

HOW MANY DAY CARE CENTERS AND DAY CARE FAMILIES ARE NEEDED IN SWITZERLAND – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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VON Susanne Stern

IN SWITZERLAND THERE IS A LACK OF ABOUT 50'000 PLACES IN DAY CARE CENTERS AND DAY CARE FAMILIES.

For the first time in Switzerland, scientifically proven data was collected for the demand for extrafamilial day care for preschoolers. The results presented during a press conference on 27 June 2005 point towards a big potential: For about 120,000 children places are missing in day care centres or day care families. In order to cover this demand, there would be a need for about 50,000 additional care places for a favoured care period of two days a week. Today's availability is estimated at about 30,000 places.

The study results show that the revenue of a family is one of the key points for the demand for extrafamilial day care: Already a salary with an increase of 10% will generate an increase of demand of 5.6 percent. Prices of day care centres and day care families are directly related to demand: If the price of a service increases by 10 percent, the demand decreases up to 12 percent. Other important factors mentioned in the study are age and level of education of the mother: The higher they are the more likely the probability of the children using child care facilities. But the demand decreases if the father is an active participant in child care. The demand decreases as well in case of older siblings living in a family with preschoolers. From the view point of the authors this leads to the conclusion that mothers with children in primary school are more likely to stay at home, also because extrafamilial care of primary school children is only partially covered. The potential of demand in this area would still have to be calculated.

PROSPECTS

The study was made in the framework of the National Research Programme "Childhood, Youth and Intergenerational Relationships in a Changing Society (NFP 52)" by INFRAS Consulting and Research, Istituto Microeconomia e Economia Pubblica of the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano and Tassinary Consulting. The study is based on a survey of all the regions of Switzerland among 750 families with preschoolers. The parents were asked which care offers – i.e. day care centres or day care families – they would choose if given

different options. The data helped to determine about a dozen demand-relevant factors. One of these factors is definitely the quality of care. With the help of these factors the study group developed a simulation model which can calculate scenarios regarding the actual and future demand for places in extrafamilial child care. Therefore it is possible that demand - according to positive demographic and economic development until the year 2015 - will increase by about 21 percent all over Switzerland. If care facilities would be subsidized all over the country, demand would even increase by 27%. The simulation model has already been used in several cantons and municipalities for regional and local estimations of demand.

APPEAL TO POLITICIANS AND INDUSTRY

The results of the study are of great importance for future political decisions. At present, several controversial developments produce headlines: Even though the demand for care places is still high, day care centres in cities like Zurich or Basel are being put under pressure. Only half of the amount of the Federal start-up financing has so far been collected. It is possible that the problem lies in the missing financial and organisational support by the cantons and the municipalities. An evaluation made by the Federal Office for Social Security should help to clarify this issue. The results of the evaluation should be available beginning of 2006. The authors of the study appeal emphatically to politicians and industry for an extension of the existing facilities. This stipulation is mainly addressed to cantons and municipalities. The cantons could coordinate the planning of the facilities better, and the municipalities could help to co-finance care offers and generate financial support of the parents. But also the industry could participate with company-owned care places or co-financing of extra-company care facilities. Several other studies have shown that well-organized care facilities pay off for society and industry.