CHILDCARE FACILITIES GENERAL STATISTICAL DATA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN COMPARISON TO THE REAL LOCAL SITUATION AT THE DISTRICT OF LEOBEN, STYRIA IN AUSTRIA

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Abstract - In order to increase the proportion of women employed in the European Union, the 28 member states were invited to increase the available share of childcare facilities. Although the targets have been met across the EU, it appears that regional disparities are significant. This is not only due to the divergent sociocultural characteristics of the 28 member states, even in a small country like Austria, the regional differences are considerable. In this overview, we compare the politically request guidelines on childcare facilities and the published statistics of the EU with the actual situation in the district of Leoben, Styria, Austria. It shows that the claimed sociopolitical standards for equal opportunities for men and women are in contrast with the regional geographical and monetary opportunities.

Keywords - Austria, Childcare, EU, Leoben, Styria,

I. INTRODUCTION

Caring responsibilities are one of the main reasons for the low participation of women in working life, which represents an economic loss for the European Union (EU) of EUR 370 billion per year [1] - [4]. The availability and use of childcare is influenced by several factors, including the legal right to childcare, accessibility and quality of care. Adjusting the opening times of the local care services to match the working hours of the parents/legal guardian(s) also plays an essential role. Therefore, the availability, accessibility and affordability of quality childcare facilities is a key factor that enables people with caring responsibilities to participate in working life [1] –[3]. In addition, care facilities are an important tool to tackle children's social inequalities and to promote children's cognitive and social development [4]. Consequently, two specific targets [5] were adopted by the European Council in 2002. Namely, increasing the availability of care facilities for 90% of children between the age of three and the compulsory school age, and increasing the availability of childcare facilities for 33% of children under the age of three.

In 2014, care by parents/legal guardian(s) was the most common form of care for under-3 years in the majority of EU member states. Whereby, there were significant differences between the member states. The highest proportions were recorded for Bulgaria (73%), Latvia (70%), Hungary and Slovakia (both 68%), while the lowest rates are in the Netherlands (23%), Portugal (27%), Denmark (30%), and in Cyprus (32%) [5]. At EU level, every second child under the age of three was cared for by the parents/legal guardian(s), exclusively.

By 2018, the target of the European Council for children under the age of three, with 32.9% of children in the 28 member states of the EU, was almost reached on a statistical average, with significant differences between the member states. The achievement of the targets varies between 50 % and more, and less than ¼ of the corresponding target group. Until 2016, 86.3% of the children attend a formal care facility or a pre-school for children between the age of three and the compulsory school age,. Here, too, the target was achieved only in 12 member states. The reasons for the fluctuations within the EU lie, on the one hand, in the financial framework conditions and, on the other hand, in the respective national family policy orientation [6]. In those member states where the care of small children is seen as a core task of the family, family benefits, if existent, are predominantly aimed on supporting parental care [7].

II. CHILDCARE FACILITIES

Regardless of the legal requirements, childcare is an issue that concerns parents/legal guardian(s) from the birth of a child. Above all, parents/legal guardian(s) who intend to return to work as early as possible need information about disposable care services. In this section we give an overview about childcare in representative members of the EU and in more details the situation in Austria.

2.1 Different Childcare Concepts ofsome Selected EU Member States

At just under 80% in Denmark, by far the highest rate of childcare rates for children under the age of 3 exists within the EU member states. The childcare places are a tax-financed free service for parents/legal guardian(s), who usually do not use day care until after the first birthday of their child, because the state pays a generous parental allowance for the loss of income. In Sweden, with a care rate of around 50%, family policy attaches great importance to full employment, and municipalities are obliged to offer day care from the first birthday. For this purpose, the working mothers and fathers have a publicly funded offer for child care, whereby the parents/legal guardian(s) have to pay a household income-dependent contribution with an financial upper limit. In Germany, the federal government has taken over the investment costs for childcare, whereas the parents/legal guardian(s) have to pay for the childminder's care costs themselves. Financial support can be requested individually. As a result, the child care rate in Germany increased from 13.6% in 2006 to 32.9% in 2015, but the parents/legal guardian(s) childcare requirement is according to local polls more than 40% and is likely to increase with increasing employment of parents/legal guardian(s). In France, children are often cared for individually by day mothers. For which there have been extra payments from the state since 1980 and since 1990 tax benefits.
It should be noted that the form of care is still strongly socially selective throughout Europe [6]. If the mother lives

in poverty-endangered conditions or has a low level of education, there is an increased tendency in general for exclusively parental care. This can be explained by the fact that in these social strata the own achievable income is equal to or lower than the costs for the childcare. Hence, in unfavorable income relationships, childcare fees lead to an additional burden, while childcare allowances increase the family budget. Therefore, social selectivity is not greatest in those countries where the care infrastructure is inadequate, such as in Germany, Austria and most Eastern European countries. The strongest selectivity is found rather in countries with quite extensive care facilities, but at an high care costs on a European average.

2.2 Childcare in Austria

In Austria, there exist 9,297 institutional childcare facilities (excluding seasonal day care) in 2017 [9]. Fig. 1 shows the number of children distributed to the different forms of care service.

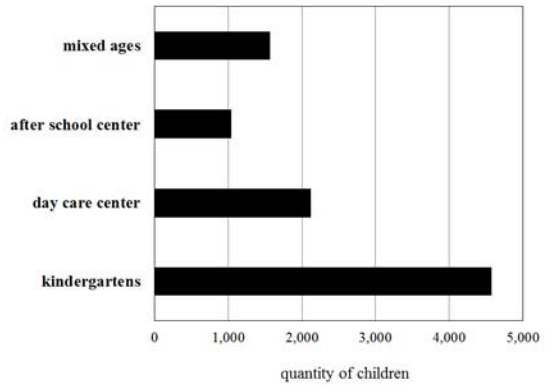

Fig 1: Quantity of children accommodated in different care facilities in Austria [9].

More than 55% of day nurseries and just under three quarters of kindergartens are managed by the public sector, while nursery and toddler care facilities and age-related care facilities are operated by the majority of private sponsors. The total number of children (1,263,740) in Austria by age group is shown in Fig. 2.

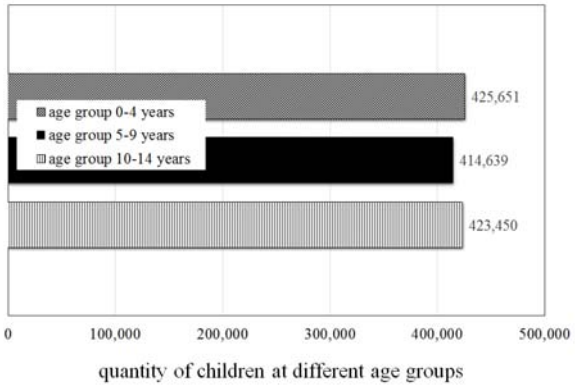

Fig 2: Distribution of children in Austria by age group [11].

This gives a statistical average of 136 children per care facility. In 2017, 361,788 children (~ 28.6 %) were enrolled in day care centers nationwide. With 220,658 children, most of them were in kindergarten groups, 43,396 attended nursery and small children care groups, 53,452 daycare groups and 44,282 mixed-age care groups. This means that an average of 39 children are cared for each care facility. In the federal capital of Vienna, the concentration of care institutes in 2018 is more than 44%. The situation as in Vienna is similar in the eight provincial capitals.

2.3 Types of Childcare in Austria

In principle, there is freedom of choice between caring a child in a care facility or by one or both parents/legal guardian(s). From the state side different types of childcares [7] are offered to cover the different parental needs, which are briefly described here. Common to all facilities is a financial contribution which has to be taken over by theparents/legal guardian(s). The charge is income-based and can reach up to 100% of the total care cost. The nursery is a form of care for children under 3 years. Facilities of this kind are adapted to the needs of babies and small children. Therefore, only a smaller number of children are allowed to care for In individual groups. Additionally, a close cooperation with the parents with regard to the deployment of character is required. The registration of the child has to be done by the parents itself and right in time. The fees for a nursery place depend on the standards of the operator, the income of the parents/legal guardian(s) and the desired care hours.Since 2009, the kindergarten is free of charge for the half-day visit (20 hours per week without lunch) in the year before the child enters the school. The regulation for kindergartens falls within the competence of the individual federal states. Therefore, number of facilities, opening hours and retention for the parents can be slightly different for each country. In order to cover the costs, there is the possibility for parents/legal guardian(s) to receive an income-related childcare allowance. Mentoring by a childminder [11] enables to respond to individual needs of the children, since they are guidance at the childminder's home. Therefore, the care times are more flexible compare to nurseries or kindergartens. But childminders need evidence of pedagogical training since they are more or less self-employed. An alternative to institutional childcare facilities are children's groups [12]. They are founded and operating on parents/legal guardian(s)`s self-initiative and with substantial parental involvement. In small groups - depending on the age of the children six to 15 children – the supervisor deals with the individual needs of children. The financing of the children's groups takes place by through parental contributions and public subsidies.Childcare at universities [13] plays a central role for students and employees who have to combine family, work or/and studies. At most Austrian universities childcare facilities are available for students' children. These are offered either by the universities itself or by the local student councils. Babysitting is an alternative if regular care is not needed. They are usually employed as marginal employees. The care can be done in this way individually and in the familiar environment of the child. If a babysitter is needed more often, the use of a loan-grandma/grandpa is also to be considered. Older, physically and mentally agile people are placed to families with children by need. The goal is to build a continuous, family relationship between the family and the loan- grandma. For the children, the loan-grandma/grandpa is to become a caregiver who devotes attention and time to them. It has to be noted, that this is not a domestic help, since they should be dedicated exclusively to childcare. The childcare by loan grandmaswas tax deductible till 2018".Full-time school forms are available for the care of school-age children. Children are not only taught, but also supported and supervised in learning and leisure phases. Thus, all-day school forms provide schoolchildren with targeted learning support, care and support for their talents. Visiting a full-time school is not obligatory for anyone, there

is freedom of choice for the parents/legal guardian(s). The all-day school offers parents/legal guardian(s) and legal guardians the possibility to reconcile work and family more easily for children in the age range of 6 to 14 years and thus to ensure more equal opportunities. due to the massive reception of refugees in 2017 The government [17] provided more budget for the expansion of childcare places , combined with improved language support, increased teaching of Austrian values in combination with the inclusion of a headscarf ban in kindergartens. Thereby, the fit two objectives: the compatibility of work and family life and, moreover, making childcare facilities to educational institutions that benefit integration. The new key parameters are investments in the area of elementary education and childcare, new places for under-3 years and more flexible and longer opening times.

III. CHILDCARE FACILITIES IN THE DISTRICT OF LEOBEN

The district of Leoben, as part of the province of Styria, with just over 60,000 inhabitants has a long tradition as a trading center for iron goods and was already settled in antiquity. The mining of the famous “ferrum Noricum” takes place until today near the city of Leoben at the “Erzberg” and was one of the reasons for the expansion of the Roman Empire in antiquity to the Danube border. With the beginning of industrialization, the Montanuniversitaet Leoben was founded and around the university and the city numerous research institutions and large companies have settled. Including Voest-Alpine, AT&S and RHI-MAGNESITA. All facilities and companies operate globally and due to their proximity to the Montanuniversitaet, the companies maintain research facilities locally. Such institutes offer high-quality jobs, which, however, require a high degree of flexibility of the employees due to the research activities. In the entire district, 15,522 employees are engaged in 1,140 commercial enterprises [14]. Whereby, more than 6,930 people are engaged within the industry and more than 1,000 employees working in research and development facilities. Although the area show a high potential for the future, the region suffers from high emigration and the associated aging of the population as well a low proportion of kids. In Leoben, the proportion of under-4 years is 2,209, the 5 to 9-year-olds 2,182 and the 10 to 14-year-olds 2,361 persons [15], a total of 6752 children. In the district of Leoben there are 44 childcare facilities available during school hours, which are broken down as follows: 1 mobile childcare, 9 nurseries, 29 kindergartens, 1 company nursery, 1 day nursery, 1 company childminder, 1 company kindergarten and 1 special education kindergarten. This corresponds to more than 153 children per care institution or 12 % more number of children per institution as for the theoretical Austrian average. Looking at the available offer during the school holidays (Christmas, Easter holidays, semester breaks, summer holidays), the offer is reduced to 1 mobile child care, 1 nursery, 7 kindergartens, 1 company nursery, 1 day nurse and 1 company kindergarten. Thus, the childcare ratio increases to 563 children per care facility, which is already more than 4 times higher than the Austrian statistical average. The legal requirements in Austria are state-specific and are for Styria a maximum of 25 children in a kindergarten group and 14 children in a nursery group, whereby children under 2 years count as 1.5 persons. There are also additional requirements regarding the minimum surface area per kid, sanitary facilities and cooking facilities. The cost of these high standards must be funded by the communities. Alternatively, day mothers are available for more flexible childcare. Fig. 3 shows the number of registered private childminder for the province of Styria. As it can be seen from the graph, the supply is correspondingly diverse in the state capital Graz. By contrast, the number of just four-day mothers in the district of Leoben is very manageable.

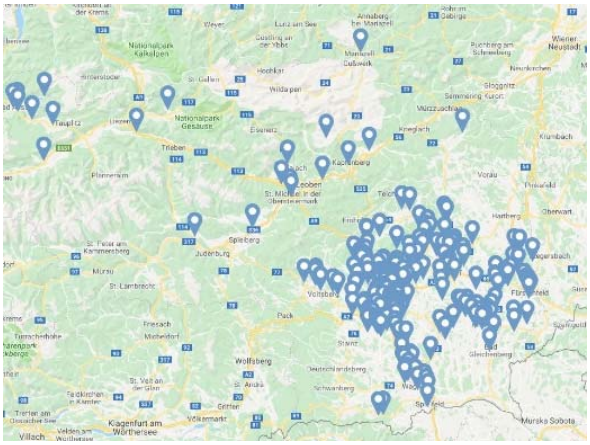

Fig.3 Registered childminders within the federal state of Styria [11].

Although the figures in this section are only comparable to a limited extent, they show that the demand is not covered. Nevertheless, the existing offer is not fully exploited.Hence the question, why?

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF THE OFFERED CHILDCARE FACILITIES

By comparing several local surveys and personal conversations with parent/legal guardians, it could be stated that many affected persons would like to accommodate their children in a care facility, but the offeringusually do not correlate with the individual needs. This concerns in particular (i) the opening hours of the facility, (ii) the fee to cover the facility costs and (iii) the distance between the residence and the childcare facility.Additionally, the childcare facilities are financed by the communities and this has led to an increase in spending by +88 percent for 0-6 year olds alone since 2007 [19].As a consequence, further cost increases due to additional care facilities can no longer cope with the community budgets of smaller towns.

(i) There are two inconvenienceconcerning the opening time, the daily opening hours (Monday to Friday) and the opening days during school holidays. Particularly, single mothers with a lower education level are working in jobs that require a start of work normally before the opening hours of care facilities. This regards to the cleaning industry and parts of the retail sector. With the increase of women in technical occupations, the proportion of mothers working in companies with shift work is also increasing. This forces mothers to refrain from employment or ask relatives or acquaintances to take over the transport of the children to and from the care facility. Long working hours, in Austria are allowed up to 12 hours (13 hours for scientists at the university) a day, also cause problems with picking up children from the care facility. For schools, the use of all-day school types is also limited. Schools offers one form of

supervising , whether it is a separate sequence of lesson and lesson, morning class and afternoon time for home exercises, sports and recreational activities, or an entangled form of teaching, learning and leisure units alternating throughout the day does not matter. In both forms, the children are looked after by teachers at the school from Monday to Thursday until at least 4 pm, on Fridays until at least 2 pm. These periods are not sufficient for people with care responsibilities, who work mainly in the industry in shifts or in the field of research at the university, where high working time flexibility means above all longer working hours. Additionally, higher educated families try to avoid this form of childcare. From the parental point of view the object of the school is not to compensate social differences, therefore, a corresponding success at school and in life depends primarily on the support of the parent/legal guardians at home. Consequently, if not enough children need afternoon care this form of care is not offered for cost reasons by school.In Austria, employees are entitled to take 5 weeks of vacation per year, whereas, school holidays are almost 14 weeks depending on local country bank holidays. There is still no satisfactory solution to eliminate this discrepancy.

(ii) Another important aspect is the amount of the financial deductible for the different care facilities. These varied according to the individual needs and the public cost contribution to the care facility. The individual costs of childcare could deducted by taxable parent/legal guardians until the end of the year 2018 in the amount of a maximum of 2,300 € per year and kid/children. The introduction of the new “Family-bonus plus” in 2019 will now replace this tax deductibility of childcare costs. However, conditions had to be fulfilled for the deductibility of the individual costs. The care had to take place in a private or public childcare facility or by a pedagogically qualified person. The care costs had actually incurred, which required a corresponding personal administrative effort, as invoices and supporting documents for the costs of childcare had to be kept for seven years for any checks by the residence tax office. Furthermore, the affected children had to be entitled to the child deduction amount for more than six months in the calendar year. In addition, the costs for childcare had to be paid by the parents one year in advance before being reimbursed by the state. If one considers the average gross annual income of the Austrians of € 25260 [17], which corresponds to a net income of about € 1400, then one had to spend almost two monthly salaries on advance payments for childcare. A not insignificant amount, if the monthly household expenditure in a household of two persons with child with is indicated by nearly 2200 € [18]. In order to counteract this, the family bonus Plus will replace the tax deductibility of the childcare costs and the child allowance from the calendar year 2019 onwards. The Family Bonus Plus is a tax deduction that reduces parent/legal guardians annual tax burden by up to € 1,500 per child. From an income of 1,700 euros gross, about 1330 € net, per month, the family bonus for a kid can be fully exploited.

(iii) Another hurdle is the administration. Registration of a child in a childcare facility can only be done once a year. Furthermore, the municipalities are responsible for the maintenance of care facilities, for the district of Leoben with an area of just over 1000 km^2, there are 16 different municipalities. However, children are only entitled to a childcare facility in their own municipality. Only if remaining places are available are they available for children from other municipalities. A hurdle that particularly affects people who changed their place of residence and employees in major international companies and research institutions. Since especially in international operating companies a discontinuous employee transfer takes place. Furthermore, for pedagogical reasons, children are not removed from the usual care facility if the parent/legal guardians move away from the community. The background is to avoid to deprive the children of the familiar childcare facilities and the circle of friends. This leads to situations in which the children often have to be transported from their home to the care facility and back again over long distances by their parent/legal guardians before and after starting work. This caused additional costs for the parent/legal guardians.

Alternatively, it is useful for the parents to leave the care of their own children to the grandparents and/or involve them more in the childcare. However, this is only possible if they themselves are not or no longer working and also meet the necessary physical and mental requirements. With the increasing employment of women, however, this alternative will no longer be available in the long term.

Another possibility is the establishment of company kindergartens. In the district of Leoben, this is also being implemented by the two international corporations Voest-Alpine and RHI-MAGNESITA. The research institutions, and the university, however, do not maintain their own care facilities.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between the statistical publications on the availability of childcare facilities in the EU and the local conditions in the district of Leoben shows that the fulfillment of average care density is only possible by over-fulfilling the requirements in the urban centers. Furthermore, there is no a real freedom of choice for parents/legal guardian(s) in the care of children [5] due to the spatial extension of the country side and/or the financial situation. The available local conditions do not meet the full requirements, where parents/legal guardian(s), on the one hand, have a full-time job and, on the other hand, find their children in good out-of-home childcare facilities. Furthermore, it shows that in Austria extra-childcare is much more supported by the state than childcare in the own family. A consequence of the EU's guidelines to increase the proportion of working women. The use of childcare outside the family, however, depends on the financial resources of the parents/legal guardian(s) as well as on the available care facilities. In case of insufficient care facilitiesin the immediate vicinity, the parents/legal guardian(s) are forced to leave the region or are not available to the labor market because of the obligation to their own kid/children care. This often affects single mothers and leads to a social and financial dependence on other family members, mostly their own parents/legal guardian(s). In an existing partnership, the financially weaker part is forced to take over childcare. This affects women in most cases. Since the EU has the declared goal of employing more women, there is insufficient consideration of "unpaid parent work" in Austria. So far, this has led to a corresponding pension loss and thus to poverty for old age, especially for women.

With the introduction of the "Family Bonus Plus", attempts are being made to counteract this development in Austria. However, the problem of the lack of care facilities outside of the urban centers has not been resolved.

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