Save the Children

Early childhood care and development situation analysis

IDENTIFICATION OF THE EXTENT OF EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONALISM, PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS, AND THE INCLUSION OF ETHNIC MINORITY CHILDREN AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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RESEARCH TEAM

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FOREWORD

Save the Children's early childhood programmes are based on an overall understanding of the child, combining physical, socio-emotional, linguistic and cognitive developmental needs. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) ensures that children survive, develop and achieve their potential.

In collaboration with the University of Prishtina and the University of Bologna, Save the Children implemented the ECCD Situation Analysis research project in 5 municipalities in Kosovo: Pristine, Prizren, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Peja/Pec.

The results derived from the ECCD situation analysis show the importance of raising awareness about ECCD, of the training and professional development of educators, and of creating and providing opportunities for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children and children with disabilities to access ECCD educational services. A further recommendation is for integrated public services for children and their families. Even though the research was conducted in 5 municipalities where Save the Children works, we seek to use these results to influence all actors at local and national levels.

Save the Children's support to ECCD consists of basic assistance which a child needs to survive and develop in life, as well as support for families and the community to promote children's healthy development and growth. Professional training on ECCD improve the lives of children and the quality of education they receive.

ECCD programmes prepare children for school, and reduce the effects of poverty by ensuring an equal start for all children and improving learning outcomes in the long run. Save the Children programmes help children with effective problem-solving as well as building transferable skills that they will need at school and beyond.

Special thanks go to all the parents and educators who took part in the research. Together with national and local institutions, Save the Children will work to improve the quality of ECCD programmes and services and the inclusion of all children.

We would like to express special gratitude to the University of Pristina and the University of Bologna for their collaboration and valuable input throughout the process.

We strongly believe that this research will assist in raising awareness about the importance of investing in ECCD.

Ahmet Kryeziu
Country Director

Acknowledgements

Glossary / Abbreviations

ECCD - Early Childhood Care and Development

EsPri - Results from Private Preschool Institutions

EsPub - Results from Public Preschool Institutions

Kindergarten – All classes attended by children from 3 to 5 years old.

Nursery – Classes attended by children from 0-3 years

Pre-primary – Attended by children from 5 to 6 years old.

Pre-school Institution – A term generally used for institutions attended by children from 0 to 6 years old.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Since 2000, a number of documents (UNICEF 2011, USAID 2012, and OECD 2003) have endeavoured to outline and analyze the status of the education system in Kosovo, as well as the structural reforms that have affected this area and, more generally, the entire country.

Debate, research, and, above all, political actions and innovative measures taken over the last ten years of intervention in the pre-school and school system have mainly been focused on areas of post-war emergency: rebuilding premises and making them suitable for students, especially in compulsory and secondary education. Efforts were then extended to the field of childhood, recognised as central to the development of a system in which the rights of citizenship and participation of the entire population are fully recognised, within an education aiming for democracy, tolerance and peace.

The Kosovo government has therefore carried out a general reform of the national education system, building a single path that starts from pre-school education and leads to university education, and which offers a point of reference for the implementation of curricula regarding the sequencing and levels of education, subsequently modified as a result of reform. Despite the great efforts made by both the Government of Kosovo and various NGOs and other organisations working in various capacities in this field, there are still many critical issues in the education sector. The access to the educational system of children between 0 and 5 years of age appears highly problematic, in particular for those with a disadvantaged background related to disability or belonging to minority ethnic groups, such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

It is already widely acknowledged that educators represent the key agent for change and innovation in the pre-school sector, and for the success of any reform within the institution (NESSE, 2008; CORE, 2011). It is also recognised that the participation of families and identification of their needs is equally necessary to have support from the outside for the processes of renewal and reforms in education. The focus of this research is therefore primarily on educators and parents, collecting their perspectives and experiences in relation to the central aspects of professionalism in the education domain and expectations regarding access to services and pre-school institutions.

More specifically, this report aims to explore two specific focuses of research in the domain of pre-school education:

- Analysis of the professional status of educators and teachers participating in the research.
- accessibility of the pre-school system with particular reference to children with disabilities and those from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The final objective of the survey is to produce recommendations and to share them with local political representatives and representatives of NGOs, in order to make more accurate and effective interventions at both the policy and action level.

■ The study was conducted in three stages:

The first stage consisted of a systematic analysis of documents relating to policies and programmes focused on early childhood. The objective of this stage was understanding the framework, at least in terms of explicit statements regarding the educational system of early childhood. The documents examined include rules, strategies, programmes, curricula and analyses carried out in the pre-school education..

The second stage consisted of brief visits in the field, interviews with selected representatives (school leaders, representatives of NGOs in the field, political representatives, academics, and experts of the field) and visits to pre-school services and to a hospital, a visit to the public pre-school institution

"*Gëzimi ynë*" in Pristine a visit to the private pre-school institution "*Bardha*" and an interview with the director of this institution Gëzime Rexhepi in Pristine a visit to the public pre-school institution "*Pëllumbat e Paqes*" in Peja/Pec and a visit paid to Dr. Shemsije Dukaj as well as a visit to the Family Medicine Centre in Peja/Pec. The objective of this stage was to explore the data gathered through desk review, fill in any information gaps, and resolve certain ambiguities or misunderstandings.

The third stage consisted of conducting field research aimed at educators and parents of all pre-school institutions in the 5 sample cities: Pristine, Prizren, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Peja/Pec, and establishing 7 focus groups with parents of children with special needs and from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Questionnaires and lines of questionning were discussed with the team of representatives from Save the Children and translated into Albanian.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The responsibility of the public schools (pre-school institutions, primary, secondary and high schools) lies with the Ministry of Education (MEST - Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Kosovo). MEST is responsible for planning, supporting, coordinating and supervising educational institutions in general, and the support for the operation of schools is a responsibility at municipal level.

At central level the government provides specific guidelines, especially related to public health and safety issues, for establishing and running educational institutions for early childhood and beyond. The legislation entitles the municipality to determine the fees for these services for participating families.

The main legislation for the establishment and functioning of pre-school institutions is quite recent: the law dates from January 2006 (L.N. 02/L-52). We believe that the regulations, though only implicitly, offer a plan for a pedagogical approach and it seems especially important to focus on the first articles of the law, to try to explain the pedagogical structure of the document.

Consistent with the values expressed in the Constitution, the basic principles of the law are primarily those of equality, inclusion, and democracy (art. 4). Article 24 of the Constitution of Kosovo is not quoted or mentioned explicitly, but article 6 of the law L.N. 02/L-52 confirms the right to education for all children, including those with special needs:

"6.1. Pre-school education is a right for all children, including those with special needs, which will be carried out in compliance with this Law and sub-legal acts".[1]

This information, together with the repeated references to the UN convention on the rights of the child, establishes the right to education among the fundamental rights of all children and, in particular, recognises childhood as a status with specific and unique rights. In the context of the principles of pre-school and objectives of the legal provision stated under article 3, education is presented as a key right, not only to ensure the full development of the human person, but also to ensure the citizen status from the first moments of life.

There is a specific educational system in accordance with such a right (article 2), of which the pre-school sector is an integral part. Providing a unified and not divided system can, as in other countries, ensure greater coordination in the interest of both organisational and curricular continuity, even in the presence of a management system which is both public and private, as foreseen in article 7 and repeated under article 13, which states that: "parents have the right to choose a pre-school programme for their children in public or private institutions."

Parents contribute to pre-school costs - meals and teaching materials – and there are discounts and exemptions regarding fees for families in need.

The above-mentioned elements can be considered as principles that characterise the standards established in Kosovo's pre-school programme, including also the policies repeatedly mentioned in official European documents placing a special emphasis on early childhood policies including those relating to education, and the rights and interests of the child.

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[1]   Article 24 of the Constitution is that which regulates the equality of citizens before the law. 'Article 24 - 1. All are equal before the law. Everyone enjoys the right to equal legal protection without discrimination. 2. No-one shall be discriminated against on grounds of race, colour, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, relation to any community, property, economic and social condition, sexual orientation, birth, disability or other personal status'.– published from 25/02/2010 at the following address http://www.diritto.it/docs/29067-republic-of kosovo-la-constitution.

Beyond the objectives, the law defines the organisation and components of the pre-school system. Article 8 cites the basic duties of the pre-school institution as follows:

a. support to the parents in the care and education of children;
b. promoting quality for children and family life;
c. establishing conditions for the development of the individual potential of children and how it might show itself;
d. creating conditions for the increase of children's skills in fulfilling the tasks and obligations required by the school."

Article 8 seems to partially overtake the priorities expressed in the first articles of the law: from the child as priority to the family. In fact, creating conditions for the development of the individual child's potential and how it might show itself is defined as the third purpose, preceded by the support of families and the promotion of the quality of life for children and their families. Finally, item d) is evidence of the preparatory nature of the pre-school system related to the demands of compulsory schooling.

This last point seems inkeeping with the suggestions given in the New Kosovo Curriculum. In relation to pre-school institutions, the system supports a preparatory approach and the objectives of preparatory education are often focused on the development of basic skills (reading, writing, counting) and social behaviours that anticipate the knowledge and, more generally, the demands that will be required of children in primary schools. Pre-school institutions favouring a non-preparatory approach tend to emphasise planning that values learning through discovery, research, stimulating children's curiosity through play, creativity, teamwork, testing materials, and problem-solving (ISSA, 2010).

In terms of content and methodology there is greater congruence with the directions of the New Kosovo Curriculum which, in the paragraph titled 'General Aims of Education in Kosovo', repeatedly invokes the need for this second group of skills for a complete formation of a free and active citizen:

"Therefore, one of the main aims of education in Kosovo should be the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills required in a democratic citizenry. This will enable young people to engage competently in public affairs, and be active and responsible citizens in a pluralistic and democratic society". The curriculum nevertheless refers to the need for young people to prepare themselves for a life in a society that undergoes a significant and continuous change: "in this respect, another important aim of Kosovo education is to equip students with valuable updated knowledge and instrumental skills which will help them cope with the challenges of a learning society, and of lifelong learning perspectives in an interdependent world."

In terms of the organisation of the work, the law proposes an annual programme of educational activities determined independently by each institution, taking into consideration both the work with the children and support for parenting.

The education qualification required by law for teaching staff to be employed are also set out. The requirement is for a university degree, or a high school diploma with specialisation for educators, or a general secondary school diploma but with specific training for the pre-school level, for assistants. The legislation proposes a hierarchical organisation of work, while also providing leadership and coordination for supervision and consultation on specific issues.

Additional elements of ambiguity appear when reading the New Kosovo Curriculum. The document defines pre-school education as an education aimed at children from 3 to 6 years old (International Standard Classification of Education/ ISCED 0), dividing this period into two formally distinct groups: kindergarten (3-5 years) and pre-school (5-6 years). In order to be in line with the sequencing set out in the Lisbon Treaty (2006), pre-school is established as compulsory education according to law No. 04/L-032 which may enter into force from academic year 2015/2016, in contrast to attendance at kindergarten which is optional. The organisation of the compulsory transition year (5-6 years old) is an issue that should be further researched. In fact, it is likely to transform pre-school education attendance into something that is purely preparatory, especially if the attendance is in shifts, as is already happening in primary schools. The short time available, the focus given to content within planning (also designed with a pre disciplinary view) rather than to the child, the high number of children per

class (and, therefore, the ratio of children: educators) are all indicators highlighting the difficulty of reconciling the development of key competencies outlined in the introduction of the curriculum with a more rigid and traditional context and organisation. At the level of investment, in a system where pre-school attendance is already rare (only 3% of children from 0 to 5 years of age attend pre-school), there is a great risk that economic and organisational initiatives focus primarily (or exclusively) on compulsory education and the mandatory year of pre-school (according to the law No. 04/L-032 which may enter into force from academic year 2015/2016) rather than on the development even in the long term, of a general education system, and thus neither accessibility to pre-school services nor a culture that supports that accessibility will be developed.

Already in the OECD report (2003), accessibility to pre-school services was considered to be the central theme for pre-school education; low attendance was seen as closely related to the culture of childhood in the country:

"Access to pre-school care and education in Kosovo is very poor. Significant behavioural changes need to be made in the care given by parents, communities and the pre-school system to improve care and education at this crucial stage in a child's life. Early childhood services are not being used, and there is little understanding of the need for child development programmes. Enrolment is low because pre-school is not compulsory, and understanding of this issue is poor, enrolment criteria are arbitrary and sometimes discriminatory, places are not available or costly" (p.349-350).

The report also makes reference to the lack of a unified curriculum and inadequate qualification of educators, but we know that much has been done, and continues to be done on these issues. The risk of low attendance in pre-school on a long-term basis is still very present, and requires a solution.

This research was conducted to support the professional work of educators, and focuses especially on those who take care of children in the age group which has been dealt with least: early childhood.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

The desk review team briefly mentioned in the first paragraph highlighted some of the issues requiring further research.

The cultural, political and institutional framework appears to be particularly complex. After the end of the war in Kosovo, and the establishment of the constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and identification of its own forms of government and democracy, Kosovo found itself in a situation with two priorities: to rebuild the country and to establish institutions and regulations to enable its citizens to enjoy their fundamental rights.

The statistical data give the profile of a country whose population is among the youngest in Europe (30% of the population in fact is less than 15 years old and only 7% are over 65[2],; during the next few years we can expect a significant increase in births due to the young age of the population, which is correlated with fertility (UNICEF, 2011).

First of all the government promulgated the law on the reorganisation of the school system[3] by which it is planned to lower the age for compulsory school attendance to 5 years, with one year of preschool. That year is 'taken' from the period intended for nursery and kindergarten (currently from 0 to 5 years). Then, the curriculum for different grade levels was prepared. The kindergarten curriculum represents a particularly high-quality document; it is in line with similar documents issued by European countries and beyond, and approaches the education of early and late childhood with great care, competency and sensitivity.

An analysis of the curriculum, and the data relating to the education system combined with interviews and observations in the field by the research team which identified the use of premises, the poor qualifications of teaching staff, and inconsistency in the training and education qualifications recognised as necessary for staff employment, led us to question the professionalism of teachers, their training and, above all, the professionalism of how they presented themselves.. We also considered it necessary to test the openness of educators to training and innovation, since the application of the curriculum, the inclusion in education of all children, including those most culturally disadvantaged (for example children from the Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities) or people with disabilities (special needs) represent major changes both in terms of teaching practices and educators' attitudes. Notwithstanding the openness in the legislation, the data on pre-university education developed by the Ministry of Education 2012-13 present a situation that is far from inclusive: only 1.6 % children in kindergarten belong to an ethnic group other than Albanian, and only 37 out of 5389 belong to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities; the percentage increases by a few points in pre-primary education: 96.3% of those attending are Albanians and 3.7% from other ethnic groups. As regards children with special needs, the situation is even more critical: there are no data about kindergarten attendance while there are only 18 children identified as having special needs in pre-primary schools throughout the country.

The research work was negotiated with Save the Children with the idea that the data gathered and their analysis could then guide actions to be taken towards educational support for children from 0 to 6 years of age, and particularly for younger children aged under three years old. The broader idea is developing knowledge in the world of education, for a culture of childhood which is child-focused and addresses children's needs, rights and potential. In order to support the inception and development of this culture, the opinion of parents and, more generally, of the families of the children are absolutely essential. For this reason these stakeholders were also included as subjects and participants in the

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2   Data from the Demographic, Social and Reproductive Health Survey in Kosovo - no. 2009 cited by UNICEF, 2011: 16

3   Law No. 04/L-032 which may enter into force from academic year 2015/2016

research, in order to gather their perceptions and experiences related to pre-school, and to identify weaknesses especially regarding accessibility.

The questionnaires represent important and complex themes, which have been explored by different research approaches, complementary to one another. The survey of educators was conducted using the quantitative instrument of the questionnaire; for parents the questionnaire was accompanied by a qualitative survey conducted through a series of focus groups.

In the quantitative survey a questionnaire was distributed to all educators in public pre-school institutions in the cities of Pristine, Prizren, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Gjilan/Gnjilane, and Peja/Pec. and in the same schools a questionnaire was distributed to the parents of each child attending the school.

Through the questionnaires addressed to educators and to parents, we tried to outline aspects of the educators' professionalism identified as an object of the study. The data obtained were analysed, and the possible reciprocal influences were also explored to verify the most significant relationships between the variables. The indicators from which the items of the questionnaire were developed derived from the theoretical analysis of the research topic; it is through these indicators that we have read the survey results, without claiming to be exhaustive, but at the same time in the belief that the issues and assumptions for each of them are relevant for a better understanding of the question we started from.

The indicators identified for educators were: the reasons for their choice of profession, the image of the ideal educator, sources of professionalism, exercise of professionalism, satisfaction in teaching/educating, the purpose of classes for children aged 0-3, and the relationship with parents.

The indicators identified for parents were: the reasons they chose to send their child to school, school attendance and child development (their perception of the function of pre-school in child development), an evaluation of the spaces and organisation of pre-school, an assessment of the relationships between the family and the pre-school, and satisfaction with the pre-school staff.

The qualitative survey, focused on a deeper understanding of the way that educators are presented, was carried out using the focus group methodology to stimulate brainstorming, judgments, and specialist opinions about the main themes relating to educators' qualification through discussion and listening to each other. The purpose of this stage of the research was to find a space to generate interpretations that could develop and categorise the assumptions arising from the results of the questionnaire.

■ The questionnaires

The instruments used for the quantitative survey were developed during October and November 2013, by a research team composed by Lucia Balduzzi, Francesca Emiliani, Giannino Melotti, and Paola Villano, who defined the structure and identified the items to be included. A first draft of the questionnaire was translated and discussed by Save the Children and the University of Prishtina who conducted the review and final translation.

■ The questionnaire addressed to educators

The resulting instrument consists of a structured questionnaire that studies the following sections:
- *Socio-demographic* and professional data and information related to the structure in which educators perform their work;
- *The reasons related to the choice of profession;,* a list of 11 items to each of which participants were asked to assign a level of importance (scale of 1 = not important at all to 4 = very important);
- *The image of the ideal educator;* two groups of items through which the educators were asked to indicate: a) the aspects of a good educator (11 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not important at all to 4 = very important); b) the elements that a good educator should know (13 items assessed on a scale from 1=not important at all to 4=very important);
- *The sources of professionalism;* two groups of items designed to reveal: a) the sources from which educators say they learn to do their jobs (9 items assessed on a scale from 1=not important at all to

4=very important); b) the relationship between the experiences of being a professional and being a mother (4 items assessed on a scale from 1 = don't agree at all to 4 = strongly agree);

- *The exercise of professionalism;* two groups of items to reveal: a) the importance attributed to a number of professional goals (11 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not important at all to 4 = very important); b) the differences between the children who attend school and those who do not (12 items assessed on a scale from 1 = don't agree at all to 4 = strongly agree);

- *The satisfaction of the role of educator;* two groups of items through which the following were assessed: a) the level of satisfaction of educators in relation to some elements related to their profession (14 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not at all satisfied to 4 = very satisfied); b) the level of satisfaction of stakeholders regarding their relations with others in the pre-school context (colleagues, children, parents, etc.) (10 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not at all satisfied to 4 = very satisfied);

- *The purpose of the classes with children aged 0-3*; a list of 14 items representing the purpose of classes with children aged 0-3 and the professional role of educators of children aged 0-3 (14 items assessed on a scale from 1 = I don't agree at all to 4 = strongly agree);

- *Relationships with parents,* a specific question to identify educators' perspective of the satisfaction level of parents of their pupils in relation to choosing the school (5 point scale from 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much) and 3 items designed to reveal, from the point of view of the educators: a) the motives of the parents in choosing to send their children to school (9 items assessed on a 4-point scale from 1 = never / almost never to 4 = very often); b) the information that parents usually ask for from pre-school staff (10 items assessed on a 4-point scale from 1 = never / almost never to 4 = very often); c) the difficulties that parents who bring their children to school may encounter (11 items assessed on a 4-point scale from 1 = never / almost never to 4 = very often).

Items of the questionnaire were identified by taking into consideration the empirical research questionnaires used for educators, and in particular those working in facilities for early childhood and pre-school[4] and reviewing the syntax and structure and its translation into Albanian.

A cover letter to educators who joined the survey was then attached to the final version of the questionnaire.

The description of the results is as follows:

1   Analysis of the social and personal characteristics of the participants, also emphasising any differences between educators who work in public institutions (ESPub) and those in private institutions (ESPri);

2   Descriptive overview of the results for the entire sample helping to identify the dimensions for each indicator;

3   Evaluation of the impact of age on the professional experience of the educator;

4   Relevance of any differences between educators in public institutions (ESPub) and educators in private institutions (ESPri) in the results obtained under point 2;

5   Comparison of educators who perform their activities at the three different types of institution (nursery school 0-3, kindergarten 3-5, pre-primary group 5-6) in order to assess whether there are differences among the three groups as to the purposes of classes for children aged 0-3, since the new curriculum does not provide any indication for classes for children aged 0-3 who are still waiting for an official document;

6   Evaluation of any differences in the results obtained in point 2 due to the different educational qualifications of educators.

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4   In particular: A. Cavalli (edited by), *Teaching today. First IARD survey on the conditions of living and working in the Italian school*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1992 and A. Cavalli (ed.), *Teachers in the school that changes. Second IARD survey on the conditions of living and working in the Italian school*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2000; Galliani L.and E. Felisatti (ed.), *Masters of University. Empirical model and the quality of primary teacher education: the case of Padova*, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce, 2001; Galliani and Felisatti E. (ed.), *Masters of the University. Curriculum training and profession. 2nd Research Report on the case of Padova*, Pensa MultiMedia, Lecce, 2005.

■ The questionnaire addressed to parents

Through the questionnaire addressed to parents we aimed to research the following sections:
- *Data on social, civil and family status;*
- *The reasons for sending their child to school;* a list of 13 possible items (2-score scale 1 = yes, 2 = no);
- *Attendance at pre-school and children's development (identification of the pre-school's role in children's development);* two groups of items where parents were asked to indicate: a) differences between children who attend pre-school and those who do not attend pre-school (12 items assessed on a scale from 1 = do not agree at all to 4 = strongly agree); b) the benefits to the child from pre-school attendance (7 items assessed on a scale from 1 = don't agree at all to 4 = strongly agree);
- *Evaluation of the premises and the organisation of the school;* 3 groups of items where parents were asked to: a) assess the indoor spaces of the school (7 items assessed on a 3-score scale 1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = don't know); b) assess the outdoor spaces of the school (8 items assessed on a 3-point scale 1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = don't know); c) identify special needs or requests from parents in relation to the opening hours of the school (5 items assessed on a 2-point scale 1 = yes, 2 = no);
- *Evaluation of family-school relationships;* two groups of items to reveal how parents assess: a) means of maintaining contact (interviews, meetings, etc.) between family members and educators (5 items assessed on a 4-score scale 1 = yes, 2 = somewhat, 3 = no, 4 = don't know); b) the ways the school welcomes the children (5 items assessed on a 4-point scale 1 = yes, 2 = somewhat, 3 = no, 4 = don't know);
- *Satisfaction with school personnel;* two groups of items asking parents to assess: a) the school staff (6 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not at all to 4 = very much); b) the ancillary staff at the school (5 items assessed on a scale from 1 = not at all to 4 = very much).

PROFESSIONAL CHARACTER-ISTICS OF EDUCATORS IN PRE-SCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

■ Description of the Sample

2 31 participants (226 females, 2 males and 3 who did not indicate their gender) took part in the survey. They were between 20 and 65 years of age (average age 43 years old, sd = 11:04). This data represents a very good result if we consider that the total number of educators working in the public pre-school system throughout Kosovo in 2013 was 511 (Ministry data 2012/2013). It confirmed the extremely widespread assumption regarding gender, that the education and care of children, especially those under three years of age, is almost exclusively conducted by female staff. Compared to national data, the participants represent a fairly heterogeneous group. Overall, we find 8 participants (4%) with an age of less than 25 years, 54 (23%) aged between 26 and 35 years old, 69 (30%) aged between 35 and 45 years old and 94 (41%), the largest group, comprised of people of more than 45 years of age; 6 participants (3%) did not declare their age. In line with similar European research, this data differs from the average age of the population of the country as shown in the ministerial documents.

■ Marital status, level of education and previous professional experiences indicate the following:

Regarding marital status, 183 participants (79%) were married/ cohabiting, 28 (12%) single, 14 (6%) widowed, 3 (1%) separated or divorced, and 3 (1%) religious/nuns. The majority of the educators in our sample are married and therefore many of them have children: 83% (191) declare being a parent and among those the majority have more than one child: there are 21 participants (14%) with only one child, 69 (36%) with two, 65 (34%) with three and 31 (16%) with 4 or more children. In total, 473 children (on average 2.5 children *per capita*).

According to their age, marital status and family structure, the majority of questionnaire respondents live in what is known as the middle age of adulthood in which women have already made very important choices concerning both their professional life and work. In the case of the education and care profession, this data is particularly significant because, especially for those who work with children from 0 to 3 years of age, the job requires many characteristics similar to those of a housewife, based on both personal and professional identity (Cover, Columbus, Bianchi 2004).

The educational level of the participants is a further matter of interest, since the correlation between quality of education and professionalism of educators is well-founded, as well as the relationship between high skills and the course of study in preparation for the profession (CORE, 2011). A university education (ISCED 5) is recommended for educators working in the sector 0-6 and a curriculum focusing on psychological and pedagogical skills.

Regarding qualifications, 66 (29%) of the participants claim to be in possession of a medical secondary school diploma, 60 (26%) a high school diploma, 57 (25%) a degree in pre-school education from the Faculty of Education, 18 (8%) a degree in general pedagogy from the Faculty of Pedagogy, 3 (1%) a degree in primary education from the Faculty of Education, 3 (1%) a degree in the teaching of specific subjects (mathematics, physics, language, etc.) from the Faculty of Education and finally only one (0.4%) a degree in inclusive/special Education from the Faculty of Pedagogy.

The training of educators who responded to the questionnaire is uneven and seems to suggest two streams: one through medicine or health, especially for educators operating in the 0-3 sector, and the other through education. The role of educator is carried out mostly by people who have completed a

professional course, and the presence of educators with a university degree (about 34%) is beginning to be significant.

The fact of different types of professionalism co-existing within the same institutions can be interpreted as a signal of change that the Government of Kosovo is trying to give in the kindergarten, suggesting a gradual shift away from a type of social welfare pattern of school (and educator) to one where the educational value of the child 's experience is recognised. The connotation of this aspect of 'education' is indeed supported by the information provided by the law no. 02/L-52 *on pre-school education*. Article 28 defines the qualifications that educators must possess[5] and it is also suggested by the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (2011) which states "Upgrading staff who work with children of age 0-3 – Most of the staff working with children aged 9 months/ 3 years have a medical background with secondary education, and have very little or no education training. This is closely related to the quality of services provided."

Given the disparity of basic training, it becomes important to invest in the upgrade of services aimed primarily at supporting essential knowledge and skills for professionalism, especially those of a psychological or pedagogical nature.

▪ Table 1 Employment before the work as educator

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	First occupation	129	55.8	57.3	57.3
	In other school institutions	13	5.6	5.8	63.1
	In other pre-school institutions	16	6.9	7.1	70.2
	In other nursery institutions	8	3,5	3,6	73,8
	In other primary school	21	9.1	9.3	83.1
	In other education institution	2	0.9	0.9	84.0
	In health sector	19	8,2	8,4	92.4
	In other sectors of Public Administration	6	2.6	2.7	95.1
	Other	11	4.8	4.9	100
	Total	225	97.4	100	
Missing	Missing from system	6	2.6		
Total		231	100		

When asked to indicate what job they had performed prior to becoming an educator, the majority responded that the current job was their first job; less frequent were those who said they had worked in primary schools, in the health sector or in other pre-schools (Table 1). The fact that many of the educators are entering the world of education without any additional work experience points out the need to place greater value on initial training and support, giving a significant space in the curriculum for

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5   Art. 28.4. The educators should possess the following:

a) Diploma of Faculty of Education – pre-school programme

b) Higher Pedagogical school – Educators stream

c) Philosophic Faculty – pedagogy branch

d) Diplomas of Faculty of Education, with additional and adequate training for pre-school educators and certified by MEST.

training in schools, in order to facilitate and create a virtuous circle between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, which are fundamental for every educator (Joint progress report on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 work programme, 2010b; Council Conclusions on the professional development of educators and school leaders, 2009c; Communication 'Improving competences for the 21st century: an agenda for European co-operation on schools ', 2008b).

■ Type of Service

The educators were distributed across the following types of institutions (Table 2):

■ Table 2 Educators by type of institution

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Valid	Nursery (0-3)	71	30.7	31.7
	Kindergarten (3-5)	86	37.2	38.4
	Pre-primary (5-6)	52	22.5	23.2
	Other	15	6.5	6.7
	Total	224	97.0	100
Missing	Missing from the system	7	3.0	
Total		231	100	

The data regarding the age of the children with whom survey participants work is related to the choice of the schools used as a sample which excluded those schools with only 'pre-primary' classes.

88% (V.A. 204) of the participants worked at a public institution and 12% (V.A. 27) in a private institution.

When asked to indicate how many children attend the institution in which they work, the educators responded by indicating a range from 45 to 450 children; a range from 5 to 37 in each class. Once again, the data coming forth is varied: very large and small schools are represented, with classes of only few children (5) and large - overlarge - classes (37).

Most educators say that they work with one or two other colleagues (Table 3); this data underlines the importance of supporting the work of the educational group (core group of educators) in a collaborative setting of exchange and mutual support as well as in the enlarged group, in the case of schools with a higher number of classes.

■ Table 3 Number of educators working with an assistant

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	1	119	51.5	52.0	52.0
	2	97	42.0	42.4	94.3
	3	12	5.2	5.2	99.6
	8	1	0.4	0.4	100
	Total	229	99.1	100	
Missing	Missing from the system	2	0.9		
Total		231	100		

■ Comparative characteristics of educators who work in public institutions and private institutions

Comparing educators who work in public institutions with those working in private institutions, we can see that those working in public institutions have more professional experience (Table 4).

■ Table 4 Anova: comparison between educators in public and private institutions regarding their age and professional experience

	Educators in public institutions (N)	Educators in private institutions (N)	Df	F	Sig.
Age	43.95 (198)	34.96 (27)	1-224	16.87	.000
Professional experience	16.34 (184)	5.81 (26)	1-209	21.99	.000

Considering qualification (Table 5), we observe that the percentage of educators with a pre-school degree from the Faculty of Education is higher among educators working in private institutions, while among the educators working in public institutions the medical high school diploma or a faculty qualification predominate.

Like other European countries in which there are both public and private pre-school services, the private sector is often the first area of access to the labour market, and this explains the younger age of the educators in this sector; the qualification related to initial training also tend to be higher. In the next few years, it will be interesting to follow the evolution of the labour market in this area, in order to see whether the private system will be a first step for subsequent access to the public system, or if the demand for social services will bring an expansion of the private sector at the expense of investments in public sector. The need for educational services and care in early childhood is indeed increasing significantly especially near larger urban centres, supporting the increase of employment, especially for women, and this could be an area of investment for local businesses (USAID, 2011).

■ Table 5 Qualification: comparison between educators in public (ESPub) and private (ESPri) institutions

Professional Qualification	Public (ESPub) % (N)	Private (ESPri) % (N)
Medical high school	32 (60)	27 (6)
Higher education	31 (58)	9 (2)
Faculty of Pedagogy, general pedagogy	9 (17)	5 (1)
Faculty of Pedagogy, inclusive/special education	0 (0)	5 (1)
Faculty of Education, pre-school	26 (48)	401 (9)
Faculty of Education, primary	2 (3)	0 (0)
Faculty of Education, subjects (mathematics, physics)	0 (0)	14 (3)
Total	100 (186)	100 (22)

There is not a substantial difference between the two groups in the institutions in which they work; only a slight prevalence of educators in public institutions in classes of children from 0 to 3 years (33% vs 23%) and of educators in private institutions in the pre-primary groups (31% vs 22%).

If we look at the number of children attending the services, we can also say that the public institutions are much larger than the private services: the educators in public institutions say they work in facilities that can accommodate from a minimum of 70 to a maximum of 450 children, while the range for educators in private institutions is 45 to 123 children.

There does not seem to be a large difference in the number of children in classes: the educators in public institutions say they work in classes of 8 to 37 children, while the educators in private institutions work in classes that can accommodate from 5 to 34 children.

To confirm that the public services have larger facilities than private ones, we observe that only the educators in public institutions say they work with three or more colleagues, while educators in private institutions say that they co-operate with a maximum of two colleagues.

■ The reasons for the choice of profession

In order to research the reasons for choosing their profession, the participants were asked to indicate the degree of importance assigned to a list of reasons regarding teaching as profession. Through the analysis of the principal components (varimax rotation) it was possible to group the reasons in 3 sets: Vocation, referring to the reasons for such vocations, Value of Education between Tradition and Innovation, which relates career choices to the history of personal and family life with the desire to impact through educational interventions on innovation and experimentation, and Personal Validation, referring to motivation at the individual and personal level (Table 6).

All three dimensions show an average high value. In particular, Vocation turns out to be a very important dimension because it shows an average very close to the maximum value of 4.[6]

What appears from the analysis of Table 6 is that the educators' profession is still a highly desirable job since it is socially recognised, as well as a place where educators can achieve their objectives. Responses indicate a profession which, without too much strain, allows educators to express their subjectivity, contributing in an original and creative way to the pre-school institution. This pressure for change is, however, deeply rooted in the idea that in order to work with children in the pre-school sector, a vocation and commitment to children should be among the most important reasons.

■ Table 6 Motivation related to profession. Average and standard deviation

Motivation related to profession	N	Average	Std. dev.
VOCATION	**223**	**3.71**	**.39**
I had an ambition to work with children	227	3.77	.483
I felt a vocation for teaching	231	3.75	.506
I had interest in / passion for teaching	227	3.70	.531
Education is a job that allows me to express independence and creativity	227	3.61	.631
THE VALUE OF EDUCATION BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION	**219**	**3.44**	**.60**
Education is a coherent occupation requiring the type of qualification that I had obtained	224	3.56	.660
In order to improve the quality of education in the pre-school institution	226	3.54	.660
Work in education is a family tradition	226	3.19	1.075

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6   4-point scale (not at all important, less important, quite important, very important)

PERSONAL VALIDATION	223	3.37	.57
Education is a job that allows me to grow on a personal level	227	3.52	.700
I believed in the social value of education	225	3.46	.694
Education leaves free time for private life, family and children	227	3.31	.794
Education is a guaranteed job with a decent salary	227	3.16	.948

■ The ideal educator

The image of the ideal educator was measured by two questions: the participants were asked to indicate the degree of importance attributed to (a) "Features that characterise a good educator" and (b) "Knowledge a good educator must have." We wanted to research in more general terms what areas, in the educators' opinion, made up professionalism, through the first question, and through the second, the presence of an implicit psychological and pedagogical pattern.

Regarding the "Features that characterise a good educator" (a) the principal components analysis (varimax rotation) showed the existence of 4 sub-dimensions (Table 7): Participants' satisfaction, responsibility and commitment to being an educator, pedagogical or didactic skills, and Organisational / management skills.

Looking at the average scores of the dimensions, it is clear that for the educators in the sample it is very important that an educator knows how to deliver the subjects, and understands children and adults (their parents).

In second place of importance, it is the awareness that in order to become (and be) a good educator one needs to engage in evaluations and selection, work with seriousness and responsibility, and be able to collaborate with colleagues (The responsibility and the commitment of being an educator). This dimension is of particular interest since the collegial dimension here is viewed more as a moral and ethical duty, rather than as an expression of a specific professional competence.

Pedagogical/didactic skills appear only in third place, but with an average score which still places them among the 'somewhat' and 'very' important. Finally, with an average score equal to that of the third dimension, we find the organisational / managerial skills or the awareness according to which, in order to be a good educator, and be recognised as such, educators must also know how to maintain discipline in the classroom and be able to organise and effectively manage their work.

The data indicates the pattern for an ideal educator where the institutional role and social functions are predominant: there is also a moral dimension to being an educator, belonging to the community, and needing to be responsible for it, at different levels of the system, starting with children and their families and extending to the community as a whole. Therefore, a good educator is also able to pass the valuations and tests of selection. Pedagogical/ didactic and management skills move to second place when compared to an image of their professionalism; even professional recognition at the local level is considered secondary. It is as if to say that the ideal educator is characterised more by what s/he represents, or rather what the level of his/ her values is, than by what s/he does, or acts professionally in the everyday life of the classroom.

■ Table 7 Important aspects in identifying a good educator. Average and standard deviations

Important aspects in identifying a good educator	No.	Average	Std. Dev
PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION	**228**	**3.79**	**.466**
The level of satisfaction of children and families	228	3.79	.466
RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT TO BEING AN EDUCATOR	**222**	**3.63**	**.48**
Seriousness regarding civic and professional duties	229	3.72	.512
The ability to work in teams with colleagues	228	3.70	.579
The ability to pass selection tests and / or evaluation	225	3.47	.720
PEDAGOGICAL / DIDACTIC SKILLS	**216**	**3.54**	**.51**
The ability to recognise the potential and assess the quality of performance of children	227	3.63	.642
The ability / skills acquired by children	227	3.63	.597
The ability to include children	224	3.60	.590
Willingness to work overtime	227	3.29	.827
ORGANISATIONAL / MANAGEMENT SKILLS	**210**	**3.54**	**.55**
The recognition of his/her competence and effectiveness in the pre-school institution where s/he works	224	3.54	.662
The ability to stick to the rules	220	3.53	.685
The possession of appropriate organisational and managerial skills	223	3.52	.683

The question of the Knowledge of a good educator offers an in-depth analysis of some of the components relating to pedagogical patterns in the description of the ideal educator.

The proposed skills refer to different psycho-pedagogical models (Montessori, 1950, 1970; Goldschmield, 1979; Pikler, 1990; Bertolini et al., 1988); the question is aimed at finding some models for the descriptions of educators.

Some items are related to the qualities, or to those innate skills of a subjective character (being available, exerting self-control, being obeyed), which, together with medical competences, are typical for the traditional models of childhood services.

A second hypothesised model is one which gives priority to the emotional needs of children and therefore the centrality of developing a good bonding between the child and the adult (Bowlby, Mantovani). They refer to this current item as follows: Facing problematic moments in infant growth, knowing how to create a family environment in the pre-school institution; having individual relationships with children; having deep relationships with the children on an affective level. As in the study of Ongari-Molina (2005), in our case the last item was introduced with a control function, because "this is certainly not referred to as an essential element when it comes to the emotional/ relationship dimension of the proper development of the child "(91) Through this item we wanted to see if the relational dimension was more associated with interaction and the individual relationship or was referring to a general affective relationship.

The element of being able to offer diverse experiences; knowing how to encourage socialisation in a group of children; knowing how to make a good educational plan; explaining to parents the reasons for the educational choices made as regards what is done in pre-school with the children and the way their pedagogical and didactic choices are communicated outside; this model is more related to planning.

Finally, a last group of items was the one that we can relate to the social dimension of the pre-school as regards the internal space and services and response to the needs of parents and collaboration with public administration.

The data show that the principal components analysis (varimax rotation) returned the existence of three dimensions (Table 8), demonstrating that the educators's understanding of professionalism is constructed by mixing different theoretical approaches. The dimensions that emerged are as follows: didactic knowledge, closely related to the teaching skills of educator; t,he ability to engage with adults; skills as an educator that allow interaction with other adults playing a significant role at the pre-school level (parents and colleagues), and the ability to bond with the child, referring to the educator's ability to create a relationship with the child.

Looking at the average scores, all 3 are considered quite important knowledge for a good educator.

■ Table 8 A good educator must know.... Average and standard deviations

Knowledge that a good educator must have	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
DIDACTIC KNOWLEDGE	229	3.79	.36
Make a good plan of activities	231	3.87	.378
Offer children diverse experiences	229	3.72	.507
KNOWLEDGE HOW TO ENGAGE WITH ADULTS	221	3.70	.43
Be always available	226	3.73	.490
Exchange views with colleagues	228	3.72	.539
Meet the parents' needs	228	3.63	.543
KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO BOND WITH THE CHILD	209	3.66	.38
Encourage the socialisation of groups of children	231	3.75	.491
Create a family atmosphere in the school	229	3.75	.543
Be obeyed	229	3.74	.523
Control their behaviour	230	3.70	.522
Have deep affective relationships with children	228	3.69	.603
Face the problematic moments of infant growth	229	3.67	.565
Explain to parents the reasons for the educational choices made	228	3.67	.564
Create individual relationships with children	229	3.65	.622

Compared with models, the pedagogical/ didactic skills are fundamental: good pre-school education is an education that offers children diverse planned and differentiated experiences in a timely manner.

A second group of skills that belong to the ideal educator are those falling under the social and management dimension of the role. The placement of the dimension of availability within this area (and that relating to children) would seem to indicate a greater problematic found in the relationships between adults than those that are established with the children, in rapport with the data on satisfaction with education that we will address later.

Regarding the work with children, the fact that merged into a single dimension are both the items that refer to a model of a pre-school of welfare structure and those affected by an educational setting shows that the coexistence of these two approaches is certainly related to the training of educators interviewed.

Trying to give an overall reading of the results of the questions regarding the ideal educator, we can say that the image shows a professionalism with rather subtle and sometimes ambivalent connotations, which can be related to the rapid changes taking place in these institutions. The educators who responded to the questionnaire consider working in pre-school education as a profession, having a strong social impact with links to the civil sphere and to values. The professional content is therefore presented both in terms of ethics (values and social image), and pedagogical/ didactic terms, associated with the activities of the children: a profession whose nature could be described as socio-educational, in which the educational intervention oscillates intermittently between a programmatic pattern that is sometimes very structured, and sometimes to a pattern that tends to be indefinite.

This data may be read in the view of a relative lack of psychological or pedagogical models of reference (what model of the child? What development theory? A programme that starts from the children needs? From their interests? ...) in a pre-school context in which, however, flexibility remains a value and a necessity.

■ The sources of professionalism

A section of the questionnaire was aimed at investigating the sources of educators' profession. The question can be seen to be particularly significant if we consider that in Kosovo, as in many other countries, there is a unique training programme for all professionals working in the pre-school sector. It is accessed, as we saw in the section on qualifications held by educators, through highly differentiated curricula in terms of their disciplinary nature, duration, and training purposes. In light of this finding, the experience gained in the field, through practical work in schools, could be a factor that significantly affects the definition of the professionalism of educators. In the period following the conflict in Kosovo, a number of projects have addressed the pre-school and school sector. There were, in principle, contributions oriented to specific issues (e.g. integration of disabled children in ordinary classes, a project supported by Save the Children), or in specific contexts (project of the International Step by Step Association aimed at kindergarten educators), or development of means to support the work of educators and parents (development indicators prepared by UNICEF). The projects, often reported as very important for the level of qualification of the work of educators even in the course of interviews with the managers of the schools visited, were characterised by the inclusion of only some pre-school institutions and a limited period of time, with very different impact from school to school.

Another context of professional development, though informal, is the training related to the experience of educators as mothers, in line with the domination of 'feminine' skills as fundamental characteristics for those working with children, especially in the 0-3 age group.

In particular, two areas have been studied: (a) the formal and informal sources which the participants in the survey used to learn how to do their jobs; (b) the perspective of being a parent which motivates and makes you believe that you can be a good educator.

With regard to formal and informal sources from which the participants learn how to do their jobs (a)[7], the principal components analysis (varimax rotation) showed the presence of three dimensions: Initial training and training on-the-job which, in addition to the school curriculum and extracurricular learning activities, also includes practical professional experience; informal education, referring to the experiences exchanged with family and colleagues and learned from books or magazines; and observation of others including not only the observation of the behaviour of colleagues and parents of the children, but also experiences in other schools. All three dimensions show fairly high average scores of importance , ranging between 'very' and 'fairly' important.

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7   The participants were also asked to comment on the importance attributed to a number of aspects (4-point scale, from 1 = not at all important to 4 = very important)

■ **Table 9 Importance of sources from which they learn to work as educator. Average and standard deviations**

The formal and informal sources from which they learn how to do their jobs	Nr.	Average	Std. Dev.
INITIAL TRAINING AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING	**226**	**3.75**	**.44**
Experience and professional practice	230	3.77	.489
Courses taught by experts	229	3.76	.551
Basic university education	229	3.70	.561
INFORMAL EDUCATION	**224**	**3.63**	**.45**
Personal experience and family	230	3.72	.495
Exchange of opinions with colleagues in the working group	228	3.67	.595
Specialised books and journals	229	3.66	.558
OBSERVATION OF OTHERS	**228**	**3.33**	**.63**
Experiences in other pre-schools	229	3.47	.729
Observation of parents	230	3.52	.625
Observation of co-workers	228	3.13	.920

As might be expected, we see that the elements considered most important in the development of their professional skills are represented by the experience accumulated during the years of work and from their own personal experience and family, along with courses taught by experts. The value given to the observation of others – whether parents or colleagues - is less significant.

In relation to what happens for the in-service qualification of pre-school staff, it is important to us to emphasise the fact that educators tend to assume their professional development from practice to be more useful and more responsive to their needs than to that of a theoretical nature, often perceived as distant from everyday pre-school life.

This indicator does not provide so much in relation to the content of training; instead it offers a method: the educators perceive as very effective and meaningful a training in which experiences and practical work are valued, which means offering things of not only operational but also cultural value. The data also points out that in the experiences of educators, training that enhances the previous experiences and support from a development perspective is preferred, perhaps with the help of psychological or pedagogical consultants, educators and coordinators, rather than training linked to individual and sporadic training days, even if of high quality. The educator perspective supports what is already mentioned in the most recent studies on supporting the professionalism of in-service educators for early childhood, in which it is emphasised that different forms of training should be identified as much as possible – 'a coherent and diversified policy aimed at continuous professional development at institutional or team level, developed by specialised staff (pedagogical co-coordinators, counsellors) can yield beneficial effects to equal those of initial professional preparation . Yet, short-term courses (e.g. limited to a few days per year) that are not embedded within a coherent policy are not sufficient to develop the competences of professionals with low or no qualification.'(Core report, 2011:27).

Regarding being a parent and working as an educator (b) (in this case, participants were asked to indicate their scale of agreement / disagreement for 4 statements[8]) we present only the averages of the individual items (Table 10) since the principal component analysis returned no particularly noteworthy results.

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8   I = disagree, 2 = slightly agree 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

As can be seen, the average scores indicate that participants agree that the experience of being a parent is important in the profession of educator, though often the problems of managing their children may interfere with job performance.[9] The experience of motherhood helps to better understand the needs and requirements of both children and their parents since these have been experienced on a personal level, and this provides a wide experience on both a practical and emotional level, which is important in pursuing a profession that is perceived in strong continuity with the work of education and nursing.

■ **Table 10 Belief that being a parent helps in working as an educator: Averages and deviations**

Belief that being a parent helps them to do their job	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
The educator who is also a mother better understands the needs of children and other parents	231	3.46	.863
In order perform well in her job, the educator must have also experienced being a mother	231	3.40	.843
Having children helps only for certain practical aspects (e.g. recognising illnesses, changing nappies)	230	3.22	.909
Often the problems of managing children interferes with performance at work	230	3.07	.910

■ Exercising one's profession

Within the section Exercising one's profession, the educators were asked to indicate the degree of importance[10] they give to a series of objectives during the course of their profession. The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) presented 4 dimensions: the objectives considered most important are those related to the dimension of hygiene and cleanliness of children, often achievable thanks to collaboration with colleagues; second in order of importance is the dimension of safety and organisation of everyday life. This dimension refers to everyday practices that promote security and the development of the child. Then follow the objectives included in the cognitive/ social dimension, or the fact that it is necessary to develop both cognitive and relational skills with children. Lastly, but still highly scored, we find the dimension of autonomy and obedience that represents seemingly irreconcilable terms, suggesting that the child can become independent only within a structured context controlled by adults.

Table 11 offers a definition of general opinions that educators have for the children in their care. Firstly, there appears the institutional dimension of the service: the child is the student, the subject in need of care and safety, educated through a strongly structured and organised context. Probably this fact is related to the strong tradition of medical care in the professional formation of early childhood educators that still characterises the culture of the educational institution beyond specific courses of study.

It is no coincidence that hygiene and cleanliness are two factors that seem to affect the quality of the service, followed by collaboration with colleagues which, inserted in that dimension, seems to suggest a coordination to achieve specific educational goals. In fact, the 'Safety and organisation of everyday life' dimension is in strong continuity with the first one and suggests once again an organisation that allows everyone to safely and quietly organise daily activities in an orderly way.

The cognitive and autonomous dimensions follows both analyses; it is interesting to notice in the last dimension the level of collaboration with parents. The data may suggest that if pre-school educators

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9   1 = disagree, 2 = slightly agree 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

10   4-point scale, from 1 = not at all important to 4 = very important

can work on the acquisition of correct and appropriate behaviour for life in the community, to achieve more specific educational goals (whether social or cognitive), collaboration with the family becomes more significant and important.

It's interesting to note that autonomy is one of the elements which is given less importance than the previous ones, and it is in first place of skills that characterise the children who attend pre-school services rather than those who do not attend them. It is like saying that it is the attendance at pre-school, in fact, that makes the children autonomous even without this being one of the priority objectives of the educators; autonomy here becomes synonymous with 'knowing how to do it yourself' in the dimension that we have called 'opportunity' and which represents a thread which connects this to the 'deprivation' dimension. Regarding the items categorised in 'Parents' and 'Deprivation', we can see that there is greater disagreement about these among educators (Std. Dev. 0.73 and 0.79), creating a situation in which there is no agreement regarding the vision of the pre-school for children from 0 to 3 years old as a valid educational opportunity for all children.

■ Table 11 Importance of goals. Averages and standard deviations

Importance of goals	N	Media	Std. Dev.
HYGIENE AND CLEANLINESS	**227**	**3.83**	**.39**
The cleanliness and hygiene of children	228	3.85	.438
Active collaboration with colleagues	228	3.82	.438
SAFETY AND ORGANISATION OF DAILY LIFE	**224**	**3.69**	**.47**
Teaching children how to behave	228	3.80	.497
The security and personal peace of children	226	3.67	.610
The realisation of a cultural project concerning the education of children	229	3.67	.603
The orderly organisation of everyday life	230	3.63	.640
COGNITIVE / SOCIAL	**226**	**3.63**	**.50**
The acquisition of skills for co-operation among children	229	3.73	.525
Co-operation with parents	228	3.68	.586
The stimulation of cognitive and linguistic capacity in children	229	3.64	.637
Connection with other educational facilities (school)	230	3.48	.665
AUTONOMY AND OBEDIENCE	**224**	**3.60**	**.59**
The obedience and the education of children	227	3.65	.615
The autonomy of children	227	3.55	.723

Overall, the question analysed was asked to educators to indicate their level of agreement/ disagreement[11] with a series of statements that place the characteristics of children who attend child care provision with those of children who do not attend them. The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) demonstrated the presence of 4 dimensions (Table 12). The opportunities, include items that emphasise that children who attend services 0-6 are part of a context that offers favourable conditions for their earlier development; the characteristics of the institution, include statements that recognise that the services are intended as suitable for children; the third dimension is related to some characteristics of the parents of children who attend the services, focusing on the need of parents to adapt their behaviour to the situation; 'deprivation' contains items that describe the services as a depriving environment.

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11   1 = do not agree at all, 2 = slightly agree 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

Observing the average scores obtained in 4 dimensions, we can say that the participants agree in recognising the potential of services (opportunities and Characteristics of the institution have high scores and Deprivation shows a low average).

Regarding the parental image, educators recognise the fact that parents are trying to strengthen relationships with their children in a more meaningful way by using the remaining time available to them.

■ Table 12 Characteristics of children attending services compared to those who do not attend. Averages and standard deviations.

Children attending services compared to those who do not attend...	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
OPPORTUNITIES	**219**	**3.45**	**.50**
They have more opportunities to build meaningful relationships with peers	230	3.59	.605
Learn earlier to respect the rules	227	3.47	.673
They become autonomous earlier	222	3.44	.733
Establish emotional relationships with other adults	228	3.32	.725
INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	**228**	**3.35**	**.66**
They are more stimulated intellectually	229	3.48	.717
Have access to indoor and outdoor spaces suitable to their needs	229	3.21	.816
OPPORTUNITIES	224	2.72	.79
Their parents are more available in the hours they spend with them	227	2.81	.883
They spend too little time with their parents	226	2.62	.946
DEPRIVATION	**215**	**2.56**	**.73**
Spend most of the time in an artificial environment with little stimulation	228	2.45	1.042
They become more arrogant and aggressive	226	2.23	1.034
They are forced to adapt their personality to the rules of group life	228	2.94	.998
They have not been able to be at home during the most important years for the development of personality	222	2.61	1.070

■ The satisfaction of the educator

The next section of the questionnaire researched the level of satisfaction[12] of the educator in relation both to their profession and towards the social relations during the course of their work. It seemed important to us to note this data so that we understand the image that the educators have of their profession by analysing the sources of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction. The items described different aspects of the work; some related to structural relationships, others to institutional factors.

We then analysed the physical context (the environment) in which the work is done and the relational context (relationship with adults: co-workers and parents); the internal aspects (working with children, the variety of the work, autonomy, opportunities for professional growth); and the external aspects (salary, working hours, job stability); the external image of the pre-school (administration, parents).

In relation to the elements of individual satisfaction (Table 13), the principal component analysis did

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12   In this section, the participants were asked to express their level of satisfaction through a 4-point scale (1 = not at all satisfied, 2 = not very satisfied, 3 = fairly satisfied and 4 = very satisfied).

not demonstrate results worth mentioning; the most satisfying elements seem to be attributable to the fact that the education profession is quite creative and leaves ample room for autonomy to those who practise it, in addition to being a secure job that offers a certain stability.

The only scores that are close to the level of low satisfaction are those obtained by salaries and recognition by the community (the municipality) indicating that participants often feel that the community does not recognise the importance of the work they do, lack of recognition that is reflected in dissatisfaction related to their financial compensation.

■ Table 13 The elements of satisfaction of the job as an educator. Averages and standard deviations

The elements of job satisfaction as an educator	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
I have a creative job	227	3.47	.660
The ability to freely choose ways of working	228	3.41	.755
The stability/ safety of the workplace	228	3.39	.803
Sharing roles with colleagues	228	3.36	.781
Working hours	228	3.29	.816
Independence/ autonomy	228	3.28	.823
The physical environment (space and equipment)	230	3.18	.856
Recognition from the director of educational and teaching activities	228	3.18	.988
Career opportunities	229	3.03	.964
The non-repetitive nature of the work	226	2.99	.914
The possibility of educational innovation	224	2.96	.862
Free time	228	2.84	.978
The recognition by the community (Municipality)	226	2.75	1.089
The salary	223	2.32	1.095

In terms of satisfaction with social relationships that the educator must have in the course of work, principal component analysis (varimax rotation) showed the existence of three dimensions (Table 14): satisfaction in relationships with colleagues, understood as with the other educators, with other staff, superiors and other providers, i.e. all the other contributors except educators, and with the stakeholders (parents and children).

Overall, the participants say they are quite happy with all three dimensions but surprisingly satisfaction in relationships with children scores relatively low. This prompts us to consider the fact that the lowest averages were assigned to the assistant for children with disabilities (3.24), with other providers (3.26) and with parents (3.28), i.e. for those with whom educators work on the specific problems of children. In light of the very limited presence in schools (data MEST 2011) of children with special needs (special needs, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities' children, or children with a particularly poor socio-economic background) it is important to invest in this sector, both supporting the means for sharing and communication among the various sectors (education, social and health) and for communication with families.

■ **Table 14 Level of satisfaction with social relationships. Average and standard deviations (scale 1 to 4).**

Level of satisfaction with social relationships	N	Media	Dev. Std.
COLLEAGUES	**197**	**3.47**	**.56**
With colleagues at the level of personal relationships	228	3.56	.602
With colleagues at the level of professional relationships (educational planning, education, school management ....)	229	3.55	.624
With the assistant for children with disabilities	201	3.24	.897
OTHER PERSONNEL, SUPERIORS AND OTHER PROVIDERS	**222**	**3.43**	**.60**
With all staff	229	3.53	.666
With the director of the institution	230	3.52	.757
With the director of educational and teaching activities	228	3.41	.736
With other services (health, paediatricians, ...)	227	3.26	.897
WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS	**220**	**3.41**	**.53**
With children according to their learning ability	224	3.50	.552
With children at the level of personal relationship	225	3.48	.655
With parents	225	3.28	.729

■ The purpose of classes with children of 0-3 years of age

This section of the questionnaire focuses on the image that teachers have in relation to the purpose of pre-school classes aimed at younger children. The participants in the survey were asked to grade their level of agreement/ disagreement on a scale from 1 to 4. The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) showed the existence of 4 dimensions (Table 15). The dimension we have defined Opportunities and Resources refers to a conception of the pre-school as a development environment and includes the items that characterise the pre-school as a place where the child has a better chance to develop diverse and balanced skills. From this point of view, the child is seen as a complex subject for its psychological, social and emotional characteristics, and invokes the idea of a competent educator, formed in a specific way. The second dimension, the institutionalisation of children, presents an idea of pre-school related to provision in the community: childcare on the one hand and promotion on a cultural level of proper raising practices on the other. The pre-school here seems to be the place where we host a socially and culturally disadvantaged child 'in need', , and the educator relies especially in her care skills.

In the third dimension, which we have defined social need and care, charitable purposes are less prominent, in a conception that sees the pre-school as a community responding to the need of parents to find a safe and reliable staff when they cannot take direct care of their children. In order to perform the required job the educator does not need any specific training.

Finally, the last dimension, negative Image - deprivation, includes items that describe a pre-school institution that assumes a negative value: a pre-school institution must ensure that the child is in a safe place but has a connotation as a depriving environment. The child here is a person deprived of support and affection of his loved ones for a long period of time and spends this time in a not particularly inspiring environment; the child may adapt more easily if it attends the institution earlier.

It is like saying, 'since you have to be there, you might as well get used to it as soon as possible.' To be an educator, in this case, it is sufficient to have solid personal resources, perhaps a motherly approach to support children in every insecurity that they might have.

It is significant that these images of school and educators continue to persist and coexist in the same structures, in the presence of situations in which representations and needs are changing very quickly, within schools, whereas training courses enable new educators to think for themselves about the planning of their educational projects in a sector with such powerful restructuring. The two images of preschool for the children seem to remain so ambivalent,, opposed to one another: one more traditional model, linked to the needs of families and a system of care, and the other more innovative in which the community and children are at the centre of more general and fully interactive plan.

◼ Table 15 The purpose of the classes fpr children aged 0-3. Average and standard deviations (scale 1 to 4)

Purpose of the classes 0-3	N	Media	Std. Dev.
OPPORTUNITIES / RESOURCES	**221**	**3.62**	**.43**
Knowing how to respect the children rhythm requires an understanding from the educator of the developmental processes of children	228	3.63	.576
The main function of the pre-school is to be a place of education for children	229	3.62	.576
A child who attends classes at the age of 0-3 years has a better chance of having a rich and balanced development	222	3.59	.578
INSTITUTIONALISATION OF CHILDREN	**227**	**3.57**	**.51**
The educator's role is primarily to promote a cultural change regarding raising the children	227	3.62	.547
The classes essentially have the function of ensuring secure care of children of working parents	229	3.53	.672
SOCIAL NEEDS/CARE	**228**	**3.27**	**.58**
Motherhood and children's education are both collective as well as social, private enterprises	229	3.31	.625
Anyone who likes children can be a good educator	229	3.30	.874
Classes for 0-3 year-olds are a necessity for parents who do not have other alternatives.	229	3.20	.919
NEGATIVE - DEPRIVING IMAGE [15]	**216**	**2.96**	**.36**
One of the most important aspects of the work of the educator is to protect the physical health of children	224	3.58	.659
A child who attends these classes is at greater risk of suffering from lack of affection compared with children who remain at home	226	2.58	1.081
The earlier it happens, the more satisfactory is the enrolment of the child in pre-school	228	3.37	.821
Classes 0-3 are above all a place of cultural exchange and participation in a joint project on early childhood	229	3.36	.764
To be able to establish solid relationships with others, the child needs to have a few stable relationships during his early years of life	228	3.32	.780
To be an educator for children aged 0-3 it is enough to rely on personal resources	225	3.29	.861

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13   For semantic consistency, by calculating the average value of this dimension inverse scores have been used 'The child who attends these classes are at greater risk, compared with the children who remain at home, to suffer from lack of affection' and 'To be able to establish solid relationships with others, the child needs to have a few stable relationships during his early years of life.'

■ The relationship with parents

In the final section of the questionnaire the relationship between parents and educators was studied in general, and in particular the perceptions that educators have of the reasons that have prompted parents to enrol their children in a nursery for children from 0 to 3 years and requests frequently addressed to the school.

Firstly, we were interested in understanding the image that the educators have of the needs of parents and if the reasons that made them choose the school are more educational or related to objective needs and the lack of alternatives. This is important if we consider that the educational value of the kindergarten after 3 years of age is quite common while there is still some distrust regarding access to provision for younger children. Sometimes the educators themselves do not fully believe that the choice of pre-school is the best one for the interest of a small child.

Table 16 presents the average scores obtained for responses to the question 'What do you think are the reasons for the choice of classes 0-3 of nursery by parents?'.

All the reasons have quite a high score, both those that focus on quality educational experiences offered to the child, especially from the point of view of socialisation, and those that bring to the fore the element of necessity.

The data would seem to highlight a certain ambivalence with respect to the motivations for the attendance of children aged 0-3 years at nursery. It's as if to say that the school is a safe and qualified place in which to leave the children if parents cannot take care of them directly.

This is an alternative, therefore, perceived as a possibility, but only rarely as a choice. In support of this interpretation, which highlights the ambivalence of educators in relation to the motivations for the choice of the parents, there is the high value of the standard deviation, which is close to one.

■ Table 16 Reasons why parents choose the classes. Average and standard deviations [14]

Choice reasons	Nr.	Average	Std. Dev.
The idea of being able to leave the child in a safe environment	228	3.68	.608
The recognition of the need for children's socialisation	226	3.57	.665
The possibility that the school offers parents a space for dialogue on educational issues	224	3.36	.769
Convenient scheduling	226	3.31	.762
Ease of logistics (organisation of daily life)	226	3.24	.825
The belief that the children in classes 0-3 will develop earlier	226	3.12	.855
Not having other solutions	226	2.91	.945
Preference over the care offered to the child from grandparents or other relatives	227	2.81	.916
Preference over the care offered to the child from a baby-sitter.	224	2.81	.986

Table 17 shows the results obtained by answering the question "What information do parents request from the school staff for their children?" A question exploring the topics educators and parents discuss in relation to the care offered to the child.

The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) shows 3 dimensions: child/ biological development focused on basic needs (eating, sleeping) that seem to be the main information requested by parents, social development referring to information often requested by parents concerning the way in

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14   Scale of 4 points (1 = never / almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = very often)

which the child interacted with peers and educators, and finally, not requested very often, the development of the child as a pupil referring to the child's participation in offered educational activities.

■ **Table 17 Information requested by parents. Average and standard deviations[15]**

Information requested by parents	Nr.	Average	Std. Dev.
CHILD/ BIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT	216	3.30	.63
What has he eaten	228	3.47	.742
When did he sleep	223	3.40	.734
When did he urinate	224	3.04	.885
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	217	2.94	.78
How he behaved with the educators	228	2.88	.961
What games did he play	221	2.85	.934
How he behaved with his peers	227	3.06	.870
How did he feel	226	3.00	.945
CHILD DEVELOPMENT AS A LEARNER	226	2.88	.78
Particular behaviours (crying, aggression, …)	227	2.90	.973
Progress in learning specific skills	228	2.88	.900
How did he participate in the educational offer	229	2.87	.982

The data can be read in two different ways. We can suppose, firstly, that the fact that parents request particular information relating to the basic needs of the child and the manifestation of his well-being in the pre-school, invokes a pattern of pre-school still very focused on care, in which the attempts to develop specific skills, especially of a cognitive nature is given little space. On the other hand, you might find that parents prioritise the pre-school's care and support of the child.. It's like saying that only a reassuring and relationship context ensures the quality of the child's experience in the pre-school institution, representing an essential condition for the development of the child.

Even in this case, the high value of the standard deviation suggests an ambivalent situation, in which care is more related to security and on-going daily activities then to the child's general well-being.

The next question asked educators to indicate how often they think the parents of their pupils encounter difficulties.[16]

In general the critique that the educators address to parents are often more related to the belief of being the only ones able to understand the child, the opening hours of the school, the school's distance from home or work place, and the difficulty in being separated from the child when they leave the school. The analysis of the data summarised in Table 18 would seem to suggest that the difficulties that educators recognise in parents are related to the fact that they tend not to have a deep understanding of the importance of education in the pre-school and the specific skills of those who work there. The educators look for a professional relationship with the parents, an understanding that is not possible if they perceive that the parents do not trust them and their competency completely to understand, and take care of, the children within the pre-school institution. The educators give lower scores to the items in which the difficulty of the relationship is transferred to the emotional plane, the rivalry about being the most significant people for the child and jealousy compared to the educator (feeling less able, jealous of educator)

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15   Scale of 4 points (1 = never / almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = very often)

16   The principal component analysis returned no results worth mentioning.

■ **Table 18 Difficulties in the relationship with parents. Average and standard deviations.[17]**

Below are some of the difficulties that parents may encounter while bringing the child to pre-school institutions from ages 0-6. Based on your experience show how often they occur	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
The conviction of being the only ones able to understand the child	227	2.95	.967
The school's opening hours	224	2.93	.918
Separation from the child for part of the day	226	2.90	.791
The distance from the home or workplace	223	2.70	.947
The fear that the child will get ill	228	2.65	.975
The fear that the child is unhappy	229	2.60	.962
Not being entirely convinced of the educational value of pre-school	228	2.43	1.028
The attitude of other family members opposed to school	222	2.42	1.042
Feeling less capable than educators	223	2.33	1.089
The fear that the child will become excessively attached to the educators	227	2.26	1.103
Lack of trust in the staff	227	2.25	1.062

Finally, to the question 'Do you think that in general, parents who are currently members of the school are satisfied with the choice they have made?; educators responded convinced that parents are very satisfied (Table 18)[18], thus emphasising the prevalence of positive findings in relation to their work on the part of families.

■ **Table 18 General satisfaction of parents. Average and standard deviation.**

General satisfaction of parents	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
13	225	3.99	,79

■ **The impact of age on the professional experience of the educator**

Regarding the initial data on the age of the educators interviewed, it seemed interesting to research whether there was a correlation between the perceptions that teachers have of themselves, of the children, and of their professionalism and their professional age. This is significant data compared to their age, especially in relation to the recent history of the country. The armed conflict, in fact, has certainly affected the careers of the inhabitants of Kosovo, having now less linear careers or periods in their pre-schools.

The first analysis allowed us to highlight the existence of negative correlations with the motivations for career choices. In particular, it was found that as age increases, the professional motivation related to vocation decreases ($r= -.21$[19]*) as does that related to the value of education between tradition and innovation ($r= -.25$**). The greater the professional age, the less the educators perceive the social

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17   4-point scale (1 = never / almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, and 4 = very often)

18   Compared to how it was presented in the questionnaire, the results shown in the table were obtained by reversing the order of the scale (5 points). The value in the table is obtained as follows: 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = somewhat, and 4 = much, 5 = very much.

19   ** sig < .01

function as important for the professionalism of their work. The values of education, the pleasure of working with children, and creativity are factors which, with the passage of time, weaken... Being an educator tends to provide less satisfaction both in terms of personal expectations (vocation) and on a social basis: there is a weakening of the power to intervene in school and society in order to bring about change or to stimulate the innovation. Professional skills do not support a motivation for education. In fact, they have always shown negative correlations with the ideal image of the educator: as the period of service extends, the belief that to be a good educator you need to have pedagogical/ didactic skills (r= -.19**) and organisational / managerial skills (r= -.16[20]) weakens.

The image of the professional educator is fading here. Pedagogical and didactic skills and those which are related to organisation and management, move into second place as the time goes by.

The interpretations of the data are twofold: on the one hand you might think that educators develop their pedagogical skills and management through accumulating experience. Mastering professional techniques could therefore diminish its importance in the perception of the ideal image of the educator, bringing up other skills (such as relational ones). A different interpretation is that according to which the professional practice tends to diminish the idea of educators being able to achieve the desired objectives for their work even in the presence of specific professional skills. This second interpretation seems more consistent with the overall picture that emerges from the data. In fact, some negative correlations were also found with the sources that educators use to exercise their professionalism: the higher the age of service, the less the teachers claim that their preparation is important for initial and in-service training (r= -.20**) and informal training (r= -.19**). Hence, they not only see the professional skills acquired and developed as less and less important but don't even feel the need to find innovative and more effective means. No significant correlations emerge between age and professional objectives during the exercise of their professional skills. The fact that a correlation emerges is significant, this time positive, with the dimension of parents (r= -16**) i.e. as the age increases, the professional attention to the relationship with parents and the support of parenting increases as well. Educators, therefore, would seem to be in alliance with parents, especially those of the youngest children, finding support for their work here rather than in the institutional or social sphere.

In fact, between the age and professional satisfaction items of the work of the educator there are significant negative correlations (Table 19). Among the most obvious results, it that the longer the period of training, the less satisfaction the educator perceives from the recognition by the director, from career opportunities, salary, the idea of being able to innovate in his/her teaching methods, or the perception of autonomy on the job.

■ **Table 19 Correlation (r of Pearson) between age and occupational elements of job satisfaction as an educator.**

The elements of job satisfaction as educator	No.	R
Recognition from the director of educational and teaching activities	208	-.28**
Career opportunities	209	-.28**
The salary	205	-.26**
The possibility of educational innovation	204	-.24**
Independence/ autonomy	208	-.24**
The non-repetitive nature of the work	206	-.23**
The stability/ safety of the workplace	208	-.21**
I have a creative job	207	-.20**

20   * sig < .05

Free time	207	-.19**
The physical environment (space and equipment)	209	-.19**
Working hours	208	-.19**
Sharing roles with colleagues	207	-.18**
The recognition by the community (Municipality)	207	-.15*
The ability to freely choose ways of working	207	-.10

**sig < .01   *sig < .05

Even on the level of perceived satisfaction in social relationships it is evident that as the professional age increases, the satisfaction in the relationship with their colleagues decreases (r= -.29**). It is interesting to note that as the age of the educators increases, the perception of a school for children from 0 to 3 years as a negative and depriving context decreases (r= -.15*), as well as the image of a pre-school as preparation for the development of the child as a pupil (r= -.16*). This data, compared with the data related to the relationship with parents, suggests a greater focus and increased importance attributed by the educators, for the affective dimension. The perception of the school tends to be transformed in time, from an institution where safety is the main concern on the one hand to the development of skills and learning on the other, emphasising the social and affective dimension.

One of the factors that one might think could affect this change is initial training:, in fact, the educator with a higher professional age is also the educator in possession of less extensive and specialised training and qualifications that impact on satisfaction within a work context.

▪ Differences according to educational qualifications

In order to distinguish the differences in the dimension of the questionnaire on the basis of qualification, we performed an ANOVA (one-way) comparing the three groups of participants:
   a) with medical high school (TSSM)
   b) with general upper high school (TSS)
   c) with the diploma of the Faculty of Pedagogy (general pedagogy or in inclusive/special education) or the Faculty of Education (pre-school or primary, excluding diplomas on specific subjects) (DIPLOMA).

The only differences that emerge are within the theme of reasons for choosing the profession, the dimension of the value of education between tradition and innovation and the theme of the information requested by parents in the biological development dimension.

In relation to the value of education between tradition and innovation, educators with qualifications in medical high school score lower than those of the other two groups (high school degree and diploma) (average TSSM=3.28, average TSS=3.50, average DIPLOMA =3.50, F=2.79, Gdl=2-190, p≤.06[21]).

In relation to the biological development of the child dimension, educators with a degree in the school of medicine reported significantly higher scores than those of the other two groups (high school degree and Diploma) (average TSSM=3.44 average TSS=3.16, average DIPLOMA =3.27, F=3.14, Gdl=2-187, p≤.05).

The data is therefore particularly significant: educators who have a medical education give more importance to the hygienic conditions compared to their colleges with an education on the psychological or pedagogical plan who advocate the value of innovation and change.

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21   Tendency to become significant

■ The different images of educators in public services (ESPub) and educators in private services (ESPri)

Through analysis of (one-way) variance it was possible to compare the responses of educators in public services (ESPub) with those of educators in private services (ESPri) on all dimensions with different thematic areas surveyed with the questionnaire:

- Motivation for choice of profession
- The ideal educator
- Sources of professionalism
- The exercise of their profession
- The satisfaction of education
- The purpose of classes for children aged 0-3 years old
- Relationship with parents

There are no statistically significant differences in the dimensions of the reasons for career choice, the ideal educator and the sources of professionalism. Within the theme of the sources of professionalism, there are no differences between educators in public institutions and educators in private institutions on the importance to the objectives they pursue with children, whereas in relation to the image of educators of children of 0-3 years of age who attend classes compared to those who do not attend there is a difference in what we have defined the 'deprivation' dimension; educators in public institutions consider to a significantly greater extent than their colleagues in private institutions that the institutions where they work are likely to be depriving contexts for this age group (average ESPub=2.60, average ESPriv=2.27, F=4.75, Gdl=1-214, p≤.03). This data requires further discussion. We can assume that the investment of the private sector in this age group (0-3 years) is more significant than that of the public sector: the statistics show a constant growth in the need for places in pre-school institutions - a need which does not correspond to public provision. Investing in the quality of provision, especially for children less than three years of age is therefore to be the focus in a market that could, in the future, become a constantly-expanding field. The perception of being within an evolving industry may also be a factor behind the increased number of differences that emerged between the two types of educators. These are highlighted in the thematic area of the satisfaction of educating, both in the dimension about the elements of job satisfaction as an educator and in the level of satisfaction with social relationships where educators in private institutions are on average more satisfied then the educators in public institutions.

Table 20 shows the differences that emerged in the questions regarding the elements of job satisfaction as an educator.

■ **Table. 20 Anova (oneway). The elements of job satisfaction as an educator. Differences between educators in public institutions and educators in private institutions.**

The elements of job satisfaction as an educator	Average ESPub (N)	Average ESPriv (N)	F	gdl	P
The environment (space and equipment)	3.10 (203)	3.78 (27)	16.00	1-229	**.000**
Work schedule	3.27 (201)	3.44 (27)	1.04	1-227	**n.s.**
Doing a creative job	3.42 (200)	3.85 (27)	10.87	1-226	**.001**
Stability/security in the workplace	3.35 (201)	3.67 (27)	3.67	1-227	**.06***
The ability to freely choose ways of working	3.35 (203)	3.92 (25)	13.41	1-227	**.000**
Sharing roles with colleagues	3.30 (202)	3.81 (26)	10.04	1-227	**.002**
Recognition from the community (municipality)	2.68 (201)	3.32 (25)	8.01	1-225	**.005**
Recognition from the director of the educative and didactic activity	3.10 (202)	3.77 (26)	10.90	1-227	**.001**
The salary	2.17 (196)	3.41 (27)	35.01	1-222	**.000**
Performing non-repetitive work	2.90 (199)	3.67 (27)	18.01	1-225	**.000**
The possibility of didactic innovation	2.87 (198)	3.69 (26)	23.05	1-223	**.000**
Career possibilities	2.97 (202)	3.44 (27)	5.89	1-228	**.02**
Free time	2.78 (201)	3.26 (27)	5.81	1-227	**.02**
Independence/ autonomy in the work	3.22 (201)	3.67 (27)	7.08	1-227	**.008**

* with tendency to become significant

In their level of satisfaction with social relations the educators in private institutions are more satisfied than educators in public institutions in relationships both with colleagues (Average ESPub = 3.43, average ESPriv = 3.81, F = 7.90, WG = 1-196, p ≤ .005) and with other staff, superiors and other providers (average ESPub = 3.39, average ESPriv = 3.71, F = 6.60, WG = 1-221, p ≤ .01).

Even in the thematic area of the purpose of the classes for children aged 0-3 we find that educators in private institutions have significantly higher averages then educators in public institutions, particularly in the dimensions of opportunities and resources" (average ESPub = 3.60, average ESPriv =

3.77, F = 3.66, df = 1-220, p ≤ .06[22]) and negative image - deprivation (average ESPub = 2.94, average ESPriv = 3.09, F = 3.960, WG = 1-215, p ≤ .05). The partial contradiction of this last data with the one above in relation to the image of educators in the classes for children aged 0 to 3 years could be indicative of the fact that the school represents a compensatory solution when there are no alternatives for children. In the public sector the idea of responding to a need by a public service, community, tends to mitigate this negative perception; instead the private sector invests to respond to a demand according to the offer in the market. Finally, in relationships with parents, it emerges that educators in public institutions have significantly lower averages than educators in private institutions in the dimension of the child's development as a pupil (average ESPub = 2.85, average ESPriv = 3.15, F = 3.56, WG = 1-225, p ≤ .06[23]): the parents whose children attend private schools are more interested in the educational outcomes of the pre-school institutions.

■ Differences according to the service type of the classes 0-3

Finally, we tried to analyse the different dimensions that emerged on the issue of the purposes of classes 0-3 depending on the provision in which educators were engaged (nursery school 0-3, 3-5 kindergarten, or pre-school group 5-6). No statistically significant differences emerge: the perceptions of educators about classes for the younger children do not depend on their school level. This is a positive finding in our view, highlighting the possibility of teamwork and continuity between the educators throughout the duration of pre-school.

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22   With tendency to become significant
23   With tendency to become significant

CONCLUSION

■ A brief introduction.

We must not forget that the data collected in relation to the image and the professional experiences of educators surveyed cannot be read alongside the data collected from similar work done in other countries.

The recent history of Kosovo and particularly the military conflict represents an important element which, is difficult to evaluate, in the absence of specific literature. We cannot believe that the war has not affected perceptions related to some key terms in this report such as the safety of children, the image of schools and pre-school institutions as shelters, and safe, clean environments perceived by the community as places of protection. The summarised data is no substitute for the stories of those educators who continued to work during the conflict, trying to maintain their commitment to the children, with their sensitivity, intelligence and talent. This type of purely qualitative research would be very important because it makes it possible to reconstruct the background of the context in order to do other research on schools and the education profession.

Overall, the questionnaire presented a complex profile of the educator who works in pre-school. The typical educator, that is the most represented in the sample, is a woman, mature, and married with at least two children. Half of the sample is in possession of a high school diploma and the other half possesses a bachelor degree; she works for16 years in the public sector and 6 years in private. The work contexts are very varied both in terms of the number of children and the number of colleagues they work with. The motivation that led the educators to follow their career in this sector is often more intrinsic than extrinsic. They chose to teach because they wanted to do dynamic and creative work which would give them satisfaction, especially in the affective sphere, and offer contact with children.

Secondly, the teaching profession brings social recognition and the job is perceived initially as an engine of innovation and social change. The ideal educator is therefore one who responds to the community and fpr whom the social function dominates over the general development of the child. The element that emerges most strongly from the data is change: the school is changing, in its function and in its structure and this also has an impact on the vision that educators have of the purposes of their work and professionalism. The traditional psychological and pedagogical models do not seem to respond to the needs of educators any more and at the same time the demands of society become more and more urgent and important. School reforms and the indicators given in the new curriculum offer targets, even in the short and medium term, very far away from where the pre-school sector is today. The gap between the actual situation of the school - characterised by a lack of buildings and their inadequacy for meeting the needs of children (i.e. the size of the classrooms, pre-school materials available etc.) and other structural elements (ratio of educators: children, working hours, and wages among others) including the minimum response to the social need (only 3% of the population attending pre-school), the professional preparation of educators and the objectives pursued in regulations could be the reason for the fall in interest and motivation to work that particularly characterises the educators who have a longer career.

Linked to professionalism, an important element that emerges is of a limited idea of the characteristics of educational intervention, from a structured programme of activities to a diverse and individualised response. Coupled with the fact that no clear references appear to pedagogical models, this highlights the need for generalised training directed at updating the knowledge and skills of educators starting from the expansion of their values and ideas about their work. Linked to the model of education, an element which appears to need elaboration is the support of the affective aspect of the profession. Especially for teachers who work with children less than 3 years old, the individualisation of approaches becomes an essential condition for the qualification of education.

Therefore, the need for training emerges in reference to professional competence: the fact that initial training does not offer a specific professional qualification is coupled with the idea that the teaching profession learns mainly through their professional experience: the school becomes the privileged place of education. There is no doubt of the importance of positive in-service training, especially for immediate impact on professional practice, but this presents a risk of rigidity and a lack of openness. Training and willingness to change are particularly important to meet the objectives outlined by the ambitious reorganisation of the school system especially regarding the challenges posed by the plan to increase the accessibility of the service and thus the inclusion of children from different ethnic backgrounds and children with special needs.

PARENTS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING PRE-SCHOOL – FEATURES AND LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH THE PRE-SCHOOL INSTITUTION

■ Description of the Sample

749 questionnaires were received (average age 34.42 years, sd 5.86), 157 filled out by fathers (21%; average age 37.26 years), 324 by mothers (43%, average age 33.26 years), 262 by both parents (35% average age 34.19 years) and 5 by others (0.7%, average age 31.80 years - in two cases it was specified that it was filled out by the child's uncle or aunt). In one questionnaire the person who had filled it out was not indicated.

■ Personal data of questionnaire respondents

Regarding qualifications, nearly two-thirds of the participants have a degree (N = 482, 65%), almost a quarter have a secondary school diploma (N = 181, 24%), 70 with high school diploma (9%) and only 9 with no more than primary school diploma (1%). There are no major differences in this variable depending on whether the questionnaire was filled out by the father, mother or both parents.

Regarding the profession, of those who filled out the questionnaire 259 (35%), are workers, 107 (15%) teachers and 55 (8%) workers, 52 (7%) managers, 39 (5%) unemployed, 37 (5%) independent professionals, 26 (4%) entrepreneurs, 24 (3%) self-employed workers, 18 (2%), housewives, 16 (2%), technical employees, 15 (2%) students and 8 (1%), military. Finally, 11% of the sample indicated other professions, mostly belonging to the category of independent professionals.

Overall, therefore, more than three quarters of the families of children who attend pre-school belong to the upper middle class. Over three quarters of those who completed the questionnaire have full time jobs (546; 78%); the remaining declare that they pursue a profession working in shifts (N = 76, 11%), part-time (N = 46, 7%) or a flexible schedule (N = 29, 4%).

■ Personal data of the parent who did not complete the questionnaire

The average age of the other parent, the one who did not fill out the questionnaire, is 35.05 years old (sd 5.65).

Regarding their qualification, more than half have a degree (N = 401, 54%), about a third high school (N = 234, 31%), 88 the upper high school diploma (11.7%) and only 13 have no more than elementary school (2%).

Regarding the profession of the other parent, 233 are employed (31%), 69 (9%) teachers, 67 (9%) workers, 55 (7%) managers, 54 (7%) independent professionals, 53 (7%) self-employed workers, 41 (6%), businessmen, 26 (4%) unemployed, 19 (3%), housewives, 14 (2%) technicians, 13 (2%) students and 11 (2%) in the military. Finally, 10% of the sample indicated that the other parent had another profession.

In their profession, 594 participants (79%) work full-time; the rest say their profession employs them part-time (N = 35, 5%), with a flexible schedule (N = 31, 4%) or with shifts (N = 28, 4%). Only 7 (1%) of participants declare other types of time schedule.

This data is consistent with the data of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, showing a homogeneous socio-cultural background within a middle- class family unit..

■ Composition of the family unit

A total of 1426 children of the entire sample (age range from 0 to 25 years), and each family has on average about 2 children (an average of 1.90 for each participant in the survey).

There are 960 children in the sample attending pre-school services and their age range is from 1 to 6 years (Table 1). One parent declared the presence of a child of 8 years old, but we do not know if this is an error or a specific situation (disability, international adoption ...) that required a prolonged stay of the child in pre-school.

The majority of children who attend pre-school, however, are those of the age group 4/5 years (48%), while only 8% are under the age of 2.

### ■ Table 1. Age and number of children attending pre-school

Age	No.	Percentage
1	81	8.%
2	171	18%
3	196	20.%
4	238	25%
5	223	23%
6	51	5.%
8	1	0.1%
Total	961	100%

■ The reasons for the choice of pre-school institution

Figure 1 shows the reasons that led parents to enrol their children in early childhood provision. From their responses it is clear that parents are aware that childcare services provide a context that encourages the socialisation and development of the child, which gives a security guarantee (even in relation to hygiene and cleanliness) and also allows them to organise their daily and professional life well.

Key issues relating to socialisation and educational development emerge among other reasons, but no mention is made of education. It would be useful to have this data divided by age groups of children.

■ **Fig.1 Percentages relating to the response to the question "Why did you choose to enrol your son / daughter in pre-school?"**
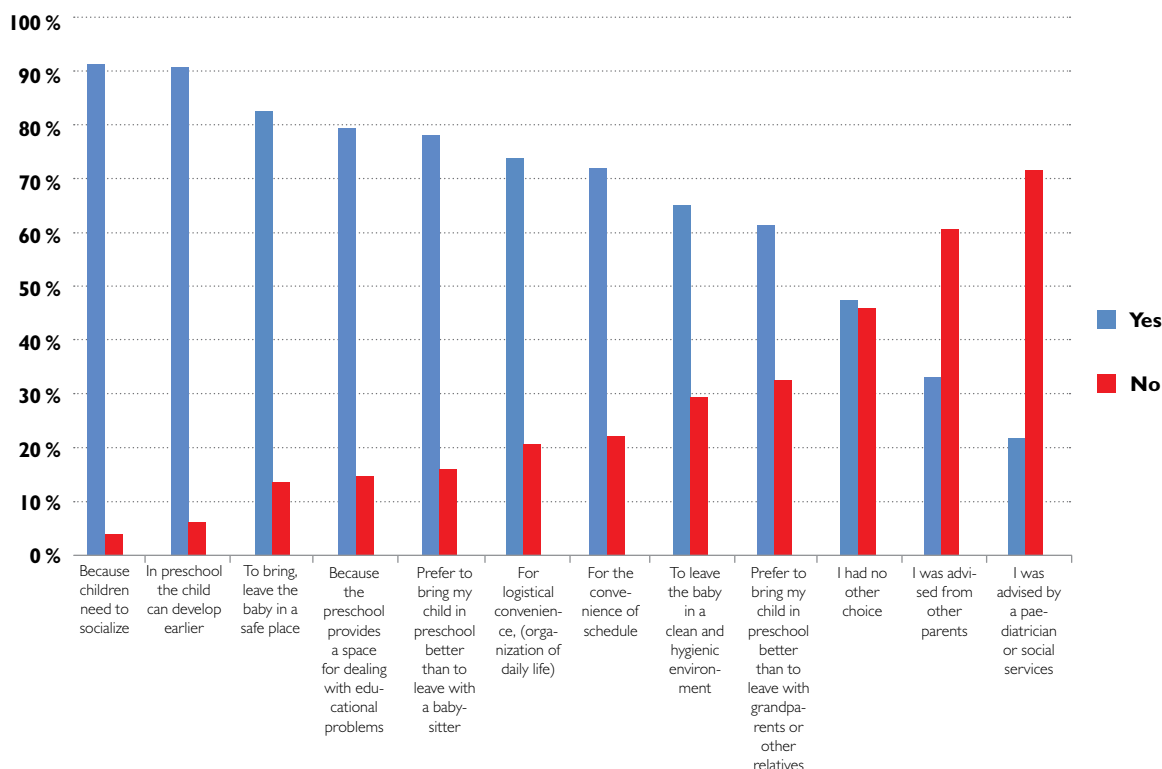
■ **School attendance and child development (identification of the role of pre-school in the development of the child)**

In order to study the perception that parents have of their children compared to children who do not attend pre-school, participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement/ disagreement[24] in relation to certain statements.

The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) presented 4 factors (Table 2): Cognitive and Social Dimension, which includes items that indicate the provision as a context which promotes social and cognitive development, Socialisation with other adults, suggesting that pre-school institutions are places where you can socialise with caregivers other than the family, what we have defined 'parents' justifications' with reasons offered by parents for the choice to send their children to pre-school and what already emerged among educators, as 'deprivation' including items that describe the provision as a deprivational environment.

The Cognitive and social dimension and Socialising with other adults are the dimensions that show a fairly high degree of agreement, indicating an awareness on the part of parents and pre-school institutions as being positive contexts for the children who attend them. In particular, the issue of compliance also emerges from the focus groups which showed particular sensitivity to this topic, which is very important in the early years of school life. The other two dimensions show a rather low degree of agreement and this finding suggests that according to parents of the children attending the services, children who do not attend services are not disadvantaged compared to their peers who attend them.

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24   I = strongly disagree, 2 = slightly disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = strongly agree

■ Table 2 Characteristics of children attending pre-school compared to those who do not attend. Average and standard deviation.

Children attending pre-school compared to those who do not attend...	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL DIMENSION	728	3.45	.55
Learn before others to respect the rules	738	3.40	.779
They have more opportunities to build meaningful relationships with peers	743	3.59	.659
They are more stimulated intellectually	739	3.36	.764
SOCIALISATION WITH OTHER ADULTS	724	3.01	.71
They become autonomous earlier	729	3.26	.824
Establish emotional relationships with other adults	734	2.78	.892
PARENTS' JUSTIFICATION	701	2.64	.66
Have access to indoor and outdoor spaces suitable to their needs	732	2.97	.857
Parents are more available in the hours they spend with them	719	2.66	.939
They spend too little time with their parents	720	2.29	.907
DEPRIVATION	710	2.10	.63
They have not been able to be at home for the most important years for personality development	733	2.93	1.005
They become more arrogant and aggressive	730	1.95	.948
They are forced to adapt their personality to the rules of group life	724	1.88	.933
Spend most of the time in an artificial and unstimulating environment	737	1.66	.861

Through the next question parents were asked if, thanks to the attendance at pre-school, their child had achieved a number of benefits (Table3)[25]. The principal components analysis (varimax rotation) returned the presence of two dimensions: Social learning, or being involved in the learning process of socialisation, and Formal learning, i.e. those skills that lead to the physical, and emotional level.

Both dimensions show quite a high average score, indicating that parents are aware that children who attend pre-school have an advantage in the learning process.

25   4 point scale (1 = none, 2 = little, 3 = quite, 4 = very)

◼ Table 3 The advantages for a child attending pre-school according to parents: Averages and deviations

The advantages for a child attending pre-school according to parents:	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
Social learning	728	3.51	.53
Socialisation and co-operation with children	729	3.65	.59
Learning of rules and behaviours	711	3.53	.71
Language	721	3.38	.78
Socialisation and co-operation with adults	715	3.29	.74
Formal learning	726	3.26	.74
Physical autonomy	701	3.19	.77
Affective autonomy	691	3.17	.78
Handling, manipulation	688	3.10	.94

◼ The premises and organisation of the pre-school Institution

When asked to assess the quality of the indoor spaces of the school, parents respond positively almost unanimously (Fig. 2).

◼ Fig. 2 Percentages of the response to the question "The indoor spaces of the pre-school institution, in your opinion, are:"
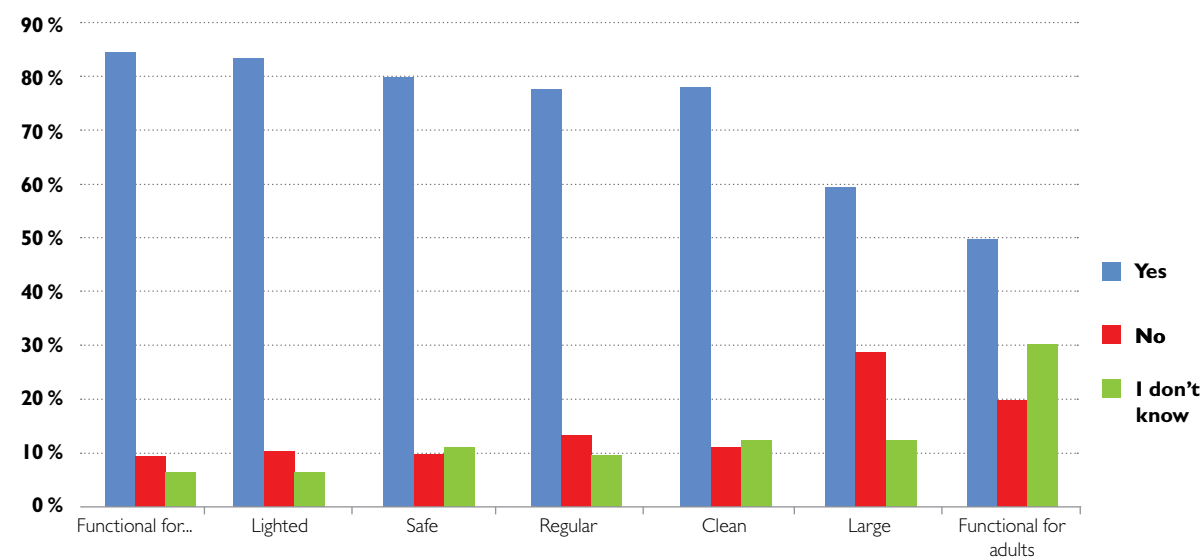

Even the outdoor spaces are evaluated positively by the majority of parents (Fig. 3), except for the item "Sufficiently used" where the percentage of positive responses is close to 50%"

■ **Fig. 3 Percentages of the response to the question "The outdoor spaces of the pre-school institution, in your opinion, are:"**
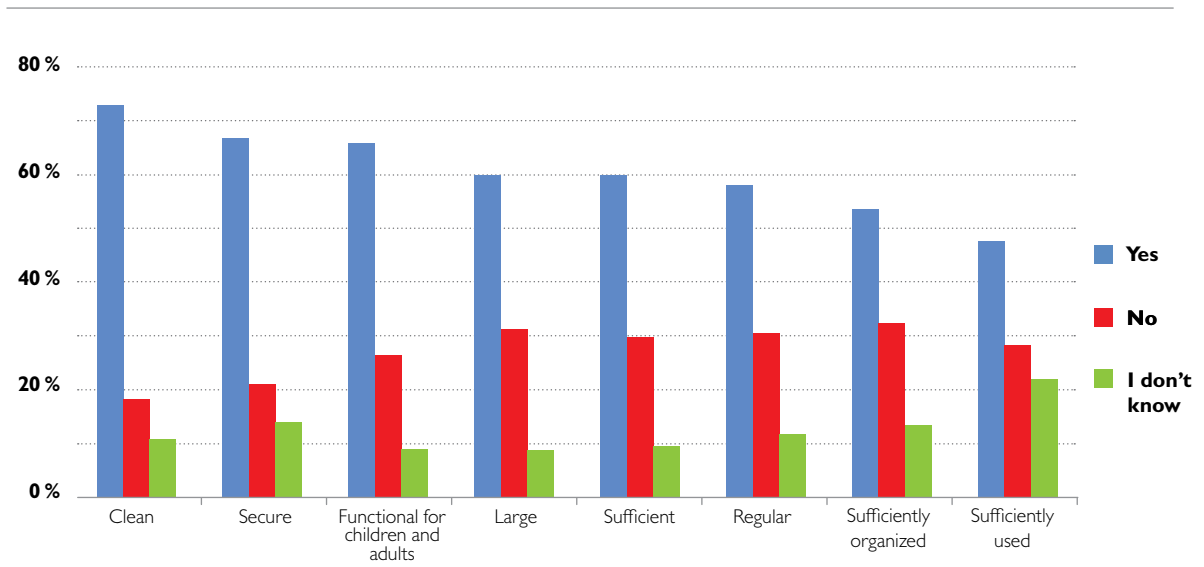
In response to the question about whether families would find it useful to extend the opening hours of the service (Fig. 4), just over 40% of respondents said it would be helpful if the school stayed open during summer and more than 30% said it would be helpful if it stayed open "every day beyond the current closing time of the pre-school institution." Less than 20% of the sample sought an opening on Saturdays and during religious holidays, and less than 10% would like the school to be open on Sundays.

■ **Fig. 4 Percentages of responses to the question " Do you consider a further extension of the opening hours of the pre-school institution necessary for your needs?"**
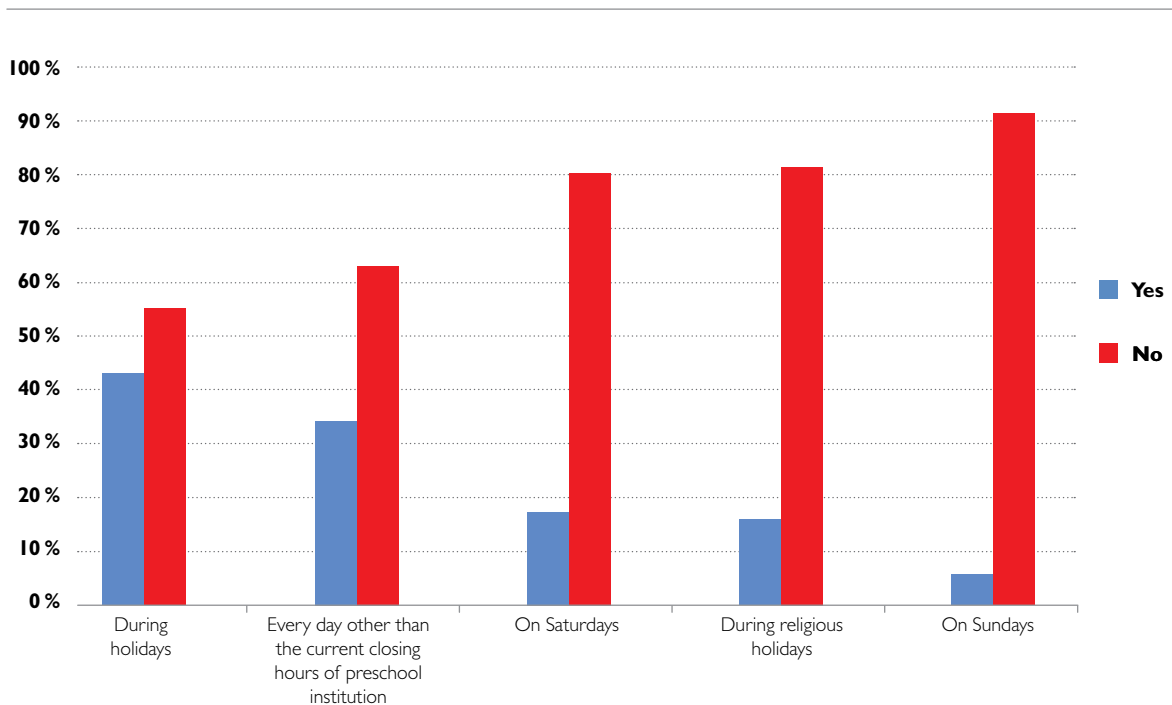
■ Relationship between family and pre-school institution

The next section of the questionnaire aimed to research the relationship between the family and the pre-school institution. When asked to assess the methods of maintaining contact between families and educators (Fig. 5), more than half of the sample gave positive feedback; only as regards the frequency of the meetings, we find that nearly one-fifth of the parents stated that the meetings could be more frequent, compared, however, with almost 80% stating that these meetings are "frequent" or " frequent enough ".

There is therefore a desire to meet with the educators and to participate actively in the pre-school institution, when its initiatives involve their children.

■ Fig. 5 Percentages of responses to the question "In your opinion, how should one maintain contact with family members and educators (interviews, meetings, etc..)?" are as follows:
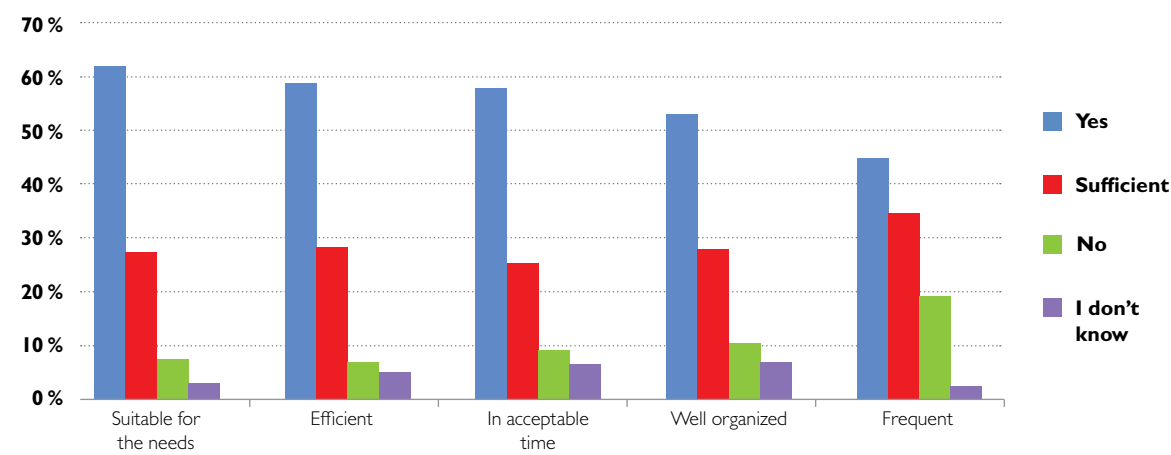
Even considering the manner in which the school hosts children, parents express themselves in a positive manner (Fig. 6): the answers "no" or "I do not know" is approximately 10% in all the possible answer choices.

■ Fig. 6 Percentages of the response to the question "In your opinion, the way the school hosts children is:"
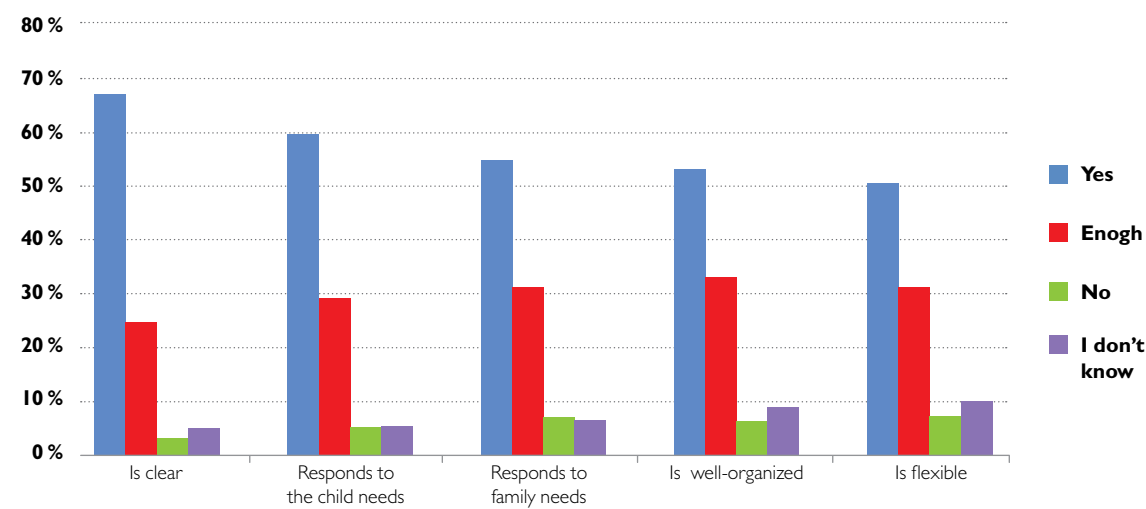
■ Satisfaction with pre-school institution staff

The final part of the questionnaire focused on the evaluation of the school staff (Table 4) and assistants (Table 5)[26]. Generally, the parents assess both the pre-school institution staff and the assistants fairly positively on all dimensions proposed. In particular, the school is deemed competent for the children and helpful, and attentive to the health and safety of children, while the support staff has excellent skills in relation to children and competent in the specific jobs they have.

■ Table 4 Evaluation of pre-school institution staff: Averages and deviations

The pre-school staff is:	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
competent in relation to educational planning	703	3.43	.75
competent regarding teaching content	680	3.43	.74
competent in relation to children	731	3.40	.79
attentive to the health and safety of children	725	3.38	.84
Available	723	3.37	.82
competent in relation to adults	716	3.33	.78

■ Table 5 Evaluation of ancillary staff: Averages and deviations

The assisting staff is:	No.	Average	Std. Dev.
able to relate to children	672	3.35	.76
involved in school life	619	3.33	.75
able to relate to adults	669	3.30	.77
competent in their work	670	3.29	.75

■ Comments on the data

Analysis of the data reveals a general satisfaction and positive response on the educational services in all their aspects (environment, facilities, teaching staff and support staff).

The age group represented the most is that of the 4/5 years old (i.e. includes a large number of pre-school age children), while the pre-school attendance by children under the age of 2 years is still poor. We need to work on this age group, in raising the awareness of families, to diminish the prejudices that exist ("at this age children are too young to attend nursery, because it is not necessary" ... this is an indicator that emerges from the focus groups). In fact, school experience, starting from the youngest children, is critical for the acquisition of skills for children's complete development..

Another important finding that emerges is higher pre-school attendance by children belonging to the upper-middle class. We need to emphasise the pre-school attendance of children coming from disadvantaged situations and not just from the upper-middle classes, giving an incentive to the welfare through different solutions (minimum fees, family allowances) that would allow this class to participate in school life.

Lastly, a sure way would be to strengthen university courses specifically for the 0-3 age range that create educational (not medical) professionals. All this would be useful to dispel the prejudices around this age group, and especially to dispel the idea that these children have only basic needs, since all age groups should have the right to enrolment and to complete educational development.

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26   4-point scale (1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = a lot)

INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND ROMA, ASHKALI AND EGYPTIAN CHILDREN – TESTIMONY FROM PARENTS

Between December 2013 and January 2014, 7 focus groups were gathered, 4 focus groups with mothers from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, 2 focus groups with mothers who have children with special needs and 1 focus group with breastfeeding mothers. The intent was to understand the reasons behind the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families sending (or not sending) their children to educational services (nursery, kindergarten, pre-school and primary school) and find out what may be the obstacles and difficulties encountered. In addition, another objective of the focus group was to try to understand the daily routines related to childcare (feeding, sleeping, etc.)

Regarding the children with disabilities, the aim was to understand the process of inclusion in institutions and the specific issues related to this objective.

Therefore, the direction of the focus group was as follows

■ SOCIAL AND PERSONAL DATA

1. How many children, (age, gender …)
2. Age of participants and at what age they had their first child
3. Where do they live (houses ....) and in which municipalities (rural area, city …)
4. Employment status of mother/ father (if they work, where, or unemployed …)
5. Education level of mother / father

2. DIRECTION

Identification of key issues and trying to bring people back to the topic, without digressions. People need to talk to each other, not with the interviewer, and discuss amongst themselves!

1.   ATTENDANCE OF CHILDCARE SERVICES – do children of age 0-3 stay at home? Do they go to nursery school,? If not, why and what are the cultural reasons … (indicate the reasons and the mentality behind this)

If there were services for children in your city, would you use them? Why are they necessary (Priorities? For mothers and children? Only for children? Research the reasons)
What are your needs?
Do you think that an educator might be useful? How? Research the reasons.

II. FOOD, CARE, NEEDS - What are your habits related to the childcare of 0-3 year-olds?. (What do you do?)
2. Related to birth (practices, registration …)
3. In terms of food and breastfeeding?
4. In terms of sleep?
5. In terms of play and, interaction with other family members (grandparents, siblings …)?

6. To develop language (mother tongue)?
7. In the case of childhood illnesses?
8. Related to your child's health?

III.   What does your community need in relation to the education and care of children 0-3 years?
IV.   Lastly, what do children want (what do they need)?

■ FOCUS ANALYSIS

The focus, as it results from the transcripts, seems to be from the group interviews. It was rare for there to be a long discussion between the participants involved and therefore answers were given individually to the interviewer. There was a constant lack of in-depth and longer discussion between participants; possibly this can be attributed to the fact that participants do not have much experience with this type of methodology.

a) Sample

The 7 focus groups were composed of 7-10 people each. A total of 54 subjects participated: 53 women and only 1 man.

The average age of the sample is not available because the data is fragmented (10 responses out of 54). The majority do not have a job (only 4 stated that they have one). They are all women with children; the average is 3.2 children each (in the sample there were 4 grandmothers and relatives and 3 people with no children). The level of education is diverse, ranging from the absence of qualifications (9, all subjects belonged to the Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities), an elementary school certificate (12), secondary school diploma (1), high school diploma (11) and university degree (6).

In particular, the sample of 2 focus groups with parents of children with disabilities has a higher level of education: primary school certificate 2, high school diploma 3, university degree 4, while for 7 subjects there was no data.

b) *Procedure*

The focus groups were organised in different cities: 3 in Pristine (about 200,000 inhabitants of Albanian majority), 2 in Prizren (165,000 inhabitants, of Albanian majority), 1 in Peja/Pec (81,800 inhabitants), 1 in Mitrovica (84,235 inhabitants – the study was performed only in the south part of the city since the city has two administrations, one Serbian in the north and one Kosovar in the south). The subjects were approached in hospitals, educational institutions and educational premises.

c) Data Analyses

The content analysis of the focus highlights very different realities, regardless of the number of inhabitants of the cities considered. In Pristine there are more opportunities than in other cities, where there are difficulties in terms of school, pre-school and hospital services, and in the villages there is nothing.

"It's hard for us to travel from the village."
"Do you have any pre-school in the village? "
"No".
(Focus group 7-P6)

■ Attendance at pre-school institutions

The first interesting indicator of the focus group analysis is the difference between the city and village. In the villages there is almost no possibility of sending a child to pre-school because it does not exist.

"In the village there is no education institution for children" (Focus group 5 - F5)

An important help could come from international organisations, which have sometimes opened facilities for children, with a low fee (5€ per month, even free for the children of those who died for their country or children with missing parents) and with excellent quality.

Another element it is useful to reflect on concerns the confusion between nursery school, kindergarten and pre-school. The feeling is that many participants spoke of kindergarten, but in reality referred to the pre-school where children attend from the age of 5 years. In general attendance at the nursery school, and kindergarten is very low, due both to the lack of provision and the costs (services are often private and fees are high - 90-170€ per month) and due to general misinformation.

Enrolment in public institutions is difficult, because, according to the participants "if you don't know someone you can't do anything. You need to have either people you know or money to enrol a child" (focus group 5 - F6)

One potential solution would be a better and clearer communication campaign in different places and contexts to free people from doubts which often arise only because of misinformation.

What motivates parents (though not many) to send their children to pre-school is the socialisation of children, the chance to learn new things, not to stay only with adults and to get them 'off the streets' "Here at least they are safe, they don't go out on the street, there is no danger from traffic, and they don't mistreat anyone. Here it is very good and when we bring the kids here we feel good ourselves too" (referring to pre-school institution for children aged 3-6 , focus group 6 - F5).

Also, *"for a better education, so that they behave well with parents, friends and others" (focus group 4 - F1)*

"He does homework, learns poems; he knows everything, knows all the letters, it is very good" (focus group 4 -F2)

"Normally those who attend pre-school education know everything; they are much more prepared, they also learn to behave better with the educator, know how to behave" (focus group 4 – F1).

If there were opportunities, they all agree they would send their children to pre-school education
"because a child shouldn't stay only with its mother" (Focus group 1 - F2)
"To socialise"
"It would be better, because children begin at a very young age to learn to be more socialised, and more communicative with one another" (Focus group 1 - F2)

And the opportunity can be provided only by encouraging and promoting welfare policies, or at least by providing a minimum salary for everyone.
"The economic conditions, unemployment … if we got something, a modest salary, certainly it could provide an opportunity …" (focus group 5 - F4).
".. there are no economic conditions …" (focus group 7 - P6-P3)
".. we have thought about it, but we have no chance" (focus group 7 - P3)

One person doesn't even have clothes for the children, "I have 3 children who attend pre-school institutions; believe me often they don't have shoes and clothes to wear" (Focus group 6 - F2).
"Money opens doors" (focus group 6 - F3), "when you don't have money, they don't even enrol your children in pre-school" (Focus group 6 - F5).
"The only problem is this poverty!" (Focus group 6, F5).

An interesting element that is often found in the psycho-social literature on migration is the function of the children as a means for the improvement and progress of parents. Children often become mediators between the family and services; they change the values and points of reference, as a mother says:

",,, when he came home he was saying everything like adults do, not as a child [...] When he went to pre-school he adapted quickly; it was a bit different then - he learned things, colours, and then corrected us when we spoke at home, he would say you don't say it like that, but like this and then he forgot the words he spoke before at home and used the words that the educator had taught him" (focus group 5 - F1)

On the other hand it is well known that children living in optimal environments with high-quality parenting, access to early childhood education, and economic stability are more likely to prosper than children without these opportunities, who suffer in many ways from a perpetual cycle of stress, disengagement, and negative health outcomes (Abrams & Killen, 2014).

■ Conditions in pre-school Institutions

Unfortunately, this item was not studied much in all the focus groups. The data we have describes situations which are sometimes positive and sometimes difficult. Positive aspects relate to clean classrooms and good educators, however the conditions are difficult not for the educators who are considered competent or very competent, but regarding the pre-school institutions' organisation:

"... when I sent my child to school she [the educator] had 40 children in the class, and I thought 'this can't be a good thing', I didn't like the chairs; the child told me that she had pain in her back - for almost two weeks two children were sitting on one chair .. " (focus group 5, F1).

■ Support networks

Basically the support networks are the family and the mother-in-law.

■ Prejudices

There are still several "prejudices" in relation to the nursery school, because "[the child] needs to be at least two years old, as it has no effect on a 1 year-old baby" (focus group 5 - F6).

■ Children with disabilities

In particular, two focus groups were conducted with parents of children with disabilities (trisomy 21, cerebral paralysis, autism, heart conditions, physical disabilities), and these situations are marked by extreme difficulties. The mothers claim not to have had help from services and that they do not send their children to pre-school education, because

"...we need to pay a person for him..." (focus group 2 - F1)
"…lack of economic conditions" (focus group 7 - P6)

"I tried to send my son [the child is suffering from cerebral paralysis, according to the mother] to kinder-garten when he was 5 years old. I was even willing to pay the assistant. They made me wait two years saying 'this month', and then 'next month' until my son was 7 years old [...] and in the end I had to send him to a special school". (focus group 2 -F3)
"They [the Ministry] have made the laws for their own interests, as they like, they don't pay an assistant and only if you pay yourself can you can send the child there." (focus group 2 – F3)

In this case, the problem is double, because there are no opportunities and those that do exist require

additional costs. The majority of people surveyed do not work - almost none of the women work, and only a few of the men, from time to time, some living on government social assistance, and some, especially in Peja/Pec, with the help of neighbours.

"And if you find someone to take care of the children it's a problem, because you stay at home, so why pay someone else? There are only a few working mothers" (Focus group 7 - P3)

And this is really a crisis - the Government of Kosovo needs to invest in employment or guarantee a subsidy for families with children. Only this way, can you have better services and adequate attendance in pre-schools. For families who do not have help and institutional support it is only through private individuals that they are able to achieve something.

"...here most of us don't even have the support of the family. [...] They don't have even the support of their family, friends and relatives let alone the government, which, as you [to the interviewer] also know I don't know if they are aware that we even exist somewhere, and this is really a problem". (focus group 2 - F8)

"...the government doesn't help. Because none of the parents, none of the families, like to see their children not showing progress, being shut away and having special needs" (focus group 7 - P3)

"We treat the child at a private hospital, paying 200€ per month only for the exercises .." (focus group 2 - F4)

The parents of children with disabilities complained that "everything we did, we did on our own" (focus group 2-F4)

"I couldn't send my child anywhere; I have no money, I didn't have anything to send my child anywhere in order to be able to talk and walk normally, and not even to the speech therapist or to anyone else" (focus group 2 – F4)

Even at the medical level they highlight that there are gaps and incompetence: "As a mother, I had to find a solution myself, I read in Serbian or English, because in Albanian there is very little material on the internet. Even though I went to the doctors and different institutions and also to private doctors, no-one could tell me what the appropriate treatment is, so I had to see myself what I could do." (focus group 2 - F8)

■ Solutions

The solution comes directly from those interviewed: "we need to raise public awareness not to discriminate against others; everything must be done for these children, Do not say 'sick'. No, my child is not sick." (focus group 2 - F6)

"We need to raise awareness because we are very far away ... there is no education" (focus group 5 - F6).

■ Child Care, Education, Habits (Food)

Regarding childcare, most of the mothers said that they take care of their children themselves. When they are not at home for any reason, those who mainly take care of the children are mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and in some cases the husband.

"If I don't have anyone home, I have my sister-in-law, I send him there or to my neighbour to take care of him for 1 or 2 hours" (focus group 3, F7)

During the discussions in focus groups, questions were raised regarding the quality of care and the forms of education for children.

In the question posed as: "Do you say to your child, 'this is a leaf, it has this colour, this shape,' do you talk to the children in this way?" the answer was as follows, "We watch cartoon movies together with them all day long."

When asked regarding the quality of child care by their mother-in-law or sister-in-law or husband (father of the child) it came out that such care was more related to physical protection,

"If we have a toy, we give it to the child to play with, if not they stay close to the child, and take care of him to make sure he doesn't fall, they feed him" (focus group 3, F5)

As regards medical care, the participants of the focus groups said that when they can they send their children for medical check-ups.

"We pay for medicines like everyone does, but the medical check-ups are free of charge, for students only if you receive social assistance, whereas for children everything is free of charge." (focus group 3, F I)

Sometimes it happens that they send their children to the doctor every week, because the children get sick often.

Regarding food provision, it is seen to be regular; the main complaints came from parents who send their children to pre-school, but were not happy with the service. One of the main factors for dissatisfaction was food.

"Even the drinks were the cheap ones, such drinks that I couldn't even remove the colour from the dummy. I've paid 180€ for both children for one month, and that's not a fee so low that my child should be drinking cheap drinks". (focus group 1, FI)

■ In conclusion, focus groups indicate several problems, as well as solutions:

1. There is confusion and a lack of clarity in distinguishing the types of services (nursery school, kindergarten and pre-school). The feeling is that when it comes to kindergarten, many confuse it with the pre-primary service.

2. The solution would be to study a clear information campaign (more and better information) that would reach the entire population, from the well-educated to the less-educated, from cities to rural areas. There is a need to study different campaigns which have been easily understandable depending on the target (e.g. nursery school, kindergarten).

3. Another important issue hindering the attendance of younger children at nursery school and kindergarten is the economic conditions and poor living conditions of many people due to lack of employment and lack of opportunities for both men and women. The solution would be to strengthen the welfare system, or at least guarantee a minimum income for families with no income or low income, and activate policies that enable employment for women.

4. As regards children with disabilities, the lack of public psychological support and public facilities to host these children is highlighted. In addition, this indicator often intersects with a lack of expertise and medical training. The solution would be to strengthen public facilities, paying supporting educators and organising training programmes to prepare educators in pre-school institution for accepting and including children with disabilities.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

■ ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH FINDING – ADVOCACY INITIATIVES AND TARGETED INTERVENTION

Promote a culture of childhood more aware of the needs of Early Childhood. Parents, but also teachers, are not fully aware of the centrality of education in childhood, and in particular in the first three years of children's lives.

In an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) the promotion of a culture of childhood requires the development of different actions at different levels:

- Raise public awareness of the Convention of the Rights of the Children (CRC). CRC may be the legal and the cultural framework to address the political and social choices of the country.

- These goals could include awareness campaigns targeted both at national and local policy makers, both through actions within schools, but also looking for the involvement of families.

- Promote and sustain collaboration, co-ordination and synergies between the different public areas involved in childhood care and in particular of the Educational, Social and Health sectors.

- This is particularly important for actions focused on children from birth to three years old. According to Law No. 04/L-032 article 49 which will come into force from academic year 2015/2016 in Kosovo, the attendance at kindergarten is very low (3%) and compulsory enrolment will start at the age of 5. In this context, social and health services operators, and in particular paediatricians, are the professionals who can meet all families, starting from the period of the mothers' pregnancy and childbirth. Parental support programmes (e.g. programmes of preparation for childbirth or breastfeeding support programmes) could be planned in collaboration between educational and health services; parental support programmes are particularly important to prepare, inform and sustain families with special needs children.

- Promote and sustain the attendance at pre-school.

This goal is actually very complex and refers to different actions.

a. facilitate access to ECEC for all families. Data analysis underlines that the majority of children attending ECEC in Kosovo belong to the upper middle class. There is a need to offer a higher number of ECEC public institution places and to improve them. Different studies (Noally et al. 2007, Vanderbroeck et al, 2010) underline that where the management of ECEC services depends on the private sector (market-based approach), the services are concentrated in urban areas, favouring advantaged families, but not present in rural areas or poor neighbourhoods.

b. Ensure access to ECEC for all children, encouraging the attendance of children with special needs and of children from minority ethnic groups (Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian). The focus group data analysis suggests that it is necessary to implement a programme to remove bureaucratic obstacles (including language barriers, difficult procedures), economical obstacles (the costs of the services) and cultural ones (including cultural and religious barriers, and prejudices against the educability of children with special needs).

c. Sustain not only ECEC quantity but also ECEC quality to increase knowledge about the importance of education from birth to three years old and the trust in the school system output for a democratic and peaceful society. Quality frameworks are important tools to improve pre-school quality especially when their conception and their assessment require the participation of teachers and families (Gariboldi, 2012).

d. More integrated services. The offer of public services for children from birth to five years old (especially from 0 to 3) may provide different typologies of services for children and their families.

It's possible to find different models of services all over Europe: the French Maison Verte (Dolto, 1985, 2009), the English play group, the Italian Family Centre (Mantovani,) are only a few examples of services that welcome children with their families enhancing social inclusion and children's education.

- Enhance teachers' professionalism improving pre–service and in-service training.

The research findings show that the teachers surveyed perceive with ambivalence the social and economic changes that are taking place in the Kosovo school system. On the one hand, they feel that the traditional educational models are no longer sufficient to answer new social needs and the challenges that the new curriculum offers; on the other hand, they do not find in their everyday work the motivation to experiment with new educational approaches and new teaching practices. The result of this tension is a drop in job satisfaction and motivation, especially for older/ experienced teachers. In keeping with the recommendations of the CORE project (Urban et al, 2011) to enhance the professionalism of ECEC teachers it is necessary to:

a. Increase the proportion of graduates (ISCED 5), especially for the teachers of 0 to 3 year- old children. The challenge could be to have at least one qualified (ISCED 5) staff member in each classroom.

b. Provide a specific Degree in ECED (Early Childhood Education and Development), or at least a focus in the Pre-school Degree, for the training of specialised teachers in the range 0-3. This degree should include courses on special needs education and intercultural education.

c. Ensure equal and reciprocal relationships between theory and practices. To reach this goal, it will be important to improve educational programmes (also in in-service training) offered by universities in close collaboration with schools, to guarantee a reciprocal interaction between theory and practice and support critical reflection (Schon, 1983).

d. Develop qualitative research on educators' image and belief to ground training (particularly in-service training) in educators' educational background and professional life experience.

e. Enhance team working and collaboration between educators' and between teachers and the pedagogical leaders of schools also bearing in mind continuity with levels of compulsory schooling. This will be a key question in the future (Moss, 2013). In fact the Kosovo school system's organisation provides a very fragmented articulation of schooling: classes for children from birth to three years old are still waiting for a specific definition and framework; the kindergarten has been reduced to two years and one year of compulsory pre-school was introduced before entering the primary system, which will come into force from the academic year 2015/2016. That fragmentation needs to be implemented by instruments and tools which guarantee a certain continuity of the educational experience of children through the different classes. Continuity represents a fundamental tool for special needs children, who need an individualised coherent project, co-ordinated with health and social services.

f. Implementing a curriculum taking account of children's social and cultural background and of the local context. This could represent the first step to the participation of children and parents in school life and drafting a process of self-monitoring of the quality of the educational offer.

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