematic planning, we develop it week by week... The programme is thus comprehensive in scope so that it can be used in many different ways” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“For the fee that people pay, the programme is a quality one. In addition to the basic programme, we also have additional ones, such as English, the little school... I think that the programme has quality and variety...” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“In assessing programme quality, we need to start with the quality of the staff... We used to have a specialist secondary school for teachers with subjects such as accordion. I graduated from that secondary school. Now we have universities, and the graduate teachers cannot play a single instrument. It is this huge gap which causes the lack of quality in pre-school education. We do not teach acting or singing; you get teachers who cannot sing or act, who do not know how to be a child again, what qualities they have to offer the children” (pedagogue/psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla)

Given that the focus group discussions exclusively addressed the quality of pre-school programmes without addressing any of the individual types of programmes implemented in pre-school institutions, the statements show that it is a shared opinion that pre-school staff try to implement the tasks set out in different programmes to the greatest possible extent. Furthermore, respondents in particular emphasised the implementation of the integral development programme. The majority of respondents think that the quality of implementation of programme units is at a satisfactory level, given that it depends almost exclusively on professional competencies and knowledge of the staff, which. This is surprising because owing to recent higher education policy, such competencies and knowledge are in fact decreasing among graduates, as are certain skills. The discussions also raised the question of inadequate recognition being afforded to PSE staff:

“I do not think appropriate recognition is attributed to how much we give ourselves to the work, how much effort we invest and to all the things we do. I don't think it is sufficiently valued” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“I think the society also fails to value our work because you get a 5 year old telling you ‘my mum paid for it’” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

Once again, the perception of respondents concerning the awareness of society, including some parents, about the importance of PSE for the child, is not underdeveloped, and therefore, the work of staff in this area is not appropriately socially recognised or adequately remunerated. This results in a decrease in numbers of young people deciding to work with children, especially of pre-school age, and in the numbers of those opting to become professional teachers. We should re-emphasise the need to introduce dual education, as well as the need to amend the curricula at higher education institutions so that subjects relating to teacher training include expert practitioners and parents of children attending PSE, which recommendations form parts of the conclusions of the focus group discussions.

THE ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS REGARDING THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF A UNITARY PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Today, in most European countries, a split exists in the PSE system arising from the principle that PSE services should be delivered in separate settings for younger and older children. The transition from one setting to the next takes place when the children are around 3 years old, but it can be at 2 years old or as late as 4 years old in some countries. The division reflects a split between ‘childcare’ services, with provision in some form of non-school centre, and ‘early education’ services, where provision is sometimes based in the same buildings as primary schools (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:33).

In contrast to this, in BiH, as is the case in most countries of the region, the provision of PSE takes place in a unitary system for children of all ages. The exception is the compulsory PSE programme for children in the year preceding primary school, which, according to existing cantonal legislation, also takes place in primary schools. This is also the practice of some European countries that also have the unitary PSE system, such as Latvia, Lithuania and Finland (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:34).

The focus group discussions regarding the advantages and /or disadvantages of the existing organisation of PSE in the FBiH and the possible need for changes have revealed the following:

“We form groups according to age and we have children of different ages in one kindergarten. We have mixed groups of different ages, and we also have age specific groups... I think that is OK” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have a medium mixed group, that is how our programme is organised, younger children are more curious and imaginative when around older children, and the older ones are more empathetic and careful with the youngsters, it works perfectly” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I used to work in a kindergarten with the mixed group; I had children who were 2 years old, or 2 to 6, but working with them was fantastic. The older children always took care of the younger ones, it was really great, like in a family home” (teacher and coordinator, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I think that applying age categories 1 to 3 years old and 3 to 6 years old in an institution is of more use to the children, it ensures better quality” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“It is positive because of the interaction. That’s how children learn from each other” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The respondents shared the opinion that a uniform system of PSE is in the best interest of the child. The reason for this can be found in the opportunity to form different educational groups, especially those comprising a mixture of children of older and younger age which also includes the so-called mixed groups.

Based on their everyday experiences, the respondents shared the following views about the educational level and professional categories of care staff, especially child health protection and advancement:

“Given that we work with ages 6 months to 3 years, these children need extra care, either a combination of nurses and teachers work with them or only nurses, whereas older groups only have teachers” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I am more in favour of having both a nurse and a teacher for the younger group – the 1 to 3 year olds...” (pedagogue /psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla)

“I think that all teachers need the same level of education, irrespective of whether they work with nursery or kindergarten groups” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Yes, but nurses can also work in nurseries” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

The quotes, as well as the four focus group discussions, indicate a unified opinion on the part of the respondents that all pre-school staff should have “the same level of education”, i.e. a university degree. Yet, according to the provisions of the Framework Law (see Article 29(2)), nurses, whose job is to care for and protect and improve the health of children ages 6 months to primary school age can have a university degree, two-year college degree or completion of secondary medical school.

Compared with the practices in other European countries, that, in institutions for younger children, mostly employ staff with a completed secondary education, BiH, according to the data from the Eurydice and Eurostat report, belongs to a handful of European countries that have the same staff categories working with all children in PSE. This is especially true when we take into account that, according to Eurydice and Eurostat report, staff employed in pre-school institutions in the majority of European countries can be grouped into the following three categories:

- **Educational staff:** teachers (pre-primary, pre-school, kindergarten) / pedagogues/educators

These staff usually have a tertiary qualification in education; they have the main responsibility for the education and care of a group of children in an ECEC setting. Their duties usually include designing and delivering safe and developmentally appropriate activities in accordance with all relevant programmes/curricula. They provide opportunities for creative expression through art, drama, play and music. In some countries, two different titles are used to distinguish between similar staff working in

different settings: 'educators' is often the term used for those working with the younger educational group in day-care settings, while the term 'teachers' is used in pre-primary settings.

- **Care staff:** childminders/childcare workers/child carers/nursery nurses and/or nurses are responsible for providing care and support to children.

In most countries, childcare workers are trained at upper secondary level, and the role of care staff is linked with two main models: they work independently for younger children only, or they develop and deliver learning activities and may be supported by auxiliary staff or assistants. They can also work in a team with educational staff, where they tend to provide support.

- **Assistant/auxiliary staff:** individuals who support educational or care staff.

In almost half of European countries, ECEC institutions may employ auxiliary staff/assistants to provide support to qualified education and care staff, both in settings for younger and older children. In some countries, the minimum level of initial qualification required is also upper secondary, whereas in others, no formal qualification is needed. Assistants usually implement activity programmes designed for children, prepare craft materials and assist children to use them. They may also arrange daily schedules and guide children in their activities. In a few countries, such as the Czech Republic and Spain, assistants are available only in settings for younger children, or only to support educational staff working with older children, e.g. Ireland and Slovakia (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:95 and 96). The presented classification, applied differently in practice depending on the type of work, ages of children

and PSE organisation (non-unitary of unitary), taken in its entirety, corresponds to a great extent to the classification of staff categories in PSE institutions in the FBiH.

COMPETENCIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The competency of staff working in pre-school institutions is a necessary pre-requisite for the quality implementation of care and education programmes. The provision of continuous professional development of teachers and other PSE experts is an obligation of the competent authorities as stipulated in the relevant legislation of the FBiH. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness that life-long learning forms a basis of the quality of work, which always must be in the best interest of the child. This awareness is shared by the various expert categories of those working in the upbringing of children, and their care and education. The focus group discussions included the following statements:

“...we all know that learning is a lifelong activity; we cannot just graduate from university and that’s it, we have to develop continuously. I think that funds allocated for trainings are insufficient. Individually we each have some sort of professional development plan, but there are also group programmes, seminars and the like. However, we have over 200 teachers so it is very hard to ensure that all of them get some kind of training each year” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Three to four times a year we have organised trainings for all staff members and the lecturers are really interesting” (deputy director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We are talking about legal obligations which apply to all kindergartens. Individual professional development, group professional development, seminars, trainings, even this group tonight is a form of development. There is the Agency for Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education and they often organise trainings” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There are differences between public and private institutions; public institutions have more opportunities for additional trainings. Private sector staff take part in those trainings on their own initiative. It would be great to have such a development opportunity at least once every four months. And other types of trainings are a matter of personal choice” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“They often forget us” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“We attend everything” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I am not satisfied. I am not satisfied either with the professional development services provided by with how they are presented to us. Usually, these are lectures, we sit, listen and take notes” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The common theme in all these statements, which reflects the discussion in focus groups, is that all respondents are aware of the need for continuous professional development, that enables them to acquire new knowledge and to keep abreast of contemporary practices in working with children. The quotes indicate that different educational seminars are organised by the competent ministries for teachers and PSE experts, as well as trainings within individual institutions. It seems that private institutions have fewer organised trainings than are available to the staff of public institutions, most often because the organisers “forget” them, as one respondent put it. However, irrespective of the gaps indicated, we can say in general that all pre-school staff are, in addition to formal education and completion of appropriate studies, more or less involved in different forms of continuous professional development (trainings, lectures, projects) mostly organised by APOSO, the pedagogical institutes, and the Association of Employees of Pre-school Institutions. The focus group discussions showed divided opinions of with regard to quality, especially of the professional development available to groups. A conclusion reached was that public pre-school institutions with many employees find it difficult to provide all of them with even a minimum continued professional development training in the course of a year. In addition to the dissatisfaction expressed with regard to the quality, organisation and frequency of mandatory training, a number of respondents emphasised the problems encountered regarding opportunities to participate in national and international conferences, despite the fact that such conferences would meet the need both for sharing personal experience and acquiring new theoretical knowledge in the field of PSE. One of the key obstacles to accessing and participating in such events is the availability of funding:

“Whatever you would like to attend, there is a fee and you are free to choose” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

The statement clearly speaks not only of the requirement of PSE professionals to take part in scientific and professional events and share their knowledge and experience, but also the need to enrich and supplement these. In support of that, the majority of respondents said that organised training should be more frequent, e.g. on a quarterly basis, and open to all staff – experts working with children and directly taking care of their upbringing and teachers. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents think that the quality professional development is reasonably satisfactory, a number of them expressed dissatisfaction with the methodology used in training; for instance, “through lectures” with little interactive work.

The discussion regarding opportunities and needs for continued professional development of staff, with the goal of increasing their professional competencies, once again gave rise to the comment on the competencies and training of graduate students, interns and volunteers, especially young teachers, as can be seen in the following statements:

“I am not worried about the staff we already employ, I am worried about what Bologna produces...this mass production of diplomas that are not based in knowledge. The young colleagues that we see...it is sad. First and foremost, they have too high an opinion of themselves but they lack expertise, and a sense of vocation” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“They know nothing. Literally, things are going from bad to worse. Activities are going on in the nursery, and they keep looking at their watches or mobile phones. They are not motivated” (nursery teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar)

“We are thrilled when a graduate social worker comes to be a temporary teacher, they work so wholeheartedly. You can see they don’t know the methods and have no practice but they ask, they try. Whenever a trained teacher comes, it’s a disappointment. Whether it’s the fault of their education, I can’t say. There is an attitudinal lack and a lack of knowledge” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I would like to add that they should not be educated to change nappies. This is what we get from a university education these days... I ask new graduates what instrument they play - none... I ask them what is the most creative aspect of their work – nothing. When they read a story – a flat delivery. I am disappointed with this new generation. I will ask the minister to exempt us – I do not want to employ a pre-school teacher, I have the right to say no, I do not want to employ anyone who does not meet my standards. They have nothing to give” (director, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“I sometimes joke that there is a university in a supermarket in Tuzla from which you can graduate. You pay for the diploma and in a few months, you become a pre-school teacher. Then hopefully, you never get a job. Because, education-wise, these teachers debilitate generations of children who are already debilitated. With honourable exceptions, there are great many young women, unfortunately, the majority of them do not meet my criteria for working in a pre-school institution” (manager from pedagogical background, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“There was a suggestion to the Faculty of Pedagogy that they should introduce a system for their students to volunteer in our

institution...for them to come every day. But the problem is that for some reason they do not want to" (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

These statements mostly refer to the current quality of higher education in the FBiH. They confirm the need, increasingly discussed in BiH, to introduce the dual education system which is a key pre-requisite for ensuring the future professional competencies of teachers – teaching being an occupation which is in decline not only in BiH but in the majority European countries.

We also need to take into consideration the fact that in every activity or profession, there are always some people, we believe a minority within the profession, of those who are not motivated, have no desire or talent to perform the work for which they have been educated. It seems that in such cases, the legal possibility of engaging assistants and interns provides an opportunity for pre-school institutions to select the people they feel are most suitable.

CO-OPERATING WITH AND INCLUDING PARENTS IN PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

Including parents in pre-school education programmes and in the work of pre-school institutions is of great importance. Co-operation between parents and staff contributes to the development and learning of the children. In accordance with Article 23 (d) of the Framework Law, the cantonal laws stipulate that special parent skill-strengthening programmes should be available, most often enacted by the competent minister. In addition to their educational and informational content, the programmes primarily serve to

strengthen the awareness of parents about their role in the upbringing of their child; the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the quality and timely meeting of their needs; the protection and improvement of their health; the protection of their rights; the rehabilitation and integration of children with developmental difficulties, etc. (see Article 30 of the SC Law on PSE).

The teachers have an obligation to remain in continuous contact with every individual parent and to lead communication, information exchange and to create the pre-conditions for parents to participate in the education of their children as far as possible. This also includes advice on the need for the child to continue learning in the family home. The focus group discussions on the co-operation of parents with pre-school institutions and the possibilities for parents to be included in different programmes produced the following statements:

“We are not able to work unless the parents are our partners. We must apply consistent methods, but I have to say that there are parents who never attend parents’ meetings... Other ways of cooperation include the Parent’s Corner where they can get information about the activities, news, but there are those who never read anything. It depends on the parent” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have workshops that parents attend and engage in activities with their children. Then there are days when parents can come to our premises and spend time with children. During the holidays, we invite grandparents to spend time with children” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Twice a year we have events with parents on Saturdays, we offer them lunch, and then there are games in the courtyard. They really enjoy it and always ask about when the next time will be” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have very little time for them” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“There is a necessary triangle – teacher, child, parent. It is an ever-present pattern” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

We see that all pre-school institutions have a partnership and continuous co-operation between staff and parents. The most common forms of co-operation are informal information sharing meetings between teachers and parents and group parental meetings. In this process, the parents are continuously informed about the progress and development of their child, starting from the child’s eating behaviour up to and including the child’s attitude to the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Also, in these meetings, the parents receive advice with respect to parental support for education and learning at home, especially for older children. The focus group discussions did not reveal whether parent skill-strengthening programmes are being implemented in practice – their implementation depends on the competent ministry and is most probably subject to available funding. Available data points to the conclusion that, in their internal regulations, the majority of pre-school institutions stipulate the founding of parent councils in order to include parents in their work. Where such councils have been established, in addition to promoting the interest of the pre-school institution in the community, they take part in institutional management e.g. by nominating parents as management board members. They also work on the development of communication and the interpersonal relations between children,

teachers, parents and the community through different projects which they develop and implement (see Article 51 of the SC Law on PSE).

THE PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONALS WITH REGARD TO THE IMPACT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION ON CHILDREN FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

Despite the ongoing risk of possible social exclusion, the children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the FBiH included in PSE remain few in number. Therefore, working with these children requires not only the introduction of special measures for additional training, but also the employment of additional persons in pre-school institutions – which rarely happens in practice, due to lack of funding. The rare pre-school institutions which are trying to implement intervention, compensation and rehabilitation programmes are financed mostly by international organisations, such as the programme run “Djeca Sarajeva” public pre-school institution for children living in suburban and rural areas, called Kindergarten on Wheels, financed by the Swiss Caritas.

The focus group discussions on the impact of PSE on children from disadvantaged backgrounds produced very different opinions on the part of the respondents:

“It is not just about the economic factor. There are families where parents are divorced, ill, addicts. It is really necessary that children from such environments attend pre-school institutions and have the same conditions available to them as to other children. They need kindergarten as a place where they can experience a mature social environment, where they can socialise...and even when it

has nothing to do with the ability of the parents to pay, when it is about parents not wanting to include their child" (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"Parents very often say – here he is, you raise him" (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"They do not socialise, they don't spend time with other children... they cannot play or share" (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

"Attending pre-school for these children has a very positive impact on them, being part of a group will not make them feel poorer than others, they are all equal" (teacher and coordinator, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

"If a child has any problems, they are easier to overcome in the kindergarten. We have had children enrolled, for instance, when their mother has died and it is much easier for them to cope. It's a different thing being at home, being exposed to all of that. After a few months in kindergarten, the child is completely transformed" (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

"We get many parents who take loans to pay for kindergarten because they want their children to be in a healthy environment. Children do not see that difference but it is very important that we are one community, that they never feel neglected because children should never feel their poverty" (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

These quotes comment on the need to have improved provision and if possible early inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in pre-school institutions. The experience of the respondents shows that teachers treat children from disadvantaged backgrounds much as they do “typical” children, without any specific individual approach, but with close monitoring of their progress, especially their emotional and social development. The results achieved in socialisation through play and time spent with their peers, as well as the knowledge and skills gained, pro-social behaviour etc., are of immeasurable importance for the future of the children, but also for the majority of their parents. This is confirmed by the statement of one respondent that many parents “take loans to pay for kindergarten.” Simply put, it can be concluded that for the majority of disadvantaged children, early inclusion in PSE is the only chance to prepare them adequately for the start of school. However, it is unlikely that this can be achieved exclusively by compulsory inclusion in PSE in the year preceding primary school, due to the insufficient number of hours legally allocated for it.

THE ATTITUDES OF THE PROFESSIONALS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION ON THE FUTURE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF CHILDREN

Different studies show that children who have been included in PSE from the earliest age perform better in school and are more successful in the future as a result of the long-term positive effects of quality pre-school programmes on cognitive development, including verbal skills and scientific thought, as well as non-cognitive skills, such as social behaviour and autonomy (Vandekerckhove, A et al. 2013:18). The results of research conducted in 28 EU member states show: “students who attended ECEC outperformed those who did not by 35 points – the equivalent of almost one full year

of formal schooling” (Eurydice and Eurostat, 2014:13). The same source provides that evidence from PIRLS 2011 indicates that children who have spent longer periods in ECEC are better prepared to enter and succeed in primary education, where the longer a child spends in ECEC, the better their reading results (2014:13).

The focus group discussions have revealed the following:

“Primary school teachers say that they notice that children are more socialised, more prepared for separation from parents, unlike children who have never attended any pre-school institution” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We get feedback from the school next to us, both pedagogues and teachers there keep saying that they immediately recognise our children. Their self-confidence, communication and behavioural culture, taken together, is really recognisable” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“Socialisation to start with, that’s number one, then comes the learning” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“They find it easier to accept school and school assignments” (non-teaching expert – speech therapist, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“The feedback from school is that children who have attended kindergarten perform better than children who haven’t, at least in the first grade. That is most probably why the preparatory programme

of 180 hours was introduced” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Children with pre-school education have more knowledge, general knowledge, and are better prepared for school than children who have not attended pre-school education. Then comes the socialisation. However, there is no data as to further achievements in education and life” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Mostar).

“Primary school teachers are quite afraid of children from kindergartens in the first grade as they confound the teachers’ expectations with the knowledge and socialisation abilities they acquired in kindergartens. Some problems occur in the first semester, I think, until they get used to the school system” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Problems can also arise. We had a problem with one school as one of their classes had 16 of our children, and only a few others. The children from kindergarten were better socialised, they had the confidence to move and to speak, and the teacher did not find this in line with the plan and programme she had in mind. Then the school concluded that in the future they won’t put all kindergarten kids in one class, but five in each so that the school system is not disrupted” (pedagogue /psychologist, private pre-school institution, Tuzla).

Despite the fact that BiH does not yet have relevant comparative research and data on the school performance of children in PSE and their peers who have not attended PSE, it can be concluded from the quotes that respondents have indirect/informal insight and that they identify indicators, especially on the behaviour and flexibility of children in school settings who

have been through PSE. Their insights indicate that children who attended PSE have a higher level of knowledge and perform better in the first grade. The statements of some respondents are remarkable: children included in PSE, due to their knowledge and capabilities, distort the dynamics of school programmes, which are most probably planned for and adjusted to children who have not acquired the knowledge and skills that have been acquired by children included in PSE. Given that similar views have been expressed in the focus groups with parents, the opinion of some respondents – that the introduction of compulsory PSE in the year preceding school will alleviate this problem – may be justified.

THE ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS THE COMPULSORY INCLUSION OF CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE YEAR PRECEDING PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT

Free-of-charge access to PSE is of great importance for all children, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, at the risk of poor performance in school or possibly in need of additional support to be able to realise their full potential. The awareness of its importance is growing in BiH society, as is specifically seen in the Framework Law which regulates the compulsory inclusion of all pre-school age children in the PSE programme in the year preceding their primary school enrolment (Article 16 (1)). Article 16 (2) of the Framework Law stipulates that: “The conditions and ways of funding, curricula and duration of pre-school care and education, shall be regulated by a relevant law passed by Competent Educational Bodies”, which in the FBiH means the passing of cantonal PSE laws. Regardless of the Framework Law having been adopted more than 10 years ago, the results of its implementation show that some cantons still have not adopted the respective laws, as was previously elaborated. The focus group discussions have revealed:

“We don’t even have clear legislation on the compulsory year before school... Studies show that 300 to 600 hours of work would have some impact... while we’re just hoping our legislation will provide at least 150. It really is a problem in our case. The ministry is of the opinion that it should be done in schools with school teachers, but pre-school staff insist that that is inappropriate. The schools are just don’t have the capacity” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“180 hours of compulsory pre-school education is insufficient. The children are somehow distant, it is very difficult to draw them in. They connect with the teacher, we really don’t have a problem with them, they open up very soon... That first month, when the 180 hours pass, in the last 15 days when parents start counting the days until the end, that is when they adapt. That is when they start playing and there are tears and everything. When the programme is completed, they come back in two or three days wishing to return, they say they miss it so much. Because they have realised what kindergarten means with its friendship and socialising” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

The quotes from the focus group discussions concerning the compulsory inclusion of children in PSE in the year preceding primary school almost entirely correspond to the discussions in the focus groups with parents – both parents and professionals expressed their full support for this programme. The discussions also indicated that in different cantons the programmes are differently implemented or not implemented at all; that the time-frames are different, as well as the number of hours and the types of institutional setting. The majority of respondents think that compulsory PSE programmes should be implemented exclusively in pre-school institutions, explaining that

only pre-school staff are qualified and have the relevant experience to work with pre-school age children and that they are the best placed people to implement the programme.

THE ATTITUDES OF PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS THE EMPLOYMENT OF A GREATER NUMBER OF MALE TEACHERS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In BiH, as is the case in most European countries, women mostly opt for educational employment and/or work in the so-called helping professions, which are remunerated and valued less highly, although their role is of utmost importance for every society. One such profession is the pre-school teacher, whose irreplaceable role in PSE is important both for the youngest in the population, and also for their parents/families and society in its entirety. Therefore, it can be said of PSE that, as well as the teachers, all other types of tasks – from the simplest ones, like the hygiene, preparation and serving of food, to organisationally the most responsible roles, such as leadership positions – e.g. institutional manager, are performed by women. The focus group discussions on the preference of women for the teaching profession and opportunities for the involvement of greater number of male teachers in PSE, led to the following statements:

“I think that the involvement of male teachers adds quality to the upbringing of children. Every child knows of a mother and a father, both a woman and a man, and we have both boys and girls in our groups. I think it would be a very good thing” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“It really would be good to change this practice a bit” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We have two men. The children really love them” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Any change is welcome to a child. They act differently. It is a normal thing for me” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“We now have two male volunteers, it is not a bad thing, a different tone of voice, children react differently to them. The parents are also not unhappy about this” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

Although the statements reveal that a number of respondents think it is useful for and in the interest of children in PSE to have a greater number of male teachers employed in pre-school institutions, there are those, among them, who, in principle, support the employment of a greater number of male teachers, who still have concerns and have expressed a certain bias:

“When it comes to early age children, the physical care is most important. A man cannot change them, wipe or wash them. It is fine with older children, but none of our three men worked with the groups of children younger than 5 or 6 years old, because you see that different things can happen” (director, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“We also had a situation where parents asked us never to leave the children alone with those volunteers and never to allow them

into sleeping areas, and such things” (deputy director and teacher, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“I think that the care for children is crucial. It is one thing to just sit and teach a child something. But if someone needs a nose wiping, that’s different, women have that innate reaction. I still feel that only women are expected to do that in our society. Therefore, I agree that men just don’t picture themselves doing this work” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“In these times, it’s a bit... Imagine a male teacher taking a child on his lap, a girl. You know, all sorts of things happen. It is tricky. Maybe it used to be about traditional views, but nowadays it’s more for these reasons” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

Each quote speaks for itself, but the common thread through them all is the evidence of personal bias and the influence of traditional attitudes towards upbringing that have led to gender inequality and a division of jobs into “male” and “female” categories, something that the majority of the adult population in BiH endorses. Most of the respondents thus exhibit the prevailing view that employment of a greater number of male teachers would be in the interests, in particular, of older children, while working with nursery-age children should remain the “privilege” of female teachers. Men rarely opt for the profession of pre-school teacher, probably because they see it as women’s work, as the experience of the respondents confirms:

“I think it is a nice thing, we have various projects involving men but they don’t see themselves in this profession....” (director, public pre-school institution, Zenica).

“In this traditional division of occupations, there are the more important ones, and it seems that care and education are not seen as so important, not intellectually challenging enough to attract men” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“In my primary school there were more male teachers than female. Nobody felt that difference, between men and women. But now I am aware that there was not a single man during my teacher training” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

Even though these quotes reflect the personal attitudes of respondents, they indicate convincingly the likely reasons for the fact that men rarely decide to train for the profession of pre-school teacher.

THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INTRODUCTION OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION AT HOME

The option of providing PSE at home is regulated in the majority of European countries, but the legislation also stipulates additional standards and criteria that are required, for instance related to health, safety, nutrition, etc. as pre-requisites for the overall safety of the child and the quality of service.

From the exhaustive and comprehensive focus group discussions undertaken about the need to introduce regulated PSE services at home, we present the following opinions:

“I don’t think it is a good idea and it should not be incorporated. They would be like lone wolves” (director, private pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“It should be organised in such a way that people who want to work in family homes are brought under the auspices of kindergartens, or classrooms, as assistants” (teacher, public pre-school institution, Sarajevo).

“If we don’t have enough capacity, it wouldn’t be a bad idea... let’s say in this situation, when we have many children on waiting lists and can foresee that that number will increase – maybe it would be better to have an educated person working with five or six of them instead of them waiting for years to be enrolled” (non-teaching expert – special needs, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“Maybe for the nursery age. For older children, socialisation in a larger group is needed” (non-teaching expert – speech therapist, public pre-school institution, Tuzla).

“It would create opportunities for manipulation and I don’t think it would be really good for the children. The children would lose out. I don’t think it would be a good thing and I wouldn’t support it” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“Only if they had supervision like we do and experts working with the children” (teacher, private pre-school institution, Zenica).

“We have child-minder education provided at the social welfare education centre. We had an intern as an assistant. It is an occupation that could have been recorded in the employment card only under a single act. However, given that the Law on Education has not been passed, we are nowhere near that situation” (director, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

“I think it is a good solution for a single parent. If a woman has an exam and has nowhere to take the child or if she has to work afternoons or evenings. Shopping malls are open late and imagine she applies for some job. Maybe it is not a bad idea. Another positive thing in my view is that groups are small. The teachers can focus better and can better adapt to the children, the patterns of behaviour” (pedagogue, public pre-school institution, Mostar).

The statements and the focus group discussions show that the respondents have a variety of opinions; a number of them think that the provision of PSE in family homes is not in the best interest of the child. However, the majority of respondents who support this proposal take into account the existing situation, in which the demand for PSE services is greater than its provision. They also think that this type of PSE should only include children younger than 3 years old. Furthermore, all the respondents think staff working in family homes must be required to have the same qualifications the education as the staff in pre-school institutions.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS BOTH WITH PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

A comparative analysis of the attitudes and perceptions expressed by the respondents in the focus group discussions with parents and pre-school professionals on the same issues has led to the following:

THE RESPONDENTS EXPRESSED THE SAME ATTITUDES/PERCEPTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- The focus group respondents expressed the almost unanimous opinion that the fees paid by parents in public pre-school institutions correspond to a realistic assessment of the financial ability of the parents to pay, although the amount varies slightly from canton to canton, depending on the level of development and of the financial health of local communities within the cantons.
- Both focus groups – with parents and professionals – expressed similar attitudes concerning the lack of adherence to pedagogical standards and rules, especially as related to the composition of educational groups, when they include children with developmental difficulties in the same groups with “typical” children; insufficient numbers of teachers, primarily in public pre-school institutions; and the necessity to have mandatory inclusion of assistants and volunteers when working with children with developmental difficulties.
- All the respondents, in both focus groups, expressed positive views on the effect of PSE on children from disadvantaged backgrounds, underlining their socialisation; the acquisition of new knowledge; the learning of pro-social behaviour etc. Also, all the respondents had a positive attitude towards the compulsory (free-of-charge) inclusion of all children in PSE in the year preceding school. There was also agreement that, to avoid discrimination and ensure equal access for all children, the number of compulsory hours should be increased and that increase should be the same in all cantons. Participants from both the focus groups were

of the opinion that the compulsory programme should be implemented in pre-school institutions only.

- The majority (marginally greater than 50%) of respondents in both the focus groups thought that PSE should employ a greater number of male teachers, but that they should work exclusively with educational groups that teaching the older cohorts of children.
- The majority (marginally greater than 50%) of respondents in both the focus groups supported the idea of regulating the provision of PSE services in family homes, reserving it exclusively for children younger than 3 years old, provided that the staff/child minders are as equally qualified and educated as the teachers in pre-school institutions.

THE RESPONDENTS EXPRESSED VARYING ATTITUDES/PERCEPTIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE FOLLOWING ISSUES:

- The majority of respondents/parents in the four focus groups think that the quality of educational programmes implemented in pre-school institutions are at a satisfactory level, however, it can be concluded from their opinions that they know little about the types of programmes and little about the obligation to implement them.

The focus group discussions with the professionals revealed an almost unanimous view on the part of the respondents that the quality and implementation of educational programmes, which were generally assessed as acceptable, depend on the professional competency of staff and the number

of staff employed in pre-school institutions, which have not been at an appropriate level in any pre-school institution in the FBiH over recent years.

- The majority of parents/respondents in the focus group discussions shared the view that professional competency, level of education, as well as the professional development opportunities available to staff in pre-school institutions, particularly teachers, is at a satisfactory level.

Unlike parents, the focus group discussions with professionals showed that they have diverging views on the above aspects, especially with regard to professional development opportunities. The majority of the respondents think that organised forms of mandatory training are not always satisfactory: especially in terms of the method that lecturers use most often, which offers little opportunity for interaction; their frequency; participation opportunities for all staff, especially in public pre-school institutions; unequal treatment of public and private institutions, etc. Respondents almost entirely agreed, however, that newly recruited professionals in PSE, particularly teachers, in general, do not graduate having acquired the relevant professional competency and knowledge, such as being able to play an instrument, which indicates that the curricula in higher education institutions are not compatible with the actual tasks and duties of future professionals.

The attitudes seen here (whether differing, or in agreement) of the focus group respondents – parents and professionals – also reveal the attitude of society towards PSE. This can best be seen in the attitudes regarding the fees paid by parents for PSE services. The fact that parents find the fee for PSE services acceptable, especially in public pre-school institutions, shows an awareness on the part of parents regarding the importance and the positive impact of PSE on children. It also shows that these are probably parents whose financial status and family budget are able to accommodate

these types of costs, without a huge impact on or negative consequences for the family.

Unlike the parents, it seems that the professionals, especially those working in public pre-school institutions, who also accept the rationale behind the fees paid by parents as users of service, take into account the overall poverty in the society and the fact that public pre-school institutions are mostly financed by the competent authorities, which means minimum social security for the staff, irrespective of their personal salaries. This is especially so in the public pre-school institutions in small communities, particularly in situations where the number of children in PSE is decreasing, primarily due to the unemployment of the parents and where the numbers of staff remain unchanged. Therefore, the situation as outlined gives rise to the conclusion that, under these circumstances, pre-school staff (both in the public and private sectors) see a sort of solution and security in the implementation of the compulsory PSE programmes in the year preceding school. All the respondents (both parents and professionals) agreed that this programme should be implemented by pre-school institutions alone.

Some parents, whose children are included in PSE programmes in private institutions find the fee that they have to pay acceptable, although they are dissatisfied with the absence of other options, primarily due to the lack of capacity in public pre-school institutions. Unlike them, those parents who decided to enrol their child in a private pre-school institution owing to the finances available to them, strongly believe that it is the best solution for their child.

The fear of an insufficient number of enrolled children, conditioned especially by the fact that private pre-school institutions are mostly financed by the fees paid by the parents, puts a number of institutions in a situation

whereby they have to struggle constantly to align their fees, as far as is possible, to the fees in public pre-school institutions. This is the only way for them to survive. A number of private pre-school institutions have very high fees, making them accessible only to a small number of users, which creates a form of elitism and unequal privilege, not only between parents but between children as well.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The main goal of the research entitled *The Role of Pre-school Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities for All Children* was to analyse and draw conclusions on the accessibility of PSE for all children in the FBiH, which is a key pre-requisite for equal opportunities. The research study analyses the existing situation regarding PSE in the FBiH; presents the key statistical indicators and qualitative research results; undertakes a comparative analysis of international policies and the rights of the child in international documents and national PSE legislation; together with a comparative analysis of data received with data from other, especially international research. Based on all the research efforts undertaken to meet this goal, the following conclusions have been formulated:

- The main conclusion of the research is that, due to the low levels of inclusion in PSE, not all children younger than 6 years old in the territory of the FBiH are provided with equal opportunity, especially as it impacts on their future performance in school and life.
- The importance of PSE, which has been stressed throughout the study, and which is proven and explained in scientific and expert literature, especially with respect to its pedagogical, social and economic function, is increasingly being emphasised in numerous national documents and laws which are, for the most part, harmonised with various international human rights standards, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The many laws, acts, and different regulations adopted in the ten cantons of the FBiH make equal access and treatment of children in this field more difficult, despite efforts to harmonise them, as far as is possible,

through the adoption of the Framework Law. As well as this, not all cantonal authorities have passed the PSE laws or harmonised their existing laws with the Framework Law. This results in the impedance and/or the disregard of the importance of the development of PSE.

- The practical implementation of the legislative provisions, i.e. the inclusion of children in pre-school institutions in the FBiH, does not harness the potential of PSE to improve the conditions for a good start in life for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, although they achieve a much higher return rate on an early investment in early care and education.
- PSE services in the FBiH are mostly used by children from well-off families in which both parents work (which is one of the criteria for inclusion in PSE, e.g. in SC). This approach supports the thesis that PSE plays an economic role, given that the inclusion of children living in poverty; suburban or rural areas; children with developmental difficulties; or Roma children is quite low, meaning that PSE services are not being used by those who need them most. In other words, this approach potentially reinforces societal inequalities rather than ameliorating them.
- The higher demand for inclusion PSE than the provision offered, especially in a number of large cantons, but also, to a greater or lesser extent, in all the cantons in the FBiH, supports the claim that the existing network of public pre-school institutions is not sufficient. This refers to geographical coverage and physical capacity, with institutions in undeveloped rural areas and frequently suburban areas too, being almost non-existent, despite the fact that they are most needed in those locations.
- Given that this research has shown that the inclusion in PSE of children younger than 6 years old is 10%, whilst less than one fifth of

the children enrolled in PSE are children younger than 3 years old, the system of PSE in the FBiH is not harmonised with EU policies, especially with respect to early childhood education and care.

- The overall situation regarding compulsory inclusion in PSE of children in the year preceding school is unsatisfactory. No relevant statistical data concerning the total number of such children exists; not all cantons apply the relevant legislation; and a number of cantons have not yet adopted their laws on PSE.
- In almost all cantons, the majority of the cost of PSE is borne by local self-government units, most often without the participation of any other level of governance. This means that, in addition to the lack of harmonisation – i.e. different levels of organisation of pre-school institutions that depend on the financial resources of the local community – the uneven distribution of public resources is exacerbated. Given the fact that users of PSE are mostly children with parents who have a stable income and therefore are members of society who are financially secure, the question of social justice and equality of opportunity in life is posed starkly.
- Children in the FBiH up to 6 years of age experience discrimination on various grounds: they do not have an equal opportunity to be included in PSE or opportunities to use PSE services in the longer term; PSE accessibility, in addition to being directly conditioned by the financial status of the parents, depends also on the geographical location of their residence (city, suburbs or rural areas); the employment status of their parents (employed/unemployed); health, social, and family status of the child (children with developmental difficulties, children from single parent families, children without parental care, children living in poverty etc.).

- Insufficient capacity in public pre-school institutions and especially the difference in fees paid by parents in public and private pre-school institutions, leads to discrimination towards a number of children whose parents had no option but to enrol their child in a private PSE institution. The children who attend private institutions, the fee for which is sometimes many times higher than the fee charged in public institutions, are often, due to the financial situation of their parents, treated as elitist and privileged. This can lead to violations of the right of the child to equal access to PSE.
- Insufficient numbers of expert staff, especially teachers in pre-school institutions in the FBiH, when not supported by the recruitment of assistants and volunteers, affects the quality of PSE. The mismatch of higher education programmes with the actual needs and the reality of the job of a future professional, specifically teachers, leads to the failure to adhere to the standards relevant to teachers, with regard to the formal education they are obliged to have completed vis a vis the legislation (additional education and non-harmonisation with “Bologna” degrees).
- Continuous training and professional development of all staff, especially of teachers, as a key pre-requisite for quality work with children and the provision of PSE, is not satisfactory. This is due to the lack of available financing and the fact that there are neither uniform standards regarding the professional competency of teachers in the FBiH, nor standards for professional development. The mandatory training, in addition to being irregular and piecemeal, is characterised by the lack of a contemporary, participatory learning methodology. It is, as a rule, reduced to delivery of information by lecture.
- In the FBiH, awareness on the part of society and many parents of young children, regarding the importance of PSE both for the child and for the

society, is very poor. This is a significant contributory factor to the low levels of inclusion of children in PSE.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions presented in this study provide evidence that it is necessary that a range of measures and activities in the FBiH should be undertaken in order to meet and implement not only the goals and principles established in the Framework Law, especially in terms of the right to equal access, equal opportunities, conditions and chances for all children, but also the strategic PSE goals laid down in the 2017-2022 Platform for the development of PSE in BiH. Therefore, in addition to the above, and especially bearing in mind the need to harmonise the development of PSE with EU developmental policies and goals, we propose the following recommendations to improve the current situation:

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- PSE should be dealt with as a strategic interest of the state and the entities, and should not be the exclusive responsibility of the cantonal authorities and parents. In order to ensure the application of the fundamental principles and goals of PSE, the higher levels of governance should adopt the relevant regulations on implementation by undertaking the appropriate measures for the harmonisation and adoption of all cantonal laws in line with the Framework Law.
- Activities should be undertaken in order to improve the overall state of PSE in the FBiH. The standards established by the Framework Law

should be applied in full, according to which, PSE must be treated as part of a single education system. As holds true in primary and secondary education, this would ensure that the PSE sector would also be able to exercise a high level of autonomy.

- The competent authorities, at all levels, should ensure the mandatory implementation of the strategic objectives set out in the 2017-2022 Platform for the development of PSE in BiH. This is necessary because experience shows that, in addition to the failure to adhere to legislative provisions, various other documents, goals, and strategic principles, mostly adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and/or the Council of Ministers of BiH, the Federation or cantonal governments, are disregarded. There is evidence that the current practice by the Council of Ministers of BiH with regard to monitoring the implementation through e.g. annual Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law, as is also stipulated by the Platform, is not producing the intended outcomes. Notwithstanding the existence of declarative statements about the results of supervision, none of the current strategic documents contain provisions for the application of sanctions; e.g. in cases of non-implementation by the competent authorities.
- The competent authorities should undertake all necessary measures to implement fully the anti-discrimination provisions stipulated by these acts. These measures should focus on equal access to PSE for all children younger than 6 years old, with the aim of increasing the overall inclusion and creating the pre-requisites to achieve the strategic objectives of the Platform.
- The programme of compulsory inclusion in PSE in the year preceding primary school must be applied in order to prevent further discrimination

against children and in order to ensure the inclusion of all children. Each year, the Ministry of Civil Affairs tables information about the present situation across the FBiH to the Council of Minister of BiH, in the form of the Information on the Implementation of the Framework Law. Despite this, over the ten years during which the Framework Law is supposed to have been implemented, the compulsory inclusion of children in PSE in the year preceding primary school has not yet been achieved.

- Given that BiH ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is necessary that the competent authorities ensure special funding for social and educational inclusion of children with disabilities. In addition ensuring the inclusion, in PSE, of children with disabilities on an equal basis to the inclusion of so-called “typical” children, this will require the employment of additional experts of various categories, as well as the mandatory employment of assistants, and the removal from PSE facilities of architectural barriers to access for children with disabilities.
- The existing provision with regard to PSE financing should be re-examined, because the current responsibility for financing lies predominantly with local self-governments. The addition of PSE into the category of ‘permanent budget user’ should be considered in order that PSE is included in local community budgets, in the budgets of the FBiH and of the cantons. Furthermore, a new budget item should be introduced in order to finance the compulsory inclusion of children in PSE in the year preceding primary school.
- The inclusion in PSE of children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be accelerated. This applies especially to children with developmental

difficulties, children in rural and suburban locations, children living in poverty, Roma children, etc.

- Innovation should be encouraged through the introduction of new PSE programmes and the improvement of the existing ones. There should be an increase in the number of expert staff in pre-school institutions, particularly of teachers. The introduction of dual education and the alignment of higher education programmes with actual practical activities and the tasks of teachers should be compulsory: for instance, compulsory music education.
- The continuous monitoring and evaluation of PSE programmes should be introduced. This should also apply to all the work of pre-school institutions.
- Demographic trends should be appropriately analysed in order to arrive at accurate projections of impact; for example, as to how the decrease in the number of children in primary schools is creating spare capacity. Understanding these trends can create the preconditions, especially in suburban and rural locations, where there are no pre-school institutions, to ensure the capacity for the proper provision of PSE.
- Effort should be made to improve the overall awareness of PSE within the society through a range of measures and activities; through the media, lectures, educational and informational material. Attention should be paid, in particular, to parents and holders of political office, who make decisions about PSE. Obstacles in the way of a greater inclusion in PSE in the FBiH today lie in the financial decisions related to the physical capacity to provide PSE. As parental decision making is the key factor for the inclusion of children in PSE, a further obstacle concerns the failure

of the majority of parents to recognise the importance of PSE for child development.

- Pre-requisites for the implementation of relevant PSE programmes by non-governmental organisations should be created, especially for children with developmental difficulties.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Appropriate legislative measures should be enforced with respect to WHC and HNC, with specific deadlines for the PSE laws to be adopted in these two cantons; the same should apply to USC where currently this law is not being implemented, allegedly due to financial problems.
- The possibility of amending the Framework Law should be considered, with the purpose of introducing sanctions against those lower levels of governance in BiH which have failed to harmonise their PSE laws with the Framework Law. This specifically refers to those PSE laws which fail to accord with Article 1 (2) of the Framework Law, according to which: “Principles, aims and standards regulated by the Law and based on the Law shall not be lowered.”
- The Framework Law itself should be amended to introduce definitions of certain terms used in the Law, such as the term “children with special needs”.
- In Article 30 of the Framework Law, which stipulates the participation of assistants and volunteers in PSE, when it comes to the involvement of assistants, the verb “may” should be replaced with “must”. Also in

this Article, the verb “may” should exclusively refer to volunteers; i.e. Assistants **must** participate, whereas volunteers **may** participate.

- The adoption of a special law should be considered that would deal with the possibility of PSE being provided in the family home, especially for children younger than 3 years old. Appropriate programmes should be adopted with the aim of employing/involving a greater number of male teachers in PSE.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH RESPECT TO DATA PRODUCED BY THE FBIH STATISTICS INSTITUTE

The preparation of this study was hindered by the inconsistencies in and the lack of relevant statistical data would be necessary to be able to conduct a fully comprehensive analysis of PSE. This particularly relates to:

- The absence of a harmonised methodology for collecting, processing, and presenting data relevant to PSE between the FSI and the competent institutions. This highlighted the need to have a greater level of harmonisation of FSI statistics with international statistics, especially those produced by the EU, in order to enable comparisons with other countries to be drawn.
- The FSI statistics should contain the data concerning the provision of PSE / the number of children included in PSE under the compulsory programme in the year preceding primary school. Where the processes and frequency of data collection are concerned, harmonisation should also be achieved between the school year and the calendar year.

- In relation to all pre-school programmes, the FSI data should also include categories of information with respect to the number and sex of children included in PSE, and the type of residential location in which they live.
- Data on children from disadvantaged backgrounds included in PSE should be improved/expanded. This applies especially to children with special needs: e.g. gifted children; children with intellectual difficulties; children with sensory difficulties etc. as well as other categories of vulnerable children.
- Information on the number of assistants and volunteers participating in the implementation of educational programmes in pre-school institutions should be included in the FSI statistical data.
- In the annual statistical bulletins published by the FSI, data on PSE should also contain indicators of the cost of PSE. In addition the various cost categories, the data should be disaggregated by the programme types implemented across the range of pre-school institutions: nurseries, kindergartens, compulsory programmes for children in the year preceding primary school.

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A REVIEW

Prof. dr. Sanela Bašić

ON THE SOCIAL INVESTMENT ARISING FROM THE PROVISION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

Within the tradition of European public education, the idea of equal opportunities has a powerful and long-lasting impact. Even today, when the social system is under siege by neoliberalism, only occasional voices oppose the egalitarian call of education for all.

But what precisely does the principle of equal opportunities mean?

From the social policy perspective, the principle of equal opportunities can be articulated in various ways. Lister (2010) elaborates on three potential approaches to understanding this concept. According to her, in the first approach, the “equal opportunities” principle reflects the idea, according to which, potential social divisions, based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, social background, religion or sexual orientation, should not have the effect of limiting any individual from the achievement of success and self-realisation. This understanding of equal opportunities is intrinsic to anti-discrimination policies and, in the case of race and gender, to anti-racism and feminism.

A different understanding of equal opportunity lies at the centre of Sen’s capability approach. This approach contains a fundamental shift in the focus

of public attention and interest – from an emphasis on the means of life, to the real-life chances, opportunities or choices that are available to a person. Aligned with his emphasis, the documents of the UN Committee on Equality and Human Rights underline that “*an equal society protects and promotes the central value of freedom and real chances or capabilities of every person*”. In the third approach, the equal *opportunity* concept is commonly used in opposition to the idea of equal *outcomes*. According to this approach, the personal, social and economic starting position of an individual should not negatively impact his or her prospects of success, especially in education and employment. The typical metaphors used in this context are “*equal start in a race*” or “*ladder of opportunity*”. It is entirely clear that not everyone can win the race, or reach the top of the ladder. Therefore, this approach emphasises the creation of chances, or opportunities, irrespective of the outcome.

Having recognised the importance and the role of education as the key factor for the promotion of social mobility and the reduction of social inequalities, in the decades after World War II, the more advanced European societies have made dramatic breakthroughs: they managed to achieve almost full inclusion of children in primary and secondary education; they democratised the approach to higher education and made the education system inclusive at all levels, especially through their approach to children with disabilities. However, even by the end of the 20th century, it had become evident that access to universal and publicly provided education alone is not sufficient to bring about equality in the future/adult? life chances of children. Many studies have shown that the correlation between the child’s (social) background and the effect of this on his/her chances in life is almost as interlinked as it was a few generations ago. A kind of paradox is at play here: we face a failure in the progress in creating a society(ies) of equal opportunities despite the significant investment in education and social, i.e., family policy.

Thus, the importance of family resources on the formation of human capital returned to focus. One of the most important sociologists of the 20th century, P. Bourdieu (1997) claimed that education systems – however progressive and egalitarian in their design – are not sufficient to achieve equality in the institutional sense. He provided a valid rationale for his claim thus: according to him, the school environment is inherently biased in favour of the middle-class culture, which unintentionally punishes/discriminates? against children from lower social layers. In more recent times, an alternative and powerful explanation has come from the field of developmental psychology, according to which the crucial cognitive and behavioural foundations for learning, and thus, the key drivers of inequality – are created and cemented in earliest childhood. Accordingly, what happens at the preschool age is key to the development of the capability and motivation of children to learn once they reach the formal education system.

If we accept this scientifically-grounded view that the key developmental stage lies in early childhood, i.e., in the family, the question arises as to how best to help families to give their children the best possible opportunities. This is particularly important because – despite rare dissonant voices and criticisms (Liessman) – the development of a knowledge-based economy – which requires a rapid up-skilling of the working population – is becoming the dominant development paradigm. Even though it is not easy to predict which skills will be crucial, it is not hard to conclude that a person with low or poor qualifications will not do well in a high-functioning labour market. Human resource theory claims that both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (such as skills of leadership, communication, good planning) will gain in importance where individual success is concerned in these (post) modern times. Both categories of skills are in part genetic – nature – and in part the result of nurture, i.e. of external environmental stimulus or the lack of it.

Given that both cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities affect school performance, and thus have an impact on the life opportunities of children, and viewing every child as a common, collective good, it is the responsibility of the makers of public policy to ensure that every child gets a good start in life. Taking this stance, the developed countries have started creating policies and approaches to of (full) inclusion of children in pre-school education and care. Historically speaking, the expansion of pre-school child care institutions was primarily conceived as a method of reconciling motherhood with professional life, and, more recently, also as an investment in children and their specific educational and developmental needs.

Nowadays, the frequent, tense and multi-layered facets of the (post-war) transition in our country create, intensify and consolidate (social) inequalities. For instance, with respect to ethnic identity, public and academic discourse is filled with analyses that work either to prove and promote equality, or to refute and discredit the possibility of its provision. There are many research studies and analyses on social inequality that have been undertaken from the perspective of gender or disability. However, inequality in education has been approached in an uncoordinated/incoherent way, and then mostly from the perspective of labour market access. The study entitled *The Role of Preschool Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities* by Borjana Miković expands the existing corpus of knowledge by widening the discussion on the (missing) link between education and opportunities for children. The study, presented on 148 pages of typed text, organised in four inter-connected chapters, provides a critical analysis and evaluation of the role of pre-school education in the provision of equal opportunities for all children in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The first part: *Pre-school Education Policies of the European Union and the Right of the Child to Pre-school Education in International Documents*

and in the *Legislation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* contains an analysis of the public policies of the European Union, in the field of pre-school education and care, which presents the strategic commitment of this union of countries to the development of programmes of universal pre-school care and education, treating them as significant “approximators” of school attendance and of more homogenous educational achievements. It also provides an overview of international and domestic standards of children’s rights, particularly the right to (pre-school) education.

The analysis of access of children in FBiH to preschool education is situated in the broader context of a demographic transition whose effects are evident in the steady decline in the birth-rate, both in the EU and in the FBiH, in the second part (*Statistical Data on Key Indicators for Pre-school Education in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*) the author presents the key statistical data on the inclusion of children in FBiH by this type of education. The data confirms the thesis that (F)BiH is at the bottom of the scale when compared to the countries in the European Union and to the average rate of institutional pre-school education coverage in the rest of the SE European region (Bašić, 2017).

The author emphasises the variation in educational coverage between the cantons and points to the lower rates of inclusion of certain categories of children, especially children younger than three years old, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with developmental difficulties. The chapter also analyses the issue of the financing of (public) pre-school institutions and the levels of professionalisation of staff and pre-school educational programmes in the FBiH. Particular focus is placed on whether and how the standards stipulated by the Framework Law on Pre-school Education in BiH are being implemented through these integral and specialised development programmes.

The third, and in my view, the most original part of the study contains a presentation and analysis of the results of the qualitative research, carried out with two targeted groups of respondents: the first group are parents of children attending pre-school education, and the second group are professionals employed in pre-school education institutions. With the goal of obtaining a more direct and comprehensive insight into the manner in which the parents and professionals perceive and assess the performance of the current preschool education system, eight (8) focus group discussions were organised in four main FBiH urban centres. The two stakeholder groups represented most directly involved and most important links in the PSE chain – one on the receiving end and the other on the providing end of the chain – The discussions in the focus groups covered matters such as: the financing, competencies and motivation of professional staff; the quality of education programmes; and the link between pre-school education and the opportunities available to children in the future; etc.)

I will now touch on a few of the findings. Firstly, I would strongly underline the emphasis and recognition placed by the parents (almost exclusively the mothers) and professionals (also predominantly women) on the various benefits that accrue to those attending these programmes – these benefits relate to socialisation, and pedagogically & cognitive development. Furthermore, when it comes to early intervention in certain groups of children who are at risk – e.g. those whose development is threatened by poverty or disability – the professionals recognise the importance of the time spent in kindergartens; in terms of the quantitative (number of hours in kindergartens), and the qualitative dimensions (programme quality) of the provision if the child, from the outset, is to be enabled to participate on a level the playing field.

A realistic and experience-based assessment is presented in relation to the reasons for the low rates of inclusion of children in pre-school education

programmes. Both parents and professionals in the focus groups underlined the general economic context, i.e., the financial reasons (poverty and unemployment), as well as the under-development of the network of institutions, their lack of capacity and their uneven geographical distribution.

Of importance, too, are the attitudes of the parents and the professionals concerning the gender ratio of teachers that they favour, where their views reflect the still powerful prejudice against male teachers.

In the fourth part of the study, the author synthesises the key results and findings, concerning the pre-school education system in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that she collected through an analysis of the international and national standards of human rights, including the rights of the child to (preschool) education, that are relevant to European Union and the (F)BiH standards, and to the research that she conducted. I believe that readers will be unsurprised to find that the general conclusion at which the author arrives contains little optimism. However, Miković does believe that the system can be improved, made more effective and efficient and ultimately that it can be harmonised with the development policies of the European Union. To this end, she presents a comprehensive list of proposals, formulated as recommendations, (thirteen general, five special and six recommendations for the FBiH Statistics Institute), for the relevant stakeholders of the legislative and executive branches that participate in the development and implementation of pre-school education policies at the levels of governance.

The Role of Preschool Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities, by Borjana Miković, offers an original, quality and valuable academic research achievement. In the scientific sense, this is an important contribution to the understanding of an area of the field of social sciences, which,

despite its social importance and scientific relevance, has not been, thus far, the subject of such a meticulous scholarly analysis. This is a project which, because of its theme, distinctive theoretical and methodological approach, innovative data collection methods and their skilful and knowledgeable contextualisation within the relevant theoretical and public policy frameworks, constitutes a rarity within scientific and research practice. The findings of the study will be useful, first and foremost, to those who, at the legislative and executive levels, deal with the planning, development and implementation of public policies in the areas of pre-school education and social, i.e. family policy. The book will also serve as valuable source material for study on the part of other actors advocating for quality child welfare policies in the public and non-governmental sectors.

Finally, it is with pleasure that I recommend for publication *The Role of Preschool Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities*.

Sarajevo, 19 November 2018

A REVIEW

Prof. dr. Lidija Pehar

INTRODUCTION

I read the text with pleasure and I am delighted to provide this review. The study uses an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon and problems of early education. Studies such as this should be promoted and encouraged because of their relevance and credibility and will serve the needs of the readers who access them. I am convinced that this text will be read with interest because it provides not only the elaboration of theory in the field but also many concrete examples from the day to day practice.

This is one of the early career studies by Assistant Professor Borjana Miković and I would like to emphasise that notwithstanding its early career status, this is a mature work, which heralds her future success.

Kahlil Gibran wrote: *I prefer to be a dreamer among the humblest, with visions to be realized, than lord among those without dreams and desires.*

Borjana, too, is not without dreams of a better and different world.

REVIEW

The Role of Pre-school Education in the Provision of Equal Opportunities concerns a complex and significantly unresearched problem: the opportunities for the inclusion in preschool education in FBiH of children younger than six years old. The main goal of the research was to contribute to finding ways for as many children as possible to be included in pre-school education in order for them all to be provided with equal opportunities. Given that accession to the European Union is one of the key strategic objectives of BiH since the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (2008), the reference point of the study is the European Union. The study comprises four key parts which are further divided into several subheadings.

The first part is entitled *Preschool Education Policies of the European Union and the Right of the Child to Preschool Education in International Documents and in the Legislation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. In addition to the analysis of relevant international policies, the relevant EU documents, the rights of the child to preschool education in international human rights documents and BiH legislation, it elaborates on the importance of preschool education for children.

This part also draws on works by relevant scholars such as Jensen, Esping-Andersen etc. The comprehensive analysis of international documents emphasises particularly the 2002 Conclusions of the European Council – the so-called Barcelona objectives. In this document, all Member States are called upon to provide childcare to at least 33% of children under three years of age and at least 90% of children older than three years of age (paragraph 32) by 2010.

Special focus is put on the Framework Law on Preschool Education in BiH (2007) and the harmonisation of relevant cantonal laws with the Framework Law. It is noteworthy in this regard that two cantons (HNC and WHC) have not yet drafted and passed their own cantonal laws in this field, whereas the law passed in USC is not being applied due to lack of finance.

In the second part, *Key Indicators for PSE in FBiH through Statistical Data* provided by the FBiH Statistics Institute, the author presents a comprehensive overview of the drop in birth rate, especially in the last seven years. The author notes that the percentage of children aged 0 – 4 years, in the total population of BiH, has been falling steadily since the figure established by the 1971 census up until 2013. Although the number of live births directly affects the number of future pre-school education users, the author claims that, unlike in other European countries, in BiH, i.e. FBiH, there are no adequate demographic projections that could offer relevant estimates for the next 10 years of the number of children in the educational cohort 0 – 6 years old.

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the establishment and organisation of pre-school institutions in FBiH (public and private) and shows that over the last five years in FBiH the number of private institutions has doubled, whereas the number of public institutions has remained almost static. This fact illustrates the attitude of society towards children of pre-school age.

The analysis of statistical data has revealed that the inclusion rate of children in PSE in BiH in 2016/2017 was 10% of the total population of children younger than six years old – the lowest rate in Europe.

In FBiH, the services of preschool education are mostly used by children from financially stable families, where both parents are employed. The PSE

inclusion rate of children living in poverty, suburban or rural areas, children with developmental difficulties, Roma children etc. is very low; therefore PSE services are not used by the categories of children who are most in need of them.

Of particular interest is the information that the demand for inclusion of children in PSE is greater than the availability of provision, especially in the largest cantons. The quantitative research, combined with the qualitative one carried out with separate groups of parents and professionals, has revealed the following: the greatest progress in PSE has been the compulsory inclusion of children in the year preceding primary school. However, although there are no relevant statistical data thereon, the numbers are still unsatisfactory. Difficulties exist also with respect to the financing of pre-school institutions, even though the sources of financing have been broadly defined in the Framework Law. In practice, the majority of PSE-related costs in almost all cantons are financed by local self-government units, most often without any contribution from any other levels of governance. This situation leads to unequal distribution of public resources, and to a situation wherein the PSE service users are mostly children whose parents have stable income and belong to the group of financially secure members of society.

Focus group discussions revealed that PSE does not employ sufficient numbers of professional staff, especially teachers, and that the legal possibility of recruiting assistants and volunteers is not used in practice. Also, the mandatory training, i.e., professional development, which is a key prerequisite for quality work with children, is not satisfactory. This necessarily reflects on the quality of PSE service provision.

It is this state of affairs that has motivated the author to present a range of recommendations in the study where she particularly took into

account the strategic objectives laid down in the 2017-2022 Platform for the Development of PSE in BiH as well as the need to harmonise this area with EU development policies and goals. As she has presented possible improvements to the current state of affairs, the recommendations by the *author* have the potential to be of significant use in improving the status and role of pre-school education in BiH. *The research has shown that not all children have equal opportunities with respect to their inclusion in early care and education. This means that when the development of the entire personality is at its peak, in terms of energy and development potential, a great number of children are not receiving PSE.*

I believe that this comprehensive research, with its theoretical approach to the analysis of international documents and national legislation, as well as the evidence revealed by it, will *certainly represent a valuable source of data and guidelines* especially for relevant institutions, but also for all interested experts and professionals in the field of PSE. I recommend this text to be published as a book.

Sarajevo, 25 November 2018

Education is a key factor in any conceptualisation of a beneficial society: Its purpose is to convey knowledge and values to new generations of citizens, with the aim of laying the foundation for these citizens to play a constructive role in society, economy and politics. For a long period of time the focus has been on primary, secondary and tertiary education. Pre-school education, however, had often remained neglected.

In many countries, over the most recent two to three decades, there have been improvements. In various countries worldwide, societal values have been undergoing substantial changes, with an increasing proportion of women aspiring to combine family and work life. Recent research has shown the positive impact that pre-school education can have on the development of children and their academic and social progress once they start school. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, a combination of traditional family values and an education system facing serious challenges at all levels, thus far, has kept the issue of pre-school education off the agenda. Recent dynamics, however, show increasing demand for pre-school education as well as rising awareness concerning the benefits of quality pre-school education.

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