

UK and Ireland top European table of for-profit care providers ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full article and table showing percentage of public-private provision ^[2]

EXCERPTS

The UK and Ireland have more for-profit early years provision than anywhere else in Europe, new research has found.

Speaking at the International Centre for the Study of the Mixed Economy of Childcare seminar at the University of East London, Professor Helen Penn presented research she had carried out for the European Commission, comparing regulatory frameworks for childcare and the role played by the private sector in 21 European countries. Fifteen countries were chosen for more in-depth study.

The cost of childcare to working parents in the UK and Ireland is higher than elsewhere in Europe and is a 'key limiter of access', Professor Penn said.

Almost all care for children aged under three in the UK is non-state provision.

Childcare and education for under-fives varies widely throughout Europe, but the UK, and England in particular, is unique in the extent to which private sector provision has been promoted by the Government to meet childcare targets.

Professor Penn said there was growing concern in the European Union over the privatisation of a range of social services, partly because this might breach competition rules, but also because it could undermine social equity.

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Professor Penn explained that because there are no definitions for childcare and education that are universally understood, the survey aimed to use the definition 'centre-based early education and care for children from birth to school starting age', or ECEC.

For example, childcare could be seen as care for the children of working parents, as a social welfare service for the most vulnerable children, and in some countries includes education, as well as or instead of care.

Private provision may be profit or non-profit. The distinction is not always clear, and in some cases data is not available or comparable, she said.

In Norway there are 46 categories of provider, including different kinds of co-operatives, while in Germany there are eight categories, three of which are religious.

Countries in the survey could be roughly divided into four groups. Those with almost universal provision include France and Belgium and the former Eastern bloc countries. The others are countries that allow private funding to non-state providers but under strict conditions; those that actively encourage private providers - the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands; and those with no policy and regulation, mainly southern and some eastern European countries.

-reprinted from Nursery World

Region: Europe ^[3]

Tags: privatization ^[4]

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