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## Existential Field 6:

# The Professional Standards of Care Workers – The Development of Standards for Social Work and Social Care Services for Families

Extra Report (June 2010)



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Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities



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## **Working Reports**

Funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme and co-ordinated by Technical University Dortmund, FAMILYPLATFORM gathers a consortium of 12 organisations working together to articulate key questions about the family for the *European Social Science and Humanities Research Agenda 2012-2013*.

There are four key stages to the project. The first is to chart and review the major trends of comparative family research in the EU in 8 '*Existential Fields*' (EF). The second is to critically review existing research on the family, and the third is to build on our understanding of existing issues affecting families and predict future conditions and challenges facing them. The final stage is to bring the results and findings of the previous three stages together, and propose key scientific research questions about families to be tackled with future EU research funding.

This *Working Report* has been produced for the first stage of the project, and is part of a series of reports, as follows:

- EF1. Family Structures & Family Forms**
- EF2. a) Family Developmental Processes**
  - b) Transition into Parenthood**
- EF3. Major Trends of State Family Policies in Europe**
- EF4. a) Family and Living Environment**
  - b) Local Politics – Programmes and Best Practice Models**
- EF5. Patterns and Trends of Family Management in the European Union**
- EF6. a) Social Care and Social Services**
  - b) Development of Standards for Social Work and Social Care Services**
- EF7. Social Inequality and Diversity of Families**
- EF8. Media, Communication and Information Technologies in the European Family**
- CSO Civil Society Perspective: Three Case Studies**

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## **1. Aspects of the Tasks to be Maintained in this Report**

The FAMILYPLATFORM follows the ambiguous aim to bring together different voices and perspectives concerning the issues of families in current Europe ([www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu)). This report is related to the Existential Field 6 “Social care and Social Services” of the FAMILYPLATFORM. In particular, this expert’s report will focus on the professional standards of workers in social services for and with families. It will provide a state of the art of the available comparative knowledge as well as identify the areas of missing knowledge and need for future research.

This report takes as starting point the definition of social care services used in the Report of the Existential Field 6 (Kuronen, 2010), which says that social care services include the assistance and surveillance provided in order to help children or adults with everyday daily activities in various organisational settings. In this report, the focus will be at the three core areas of services: social work, child day care provisions and direct social care services in families and in institutions.

This report sets out the current state of research into the quality standards of family-related services over the course of a life-time - for example, a day-care system for children or families counselling - in EU member states. Two aspects will be taken into consideration: firstly, the development of quality standards of care facilities in EU member states, including similarities and differences and evaluation standards, and secondly, the development of professional standards for care workers in EU member states, including similarities and differences and different types of professional training standard (see FAMILYPLATFORM, 2009).

## **2. Professions to be Considered and Concepts Used**

The first draft and the content of this report were presented and discussed in the meeting of the FAMILYPLATFORM consortium in Jyväskylä on February 26, 2010. During that discussion, the focus of the report was clarified and directed towards an examination of the following professional fields of social care services for families.

- Child day-care services

This field includes several levels of professional pedagogical and care work in various types of services for child day-care in child day-care centres, kindergardens, and child day-care groups, as well as for child-minders in child day-care.

- Social work, child and youth care authorities, family counselling

This field refers particularly to the professional social workers involved in child and youth care, in family counselling, in preventive social work with families, and in the management and supervision of family-related social services.

- Family care services supporting families at home and at family centres, including institutional care for children in care

This field includes practical assistants in households of families, particularly families with young children, and a more pedagogical, counselling manner of family support. In many countries the boundary between these tasks is addressed constantly in professional debates. Vocations such as social carers, care assistants, home helpers, family worker, and family helpers may appear.

These fields of service do not cover all social care services related to families, particularly if the entire life circle of families and old age is considered. Many member states also have social and multi-professional specialised services for families that include social professions such as services for pre-natal mothers, youth services, and care services for persons with disabilities and elderly people. Also, social services in education - such as school social work, counselling, and school health care - might be added. However, as the extent of the sub-contract did not allow for a wide range of fields of social care services to be examined, a decision was made that the analysis should address the most general social care services that are used broadly by families in all member states.

As Munday (2003) states, even from the viewpoint of the labour market the definition of care sector is not very clear. Terms such as 'social services,' 'social welfare,' 'welfare services,' 'social protection,' 'social assistance,' 'social care,' and 'social work' are used with mixed meanings. This report focuses therefore on the three most central and frequented areas of family-related social care services. It is also important to consider that - regarding the qualifications of professionals in social care services for families - most care is still provided by carers who are not formally qualified, by family members particularly. Even if the formal services provided by qualified social care workers are used, a large number of tasks and a lot of time will still remain the responsibility of informal carers.

This report defines 'social care services' according to FAMILYPLATFORM's report number 6 on social care and social care services<sup>1</sup> (see Kuronen *et al.*, 2010). Referring to Munday's (2007: 10) understanding of social services, social services may be provided in various locations such as individual homes, day centres, residential establishments, offices; by various organisations such as local authorities, NGOs, and private agencies; and by various staff, such as social workers, social assistants, care managers, family helpers, kindergarten

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.familyplatform.eu/en/1-major-trends/reports/6-social-care-social-services>

teachers, and childminders. The qualifications of social care professionals may be even less complicated to define than the services themselves.

Claire Camenon and Janet Boddy (2006), who have compared three care sectors in the UK, contend that issues of knowledge and education, as well as of their measurement through qualifications and training, are a definitional minefield. Education refers to more school-based, college-based, and university-based qualifications, while training refers more to the workplace, to learning by doing, and to competence-based, practical methods of knowledge transferral (*ibid.*: 50). A further distinction can be made between vocational-industrial education and professional education. In this report, the comparative view of qualification standards of professionals in social services must be limited to formal education and to whether requirements are defined or not.

In short, the following options of qualifications in the three comprehensive professional fields of social services may be considered:

- whether a formal qualification is required at all;
- whether more vocational training at a particular level of the national education system is required;
- whether an academic education either at Bachelor (BA) or Master (MA) level is required, and in what disciplinary orientation.

### **3. The Relevant International Documents**

Current comparative international literature on the qualification standards of various professions in social services is not plentiful or detailed. Some existing research does compare qualification standards in social services between two or more countries (e.g. Boddy, Cameron, and Petrie, 2006) or between countries participating in individual research projects (e.g. Kröger, 2003; Salonen, 2009). Systematic comparative research has not yet been carried out between member states; however, a small number of comparative reports have been published, particularly regarding the interests of professional organisations on the one hand and the interests of policy makers and administrations on the other.

UNICEF's *The child care transition* (2008) report provides a coherent overview of the qualifications of staff in child day-care provision in the 25 OECD member states. The European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE) has published a comprehensive report on child care provision in the 30 European states, a report that also contains a comparative table of the qualifications of staff in child day-care. This report is not very exact in nature and rather seems to be based on an administrative questionnaire than on research. As a consequence, data on each country is not clearly expressed and does not offer a solid basis for comparison. If used in connection with further reports and research, however, the EGGE report is useful for its comprehensive nature.

In 2006, the OECD published a third relevant international report that included comparative information on the qualifications of professionals in child day-care — the second report in the “Starting Strong” project (Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care - OECD, 2006). Also, Elizabeth Frost and Maria José Freitas (2007), who are involved in the cross-European ERASMUS network European Social Work (EUSW), have published a coherent book on “Social Work Education in Europe.” In this book, different authors discuss professional issues particularly from an educational viewpoint.

The most recent report concerning a comparative data of social workers and their qualifications - entitled “Standards in Social Work Practice Meeting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” - will be published in June 2010 by the International Federation of Social Workers, Europe. A draft of this report has been made available for the work of FAMILYPLATFORM by Talentia, the Finnish Union of professional social workers. Also have The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) published in 2004 a paper entitled “Global standards for the Education and Training of Social Work as a Profession”.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006) has conducted important research into current and future general issues concerning the care service sector in Europe, based on a national report. The first part of the “Labour supply in care services” project was based on data from six member states, namely Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, and the UK. The second covered data from five new member states, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia. The report identifies a clear need to increase the number and quality of care workers, particularly in response to the needs of an aging Europe. Some conclusions in the “Employment in social care in Europe” report are also relevant from the perspective of social care services for families. Besides the documents specified above, I have conducted interviews with experts from the professional organisations for each of the given professions in Finland. These experts - in charge of international co-operation or issues of education and training in their unions, or both - were in a position to provide me with the most up-to-date information on current development, comparisons, and research in child care, social work, and social care in Europe or even at a global level. The European Commission’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE, 2009) has published a comprehensive report of child care provision in 30 countries, based on a questionnaire to national authorities. This report is one of the most recent and detailed concerning the qualification of child day care service staff, too.

Analysing the documents, it became quickly evident that strong development exists not only towards The European Qualifications Framework in these professions but also efforts to develop the curricula of professional education according to joint standards. This paper will continue by discussing the European



Qualifications Framework (EQF) and how it may be applied to social services for families.

#### **4. The European Qualifications Framework and National Qualifications Frameworks**

In most European countries, the regulation of social service professionals started quite late, as late as the 1980s. Requirements for the more academic staff of social services - for instance social workers and kindergarten teachers - have, however, already been more clearly defined, and in most cases, definitions of qualification requirements have proceeded hand-in-hand with the establishment of corresponding educational institutions. However, over the last ten years, discussions about the qualification standards of social service workers have become increasingly common, motivated in part by the increasing mobility of professional staff across Europe.

In April 2008, the European Parliament published recommendations for a European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning, valid in all fields of the labour market (European Parliament, 2008). Instructive in nature, the EQF is designed to ease translation between different qualification systems and different fields of education. In practical terms, the EQF ranges from formally non-qualified levels of qualification to doctoral levels of formal qualification and can be applied to both practical vocational work and to highly specialised academic tasks. The European Parliament underlines that each level of qualification can be achieved in various educational and career paths. The definition of each level relates, therefore, to the required knowledge, skills, and competences, not to a particular degree. However, in the practical cases of applying the EQF as a frame of reference, formal degrees will certainly play a central role.

The following information given by the European Parliament should be acknowledged. Firstly, the EQF recommendation does not replace or define national qualification systems or qualifications. Secondly, the EQF does not describe specific qualifications. However, particular qualifications should be referenced according to the appropriate EQF level by way of relevant national qualifications systems. Thirdly, in its non-binding nature, the EQF recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity by supporting and supplementing Member State activities through facilitating further cooperation between those states, so as to increase transparency and promote mobility and lifelong learning (*ibid.*, 2008).

The EQF and its manner of formulation can be criticised for many reasons. However, particularly given such a diffuse sector of qualification as the field of social services with its personal, vocational, and academic aspects and broad variations of existing qualifications, a frame of reference can be useful for

purposes of comparison. A frame of reference can also be helpful as a comparative clarification for the increasingly frequent cross-border mobilities of the staff of social services for families. Nevertheless, the EQF does not advise how knowledge, skills, and competences relating to each level can be proved or achieved.

The possibility that knowledge, skills, and competence can be attained by means other than formal education is confusing in an era of the knowledge society. If clear educational standards are not required, frameworks such as the EQF might even lead to the de-professionalisation of areas such as social services. Social services is a vulnerable area in this regard: assumptions about the 'natural talents of women' for caring still exist in many countries and have been strong - for example - at the beginning of social work as a distinguished vocation in the late nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth century across Europe (see Kuhlmann, 2000; Salomon, 1927).

The European Parliament (2008) recommends that member states use the EQF as a reference tool to compare qualification levels between different qualification systems and relate their national qualification systems to it in a transparent manner. The aim is that by 2012 all new certificates, diplomas, and similar degree documents contain a clear reference to EQF levels, by way of national qualification systems. Moreover, the Parliament would like member states to apply a definition of qualifications based on learning outcomes, in which non-formal and informal learning are validated so as to strengthen lifelong learning and aid the labour market participation of citizens most likely to be subject to unsecure forms of employment. Strong emphasis is also placed on principles of quality assurance in higher education and on vocational training related to the national framework and to the EQF.

The European Parliament also recommends that the National Coordination Points of the member states promote the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the process of defining and in applying the qualification standards at a national and European level (*ibid.*, 2008). In that sense, service users such as families should be heard when defining the qualification of professionals working in social services for families. This report mirrors that purpose to some extent from the viewpoint of stakeholders in the FAMILYPLATFORM project.

Table 1 presents an initial effort to apply the EQF from the perspective of social services for families, examining how the qualification of staff in these services can be analysed and compared.

As outlined in the EQF, the table consists of eight qualification levels standardised in relation to four central elements: learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, and competences. These elements are set out in the table in detail for each level. The European Parliament (2008) defines these four concepts as follows. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows,

understands, and is able to do on completion of a learning process, defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. Knowledge is the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. It is the body of facts, principles, theories, and practices related to a field of work or study, and means theoretical or factual knowledge or both. Skills are the ability to apply knowledge and the ability to use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills may be described as cognitive, involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking; or practical, involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments. Competence is the proven ability to use knowledge, skills, and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work situations or study situations and in professional and personal development. Competence may be described in terms of responsibility and autonomy (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2009).

This table follows the idea of the given EQF but refers, in as much detail as possible, to existing tasks, vocations, and professions in social services that can be related to current degrees of education or to national qualifications frameworks. I have used the EQF -table published by the European Parliament (2008) and applied the description of knowledge, skills, competence and degrees to the field of social care and social work for and with families, as far as possible.

*Table 1. The EQF from the Perspective of Qualification of Professions in Social Services for Families (Matthies, 2010)*

Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competences	Related degree of education in national qualifications frameworks
1	Basic general knowledge and social-care-related knowledge based on life experience.	The basic skills required to carry out simple tasks, and everyday skills in social care.	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context of social care, and lay and citizenship competences.	No formal degree (but informal training based on social and family life, and lay and voluntary engagement).
2	Basic factual knowledge of field work.	The basic cognitive and practical skills required to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems.	Work under supervision with some autonomy in social care.	Compulsory basic education, for example at a secondary school (at the age of 16, after 8 to 10 school years).
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in field work.	The cognitive and practical skills to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting basic methods, tools, and	Taking responsibility for the completion of tasks in social care, and adapting one's own behaviour to the circumstances so as	A vocational qualification without a formal degree, with long vocational experience or

		information.	to solve problems.	short-term training.
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in a broad context within the field of social care.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in the field of social care.	Exercising self-management within the guidelines of contexts that are usually predictable, supervising the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation of and improvements in social care.	A matriculation examination and a basic vocational degree or upper secondary vocational qualification (for example, 3 years after compulsory basic education).
5	Comprehensive, specialized factual and theoretical knowledge within the field of social care and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge.	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.	Exercising management and supervision in contexts of social care where there is unpredictable change, and reviewing and developing performance of self and others.	An upper or specialised vocational degree.
6	Advanced knowledge of social care and social work, involving critical understanding of theories and principles.	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of social care and social work.	Managing complex professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work in social care and social work, and taking responsibility for managing the professional development of individuals and groups.	A BA degree from a university or polytechnic/ university of applied sciences.
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in social care and the social work field, as the basis of original thinking and/or research; critical awareness of knowledge issues in social care and social work and the interface between different fields.	The specialised problem-solving skills required in research, innovation, or both to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.	Managing and transforming work in social care and social work that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; taking responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or reviewing the strategic performance of teams.	An MA degree from a university or a polytechnic / university of applied sciences.
8	Knowledge at the most advanced	The most advanced and specialised	Demonstrating substantial authority,	A doctoral degree or licentiate

	frontier of social care and social work and at the interface between fields.	skills, techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.	innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity, and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of social care and social work contexts, including research.	degree.
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## 5. Current Standards of Qualification in Comparison

### 5.1. Social Workers Working with Families

The social worker's profession is probably the most clearly-defined, standardised social services profession in the member states. In particular, the social work professionals in local child and youth protection being in the authority positions responsible for significant expertise and decisions based on child care Act have increasingly to meet clear and comprehensive requirements of qualification. Most member states require in child protection an academic qualification achieved at a university or even post-graduated specialisation, only few accept a social work qualification achieved at a university of applied sciences. While most countries require already a MA degree in social work or are moving towards it, other countries require at least a BA degree in social work, achieved at a university of applied sciences as a minimum qualification for social workers.

Many countries also offer further post-graduate specialisation for working with families and in child care and protection. Also, an increasing number of countries are offering a doctoral degree in social work and have established cross-European and international doctoral programmes of social work in co-operation with universities from various other nations (see for example, [www.indosow.net](http://www.indosow.net)). European social work education follows a somewhat generalist approach: education aimed at working with families is integrated in the general social work programmes at BA or MA level, but specialised programmes for working with families and in child protection are issues of further education.

Fifteen years ago it was still possible to identify different types of social service states in which significant differences in the qualifications of social workers reflected the type of welfare service state (see Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996). This meant that in western countries with a strong public services sector also the professionalisation and 'academisation' of social work was relatively strong. Such was the case in the Nordic countries, but many East European countries have also gone in the direction of academising social work - or have academised social work after 1989. However, during the last fifteen years, various strong,

cross-European or even global changes and politically-initiated reforms have led to a harmonisation of social work education in Europe.

An astonishing convergence in the development of social work education is visible. Due to the Bologna process of the European Higher Education Area, nearly all European countries are now applying or moving towards a two-step model of education consisting of Bachelor's and Master's degrees in social work. The Bologna process has been a success for the social work profession in so far that practically all social work education programmes in Europe are now fully integrated nationally into the systems of higher education (see Martínez-Román, 2006: 28). The UK is somehow an exception: in the UK, professional qualifications and academic degrees are not directly bound together: an academic Master's degree in social work is not a formal part of the UK professional qualification. Some countries that before the Bologna process required a four-year university degree in social work are now either requiring a four-year BA degree - such as in Slovenia and Poland - or are including a legal professional qualification only at MA level, while a BA is not regarded as relevant to the labour market. Other countries that previously had no clear definition of social work qualifications, or had social work education below a BA level, are now up-grading their social work education to at least BA level at a university or a university of applied sciences. Countries that used to have a three-and-a-half or four-year diploma/degree in social work at college, polytechnic, or universities of applied science level are in a more difficult situation due to the Bologna process. These countries - including Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands - must reduce their previous, longer diploma degrees to a three-year BA degree as the basic qualification required for social work, and offer an additional, optional MA degree to students.

Regardless of how the Bologna process is applied, significant differences remain in the qualifications of social workers due to differences in previous educational systems, to different traditions in understanding the professionalisation of social work, and to differences in the structure of higher education institutions, such as having, or not having, a dual system of universities and universities of applied sciences. For instance, the new Bachelor's (BA) degrees differ quantitatively as follows: Countries whose BAs consist of 180 ECTS credits include Belgium (FL and FR), the Slovak Republic, Estonia, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, the Czech Republic, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Countries with 210 ECTS BAs include Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Portugal; and 240-ECTS BAs are found in Germany, Ireland, Slovenia, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Scotland, and Romania (see Martínez-Román, 2006: 28).

Over fifty percent of social work education in Europe is now offered at university level, in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Outside universities, education in social work is offered by accredited higher education institutions that adhere fully to a tertiary education system. Examples of

programmes run at a higher professional education level include Hogeschol (the Netherlands and Belgium, FL), Fachhochschule, Universities of Applied Sciences (Germany and Austria), and Technological Educational Institutions (Cyprus and Greece). The traditional difference between universities and non-university institutions is that non-university institutions adopt a more professional orientation rather than an academic orientation. As Martínez-Román (2006) concludes, both institutional modes are regarded currently as part of the same system, with a clear trend toward congruently offering Bachelor's as well as Master's degrees. Doctoral programmes are offered only at university level in Europe.

From the viewpoint of the FAMILYPLATFORM project, it is interesting to acknowledge that such extremely demanding fields as Counselling Centres for Family and Child Rearing Issues (in Finnish kasvatus- ja perheneuvola) require two year's specialisation training on the job in Finland, following the obtaining of an MA degree in social work. Many other countries offer a similar specialisation in Family Issues and Child Protection, but it is not always a mandatory requirement.

To give an example of the confusion in German disciplines of social work and social pedagogy requires closer analysis. In Germany, besides the main stream of social work education at the level of the Fachhochschule, twenty-five universities offer BA studies, MA studies, or both in the discipline of social pedagogy, either as sub-areas of pedagogy or educational sciences or as independent disciplines (see the Kommission Sozialpädagogik DGfE, 2009). University-level social pedagogues do not usually aim at practical social work or social pedagogical work, however, rather at administrative, management, and research tasks in social work and social pedagogy. The practical social workers - or social pedagogues, both terms are used practically as synonyms - are educated at German universities of applied sciences (in German Fachhochschule). Currently, most universities of applied sciences offer BA level studies, but many have begun to offer MA level studies, mostly as specialisation for a particular area of social work.

The implementation of the Bologna process, the two new BA and MA degrees, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and the system of modules - which has also been new to many educational institutions - have caused significant structural changes in the education of social workers in Europe. The next large reform, the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in the National Qualifications Frameworks of social work education, will not perhaps affect structures so much as it will bring change in the methods of understanding the content and goals of education. It is to be expected that in along run the increasing academic education and research will also improve the quality and quantity of scientific knowledge needed in the work with families.

## **5.2. Child Day-Care Staff**

Outlining the qualification requirements for staff working in the day-care systems of member states is currently the focus of significant public interest. A growing awareness exists of the interrelation between the quality of pre-school services and the learning performance of children in school as well as their further options in life. Early childhood services and their quality are becoming increasingly important due to long-term development in most societies towards the labour market participation of mothers, today a very clear strategic aim of the EU and of most member states. However, as seen in comparative studies, the issues concern not only the availability of child day-care but also the quality of child day-care in terms of the qualifications and number of staff. In such questions, cross-European comparisons are very fruitful and exciting.

The UNICEF report “Child Day-Care in Transition” (2006) refers to a British long-term study of young children’s development (EPPE, 2003) that concludes that pre-school enhances children’s cognitive and social development and that the effects of this enhancement are the greatest for disadvantaged children, particularly if pre-schools bring together children of mixed backgrounds. The study also contends that benefits correlate positively with measures of programme quality and with staff qualifications. The qualifications of staff in child day-care services cannot be analysed and explained as an isolated factor, but are closely connected in international comparisons to other important factors of provision for children and families in a society. For example, UNICEF’s “Child Care in Transition” report (2006) shows that high qualifications for child day-care staff are demanded in societies where other conditions for families and children are of a high level, too.

The UNICEF report uses the qualifications of staff as a core criterion for evaluating the quality of child care. UNICEF sets as a minimum criterion that 50% per cent of the staff should have a least three years’ tertiary education with specialist qualifications in early childhood studies or a related field. UNICEF proposed as minimum that at least 50 per cent of staff in early education centres supported and accredited by governmental agencies should have a minimum of three years tertiary education with a recognized qualification in early childhood studies or a related field. The UNICEF report states, however, that twenty out of twenty-five OECD countries were able to meet this standard. The UNICEF minimum only addresses primary school teaching qualification, with no special training in the developmental needs of pre-school children. However, this data seems to include some mistakes. For example, Finland is considered a country that would not achieve the minimum standard, although the level of staff qualification requirements in the Finnish child day-care is the highest. In Finland, only child minders taking care of children in their homes in family day-care do not always have the three-year tertiary education.

When comparing the qualifications of child day-care staff, most attention is paid to the quantitative level of qualification in terms of the required degree. However, analysis of the content and orientation of the qualification, another very important



issue, depends on whether child day-care is regarded mainly as a social care service, an educational service, or a mixture of both. The answer may differ in a society according to the form of child day-care services. In countries where child day-care is regarded as both a social care service and an educational service, the groups of children are smaller and the staff-to-children-ratio is lower (1:4 for children under 3 years, 1:7 for 3-7 year old children). Also, both 'types' of staff are available, experts in social care and experts in early childhood education. Finnish child day-care centres - for example - exemplify this mixture. Where the only aim is to provide care, the demand for qualifications is not very high and groups are small, such as in children's private day-care groups, or care through private nurses. Where the focus is mainly on education, groups are quite large, the staff-children-ratio is quite high, and the qualifications of staff are educationally-oriented. The German traditional Kindergarten, which does not provide all-day-care, is a clear example.

As discussed, cross-European variation in the qualification requirements of staff caring for children is broad, ranging from the MA degrees in early education of kindergarten teachers in Finland to Portugal's stipulation - stated in answer to a questionnaire about European child-care provision - that "child minders should be able to read and write" (EGGE 2009: 46). Despite such huge variations, very clear commonalities exist in the qualifications of child care staff. Most countries differentiate between types of staff according to three levels: child minders or care assistants with a qualification level of one to four; child carers, educators, or pedagogues with a qualification level of four to five; and kindergarten teachers, supervisors, or managers with a qualification level of six or even seven. Beyond this very similar structure across member states, differences emerge in questions of how rationally qualification requirements work in reality, and of the quantitative relation between various groups of staff with various levels of qualification. Finally, the most important factors in the quality of child day-care are child-to-staff ratios and group sizes; these vary greatly between countries.

### **5.3. Social Carers in Services for Families: family helpers and social carers**

Less systematic comparative research exists on direct social care for families than on the other two fields, which both have a clearer professional profile. Professionals in social care for families include social carers, social pedagogues, social inspectors, social assistants, social educators, family helpers, and childminders. Surprisingly, although care issues are even considered a global challenge (see Ehrenreich & Russel Hochschild, 2004) and while Europe envisions meeting challenges with the help of a "knowledge-based society," comparable systematic data on the qualifications of social care staff working with various age groups is not yet available. Several cross-European publications are available on social care work, publications that include issues of qualification, but mostly concentrate on the care of the elderly or of people with disabilities, or include residential care for different age groups. The edited book "Care work – Present and Future" (Boddy *et al.*, 2006) is an example of this type of publication.

It is an important contribution to understanding current general issues of social care work, even though limited mainly to the UK, with short comparative sections on social pedagogy in Germany and Denmark.

“Employment in social care in Europe,” published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006), attends to critical future issues of staff shortages in care services and collects examples of good practices in developing solutions for challenges in care services across Europe. It does not, however, include any systematic comparison of the qualifications of care staff in the member states. Another publication, the results of the EQUIP project (see Salonen, 2009), explores home care practices and education in six European countries; its data concerning elderly people may be relevant also to home services for young couples with families.

Compared to professionals in nursing and education, professionals in social care and the child-care workforce have a lower level of education in the UK (Brannen *et al.*, 2007). At the end of the 1990s, thirty-five percent of social care workers and twenty-three percent of childcare workers in the UK were qualified up to level three on the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) scale. Most of those social care workers had one or more General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSEs), which can be obtained at the age of sixteen.

Brannen *et al.* (2007: 77-78) identify a growth in the current public use of the term “career” for all employment and especially employment linked to formal qualifications. This growth stands in contrast to the idea of caring as a “calling” based strongly on experience on the job and not only on qualifications as such. While UK care occupations require no upper-secondary schooling, those lacking such an education should now gain level three in the NVQ table. Brannen *et al.* also note that despite the increased importance placed on qualifications, many care work occupations have relatively few prospects for career or promotion (*ibid*). The lack of options for promotion or career progress in social care might be one important reason why it does not attract many young people, particularly men, and why many existing care workers change field. The European notion of Lifelong Learning and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should be developed therefore into “ladder instruments,” instruments that enable promotion to more demanding and qualified tasks, continuing the process of education in social care for those who look for new challenges. It became evident to Brannen *et al.* (2007) that most care workers move across different areas of child care work during their working years, a fact that can be regarded as a strength of social care, enabling working options and widening of experiences and perspectives in a vertical direction also.

The level of training seems to influence how care workers - for example - view and understand the children they care for and the work they do. From the viewpoint of families, the research result concerning these issues are significant as it has been discovered that a lower education means that care workers see

themselves and their work more often as a replacement for the own homes and the parents of the children they care for and less as a support for the biological parenthood. (see Brennen *et al.*, 2007: 104). Over recent years, the UK's employment and education policy has stressed the importance of statements of work-based competence, gradable as equivalent to formal qualifications in a system of National Occupational Standards that consists of statements of skills, knowledge, and understanding. It is important therefore that work-based competences can be completed by training in pedagogy, reflecting a holistic approach to focusing on the child as a whole person. Academic studies, professional skills, and practical training should be combined in the qualifications of child care workers; integrating theory, practice and personal qualities or "head, heart, and hands" in work with families (*ibid.*: 105).

The UK has a shortage of qualified social care workers. Considerable pressure exists for existing non-qualified care workers to upgrade their skills to as high as level two or three of the National Vocational Qualification standards (see Brannen *et al.*, 2007: 200). The situation may be similar in many member states: improving the qualifications of social care service workers requires the development of in-work training and part-time study opportunities.

Merja Borgman (1998), in her constructionist research into social care workers' professional interpretations in Finland, states that the core meaning of social care is to be the virtue existing in a human being. In the interpretations of social care workers, the virtue is essentially related to ethics of care work (Borgman, 1998: 10). The research focuses on upper secondary vocational qualifications of social care workers in Finland, which can be regarded as equivalent to vocational level four of the EQF. Borgman contends that while the previously fragmented educational system of social care workers was reformed in the 1980s into a comprehensive unified structure, confusing approaches to interpreting the contents and goals of that education still remained among teachers and students.

In Finland, a new, cross-sectoral basic vocational degree to become a practical nurse (in Finnish *lähihoitaja*, somewhat "close to person –care") was introduced during the 1990s. The new degree unifies previous traditions of social and family care for all age groups with the more health-care-related tasks of nurses. After comprehensive school at the age of 16 years, the 120 ECTS training programme takes three years to complete. The curriculum includes 20 credits in core subjects, 50 credits in common vocational studies for the qualification, 10 credits in free-choice studies, and 40 credits in specialist vocational studies for each study programme. Inside this comprehensive basic education, a specialisation in the following study programmes is possible: emergency care, child and youth care and education, mental health and substance abuse welfare work, nursing and care, oral and dental care, care for the disabled, care for the elderly, customer services and information management, and rehabilitation (SuPer, 2010).

My conclusion at this point is that social care services for young families do not appear to constitute their own field in the current debate on care services and qualifications in Europe. Exceptions include social pedagogical family help in Germany (called “SPFH”), which is part of a child protection act and address families at risk only. Another exception are traditional home services for families with children in Finland, services that were previously available universally to every family in temporary need due to the sickness of a family member or other emerging cases. However, due to the shortage of resources in the municipal home services and especially since the neoliberal shift in the Finnish welfare state services, this home service in Finland is limited increasingly to families at risk.

In an emerging case, a particular type of family work may be involved as a form of “preventive child care intervention,” a mixture of practical help or ‘self-help’ and social counselling. This intervention can also consist of peer work with two types of professionals, a more practical professional - a family worker - and a social worker to deal with counselling. Similar settings of intervention as family support are available in most countries. Generally, assistance in the everyday issues of families in Europe seems either a “private issue” to be solved by informal networks and voluntary organisations, or grown so demanding that an emerging case of children at risk must be diagnosed to mobilise help. The qualifications of staff for family care services are hardly standardised, therefore, since the work is extremely occasional in nature — as shown by the comparative data missing in the following table.

#### 5.4. Concluding comparison of the qualification of professionals in social services for families

*Table 2.* The qualifications of social care workers for families in the EU member states, according to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Matthies, 2010)

Member State	Qualifications of social workers working with families in - for example - counselling, child protection, family support, school social work, and family centres	Qualifications of staff in child day-care services	Qualifications of care staff in social care services provided for families - for example - at home, in family centres, and at children’s homes <sup>2</sup>
Austria	A change from college	Kindergarten	

<sup>2</sup> In most member states, data on the qualifications of staff in social care for families of this type is not available; required qualifications are either not defined or social care services for families are not established.

	(level 5) to universities of applied sciences (3-years diploma, level 6) took place in 2001; change towards BA/MA at universities of applied sciences with bachelor (3 years level 6, mandatory) + master (2 years level 7, optional) took place in 2007.	pedagogues (60%) have 5 years upper secondary education at level 5; educators (care assistants) have level 2 training (30%). Training for childminders is not mandatory in all provinces, and training standards can differ between regions.	
Belgium	The Flemish community: A change from colleges to universities of applied sciences took place 1995, bringing a 3-years diploma degree at BA (level 6). The French community: non-university higher education (institutes of higher education) in social work either as a BA (level 6) or BA + MA (level 7).	The Flemish community: only 25% of jobs require a diploma; nursery school teachers have 3 years tertiary level 6; child care workers have a secondary level degree at level 3 to 4. The French community: teachers have 3 years at college at level 6; nurses have 2 years secondary education at level 2; child minders only require "useful experience".	
Bulgaria	A four-year BA degree (level 6) and two-year MA (level 7).	No details available; "Staff education has been introduced in working with children and improving management skills"; level 2.	
Cyprus	A four-year BA degree (level 6) at a university.	Child carers have a college diploma at level 4 to 5, kindergarten teachers have a BA (level 6).	
Czech Republic	A BA and MA university degree; level 7.	95 % of pedagogues have an upper secondary degree at level 4; university education at BA level 6 has started.	
Denmark	A 3.5-year BA degree at a college (level 5 to 6) required; two universities also offer an optional MA degree.	Social pedagogues have a 3.5 years degree at level 6; basic educational training for careers is at level 2; the informal qualification of childminders is at level	Social and health care assistants have vocational level 4; social and health care helpers have vocational level 3.

		1.	
Estonia	A BA and MA university degree; level 7.	Teachers in child day-care institutions have a degree at level 5 – 6 or secondary vocational education (level 4) with either a specialisation in pre-school education or additional courses in pre-school education.	Social care worker.
Finland	MA university degree, level 7.	Kindergarten teachers in day-care centres have an MA or at least a BA degree (levels 6–7) in early childhood education; children's nurses have 3 years of secondary vocational education at level 4; childminders in family day-care have had access to a vocational degree at level 4 since 2005 (yet most are at level 2 to 3).	Social instructors and family workers have a BA degree at university of applied sciences level 6, or a previous upper vocational degree at level 5; practical nurses have a degree at level 3; previous vocational degrees of family helpers and social carers.
France	3 years tertiary-level education (diploma) at level 5; three universities offer undergraduate-degree-level social work training at level 5; private schools train the majority of social workers.	Teachers at an <i>école maternelle</i> have a university degree and specialisation equal to level 7; children's nurses at an <i>école maternelle</i> or at a <i>crèche</i> have specialisation at level 4; educators have a degree at level 5 to 6.	
Germany	BA degree level 6 (university of applied sciences) required; MA degree level 7 optional at several universities of applied sciences; universities offer social pedagogy degrees at level 7.	Educators (64%) have a 2-year degree at level 5; child nurses have a degree at level 4; childminders have no education; social pedagogues in leading positions have a tertiary degree at level 6; new academic programmes for early childhood education started at BA-level 6 in 2005.	Degree level 6 is required for social pedagogical support of families at their homes (not achieved); educators level 5; temporary and part-time contracts for person with certificate from a 80 hours adult education course level 3 or without qualification; educators in residential care mostly have a level 5 education.
Greece	BA and MA university	Educators are mainly	

	degree; level 7.	higher education graduates at level 6; assistants have mainly finished a post-secondary vocational education at level 5	
Hungary	The previous three different professions are now developing towards an identity of social work with a strong social science and social policy content; a 3-4-years education (BA; social worker, educator, deacon) and a 4,5 years MA university degree as social worker have been established.	Two-thirds of the staff in kindergartens have a tertiary degree at level 6; trained child care workers have secondary vocational training at level 4; workers in nurseries mainly have secondary vocational education at level 4.	
Ireland	A national professional certificate in social work and a 3 to 4 year BA degree at level 6; an additional 2 years for an optional MA degree at level 7.	No national minimum standard of qualification ("qualification poor/ experience rich"), level 1 to 2; National Child Care Strategy has suggested a training framework, and several universities and institutes are now offering qualifications and degree courses related to childcare.	
Italy	3-year undergraduate degree, level 6; 2 additional years for a postgraduate MA degree at level 7.	In kindergartens, staff may have - since 2003 - a university degree in primary education (level 6); however, practicing staff have training at level 5 (no information exists on the training of other staff members).	
Latvia	4-year university BA degree; level 6.	Kindergarten and pre-school teachers should have a higher pedagogical education and higher qualifications than pre-school pedagogues. All these pre-school teachers need to take in-service training of about 36 hours every	

		3 years. No official education and training programmes exist for private childminders.	
Lithuania	College to 3.5-year, level 5; a 4-year BA degree at university level 6; an MA degree after an additional 1 to 2 years, level 7.	Teachers in pre-school education need to have a secondary or higher education (level 4-6) related to pre-school education.	
Luxembourg	No one social work education programme existed for a long time; a BA degree has now been established at the University of Luxembourg; level 6.	Most workers working in the care sector are qualified employees with training that may differ by function (management, education, and cooking and cleaning).	
Malta	4-year BA degree, level 5.	Supervisors need training in management and administration (level 4). Other carers and people in home-based facilities need a recognised level of training and education in childcare (level 3 to 4).	
Netherlands	4-years BA degree, level 5; international MA in comparative Social Work offered at one university	The minimum qualification requirement for childcare employees is relevant schooling at secondary vocational level 4; debate exists about the necessity of a higher vocational education; directors have 4-years tertiary at level 5 to 6.	Care workers have a vocational level of 3; care helpers have a vocational level of 2.
Poland	3-year BA and 3-year MA university degrees (levels 6 and 7).	Pre-school teachers are treated the same as teachers in other educational programmes and are therefore obliged to obtain pre-school teaching qualifications at the level of post-secondary education, level 5.	
Portugal	A 3 to 3.5-year BA degree at level 6, with 1.5 to 2 further years	Workers in <i>crèches</i> are teachers who have received a 4-	



	for an MA degree 7 at level 7.	year university or polytechnic education, level 6; nurses and social workers have tertiary education level 5. Kindergarten teachers may also have a 4-year university or polytechnic degree at level 6. Care assistants are obliged to have a secondary education at level 4, but training is now being introduced for them. Childminders are not legally obliged to have a secondary education, but vocational qualification programmes are being introduced.	
Romania	3 years for BA, level 6, and 2 years for MA, level 7 at universities, introduced according to the Bologna process.		
Slovakia		The compulsory education for a kindergarten teacher is tertiary schooling level 5 or special secondary education level 4.	
Slovenia	4-year university BA degree at level 6; one additional year for the MA degree level 7.	Pre-school teachers have an advanced or higher education degree, or a university degree (level 5 to 6); Care assistants have an upper secondary qualification at level 4.	
Spain	A 3-year undergraduate degree at level 5 will be changed into a 4-year degree at level 6; a 1-year postgraduate degree will change into a 2-year MA degree at level 7.	The minimum required level of education to work in pre-school education services is a 3-year university degree in (pre-)school education level 6 or a professional qualification related to childcare at level 4 to 5; no information exist on further staff	Social and health care workers at home have level 2; a home helper has level 1 (no qualification).

		members' qualifications.	
Sweden	3.5-year BA degree at level 6 required; 2-year MA degree introduced at level 7.	Half the workers and all the directors in child day-care have university qualifications in teaching or pedagogy at level 6; child care assistants (38%) have a 3-year diploma degree at level 4 to 5; family day-carers should have equivalent training at level 4.	Social carers have a 140 ECTS degree at college level.
United Kingdom	3-year undergraduate degree in England and Wales, level 5 to 6; 4-year BA undergraduate (Hons) degree in Scotland and Northern Ireland, level 5 to 6; 1 to 2-year postgraduate degree (specialist areas, management, research), level 7.	20% have a university or tertiary qualification at level 5 to 6; senior managers and supervisors have a minimum professional qualification level of 3; at least half the staff must be trained at least at level 2; child minders must complete a pre-registration course within six months of service; 30% have no qualification.	Level 3 is required, but has been achieved by all workers (70% of providers have fewer than 20% staff with any relevant education); family support workers are under pressure to upgrade their qualification to level 2 or 3. Domicile care workers / care at home staff have a vocational level of 1 to 4.

(Boddy, Cameron, & Moss, 2006; Frost & Freitas, 2006; Hofer, 2005; IASSW, 2004; IFSW, 2010; The Ministry of Education – Finland, 2009; Salonen, 2009; SuPer, 2010; Pantucek *et al.*, 2008; Panayiotopoulos & Athanasiou, 2005)

## 6. Tendencies of Current Development

Analysing the available literature, this chapter will crystallise emerging tendencies and joint figures in the development of qualifications for staff in family social care services. Professional tendencies go hand in hand with changes to the services themselves, which are analysed more comprehensively in Chapter 6.2. However, certain figures concerning the development of family services focus directly on qualifications and on staffing issues.

### 1. Social care services as one of the most rapidly growing branches of the European economy

No doubt exists that social and health care services for the population of the member states - including special service needs for families at the various stages of their life cycle - are becoming a considerable European political and economic issue. The social and health service field in general, a category that includes services for families, is becoming increasingly interesting to the market sector, to larger companies, and to the political and economic power structures regulating them. The European Union's Lisbon strategy states that the public service sector should be open to market competition in all member states as far as possible.

To give a quantitative example, in small Finnish municipalities seventy to ninety percent of public budgets are expended annually on social and health care services. Growth in the need for services and the simultaneous opening of services to the market indicates an enormous new potential economic shift from state, municipalities, and third sector organisations to the market. As a consequence, national governments and ministries in charge of trade and employment are increasingly involved in governing welfare services that used to be part of other ministries such as social and health care, or family ministries. This may mean not only a shift of power relations between different experts, but a new understanding of the issues of social care. For instance, a strategic project of the Finnish Ministry for Employment and Economy focuses on the following themes and goals concerning welfare services: one, a sufficient number of qualified staff for the needs of care services; two, the development of entrepreneurship and the preconditions for entrepreneurship; three, the growth of productivity in services (see Laiho, 2009).

These themes, rooted also in the Lisbon strategy, concern all member states but raise questions about the qualifications of staff working in services (Kröger & Zechner, 2009). Will there be enough qualified staff and from what perspective might this question be solved: from the viewpoint of professional interest groups and service-users, from the viewpoint of employers, or according to the interests of trade and economy? How these various interests match each other and are negotiated is vital to the future of social and health services.

The tendency to solve the challenges of care with entrepreneurship will also influence the field of services and the working conditions of its professionals. Entrepreneurship, a considerable issue, may need to be included in the qualifications of professionals, at least as an option for further education. The neoliberal tendency to consider personal services for families as "products" whose productivity need to be improved might be reflected on critically from the perspective of families, service users, and service staff. As experienced in many countries, efforts to increase the productivity of services means in most cases a reduction of time used and of staff, and means limiting individual and personal aspects in the contents of services and increasing the size of groups to care for and the number of cases per staff. This also concerns the qualifications of staff and to what degree they can communicate a particular character of social care work in relation to the industrial production of goods and services.

## **2. A lack of social care staff, but temporary contracts**

Several experts in comprehensive studies (see Boddy, Cameron & Moss, 2006; Brannen *et al.*, 2007; the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006; Henriksson & Wrede, 2004; Kröger, Leinonen & Vuorensyrjä, 2009; Vuorensyrjä *et al.*, 2006) and many practitioners in their daily work contend that a contradictory coexistence exists between 'rising demand' and 'decreasing supply' in care services, particularly regarding the numbers and availability of staff. All the member states have an increasing need for workers in care services but limited resources or a limited willingness to pay them in regular jobs. The 'flexibilisation' of labour market regulations, promoted by the Lisbon strategy, is used widely in care services. On one hand, temporary part-time contracts might be useful for staff in particular life situations, but for most staff members and particularly for service users, permanent contracts and continuing working relationships in personal services - especially for families with young children - are evidently better.

Although in Finland, education for care professions takes longer than in other Nordic countries - and commitment to the professions is higher - temporary work contracts are more usual, overall working conditions are harder, and the staff-client-ratio is higher (Kröger *et al.*, 2009: 112-113). Kröger wonders whether the strength of Finnish care work, namely its high qualification demand and long educational path, explains the high commitment to care professions in Finland. Identification with the profession could explain why care workers accept weak working conditions. However, exploiting the loyalty of care workers risks the health and motivation of those workers over a long period of time. Direct communication with people in need of care, which motivates people to work in the care sector cannot be achieved sufficiently if workers are overloaded.

## **3. A Growing need for trustworthy service facilities for families**

Lengths of contract and other working conditions are fundamentally important to making the services field attractive to qualified workers. Having examined the current general tendencies in UK social care work, particularly in relation to issues of qualification, Brannen *et al.* (2007: 3) stated that a growing need exists for qualified social care professionals, particularly to care for vulnerable children who cannot live with their parents. Furthermore, few local authorities are able to recruit sufficient foster carers. Finally, the independent sector - both private and non-profit - is increasingly involved in care work for children, and settings such as family centres, children's centres, and extended schools are increasingly common, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

The comparative evaluative research of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006: 7) allows for the identification of certain conflicting tendencies related to issues of staff qualification. Social care, when defined as caring for weak and vulnerable members of society, has a valued public image, but social care is not rated highly as a paid career. One area of political power at Member State level and at the level of the European Union speaks for joint regulations to require higher qualifications and good training for social care professions; another area of political power feels that doing so would invite an unacceptable financial burden on the member states. A mismatch exists between the skills needed for providing quality, compassionate care, and the formal qualifications required to perform the work. Qualifications specified by law may be very high, while the job itself is unrewarding.

As a consequence, not only is a quantitative increase in the need for qualified staff emerging, but the character and qualifications demanded of staff is changing to meet more demanding, complicated, and responsible tasks.

#### **4. A desire to upgrade qualifications, but a practice of de-qualification**

As discussed in the previous chapter, a cross-European tendency exists to upgrade the qualification standards of social workers, child daycare staff, and social carers. Several European comparisons are even used as arguments for better qualifications. This can be considered a positive tendency in the frame of the “knowledge-based society,” a tendency towards better skills, knowledge, and competences for work with the most vulnerable members of society. However, at the same time a tendency towards the de-qualification of staff in services for families can be observed in many countries. Worsening working conditions and low salaries mean that many qualified professionals are leaving the field of social services and less qualified staff must replace them in many societies. Due to the privatisation of services and mixture of providers, staff qualifications can no longer be controlled to the same extent by the public sector. Reduction of qualification requirements is often regarded positively as flexibilisation. Perhaps the largest challenge for qualification standards in social care services is the neoliberal labour market policy. As each unemployed individual has to be “activated” in any kind of job and as local authorities are under pressure to find for those individuals practical placements, short-term jobs, or other means of labour market integration, the service sector is often seen as a solution. Moreover, as part of an activating labour market policy, the new type of combined unemployment and social benefits are made conditional: a person must find and accept any kind of employment, such as the ‘one-euro jobs’ in Germany in which hundreds of thousands of unemployed people are sent to work in social care services without any qualifications. Similar systems have been also introduced in Denmark and Finland. In Finland, a long-term unemployed person can take a fifty-hour course in social care and begin work in the field — although high qualification requirements exist on the other side. Growing general

unemployment is attracting employers to employ cheaper staff, as people are prepared to accept lower, more flexible conditions.

## **5. European Qualifications Framework in process – international pressure?**

Regarding the tendencies mentioned until this point, the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) can be seen as a promising step to facilitate the movement of staff in social care to regions where they are most necessary and where working conditions are the most attractive. By enabling an objective comparison of qualifications between countries, the EQF may in turn create positive pressure to upgrade standards in the European main stream. However, the comparison may lead to political pressure in another direction and a type of 'de-qualification'; if less highly-qualified professionals are sufficient in Southern European countries, one might ask why such highly-qualified staff are necessary in Northern Europe. Implemented according to European Parliament recommendations, the EQF should begin by motivating discussion about National Qualifications Framework. It seems reasonable to hope that cross-European reflection might encourage valuing skill, knowledge, and competence in social services for families — rather than belief in 'natural competences' of caring.

## **6. Globalisation and feminisation**

Three factors seem to drive the unplanned, as yet insufficiently considered globalisation of social care in Europe, also in meeting the care service needs of families. Firstly, gaps between living standards, income, and working conditions between different regions inside Europe - and on the borders of Europe - are motivation for the mobility of workers in care services between member states and outside Europe. Secondly, a shortage of qualified staff and a willingness of service providers to find cheaper employees make working in another country an easier, more rational decision. Indeed, migration between countries may be a solid solution for arriving at a sufficient number of workers for the European service sector of the future. Thirdly, in some cases, countries may offer high qualifications but may not be able to afford highly-paid jobs in social care. If nations on the other side of a national border lack qualified staff and pay a better salary, a decision to move is easy to understand. Migration is particularly common among professionals from countries such as those in the Baltic area, Poland, and in south-eastern Europe. The exact consequences for services and families in the poorer regions, as well as for service users in the recipient countries, have not yet been systematically studied.

Another, perhaps more widespread phenomenon is the movement of partly qualified and partly unqualified workers outside Europe. It is important that these workers can achieve the necessary qualifications as soon as possible, so as not to be exploited in the de-qualification of professional standards. Numerous issues

concerning the qualification of migrant social care workers remain to be clarified both inside and outside the EU. Interestingly, it is easier to coax women from the other side of the globe to Europe to work in family care than to convince European men inside of a family to become involved in social care. Most documents analysed for this report emphasise the importance of recruiting more male workers to this predominantly female sector of the labour market.

Male staff members would be extremely important for various reasons; particularly in care services for families, child day-care, family support, household assistance, and social work; beginning with model learning in the socialisation of both young boys and girls and touching on equal views of both genders in issues of parenthood — not to mention public image and salaries in the sectors. In all countries, considerable gender and diversity imbalances exist within the professions working with children (OECD, 2006). Effective strategies for recruiting a mixed-gender, diverse workforce have been discussed but have not yet proved successful. Most countries fail to recruit sufficient numbers of men or staff from minority communities into early child care and education services. A similar situation exists also in further areas of care for families (*ibid*).

## **7. Education or social care – or both?**

The emerging paradigmatic question in child day-care systems across Europe concerns the separation or mixture of social care and early education. Regarding child day-care as a service for family, parents, and child emphasises the provision of care for children through close and flexible dialogue with parents, thereby supporting the family and enabling parents to work or study. The paradigm in this case is a comprehensive multi-perspective view of social services as including care aspects and support for parents in the comprehensive task of child rearing. Facilities must be more comprehensive as a consequence of that paradigm, and day-care must include facilities for sleep and meals; moreover, group sizes of children and child-staff ratios must be kept low. An alternative perspective is to regard child day-care as a service for children, and to emphasise education and preparing children for school as much as possible. In this case, the paradigm is an educational approach towards children; disciplines such as education and early childhood education are required from staff. As the main focus is more on learning and educating and less on personal care for children and support for parents, groups can be larger and the child-staff ratio higher.

In many countries, both paradigms and approaches are available in a consecutive system organised according to the ages of children. Until the age of three, for example, a caring approach is more common. In the ages before entering school, in other words from four to six, an educational approach is more dominant. However, in many countries - for instance in the UK, Germany, and in Finland - the educational paradigm is currently moving towards children under the age of three. Both parents and the educationally trained staff are looking for

optimal support for consequent learning as early as possible, while others are worried about a free and more comprehensive approach to childhood and support for parenthood. As stated in the chapter concerning the qualifications of professional staff in child day-care, a more or less implicit paradigmatic conflict is growing between care and education in early childhood services. The OECD report (2006) identifies a wide pay gap between child care staff and teachers, with child care staff in most countries being poorly trained and paid next to minimum wage levels. As a consequence, very many employees are leaving the child-care sector. A comprehensive and multidisciplinary view of children's needs in day-care is important, and cooperation between various professional paradigmatic approaches is necessary. Early childhood care and education services should also be regarded as services for the entire family; the professionals should not focus only on the education of children, a trend that seems to be growing in Europe today, strengthened by an increasing shift of child day-care issues from social and health care departments to education departments and school departments at local and national levels of governance (see SuPer, 2010).

#### **8. Social care professions as a career with options**

In many countries, qualification for a certain vocation in social care services marks entrance to an “empty-ended” career. However, understanding EQF levels as optional steps towards higher education - according to the concept of lifelong learning - might be both possible and motivational. A covering system of options for the lifelong learning of care workers is necessary. Not only should young and new workers be recruited through qualified training opportunities; existing workers need on-the-job and mid-career training to update their competences regarding the constantly changing circumstances of their work with families. The OECD report (2006) identifies greatly varying levels of in-service training between countries and between educational and child-care sectors.

Underfunding means that many private, community or voluntary bodies providing services in mixed market systems are unable to finance and organise regular in-service training and cannot allow students working and studying to take paid working time for those parts of their study where their presence is required (*ibid*). It is typical for the qualifications and professional work of social care services to be in the middle of disciplinary and sectoral disputes. Health care professionals and agencies, on one side, and professionals and institutions with backgrounds in educational thinking, on the other, take part in social work and social care in each of the professional fields concerned, namely social work, child day-care, and family support. On one side, a medicalisation and over-pedagogisation of the social needs of families must be avoided. On the other side, a multi-professional perspective is clearly needed to best meet the needs of family-related services.



This perspective may be achieved only if the content of the qualifications of social professions has its own clear identity, an identity in which social aspects, social work, social policy, and other social science-rooted contents are central.

#### **9. Learning to work with families from an equal and resource-oriented basis needed**

In many countries, professionals, independent of their level of qualification, often lack the skills to work with families at an equal level of companionship instead of focusing only on the child, neglecting the parents, or the other way round. Working with parents in a vulnerable situation can result in mutual uncertainty and hesitation. Building a mutual trustful working relationship can take time, time that is unavailable in most services. Many professionals tend to have sceptical attitudes towards the competences and resources of families and focus rather on the visible problems.

Banez & Ehlert (2007: 68) contend that to strengthen the relevance of gender issues within the social work curricula, gender must be considered part of the criteria in the national accreditation, evaluation, and quality assurance process. They regard the guidelines given by the EU and by international organisations as very important, therefore.

The global standard of social workers, formulated by the International Federation of Social Workers (2004), points out the critical nature of relationships to service users and states the following points concerning the most important goals for the qualifications of social workers. Firstly, a social worker “respects the rights and interests of service users and their participation in all aspects of the delivery of programmes.” Secondly, “the core purpose of Social Work is to form short and longer-term working relationships with and mobilise individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities to enhance their well-being and their problem-solving capacities.” Moreover, concerning the paradigm of the social work profession, “there is a clear requirement that the curriculum should focus on capacity-building and empowerment of individuals, families, groups, organisations, and communities through a human-centred, developmental approach” (IFSW, 2004).

#### **7. Recommendations**

Various professional social services are becoming increasingly significant and indispensable support for the management of everyday life of families in current Europe for various reasons. Therefore it is surprising how few cross-European researches have been done concerning the qualification requirements of various professions working in services for families and with families. Consequently, the most important and a kind of meta-level recommendation resulting from this

report is that this lack of knowledge about the qualifications has to be considered seriously and corresponding research-based comparative knowledge has to be provided. The situation is most emerging concerning the qualification standards of care workers in direct care work in families and institutions, as the qualification standards for professional social workers and workers in child day care seem to be more advanced. However, also in these professions the knowledge base is not very strong and mostly referring only to the normative level of qualification. How far the required qualifications are indeed achieved, has not been analysed in a cross-European perspective until yet.

Based on the analysis in this report concerning the qualification of professionals working with families in various European social care services, and based particularly on identification of the somewhat highly critical tendencies in the previous chapter, the following recommendations can be set out. It can be emphasised that priority must be given to the following issues concerning current tasks when developing the qualifications of professional staff working with families in social care services:

1. To safeguard quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient provision of labour for family care services, making social care attractive as a field.
2. To advance the quality of services by improving the qualifications of staff.
3. To work towards shared basic standards in Europe in upgrading qualification levels.
4. To establish research on the global qualification-related consequences of the globalisation of care.
5. To maintain strong efforts to involve more qualified male workers in family care services.
6. To underline a particular commitment to the ethics of care in, for, and with families in the required competences of professionals.
7. To improve joint European knowledge relevant to social care services, including awareness of the needs of families with backgrounds from various countries.
8. The skills and practical competences of professionals should emphasise working with parents on an equal and respectful basis.
9. Both formal and informal qualification paths should be acknowledged, but not as down-grading of a qualification.

10. The entire field of various professions in social care services should be viewed from a Lifelong Learning perspective and from a perspective of continuing education in which vertical changes and horizontal advances in qualifications are made possible and encouraged.

In conclusion, certain recommendations may be emphasised. The comparative evaluative research of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006: 77) states that increasing the number of care workers will be the major challenge in the future. Particularly necessary is to attract new university graduates to work in social care work in order to upgrade the profile of social care as a qualified field. On the other hand, at the level of less demanding qualification level of staff, disadvantaged groups such as the unemployed, mid-career female returnees, and the elderly should be encouraged to entry into the social care sector. The care sector might also attract higher levels of migrant workers, both EU nationals and non-EU nationals, for the purposes of which qualifications in language skills should be offered.

Besides the basic qualification for entering the family-related social care services, the regular up-dating of qualifications is an inevitable part of issues of qualification. The circumstances of families are constantly changing and skills and knowledge must be refreshed to keep competences updated. The competence to support various forms of informal care, to encourage user-involvement and self-help-based forms of help, even through ICT media, are examples of the professional qualifications needed in future services for families.

A lack of options for promotion and progress in social care as a career may be one important reason why young people - particularly men - are not attracted to the field and why existing workers are leaving the field. The European notion of Lifelong Learning and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) should be developed therefore into “ladder instruments” that enable promotion to more demanding and qualified tasks, and continue an education in the field of social care for those looking for new challenges. Development of the public image of family care work to attract more workers to the field is also hugely important, as is the possibility for professionals to move between various sectors of social care with the same basic qualification — an important option for keeping motivation high, encouraging new perspectives, and widening the room for choice. Also, opportunities for in-work training and part-time study must be developed to improve the qualifications of social care service professionals.

The data allows one to consider that, for professional social workers with academic degrees at BA and MA level, the European qualification standards are already quite clear. International professional organisations (IFSW, IASSW) have tried comprehensively to define joint standards and learning outcomes for social work education worldwide. At a European level, efforts are emerging to define minimum standards for required qualifications in child day-care and early education (see for example UNICEF, 2008). However, professional qualifications

in the third area of family-related social care services in this report - namely direct caring in households, in family support centres, and in children's homes - have not yet been discussed at a cross-European level. This third area seems to consist of a mixture of one, staff who are not formally qualified; two, low-level staff trained on the job; and three, staff such as social educators with vocational degrees at level three to five. This leads me to recommend that the pluralistic fields of social care tasks beyond social work and child day-care should be developed also in terms of qualification standards, as being significant for coping of everyday life of families in Europe. Finally, as most of the (potential) cross-European migration of workers are entering in this part of the field of social care, where qualification is not yet regulated, also they would benefit out of better in-work training and up-grating of care work.

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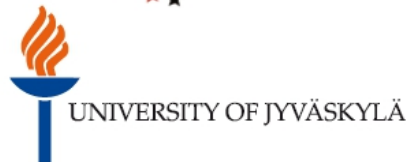
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