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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN EUROPE AS INVESTING IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL — COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

WCZESNA EDUKACJA I OPIEKA NAD DZIECKIEM W EUROPIE
JAKO INWESTOWANIE W KAPITAŁ SPOŁECZNY I KULTUROWY JEDNOSTKI —
ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA

Abstract

The article presents the issues of Early Childhood Education and Care in European countries. Early Childhood Education and Care is defined in the first part of the article, including in the context of investing in social and cultural capital. Next part focuses on the specifics of EU policy in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care and discussed the key EU documents in this regard. The last part focuses on the presentation of the differences between the education systems in selected countries in the field of ECEC.

Key words: Early Childhood Education and Care, preschool education, education policy

Słowa kluczowe: wczesna edukacja i opieka nad dzieckiem, edukacja przedszkolna, polityka edukacyjna

INTRODUCTION

One objectives to be realized within the “Europe of knowledge” concept is to support development of early childhood education and care over little children in all European countries. Development of that education stage is also inscribed in realization of the “lifelong learning” idea. Significance of access to early childhood education of high quality is currently emphasized not only by pedagogues and psychologists, by also by politicians and EU decision-makers. Early childhood education may not only contribute significantly to better and comprehensive development of children, therefore exerting positive influence on their social and cultural capital, but it may also pose a factor for equalling social and cultural differences, especially in case of children from disfavoured groups. Early childhood education and care over a child is also a crucial first stage, that realizes the assumptions of the European Union common education policy, within the broadly under-

stood European education. Here, it must be stressed that according to treaty provisions, pre-school education is left to the member states. This is one of the reasons for existence of significant discrepancies in the scope of development of this education stage and its availability in particular European areas.

Currently, Europe is a home for 32 million of children at the age, which entitles them to use the services of early education and care. However, taking the demographic forecasts into consideration, the percentage of children that are maximum 6 years old will drop by as many as 7.6% until 2030, what gives 2.5 mln children less when compared to 2012. The greatest drop is anticipated to take place in some eastern European countries and in Spain. Despite signals that demand for early childhood education and care over children services will remain on the decrease throughout the nearest decade, it does not pose a solution to the problem, which is still lack of a sufficient number of places in early childhood education and care facilities, which refers to almost all European countries, especially in relation to the younger age group (Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, p. 11).

HOW TO UNDERSTAND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE AS INVESTING IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL IN EUROPE?

In recent years, the approach to early education in Europe has changed, namely attention has been turned to great significance of pre-school education for success of the whole education process. High quality pre-school education prepares perfectly for taking up the proper school education, which starts in accordance to the compulsory education applicable in a given country. Moreover, major significance for the European economy, and support for parents, is borne by proper care over a little child in a nursery age. Pursuant to provisions in EU documents, care over children in the scope of early childhood education and care (ECEC — Early Childhood Education and Care), embraces children from the time of birth until primary school. The notions of age, at which education in a primary school is commenced, are regulated by national law. Early childhood education and care covers the public, private sector and volunteership, both the institutionalized services and those provided in home.

Thanks to struggles for provision of high quality education in European countries, both social and cultural development is possible. Currently, the early childhood education and care stage is perceived as a significant method for equalizing educational opportunities of children from marginalized groups such as: poor families, national minorities, children with disabilities. Early childhood education understood in such a manner also poses a considerable factor for sustainable development of European communities. A fact is that in Europe we deal with social inequalities, the reasons of which should be sought for in differences of social positions, resulting from a material situation, life and cultural level of a family, place of residence, sex, but also ethnic affiliation and other factors (M.J. Szymański, 2013, p. 195). Therefore, it is obvious that well-functioning education provides European societies with opportunities to acquire greater competences, better work,

thus better life. It is significant that high quality education is already provided to children at their earliest stages of knowledge acquisition.

A life success of young Europe residents is directly connected with the sector of education, but also with development of the society as a whole. Education, especially at the higher level, represents a certain highest form of human capital investment. According to sociologists, the higher education held by the Europe residents, the more developed the European society will be (T. Gmerek, 2008, pp. 22–23). However, it seems that equalization of educational opportunities of young European residents cannot be limited just to higher studies. For numerous children, a significant investment in their social and cultural capital will be provision of access to high-quality pre-school education and institutional care for the youngest.

Pierre Bourdieu — the influential French sociologist defined the social capital as follows: “Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (P. Bourdieu, L.J.D. Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Significant American sociologist James Coleman also write about social capital. He’s approach leads to a broader view of social capital, where it is not seen only as stock held by powerful elites, but notes its value for all kinds of communities, including the powerless and marginalised (D. Gauntlett, 2011). Coleman wrote that social capital is defined by its functions. Social capital is productive like other forms of capital, making possible to achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities (J.S. Coleman, 1988, p. 98).

Social capital is a kind of a public good, as its benefits are experienced more broadly. It is a type of resources with a social and structural character, streamlining various actions undertaken by social entities. This public good is of course education, which renders it possible to establish elites, but also marginalized and excluded groups. Equalization of educational opportunities of children from disfavoured groups in Europe will be possible thanks to greater involvement by EU institutions, which should support national educational system at implementation of solutions, thanks to which early childhood education and care will be more accessible, and carried out on a proper level.

In turn, the cultural capital is growing as a results of non-precedent educational boom, which rendered it possible to double the number of European students within last decades (P. Sztompka, 2004, p. 469). However, it must be borne in minds that educational inequalities should be reduced on the lowest educational level, i.e. early childhood education. The cultural capital concept creator — P. Bourdieu — drew attention to unequal access to symbolic goods, i.e. education, reputation, possession of which influences and individual’s position within the social hierarchy. For Bourdieu, one of the basic criteria for social stratification and school selection is the language that a child uses. Educational institutions keep on classifying and differentiating students in terms of cultural capital they possess. According to the concept by Bourdieu, the key notion is “habitus” — an individual’s capital, i.e. all resources it holds. Habitus of children from middle and upper class is different from that of children from lower classes. This results from other forms,

principles and objectives of socialization in families that belong to various social classes (J. Szacki, 2002, pp. 894–897). In practice, school prefers habitus of children from privileged social groups, raises expectations that are easier to be met by children from middle and upper class.

In contemporary societies, the social development process and expansions of education are very often perceived in economic categories. The human capital theory is inscribed in a dominating model of educational policy in almost all highly-developed countries. Education is perceived as a drive for economic development and social mobility, thus posing contribution to development of the “continuous growth” idea. It is worth stressing that in light of the human capital concept, the educational institutions reduce social injustice, through neutralization of family environment influence on school achievements of pupils (T. Gmerek, 2008, pp. 22–24).

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE — DEFINITION AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is defined as: “Provision for children from birth through to compulsory plus primary education that falls within a national regulatory framework, i.e., it has to comply with a set of rules, minimum standards and/ or undergo accreditation procedures” (Early Childhood Education and Care Systems in Europe, 2015, p. 9, <http://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/191EN.pdf> [access 20.03.2016]).

While speaking about early childhood education and care in European countries, attention should be drawn to the fact that in Europe we generally deal with a two-stage system, and the division is carried out according to the children age. Care services are provided in separate facilities for little children, up to 3 years of age. Early childhood education usually covers children that are at least 3 years old, until they start their school education. The two-stage system is adopted in the following countries: Belgium (German-speaking and Flemish community), Czech Republic, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia. In turn, in case of a single-stage system, the early childhood education and care services for pre-school age children are provided in a single facility. Education and care are continuous, with no breaks, until education in a primary school is commenced. Responsibility for management, administration and financing of the early childhood education and care institution is borne by the ministry of education. Such facilities employ persons with the same education and qualifications, who usually graduated from a university. The statutory right to early childhood education and care, or free of charge educational and care services are also provided for very little children. Such systems operate in Scandinavian and Baltic countries, as well as in Croatia and Slovenia (Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, p. 12). Currently, education and care over little children is perceived as an element of early childhood education, and the educational guidelines cover the whole stage of early childhood education and care. Experts in the field of early childhood education evaluate the integrated system as more advantageous,

providing greater opportunities for global thinking about developmental needs of a child, therefore contributing to implementation of solutions that guarantee access to early childhood education and care for all children.

Early education in Europe is understood as ISCED 0 level — Pre-primary education, which means: education designed to support early development in preparation for participation in school and society. Programmes are designed for children from age 3 to the start of primary education.

The problem of early childhood education and care is a relatively new field of interest of EU institutions. The first significant document in the field was the Communication from the European Commission, entitled: *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow* (2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL-EN/TXT/?qid=1458076022530&from=PL&uri=CELEX%3A52011DC0066&locale=en> [access, 14.03.2016]), issued in February 2011. The Communication was the European Commission's response to applications submitted by member states, asking for cooperation in this educational sector. Cooperation between EU institutions and member states in the field of early childhood education and care was to be a way to provide children with access to high quality early childhood education and care through properly integrated services. This cooperation would allow to develop more effective curricula, and ensure adequate competences of this sector's employees, as well as to provide administrative solutions, which facilitate this task. This Communication showed how the "Barcelona objectives" are realized within the European Union. It turned out that only five countries exceeded the assumed threshold of 33% for share of children in early childhood education and care, aged between 0 and 3. The remaining EU member states were far away from the suggested level. In case of the second age group, above 3 years old, eight countries exceeded the threshold of 90%, while in almost one third of the countries, the percentage still remained on the level of 70%. The new assumptions say that until 2020, the early childhood education and care system should embrace at least 95% children aged up to 4, until the moment of commencing education in a primary school. The Communication from the European Commission, related to early childhood education and care, was the first one to suggest significance of this education sector for improvement of quality of all educational systems in the European Union. This Communication stressed a series of advantages for European societies, both social, economic and educational. High quality early childhood education and care is becoming a significant factor for a school success of a child, and what is more, it enables the parents to combine their household and professional duties effectively. Availability of early childhood education and care is especially important for those children and families, which are in an unfavourable material situation, as it influences elimination of negative school selections (Communication from the Commission: *Early Childhood Education and Care*, 2011).

In May 2011, the *European Parliament resolution on Early Years Learning in the European Union* was issued. The European Parliament was happy to adopt the objectives, which were included in conclusions by the European Council, from the sitting in Barcelona, i.e.: *to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age* (European

Parliament resolution of 12 May 2011 on Early Years Learning in the European Union, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011IP0231&qid=1457217482094&from=EN> [access, 04.03.2016]. The interest of EU institutions in the field of early childhood education and care was focused on a child and its needs. It was agreed that the European Council and the European Commission must update their objectives in this area. At the same time, the Resolution emphasizes that contribution to development of early childhood education and care is a significant stage in the process of the “Europe 2020” strategy realization, with a primary purpose to create an integration society through improvement of the employment level, reduction of the drop out rate, but also limitation of poverty in European families. All children cannot be provided with a proper start without adequate financial outlays and support from member states. Resolution passed by the European Parliament drew attention also to the fact that early childhood period is of crucial importance for mental, emotional and physical development of children. They become a certain foundation for “lifelong learning”. Therefore, a decision was made so all EU member states consider implementation of a one-year pre-school compulsory education, before a child commences its education in a primary school. Moreover, the document stressed the need to provide proper conditions for children when it comes to teaching foreign languages, multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe (European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2011).

In February 2013, the European Commission issued a special recommendation for investing in children, through breaking the marginalization cycle. As suggested by statistical data, in majority of EU member state, these children are endangered with poverty or social exclusion more often than the rest of society. An important objective to be realized by the EU institutions within the nearest years is to prevent the phenomenon of marginalization inheritance. Realization of that objective will pose a significant contribution into the “Europe 2020” strategy for employment of intelligent and permanent economic growth, which will support social inclusion, at the same time emphasizing long-term advantages for children, economy and European society. Solving the problem of marginalization in early childhood poses a significant mean of improving efforts of fight with the phenomenon of poverty and social exclusion. This prevention is most effective, when integrated strategies are implemented, combining support for parents, who want to go back into the labour market after a parental leave, as well as proper support for their income and access to services, such as good quality pre-school education. In this document, the European Commission recommended the member states to undertake actions that allow to solve the problem of poverty among children and their social exclusions. It also stressed the significance of supporting investments in families and children. Support to parents should be realized not only through introduction of proper legal regulations, making it easier for parents to go back to the labour market, but also to provide them with high-quality care over their children, and their early childhood education at an affordable price. High quality early childhood education and care should also embrace various recreational, sport, cultural activities and games, which are of crucial importance for their proper development (Commission Recommendation of 20 February 2013. Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage, 2013, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-con->

tent/PL-EN/TXT/?qid=1458078130603&from=PL&uri=CELEX%3A32013H0112&locale=en [access, 15.03.2016]).

In May 2015, the European Union Council issued: *Conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence* (2015, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL-EN/TXT/?qid=1458078130603&from=PL&uri=CELEX%3A32013H0112&locale=en> [access, 15.03.2016]). This document was focused on significance of promotion of creativity and digital competences already at the earliest stage of education. The European Union Council emphasized in the document that promotion of creativity, innovation and digital competences at the level of early childhood education may bring great advantages in the following years of education, at it already provides the children with basis for future learning with modern methods. Especially, equipping a child with digital competences enables to reach a much higher level of its knowledge, improving its skills in development of creative and critical thinking. In the conclusion it was also emphasized that teachers and specialists in the early childhood education filed are the ones responsible for stimulation of a child's curiosity, its imagination and the will to experiment, as well as for helping a child in development of not only the basic knowledge and skills, but also broader competences, necessary for creativity and innovation, i.e. teaching how to think critically, solve problems and undertake independent initiatives. The document pointed that early childhood education is to be understood as learning through fun, but also with games and digital tools of a high pedagogical value. Thus, it is currently especially important to put greater emphasis on the need for continuous development of a teacher. The group of new competences that a teacher in early childhood education sector should be equipped with embraces a skill to care children creativity and innovation, with application of their own digital competences (*Conclusions on the role of early childhood education and primary education in fostering creativity, innovation and digital competence*, 2015). The document also drew attention to the need to modify current education programs for teachers in European higher education systems. It is necessary for the future teacher to not only have classes in media education or IT, but also history of education and comparative education, which will allow them to get familiar with and understand the tradition and phenomenon of the best world educational system, so they are able to implement the best global educational solutions into the educational process in the facilities that they work in.

In December 2015, the: *Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)* (2015, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN-PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)&from=PL](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN-PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)&from=PL) [access, 16.03.2016]) was issued. The Document suggested new priorities of European cooperation in the field of education and training, i.e.: significance of inclusive education, equality, non-discrimination and promotion of civic attitudes. Good education and training help promote sustained economic growth, as well as sustainable development: they fuel R & D, innovation, productivity and competitiveness. Early childhood education and care is perceived as a starting point and one of the most effective manner for improvement of key competences. The challenges that the member states must face in the filed cover the necessity to enhance availability of early

childhood education and care, and simultaneous improvement of quality of those services. What is more, it is necessary to draw attention to children from disfavoured groups, professionalization of pedagogic staff, effective management systems and new curricula (Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), 2015). Education and training currently play a highly significant role when it comes to protection of human and civic values that are common for Europe residents, and to hand them over to future generations. Education, already from the earliest stage, should support social integration and prevent social exclusion. This report also suggests that EU institutions assume implementation of educational solutions, which will make it easier for immigrants to integrate in the new European reality.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE — DIFFERENCES IN THE VARIOUS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

The report issued by Eurydice together with Eurostat, entitled: *Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe* (2014, <http://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/166EN.pdf> [access, 02.03.2016]) from 2014, is already the second publication of such type, the previous report from 2009 was devoted to reduction of social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care. As suggested by the report, currently in European countries, the demand for early childhood education and care is higher than the supply. A decreasing number of births in Europe suggests that the demand for such services will be on the decrease in future. However, there are still not enough places for children in early childhood education and care facilities in numerous European countries. It is a fact that majority of European countries has already undertaken some efforts to provide the children with places in the facilities, either through a statutory right for early childhood education and care, or thorough introduction of compulsory participation in pre-school education, at least within the last year before commencement of education in a primary school. Such solutions have still not been implemented in three countries: Slovakia, Iceland and Turkey. Eight European countries: Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Malta, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway provided each child with a statutory right for early childhood education and care, a short time after birth, most often right after the parental leave of one parent is finished. Parents of children, who use such care and education most often participate in its costs until education in a primary school is started. However, the charges are relatively low, and the discounts are adjusted to financial possibilities of families. In comparison to pre-school education, the participation rate of children up to 3 year of age in early childhood education and care in Europe remains very low. In the group of countries, who managed to realize the “Barcelona Objectives”, i.e. provide care services for at least 33% children until 2010, Denmark can be especially distinguished. Participation of as much as 74% of children below 3 years of age has been recorded in early childhood education and care facilities in that country. In turn, a very low participation rate in this sector of education was recorded in Bulgaria, Czech Repub-

lic, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, in Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Right before commencement of education in a primary school, the percentage of children participating in early childhood education and care is reaching to 93%. The European objective until 2020 is to reach the level of 95% of children up to 4 years of age, till the moment of commencement of education in primary school, according to the compulsory education. In 2011, the participation rate of 4-year-olds in pre-school education program reached the level between 70 and 79% in Greece, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Finland and Switzerland. The lowest level was recorded in Turkey (43%) (Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, pp. 11–12).

Significant differences in participation of the youngest children, up to 3 years of age, in early childhood education and care in particular countries, result on one hand from the family policy, and on the other on availability of such services, but they may also result from a different approach to children education. Numerous European societies believe that the best environment for harmonious development of a child in first years of its life is the family home, thus not many parents delegates care of their children to specialist facilities, unless it is the only alternative for a given family, regarding professional work of parents. A task of each country should be to provide parents with a possibility to choose, to remain at home with a child until it starts pre-school education, thanks to a childcare leave, or to provide the children with places in adequate facilities. In majority of European countries, children remain at home under supervision of one parent, until they are one year old. The problem with availability of places in early childhood education and care facilities usually emerges when parents have already used the parental leave. Numerous European countries do not provide places in such facilities for children that are 1 or 2 years old. Only a small number of countries, such as France, provides 2-year-olds with a right for education in a kindergarten, while in other states the education process starts when a child is 3 years old.

As communicated in the report by Eurydice and Eurostat (2014, p. 39), the properly paid childcare leave is the longest in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania, where parents may care over their child until it is 2 years old. In 11 European countries (Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway), parents may jointly use from 46 to 70 weeks of leave in order to take care of their new-born baby. A properly paid childcare leave, in a time dimension of 20–29 weeks, functions in: Ireland, Greece, Croatia, Portugal, Slovakia, Great Britain, Iceland and Lichtenstein.

Analysing the participation level of children in early childhood education and care in particular European countries, we notice that there are significant differences in age, at which children are provided with a place in such facilities. Moreover, the differences are noticeable in the scope of the number of hours, which the children are entitled to, whether the costs are incurred by parents or not. In six European countries: Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and Norway, law provides early childhood education and care to each child, right after the birth, often directly after the parent's childcare leave. For example, in 2001 Denmark implemented regulations that oblige communes to provide early childhood education and care to all children that are 26 weeks old, until they are

6 years old, when the compulsory education in a primary school starts. Parents cover up to 25% of expenditures on education and care. In Finland, children aged 9–10 months are entitled to financing from public funds, for a place in early childhood education and care facilities. Pre-school education is totally free of charge, but only for 6-year-olds. In turn in Sweden, the children, who are at least 1 year old are entitled to 15 hours of publicly donated early childhood education and care, and if both parent work or study, they are provided with full free care, in a full time dimension. In remaining European countries, the time interval between finishing a properly paid childcare leave and the statutory right to early childhood education and care is more than 2 years. Only in about one third of the European countries (Belgium, Ireland, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Portugal and Great Britain) the statutory right to early childhood education and care, donated from public funds, is ascribed to children up to 3 years old, or several months younger (Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, p. 41). As suggested by the data, in numerous European countries, these are the parents, who is responsible for provision of paid care, usually for 2 years, until they start their pre-school education, when the parent incur costs partially or are totally relieved from them.

The statistical data clearly prove that the participation level of children in early childhood education and care increases with each year of their life. In 2011, an average level of participation of 3-year-olds in pre-school education in 28 European countries reached 82%, while in case of 4-year-olds the level was already 91% 5-year-olds — 95%, 6-year-olds — 98%. However, there are certain differences between particular countries. At the ISCED 0 level, education is participated in about 50% of 3-year-olds, in such countries as: Ireland, Croatia, Cyprus, Malta, Poland and Finland. The greatest number of 3-year-olds is covered with early childhood education and care in Denmark (74%). In the Netherlands and Sweden, every other child that is 3 years old uses such care and education. In Belgium, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Iceland and Norway, the participation level in early childhood education and care of children that are younger than 3 years old amounts up to 40–45%. About 30% of children that are younger than 3 years old, use the institutionalized care for at least several hours per week in Portugal, Slovenia and Great Britain. The worst situation was recorded in the following countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, where the participation level in early education and care over children below 3 years old is about 10% or less. In Croatia, Austria and Latvia, this level is about 15%, and in Estonia, Ireland and Greece about 20% (Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, pp. 63–66).

The early childhood education and care sector is financed by parents in majority of countries. For numerous families, especially for those with low income, it is an enormous barrier. The parents bear no costs related to early childhood education and care only in Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. The highest charges for early childhood education and care function in Ireland, Luxembourg, Great Britain and Switzerland. While the lowest fees for services from this education sector are recorded in eastern Europe countries and Scandinavia. Regarding the fact that majority of eastern European countries did not introduce the statutory right for early childhood education and care, demand for those services is greater than supply. Only in the Scandinavian countries, the early childhood education

and care services are available in terms of both free places and prices (Key Data of Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, p. 14).

Numerous scientific studies point to enormous benefits for children, flowing from good quality early childhood education and care. Data from PISA and PIRLS research (PISA — Programme for International Student Assessment OECD; PIRLS — Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) mentioned in the Eurydice and Eurostat report (2014, pp. 17–20) clearly suggest that students, who participated in early childhood education and care obtained 35 points more on average in the studies than the remaining ones. The PIRLS study from 2011 proved that children, who spent more time in the early childhood and care facilities, are better prepared to start education in primary school. Moreover, the longer was the education in such facilities, the greater were the child's results in reading. Better results in reading were achieved by children from disfavoured environments than those from families with more advantageous economic situation. It turns out that participation in early childhood education and care is especially beneficial for children from families endangered with poverty or social exclusion. Children from disfavoured linguistic aid is most often directed to children of immigrants or ethnic minorities (Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014, pp. 17–20).

CONCLUSION

EU institutions increasingly more often raise appropriateness of introduction of solutions with a purpose to provide the greatest number of children possible with access to early childhood education and care. Since publication of the Council's Conclusion on early childhood education and care from 2011, a greater stress is placed on significance of that education stage, not only in relation to active participation of parents in the labour market, but also in order to level socio-economic inequalities, and to provide full development of children. Basic importance is also ascribed to provision of all children with access to high quality early childhood education and care, which is reflected in economic benefits for the whole society and better results in education. Results of international studies — PISA and PIRLS — prove that children and teenagers, who participated in early childhood education and care, had better results in reading and mathematics. Thanks to solid foundations for effective "lifelong learning", high quality early childhood education and care provides children with a variety of benefits, especially those from disfavoured environments. Expansion of access to early childhood education and care contributed directly to the increase in social and cultural capital of children, especially from surroundings that are endangered with poverty and social exclusion.

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WCZESNA EDUKACJA I OPIEKA NAD DZIECKIEM W EUROPIE
JAKO INWESTOWANIE W KAPITAŁ SPOŁECZNY I KULTUROWY JEDNOSTKI —
ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA

Streszczenie

Problem wczesnej edukacji i opieki nad dzieckiem jest stosunkowo nowym obszarem zainteresowania instytucji unijnych. Aktualnie wczesna edukacja oraz opieka nad dzieckiem w wieku żłobkowym postrzegane są jako kluczowe etapy dla pełnej realizacji koncepcji „uczenia się przez całe życie”, ale również dla realizacji strategii „Europa 2020”. Wysokiej jakości wczesna edukacja i opieka nad dzieckiem ma ogromne znacznie nie

tylko dla podniesienia poziomu nauczania w krajach europejskich, ale również dla przewycięzania zjawiska marginalizacji i wykluczenia społecznego, przynosi znaczące korzyści nie tylko dla gospodarki europejskiej, ale przede wszystkim dla rodziców i ich dzieci. Wszelkie zalecenia w tym obszarze, jakie możemy znaleźć w dokumentach unijnych stanowią jedynie punkt wyjścia dla reform, jakie podejmą krajowe systemy edukacyjne. W wielu państwach członkowskich Unii Europejskiej upowszechnienie wczesnej edukacji i opieki nad dzieckiem nadal stanowi problem. Artykuł prezentuje rozwiązania w zakresie wczesnej edukacji i opieki nad dzieckiem w wybranych krajach UE.