



## Policy Brief

### Obstacle Course to Day Care: Why Parents with a Migration Background are Less Likely to Send Their Children to Day Care.

#### Executive Summary

Children with a migration background are less likely to attend a crèche than children without a migration background. But not all parents make a conscious decision to educate their one- or two-year old child at home. Over two thirds of all parents do not take advantage of the opportunity to send their children to a crèche or day care facility because obstacles limit accessibility to day care. From the perspective of parents in the first generation of immigrants, these obstacles are, first and foremost, the low level of perceived quality of child care and inadequate intercultural awareness. In contrast, the cost of day care plays a less important role for parents with a migration background than it does for parents in the native population.

These are the findings of this Policy Brief which looks at why children with a migration background are less likely to attend a crèche than children without.

The decision to take up this issue was spurred by the new laws in early childhood education which will go into effect on 1 August 2013: every child in Germany will then have a legal right to a place in a day care centre upon turning one year old. Moreover, parents who do not exercise their right to publicly funded day care for their one- and two-year old children will receive *Betreuungsgeld*, or a childcare allowance. This is supposed to allow families to freely choose between different day care models. This is the starting point of the Policy Brief: Does this freedom to choose actually exist? Or do barriers to day care access outside the home limit parents' options? It is not just insufficient numbers of places available in day care centres but also other barriers like the low quality care that can make day care so unattractive to parents that they ultimately decide to keep their children at home.

Around one-third of children under the age of three currently attend day care in Germany. The percentage of children with a migration background is particularly low. In fact, however, children from immigrant families can benefit enormously from attending day care. For example, they learn German better and more quickly if they are encouraged early on. Skills developed in day care play an important role in school learning processes and thus in the success of children's education overall and their participation in society. In addition, day care facilities help parents bring up their children and advise them in decisions about their education, e. g. when



transitioning to school. Barriers to day care access thus not only limit the parent's freedom to choose, they lower the possibility of social mobility and social participation over the long run.

To investigate possible barriers, the Expert Council's Research Unit analysed the answers of 1,875 parents of one- or two-year old children to questions asked as part of a survey of the German Youth Institute for their study "Growing up in Germany".

The analyses show that the main reasons parents in the first generation of immigrants do not send their child to day care are qualitative and intercultural barriers. This is not the case for parents with a low level of education: they have a more difficult time finding a place in a day care centre for their child at all. Moreover, they are more likely than other parents to keep their children at home due to the high cost of day care and long distances to the day care centre. The main finding of the Policy Brief: for many of the barriers to access identified by the parents, it is not the migration background but the low level of education of the parents that plays a decisive role.

The results of the Policy Brief also show: the general finding that children with a migration background are less likely to go to a crèche needs to be further differentiated because there is a big difference between the generations of immigrants. Only parents in the first generation who themselves immigrated to Germany and have relatively little experience with the German education system usually care for their children at home. For parents in the second generation and parents in binational partnerships, the decision to send their child to day care or not depends on their level of education – and not on their migration background: around 50 per cent of immigrant families where one parent has completed high school send their child to crèche at the age of one or two. This is similar to the decision-making behaviour of parents without a migration background who have the same level of education. The percentage is much lower among parents with a *Hauptschule* diploma (*Hauptschule* in Germany is a modern secondary school that prepares students for vocational school, apprenticeship in trade, or the lower levels of public service) or who did not finish school. It is extremely important to distinguish between the parents' migration and educational background. Because parents with a migration background in Germany are on average less educated than parents in the native population, analysing the two factors separately makes it possible to arrive at more accurate conclusions about problems that supposedly affect primarily parents with a migration background.



Therefore real freedom of choice does not exist between day care models for parents with a migration background and for parents with a low level of education even if they are actually granted a place in a day care centre. Due to the diverse structural, qualitative and intercultural barriers to access, some parents ultimately decide not to send their child to day care.

To give children from immigrant families or parents with a low level of education the same opportunities as other children in early childhood development, the Expert Council's Research Unit believes that every effort must be made to remove these barriers to access. The actors responsible need to have a better understanding of parents' needs and concerns. This is the starting point of the following four recommendations:

- (1) In addition to increasing the number of places in day care centres, the quality of care also has to be improved. What is needed is a transparent and objective information system that lets all parents assess the quality of care provided in the day care facilities.
- (2) To appeal to parents with a migration background, the day care centres need to implement interculturally sensitive cooperative work with parents across-the-board.
- (3) As long as there are barriers to access to early childhood day care, parents have no real freedom to choose between care at home or in a day care centre. In this kind of situation, incentives such as the childcare allowance (*Betreuungsgeld*) that give parents an additional motivation to keep their children at home are counter-productive.
- (4) Parents who raise their child at home should also receive support and advice in bringing up their children. Along with institutional day care, effective parent counselling and educational services need to be firmly established on a large-scale.