



THE BEST START

**INEQUALITY
AND OPPORTUNITIES
IN THE FIRST YEARS
OF LIFE**



Save the Children
100 YEARS

Coordination of Research Activities and Writing of the Report

Christian Morabito

Methodological Contribution to the Research Activities

Giorgio Tamburlini

Technical Coordination of Field Research

Annamaria Cosatti and Silvia Taviani

Contribution to the Writing of the Texts

Annamaria Cosatti, Chiara Damen, Antonella Inverno, Silvia Taviani, Arianna Saulini, Elena Scanu Ballona

This paper was written under the supervision of

Aldo Fortunati - *Head of the Childhood and Adolescence department at the Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence*

Emmanuele Pavolini - *Professor of Economic Sociology and Social Policies at the University of Macerata*

Giorgio Tamburlini - *President of the Centre for Child Health and Development, Trieste*

Special thanks to

Christian Fabbi - *Azienda speciale Servizi Bassa Reggiana, Progetto Infanzia*

Giulia Milan - *Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)*

Arianna Pucci - *Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence*

Jonathan Seiden, Lauren Pisani, Frannie Noble, Ivelina Borisova - *Save the Children USA*

and all of our colleagues worldwide who supported the use of the IDELA survey

The administrators of the survey who participated in the study were

Giulia Cau - *Prato*

Giuliana Mosetti - *Trieste*

Rebecca Marconi - *Macerata*

Stefania Crudo - *Brindisi*

Vittoria Castagna - *Palermo*

Beatrice Coppelli - *Reggio Emilia*

Elena Sarzi Maddidini - *Reggio Emilia*

The teachers from the E.D.I. Non-Profit Cooperative,

in particular Giusi Nazzaro for coordinating administration of the survey in *Rome, Naples, and Milan.*

Graphic Design

Odd Ep Studio Collective

Cover Photo

Simine Alam for Save the Children

Published by

Save the Children Italia Onlus, NPO

September 2019

Printed

September 2019

At Save the Children, respect for gender has always been one of our fundamental priorities and we are careful to respect the rights of little girls in everything we do. For the sake of simplification and brevity, in this paper we refer generically to the subjects of the survey with the neutral term “children”, in reference to both boys and girls. This term, also for the sake of simplifying the language used, includes the age group of individuals up to 18 years old.

THE BEST START

**INEQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITIES
IN THE FIRST YEARS OF LIFE**

INDEX

- p. 5 **Introduction**
- p. 6 **Educational Poverty**
- p. 7 When does educational poverty begin?
- p. 9 How can we fight educational poverty in the first years of life?
- p. 10 Childcare Centres and early education services
- p. 14 Social Policies and Policies That Provide Parental Support

- p. 17 **1. Early Childhood Education and Care: the Data**
- p. 18 The Situation in Europe
- p. 21 Early Childhood Education and Care in Italy
- p. 26 The Limits of Surveys of Italian Children and the Save the Children Study

- p. 29 **2. The IDELA Study in Italy**
- p. 30 What is IDELA?
- p. 33 IDELA Pilot Study in Italy
- p. 35 The Description of the IDELA Participants
- p. 40 The Inequalities That Emerge in Early Childhood
- p. 45 Childcare Centres Help to Reduce Inequalities
- p. 51 Activities with Parents: Another Key Factor in Reducing Educational Poverty

- p. 59 **3. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- p. 68 **ANNEX. Several Examples of Questions in Each IDELA Area**



INTRODUCTION

EDUCATIONAL
POVERTY

Photo: Joshua Baker for Save the Children

Introduction

Educational Poverty

Educational poverty is defined by Save the Children as “the impossibility of children and adolescents to learn, experiment, develop, and freely allow their skills, talents, and aspirations to flourish.”¹

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children and Adolescents and on the capability approach theorised by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum², the definition of educational poverty refers to the failure of children and adolescents to acquire cognitive skills and knowledge (reading and mathematics in particular) as well as so-called “non-cognitive”, or socio-emotional, skills (creativity, curiosity, self-esteem, motivation, adaptability, stress management, cooperation, and communication) and the ability to lead an autonomous and active life through physical and motor development. Educational poverty, in this sense, refers to a child or adolescent being deprived of his or her right to development.

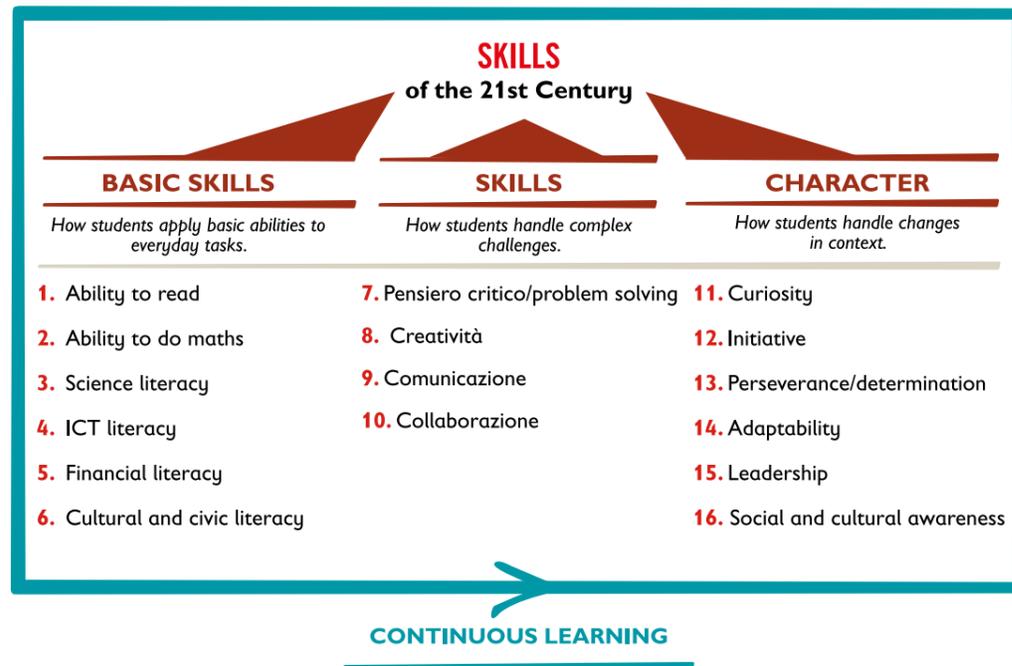


Fig.1: “Skills of the 21st Century”
Source: <https://widgets.weforum.org/nve-2015/chapter1.html> - Graphic representation by Save the Children.

A growing number of studies demonstrate that this disadvantage already begins to manifest itself in the first years of life⁴.

¹ Save the Children, *La Lampada di Aladino [Aladdin's Lamp]*, 2014.

² Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 2010; Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 2014.

³ OECD, *New Vision for Education: Fostering Social and Emotional Learning Through Technology*, 2015.

⁴ Please see “Nurturing Care. For Early Childhood Development”, curated by the World Health Organization, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Bank Group, 2018.

Promoting a child’s right to health, education, and social protection and supporting a positive relationship with his or her parents must be a priority of our initiatives if we wish to break the vicious cycle in which social disadvantage is passed down from generation to generation, so that children may unleash their individual talents and allow their abilities to flourish. These initiatives have the potential to be a powerful motor for a country’s growth, through the promotion of social justice and equality.

That is why this year Save the Children has decided, through an explorative pilot study, to dedicate its *Illuminiamo il Futuro [Enlightening the Future]* report to the educational poverty which afflicts the youngest children. A one of a kind study in Italy, it aims to analyse the inequalities that exist in the acquisition of educational skills and proficiency starting in early childhood, and the factors that create them, from the standpoint of socio-demographic and cultural conditions as well as of childhood education programs attended. The study made use of the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) tool, developed by Save the Children International and used in over 40 countries worldwide. IDELA measures children’s progress between the ages of 3 and 6, using four different areas of skills and development: physical, linguistic, mathematical, and socio-emotional.

When does educational poverty begin?

By the age of three, children whose parents have a higher socio-economic status have already acquired a substantial advantage in terms of education and development as compared to children of the same age growing up in disadvantaged family situations.

Early childhood represents a crucial period in a person’s life. It is the moment in which one begins to learn about and understand the world, oneself, and others. Economists, like Nobel Prize laureate James Heckman, a neuroscientist and sociologist, maintain that the skills necessary for growing and living in the 21st century (cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical) are developed, in large part and according to a cumulative process, in the period from birth to just before beginning school⁵.

⁵ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Incomplete Revolution: Adapting Welfare States to Women’s New Roles*, 2009; James Heckman, ‘Policies to Foster Human Capital’, in *Research in Economics*, 2000; *Giving Kids a Fair Chance*, 2013; Save the Children, *Building Brains. Early Stimulation for Children from Birth to Three*, 2017.

DEVELOPMENT OF NEURAL CONNECTIONS FOR VARIOUS FUNCTIONS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE



Fig.2: The Development of the Human Brain During Childhood and Adolescence. Source: Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University.

This graph is based on researcher Charles A. Nelson's study entitled "Neural Plasticity and Human Development: the Role of Early Experience in Sculpting Memory Systems", published in the book by Jack P. Shonkoff and Debora A. Phillips (2000), and illustrates how the neural connections that activate functions like sight, hearing, and linguistic capability as well as more important cognitive functions like self-control, perception, motor coordination, and planning, are more extensive in the first years of life⁶.

The human brain is made up of billions of neurons. Every time we perform a task, think, or experience an emotion, an incalculable number of synapses and connections between neurons and between the neural network and other systems in the human body are activated. Studies conducted in the field of neuroscience have demonstrated that the plasticity of the networks which control the neurons and the synapses in the brain is much greater during the foetal period and in early childhood. These studies emphasise that, while genetics are important in stimulating these connections, the quality of the interactions which a child has access to in the first years of his or her life⁷ has an even greater impact.

A delay in the acquisition of these skills in the first years of life is almost impossible to overcome. Educational and developmental disadvantages accumulate over time. Educational poverty, therefore, takes effect long before children begin school and is largely influenced by the family, economic, and social environments in which a child is born and raised.

In fact, numerous studies indicate that it is children who live in conditions of economic poverty, or in which educational and cultural stimuli are limited, that are the most penalised⁸.

⁶ Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips (ed.), *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, 2000.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Flavio Cunha and James Heckman, *Investing in Our Young People*, 2006; James Heckman, *The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children*, 2008.

The connection between economic poverty and educational poverty already manifests itself in the first three years of life.

INEQUALITY IN THE ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY IN THE FIRST YEARS OF LIFE

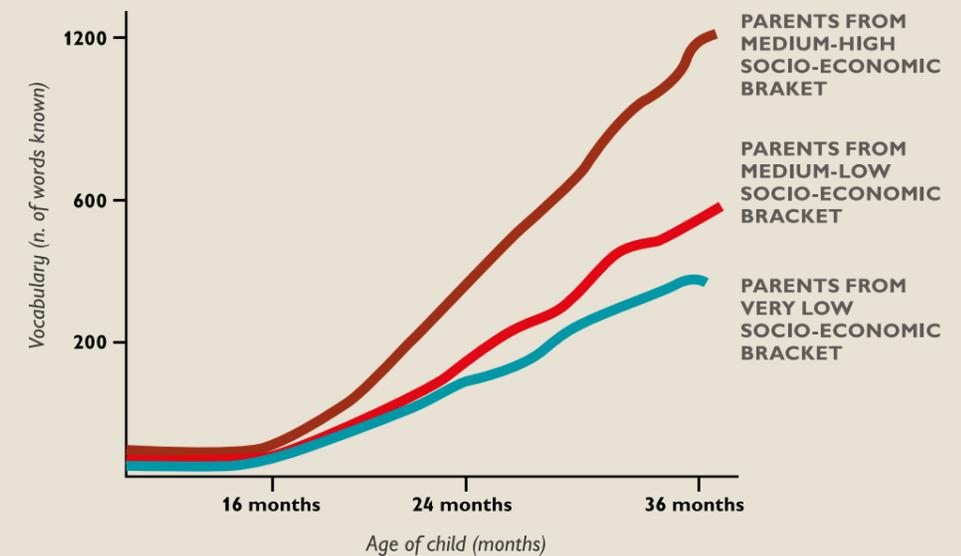


Fig.3: Inequality in Size of Vocabulary During the First Years of Life Due to the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Parents.

This graph illustrates the results of a study conducted by researchers Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley and published in the book "Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children" (1995). The study, which examined 42 American families from various social backgrounds, demonstrates the differences in linguistic skill acquired by children from 0-3 years of age (measured in terms of the number of words known) in relation to their parents' socio-economic background: "low income parents" (parents with a very low socio-economic status who depend on social services), "working class parents" (parents with a medium-low socio-economic status who work primarily manual jobs), and "college educated parents" (parents with a medium-high socio-economic status, generally professionals).

How can we fight educational poverty in the first years of life?

Educational poverty is not inevitable and it is not irreversible. Policies which focus on care and education in early childhood⁹ can, alongside welfare and parental support policies, contribute to ending the vicious cycle in which inequality is passed down from generation to generation.

⁹ These are intended as programs and initiatives aimed at promoting children's health, nutrition, and education in the first years of life, so: breastfeeding and post-natal health, childcare centres, and preschool. For the latter of these, please also refer to the term "childhood education and care". However, it is important to emphasise that these services, though focusing on the educational aspect, also include (or should include) programs related to health and nutrition.

Childcare Centres and Early Childhood Education and Care

By now countless studies have been conducted which illustrate the positive effects of initiatives which promote the integral development of children in their first years of life, in particular attending a childcare centre or preschool, in helping to bridge the gap in skills among children from low to medium socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies and cross-sectional observations, conducted primarily in the United States and Europe, highlight the positive effects that attending a childcare centre or preschool have for children growing up in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. The studies refer in particular to the acquisition of cognitive abilities like memory, oral and written comprehension, numerical and mathematical skills, problem solving, social skills, and physical and motor development¹⁰. These positive effects continue throughout adolescence, independently of the kind of primary or secondary school attended, reducing the probability of being left back or of dropping out¹¹. To this end, in 2018 Save the Children, in collaboration with the University of Rome Tor Vergata, conducted an analysis of what qualities characterise resilience, or rather the ability to react positively in negative circumstances. With regard to studies on educational poverty, this is represented as the probability of a 15-year-old boy or girl at a socio-economic disadvantage to achieve and surpass the minimum level of proficiency in math and reading according to the PISA test¹². In particular, the analysis showed that the most disadvantaged children who had attended a childcare centre or other childhood program were almost twice as likely to be resilient at the age of 15 as compared to their peers who did not attend any such program.



Photo: Francesca Leonardi for Save the Children

¹⁰ James Heckman, *The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children*, 2008; James Heckman and Dimitri V. Masterov, 'The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children', *Review of Agricultural Economics*, 2007; OECD *Pisa in Focus: Does Participation in Pre-Primary Education Translate into Better Learning Outcomes at School?*, 2011.

¹¹ Jane Waldfogel, *Social Mobility, Opportunities, and the Early Years*, 2004.

¹² In reference to 15-year-old students from the lowest socio-economic and cultural quartile in the OECD -PISA dataset who obtained a score greater than 480. Regarding the term 'resilience', there are many definitions: the term – originally applied to metallurgy – has now been adopted by the economic, human, and ecological sciences and is used to indicate the capacity of an individual, community, economic system, or environment to react positively in adverse conditions

Specifically, the percentage of children from families in the most disadvantaged segment of the population who do not achieve the minimum level of proficiency in mathematics and reading drops considerably when the number of years that these children attended a childcare centre or an integrated childhood program increases. Among those who did not attend a childhood education and care program, the percentage of low achievers is 64% in maths and 82% in reading. This number is noticeably reduced if the students attended one year of preschool (50% in maths and 44% in reading) and is drastically reduced by approximately one third in the case of attendance for more than one year¹³. This data is remarkably significant because it confirms the long-term, permanent effect of early childhood education and care. Other studies have also highlighted the long-term positive effects on employment and income level as adults¹⁴, the reduced propensity for adopting anti-social or illegal behaviours, and the lower incidence of mental illness¹⁵.

The Studies of Nobel Prize Laureate and American Economist James Heckman

Nobel Prize winning American economist James Heckman is one of the leading scholars, and supporters, of childhood education policies. In particular, Heckman analysed the data collected from two longitudinal studies conducted in the United States beginning in the 1960s and 1970s: the High Scope / Perry Preschool Program (PPP) in Chicago and the Abecedarian (ABC) Project in North Carolina. Each study monitored, for more than forty years, the effects of participation in high quality pre-primary school programs on children from disadvantaged families, as well as the economic impact and return on long-term investment. At five years old, the children in question demonstrated better results in the surveys relating to cognitive skills as compared to their peers in the same social and economic conditions who had not attended the programs, and even better results in the tests regarding socio-emotional abilities. According to Heckman, participation in the two programs had the greatest long-term impact specifically on socio-emotional skills, to which the positive effects on these children's educational and professional careers later in life can be attributed. Heckman also calculated that the cost-to-benefits ratio of investing in early childhood education and care, such as childcare centres and preschools, could reach a value of 1:7, meaning that every USD invested would see a return of 7 USD. The benefit is calculated, for example, in terms of increased revenue for the government due to an improvement in the socio-economic level of the beneficiaries and potential savings in terms of medical and social assistance. By comparison, initiatives that target, for example, a reduction in drop-out rates and adult education, were found to be more expensive and less effective¹⁶.

Cfr. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2015-02-19-what-is-resilience.html> (482 in Mathematics, and 481 in Reading). Save the Children, *Nuotare Contro Corrente [Swimming Upstream]*, 2018.

¹³ OECD PISA 2015, elaboration of data by Save the Children.

¹⁴ James Heckman, *Giving Kids a Fair Chance*, 2013.

¹⁵ EOJ, *The Link Between Early Childhood Education and Crime and Violence Reduction*, Online, <http://www.eoionline.org/wp-content/uploads/early-learning/ELCLinkCrimeReduction-Jul02.pdf>.

¹⁶ James Heckman and Dimitri V. Masterov, 'The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children', *Review of Agricultural Economics*, 2007.

The “Heckman Curve”

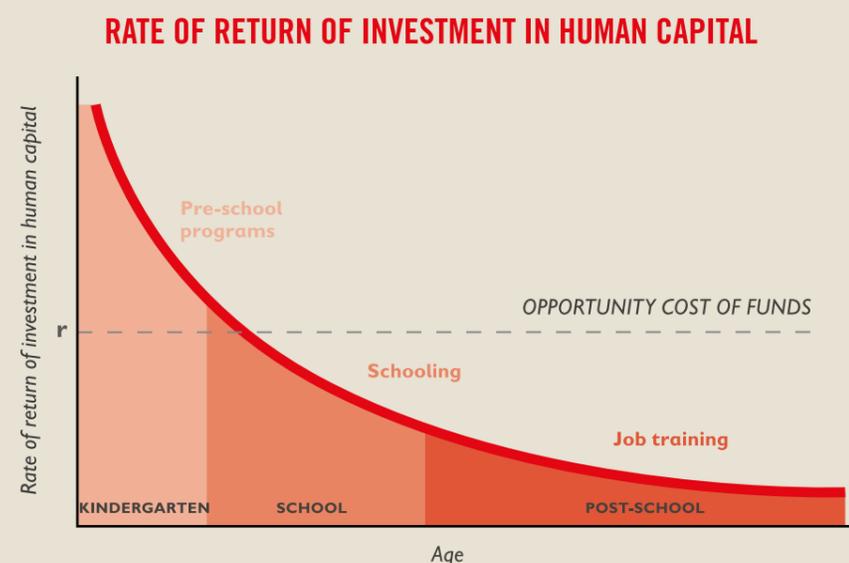


Fig.4: The “Heckman Curve”.

The famous “Heckman Curve” demonstrates the financial return on investment in human capital over the course of a lifetime. As demonstrated in the graph, the benefit is greatest for educational programs during the 0 to 6 year age range (“pre-primary school programs”) and then gradually decreases as the years progress (“schooling” and “job training”). This does not, of course, mean that scholastic and post-scholastic (adult education) programs are not important. The curve helps, above all, to point out the paradox that the most economically effective programs, the ones which take place earliest in life, are also those that generally receive the least amount of public financing¹⁷.

The positive effects previously illustrated manifest themselves primarily in the presence of programs which take place in structures that offer a full-time option. In terms of the age at which children enter the program, despite the fact that some analyses have shown that even just one year of pre-primary school attendance can have a positive impact on the acquisition of skills for disadvantaged children, studies show that attending for a longer period of time is preferable.

¹⁷ James Heckman, *The Heckman Curve*, Online: <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/the-heckman-curve/>.

Early Childhood Education and Care: Different Approaches to a Common Objective

Establishing specific standards of quality for childhood education and care is an incredibly complex task. In 2018 the European Commission outlined a series of recommendations for the European Council regarding the implementation of a “framework of quality indicators” to be applied in pre-primary school systems within the EU member states¹⁸. Quality is defined with respect to the numerical relationship between educator/teacher and child and the number of the latter per class or educational space; the qualifications and training of the educators and teachers and their coordination; the characteristics of the physical infrastructure (environments, spaces, furniture, materials) as well as the curricular framework of reference and the learning levels; the interaction between the program, the family, and the community and the participation of the children themselves in the educational process; and the governance, financing of initiatives, and equality of access to the services¹⁹. Meanwhile, other qualitative aspects are difficult to standardise because they are influenced by the social and cultural environments in which they are implemented, in the first place the school’s pedagogical approach, or rather the way in which the educational project is developed, conveyed to the child (and family) by the educator or teacher, observed, and evaluated. A wide variety of pedagogical approaches exist²⁰. On one side we have the more traditional, sequential approaches which focus on the school’s preparation and which are adopted, in particular, in Anglo-Saxon countries. On the other we see examples of so-called social pedagogy, which focus on the holistic development of the child through, for example, play and didactic projects in general. Included in this group are several methods developed in Italy, the excellence of which are recognised worldwide, such as the Montessori method, and the approaches adopted, for example in Tuscany and Reggio Emilia.

The **Tuscan Approach to Early Childhood Education and Care** is a method used in Tuscany that aims to develop an integrated system of children’s educational services and that today receives approximately half of all resident children in the 0-3 age range and all children up to 6 years old, with an unwavering focus on the quality of the educational services provided. The approach has led to the development of local structures, both public and private, that are different from one another and therefore impossible to standardise as they are based on original interpretations which are the result of the local context in which they are found, but which share several common elements that define the identity of the method: **a)** the organisation of the space; **b)** the concept of a flexible curriculum that is open to possibility; **c)** the involvement of the families; **d)** the training of the staff; and **e)** the roles of governance. These are the five fundamental elements of the Tuscan Approach and it is upon these that comparison and exchange with other structures which one comes into contact

¹⁸ European Commission, *Monitoring the quality of early childhood education and care*, 2018.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ John Bennet, *Early Childhood Services in the OECD Countries: Review of the Literature and Current Policy in the Early Childhood Field*, 2008; *Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries*, 2008.

with are built, in order to fuel - differences aside - the continuous improvement of the reciprocal experiences offered each day to children and families²¹.

The **Reggio Emilia Approach** is an educational project conceived and developed in the pre-primary schools and childcare centres of the City of Reggio Emilia by Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) in the years following the end of WWII, which has shaped the structure of schools all around the world. The Reggio Emilia Approach is based on several distinctive traits: a) the participation of the family; b) the collective work of the entire staff; c) the image of a capable child with rights; d) the importance of the educational environment; e) the presence of a space known as the atelier and the figure of an atelierista (teacher), and an onsite kitchen; and f) pedagogical and didactic coordination. According to the central focus of the “hundred languages” which human beings possess, the children are offered, on a daily basis, the opportunity to explore multiple subjects, languages, and points of view and to simultaneously engage their hands, thoughts, and emotions, thus developing the expressiveness and creativity of each child and of the children as a group²².

Social Policies and Policies That Support Parenthood

In order effectively combat educational poverty, healthcare and educational services in early childhood must be complemented by other welfare initiatives that aim to improve the quality of parent-child interaction at home²³. These complementary welfare policies impact children’s development in various ways, for example by guaranteeing financial support to the most disadvantaged families, thus also increasing the likelihood that the family itself will invest in the wellbeing of its children (ex. purchasing educational material, participating in physical and socio-cultural activities). In particular, the initiatives aimed at ensuring a better balance between family life and work can allow women greater participation in the employment market, with consequent financial benefits for the entire family, as well as for society²⁴. Furthermore, various studies have also demonstrated that female employment in particular, as well as work-family conciliation policies, despite reducing the amount of time mothers spend taking care of their children, actually increase its quality and intensity and, at the same time, stimulate the participation of the other parent.

In these cases, parent-child interactions become more structured and more focused on early learning, thus encouraging the development of the child’s key cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional skills²⁵. Greater educational stimuli are achieved when parents have a higher level of formal education and employment, and therefore are more able to structure the quality of the interactions with their sons and daughters. This is why it is of utmost importance that the expansion of childhood services be accompanied by the launch of programs which aim to encourage parents to adopt constructive practices for their children’s development.

²¹ See https://www.bambinioscana.it/sites/default/files/idi_ta_volume_190503_web.pdf.

²² See <https://www.reggiochildren.it/identita/reggio-approach/>.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Cfr. Save the Children, “Le Equilibriste. La maternità in Italia” [Walking a Tightrope. Motherhood in Italy], 2019.

²⁵ Jane Waldfogel, *Social Mobility, Opportunities, and the Early Years, 2004*; Anduena Alushaj e Giorgio Tamburlini, “Tempo materno, tempo di nido e sviluppo del bambino: le evidenze, *Medico e Bambino*”, 2018.

Parent-training programs should be an integral part of the pedagogical program of educational services, but must also be accessible to parents that do not take advantage of these services²⁶.

The Matthew Effect

In the field of social disciplines, the “Matthew Effect” refers to a process whereby resources are distributed among beneficiaries in proportion to that which they already possess. It was named for verse 25:29 in the Gospel of Matthew: “For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

In the specific case of early childhood education and care, many studies have revealed a Matthew Effect in terms of access to quality services; or rather, that children from more privileged families have a greater likelihood of attending, for example, quality childcare centres. Likewise, children on the brink of poverty and social exclusion, who would, as demonstrated by internationally-conducted studies, benefit the most from these programs (in terms of acquisition of skills and reduction in the educational gap), are actually more likely to be excluded from them. The Matthew Effect can have different origins: socio-economic, of course, and cultural in some cases as well. But the Matthew Effect cannot be explained, as is often erroneously believed, simply by the fact that lower income families may be less aware of the importance of early childhood education and care for their children’s development and future opportunities. In fact, the effect is primarily attributable to the availability of services offered (a lack of services, costs, etc.) which do not guarantee equal access. Analysis of several comparative studies on the topic in Europe demonstrates that the more frequent use of early childhood education and care programs on the part of families from a medium-high socio-economic background is determined, first of all, by the parents’ (often both employed) need to conciliate work and family commitments. Add to this a territorial distribution of services, with a greater number of options offered in more privileged contexts and areas, and admission criteria that favours work-family conciliation. Furthermore, the growing privatisation of services and/or the increase in financial participation of the families, as in the case of Italy, makes the services more accessible to those families in which both parents are wage earners and therefore have a greater spending capacity. All of these aspects often discourage/prevent children from families in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions from having access to early childhood education and care services²⁷.

²⁶ Anduena Alushaj and Giorgio Tamburlini, “Effects of maternal and childcare time on child development: a review of the evidence”, *Medico e Bambino*, 2018. EUROSTAT EU-SILC, 2016.

²⁷ Emmanuele Pavolini and Wim Van Lancker, “The Matthew Effect in Childcare Use: a Matter of Policies or Preferences?”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2017; Emmanuele Pavolini, Dora Gambardella, Emmanuele Pavolini, and Marco Arlotti, “L’Investimento Sociale alle Prese con le Disuguaglianze Sociali e Territoriali”, *Investire nel sociale. La difficile innovazione del welfare italiano, [Social Investment to Combat Social and Territorial Inequalities, Investing in Social Services. The Difficult Innovation of Italian Welfare]*, 2016.



CHAPTER 1

**EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION AND
CARE: THE DATA**

1. Early Childhood Education and Care: the Data

The Situation in Europe

The most recent data²⁸ outlines/illustrates that approximately 24 million children in the European Union are on the brink of poverty or social exclusion, 25% of the total (Fig.5). If we put all of these children in a single country, it would be the eighth largest member of the EU in terms of population. Children who live in families with parents who are unemployed or who work precarious jobs are particularly affected.

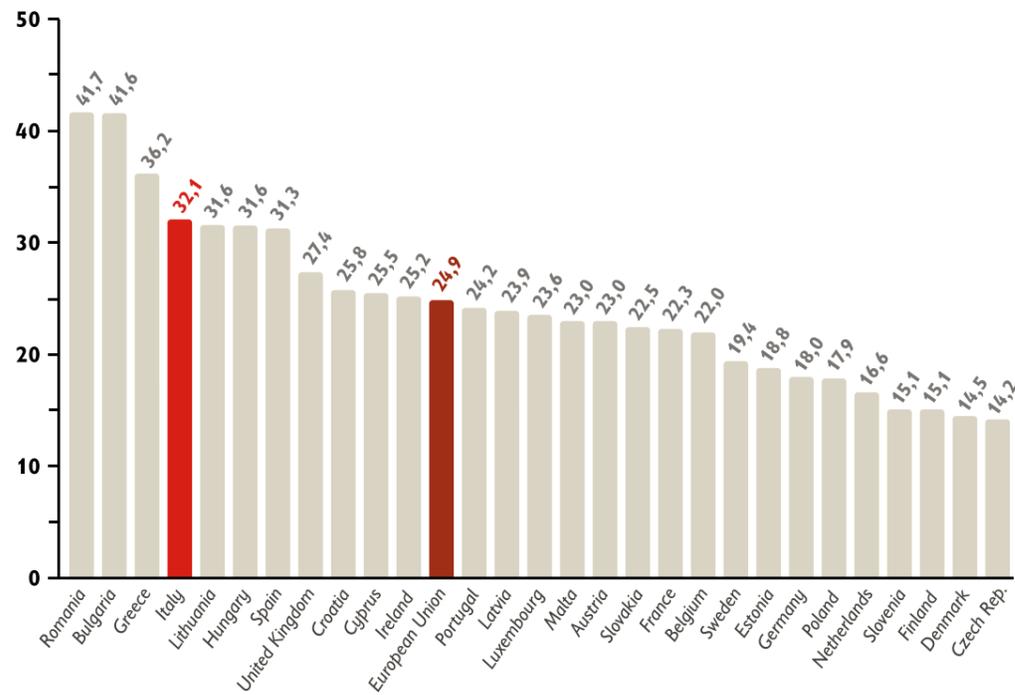


Fig.5: (%) minors at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. Source: EUROSTAT EU SILC, 2017.

As we saw earlier, parents' employment status and income have an effect on the development of a child's skills, necessary for growing up and living in the 21st century. Parents in financial difficulty clearly have fewer resources to invest in their child's education.

²⁸ EUROSTAT EU-SILC, 2016.

Furthermore, the lack or instability of parental employment can reduce the quality of a parent's relationship with his or her child and diminish the stimulus to learn. In nine countries, coverage of childcare centres and integrative services is less than 20% and in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Greece, it is less than 10%. It is, however, important to note that even in countries in which the percentage of coverage for early childhood education and care reaches the objective of 33%, only half of these children attend programs that offer 30 or more hours per week.

The rate of attendance preschool programs in the European Union, and therefore for children between 3 and 6 years of age, despite being higher than that for the youngest children (86%), is still, for many countries, far from the objective of 90% coverage. According to the most recent data available from EUROSTAT, only twelve European countries achieve that objective. In some cases, as in Poland, Romania, Greece, and Croatia, the rate drops to 60% or less for children aged 3-6 who attend preschool²⁹.

It is the children from economically disadvantaged families who have less access to early childhood protection and education services, particularly from the ages of 3 months to 3 years, further exacerbating these inequalities.

The so-called Matthew Effect (greater availability of services for those who already have an economic and social advantage) is evident in most member states of the European Union. The lack of investments aimed at increasing coverage, and the subsequent privatisation of childhood services, as well as a reduction in welfare programs (in particular those that provide income support) over the past few decades are the causes of the growing exclusion of the most disadvantaged children. Even in those cases in which the services offered are primarily public, the presence of indirect costs can make access to these services particularly difficult for the neediest children. To this end, a study conducted by OECD has revealed that in European countries the cost of early childhood education and care programs, like childcare centres, reaches an average of 10-15% of a family's available income and, in some countries, exceeds 20%³⁰.

Furthermore, the lack of flexibility (for example in the hours that the service is offered) and of training on the part of those who manage the services and the public administration which assists children and families in particularly dire socio-economic situations, as well as admission criteria that penalises these children and families, make gaining access to early childhood education and care programs in most European countries even more challenging for the most vulnerable children.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ OECD, *Who Uses Childcare? Background Brief on Inequalities in the Use of Formal Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Among Very Young Children*, 2016.

Policies Regarding Early Childhood in the International and European Agenda

The first years of life, from birth to the start of compulsory education, represent a crucial period in a child's development. It is during this period that the skills and abilities (cognitive, not cognitive, and physical) which will accompany a child throughout his or her life are formed. That is why the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in effect since 1990, recognises the fundamental importance of care and education in early childhood and states that member-nations must adopt every appropriate measure in order to guarantee children [whose parents work] the right to benefit from these services (art. 18, par. 3). This approach, which positions early childhood education and care programs as a tool with which to conciliate work and family (because the rights specified in the CRC are all interconnected), must also be interpreted in light of the right to education (art. 28), educational objectives (art. 29), and the principle of non-discrimination (art. 2). On occasion of the 30th anniversary of the CRC, Save the Children and the Istituto degli Innocenti³¹ promoted an updated reading of the convention which focused on three strategic and extremely relevant topics, one of which is that of the "right to a quality education beginning in early childhood." The directives which are considered priority imply recognition of an individual's right to education beginning in early childhood and recognition of the public responsibility for a child's education, as well as a need to rethink childhood education so that it also includes access to parental support and parent-training.

Recognition of the fundamental role that care and education policies in early childhood play, at the international level, is also sanctioned by its integration in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adopted in 2015, it includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, and 169 targets to be reached by 2030. Sustainable development goal number 4.2 states that every child must attend at least one year of pre-primary school in order to ensure his or her cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development in the first years of life³². A recent study conducted by a group of international experts, among which two Nobel prize laureates in economics, emphasised that concentrating public financial resources of developing countries on a limited number of objectives that focus on early childhood education and care, would have a financial impact that is two to four times greater than that of initiatives which provide developmental aid³³.

³¹ The details of the convention can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.minori.it/it/node/6867>.

³² United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, please see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>.

³³ Post 2015 Consensus, Prioritizing 19 targets instead of the UN's 169 targets is equivalent to doubling or quadrupling foreign aid, Online: <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/post-2015-consensus/nobel-laureates-guide-smarter-global-targets-2030>.

Even the European Commission, with its 2013 recommendation of "Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage", emphasised the important impact that investments in childhood have on equality and inclusive growth. The recommendation invites EU member nations to focus their national development strategies on initiatives that aim to reduce children's material poverty and social exclusion and increase access to quality care and education services in early childhood³⁴.

Childhood Education Services in Italy

In Italy, childhood education services are structured according to a child's age. *Nidi* and *micro nidi* are childcare centres that accept children from 3 months to 3 years of age. These are accompanied by early-entry "spring sections", for children between the ages of 24 and 36 months, which are usually associated with public or private preschools. There are also other kinds of less structured educational services, known as "integrative services", like play spaces, centres for children and families, and home-based services. The management of childcare centres and integrative services is generally entrusted to the municipalities, while the regions are responsible for orientation, promotion, and regulation, as well as management of special government funding. Public management can be direct or indirect and may include private services. Meanwhile, children between the ages of 3 and 6 attend the *scuola dell'infanzia* or *asilo* (a school which is the equivalent of preschool), under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, University, and Research. These schools are primarily state-run (though in varying proportions depending on the region), but municipal and private schools also exist (usually managed by cooperatives)..

Law 107 of 2015

Law 107 of 2015 and its 2017 implementing decrees³⁵, in particular Decree 65/2017, have established the progressive integration of services covering the ages from birth to 6 years old in the education system, charging the Ministry of Education, University, and Research with the direction, coordination, and promotion of the same throughout the country. Specifically, the provisions include:

- the progressive consolidation, expansion, and accessibility of childhood education services, also through a territorial rebalancing, with the tentative objective of achieving at least 33% coverage of the national population under the age of three;

³⁴ European Commission, *Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, 2013.

³⁵ Cfr. d.lgs. 65/2017 on the integrated system of education from birth, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/05/16/17G00073/sg>.

- the gradual territorial distribution of childhood education services with the tentative objective of achieving 75% coverage of municipalities, singularly or in partnership;
- the progressive qualitative and quantitative generalisation of preschools for children between the ages of 3 and 6;
- the inclusion of all children;
- the university qualification of childhood education services' personnel [...]
- the in-service training of the integrated education services' personnel, also for the purpose of promoting physical and mental health;
- territorial pedagogical partnership;
- the introduction of conditions which facilitate the frequency of childhood education services.

Legislative Decree n.65 has established a national fund³⁶ equivalent to €209 million for 2017, €224 million for 2018, and €239 million for 2019 dedicated to the progressive execution of the multi-year national action plan for the promotion of the integrated education system. The purpose of these funds is to finance new constructions or renovations of buildings owned by public authorities, sustain a portion of the management costs for childhood education services and preschools, and ensure the ongoing professional training of the education personnel and teachers in service. Furthermore, the decree foresees the establishment and financing of children's centres. The objective of these children's centres would be to encourage the continuity of a child's educational journey, by grouping services like childcare, integrated services, and preschools in a single plexus or adjoining buildings, and to create an integrated education plan. The decree also foresees a partnership between the National Student Registry Office (Anagrafe Nazionale Studenti, ANS) and the National Information System for Socio-Educational Services (Sistema Informativo Nazionale Servizi socio-Educativi, SINSE) for early childhood (under the authority of the Ministry of Employment and Social Policies) in collaboration with the Italian government's Department of Family Policies and ISTAT, for the establishment of a monitoring system, even though to date this partnership has not yet become operative. Though the direction indicated by the aforementioned decree is positive, the reform missed the opportunity to immediately promote the shift from individually requested 0-3 educational services to services that are universally available, primarily due to the small amount of allocated resources.

³⁶ Let it also be noted that in paragraph 741 of the 2019 budget law [law 30 December 2018, n.145] it is specified that as of 2019 the national fund for the integrated education system for 0-6 year olds will increase by €10 million/year. Therefore, as of 2019 the total endowment was €239 million + 10 = €249 million. The fund was to be distributed to the municipalities by the regions and on the basis of regional scheduling. For more information please visit: Regioni.it, <http://www.regioni.it/comunicato-stampa/2018/09/20/scuola-bonaccini-ripartiti-224-milioni-del-fondo-nazionale-per-il-sistema-di-educazione-e-istruzione-0-6-anni-5786621>

Upon analysis of the data available at the national and regional levels, collected by the Istituto degli Innocenti and ISTAT, it is evident that Italy is still very far from the target set by the European Union to guarantee that at least 33% of all children aged 0 and 3 years have access to a childcare centre or other integrative service. The most recent data, collected primarily by the Istituto degli Innocenti³⁷ and which refers to 2017, indicates that the availability of early childhood education and care (for children aged 0-3 years) is at 23.6% (Fig.6). This percentage covers both public and private childcare centres, including spring sections for children aged 24 to 36 months (21.5%) and integrative services (2.1%). If we add early-entry children to this (5.2%), therefore 2-year-olds who enter preschool at a younger age than usual, but without an adapted program, as in the case of the spring sections, this percentage reaches 28.9%³⁸.

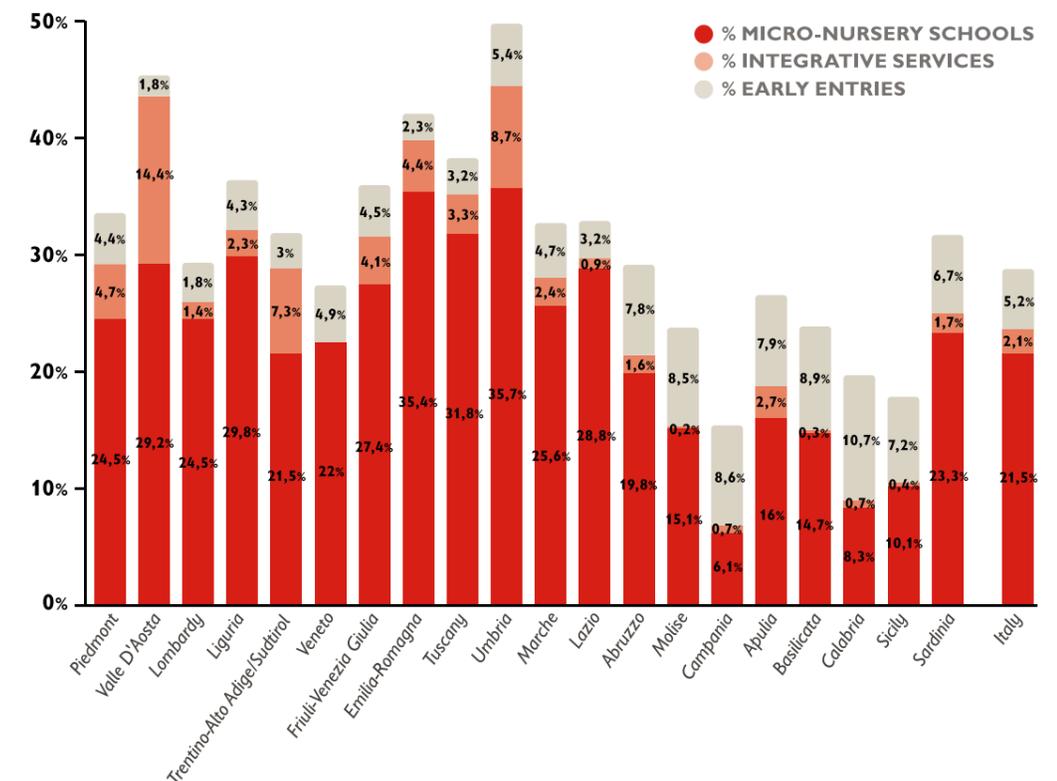


Fig.6: Coverage of Early Childhood Education and Care (childcare centres, integrative services, early-entry children) (%) in the Italian regions. Source: Istituto degli Innocenti, 2017.

Regional differences are very pronounced, with a rate of coverage in the Centre-North that is double that of the South and the islands. There is, in fact, a very strong correlation between the percentage of coverage of childcare centres, integrated services, and early-entries. For example, in the South and on the islands, where public and private coverage of childcare centres is lower, the population of two-year olds who enter preschool early

³⁷ Istituto degli Innocenti, 2017.

³⁸ Gruppo CRC, 3° Supplementary Report to the United Nations Monitoring of the Convention on Childhood and Adolescent Rights in Italy, 2017.

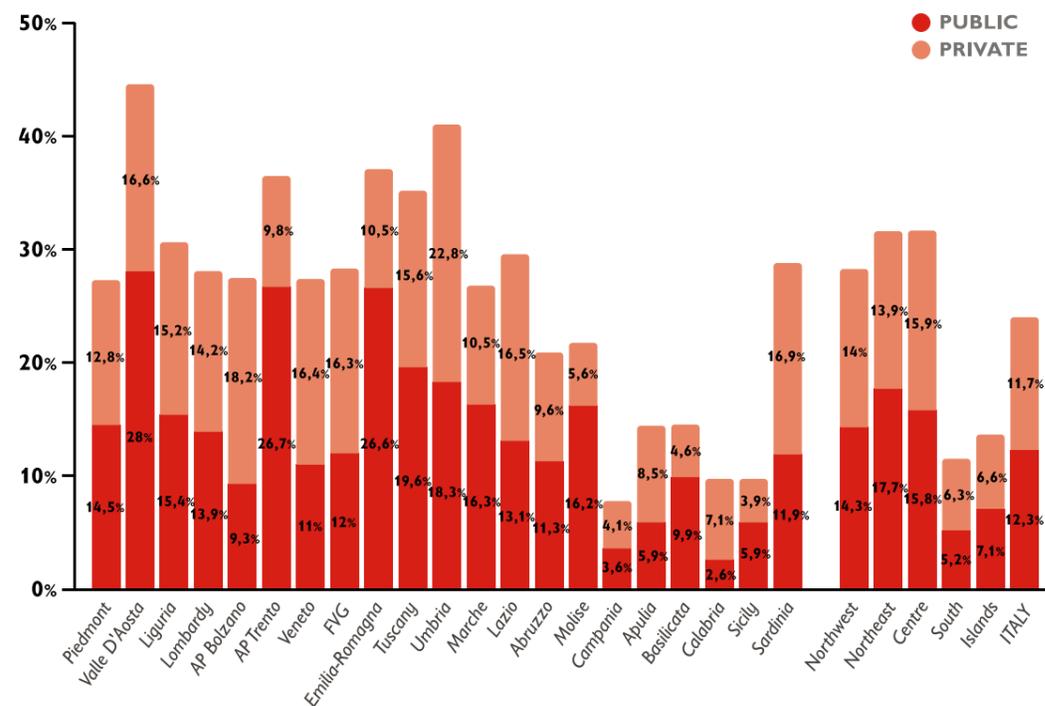


Fig.7: Coverage of Childhood Education Services (public and private) (5) in the Italian Regions. Source: ISTAT, 2016.

is markedly higher as compared to the northern regions (in Calabria and Campania it even surpasses that of those who attend preschool) (Fig.6)³⁹. Examining the data collected by ISTAT (Fig.7), relative to 2016-2017, which also distinguishes between attendance in a public or private program, in only several Italian regions – Valle d'Aosta (28%), Autonomous Province of Trento (26,7%), Emilia-Romagna (26,6%), Molise (16,2%) – is the coverage of public childcare centres and integrated childhood services markedly greater (more than double) than that of private programs. Meanwhile, in regions like Calabria (2.6%) and Campania (3.6%) public coverage is almost non-existent⁴⁰.

It must be noted that the gap between regions which are more and less efficient in terms of coverage of early childhood education and care has not changed in recent years⁴¹. The northern regions (with the exception of Piedmont and Liguria), together with Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, surpass those in the southern central area also in terms of the percentage of municipalities covered by the service: 80% or more (in Piedmont, 29.5% and in Liguria, 33.6%; while 100% in Friuli Venezia Giulia) in the first and 50% or less in the second, with a record negative in Calabria (22.5%)⁴². Despite the fact that analyses and academic studies are all in agreement regarding the positive effects of early childhood education and care, in Italy it is the most disadvantaged children who take the least advantage of them.

³⁹ Istituto degli Innocenti, 2017.

⁴⁰ Source ISTAT, 2016. It must be noted that the small and very limited differences found between the data collected by the Istituto degli Innocenti study and that collected by ISTAT are due to a difference in the sample population (the first based on region, the second on municipality).

⁴¹ Source ISTAT, 2004-2016. 41.

⁴² Source ISTAT, 2016.

⁴³ CRC Group, 9th update report on the monitoring of the Convention on Childhood and Adolescent Rights in Italy, 2015-2016.

The static nature and, in some cases, the reduction in coverage of public childhood services can, in the absence of public policies aimed at supporting work-family conciliation, be attributed to a decline in demand for these services, exacerbated by the financial crisis (which has increased the rate of female unemployment, lowering families' spending capacity, and, consequently, increasing the prevalence of unpaid housework) and an increase in tuition⁴³.

Furthermore, based on the early results of a recent, and not yet made public, analysis conducted by the Istituto degli Innocenti on a sample of Italian cities, it was found that out of 100 children under the age of 3 who attend public childcare centres, only 67 completed the program. The remaining 33 did not finish primarily for economic reasons⁴⁴. The growing phenomenon of early-entries (2-year-olds who enter preschool early but without an adapted program, as in the case of the spring sections) can be explained by the fact that preschool is a free service and is therefore more financially accessible for many families.

This is an alarming figure, if looked at in relation to the incidence of economic poverty. In Italy more than one million children live in absolute poverty, 12.6%⁴⁵ of the child population. The grip of material poverty, as we have seen, contributes to reducing the quality of interactions between parents and children and fuels educational poverty.

A better situation was found with respect to accessibility to preschool.

92.6% of children between the ages of 3 and 6 attend a preschool. Of these, 61.4% are in government-funded schools (free, except for individually requested lunch services), 8.5% in municipally-funded schools (with the same practices as the government-funded schools), and 28.2% in private schools (which receive a government subsidy and charge a tuition that is generally lower as compared to the costs of, for example, childcare centres, even if run by the municipality). Italy is, therefore, among those at the top in terms of access to preschool, in line with the European objective of 90% coverage for children aged 3 to 6 years⁴⁶.

Quality Standards for Childhood Services

As mentioned previously, quality is an essential component of childhood programs in effectively combatting educational poverty. Equal access to services must, therefore, be accompanied by particular attention to their quality. If, historically, national regulations⁴⁷ exist that oversee various aspects which determine quality (covering, for example, the university qualification of the teachers, the curriculum, and the physical infrastructures which are applied to the various kinds of services), then, in terms of childhood services for children under 3 years of age, the reform of title V of the Constitution establishes a concurrent legislative framework for early childhood care and education.

⁴⁴ Aldo Fortunati and Arianna Pucci, '0-6: lavori in Corso. Prove di Integrazione [Work in Progress, Integration Trials], Bambini, 2018.

⁴⁵ FSource ISTAT, 2018: 1.2 million.

⁴⁶ Source EUROSTAT EU-SILC 2016; Gruppo CRC, 3rd Supplementary Report to the United Nations monitoring of the Convention on Childhood and Adolescent Rights in Italy, 2016. In recent years there has been a decline in preschool attendance, primarily determined by a demographic decline.

⁴⁷ It is important to note that the structural qualitative standards are obsolete and several reforms (see the case of the number of personnel per student and the number of child per section) have allowed for broad autonomy and created substantial differences between regions. Furthermore, the limited specialisation of the teachers and the absence of a

Every region relative to the educator/child ratio (which varies from a minimum of 1 to 4 for children aged 3 to 12 months, to a maximum of 1 to 10 for children aged 24 to 36 months) or the physical size of the spaces.

Among the strategic objectives of the “Integrated Education System From Birth to 6 Years Old”, Decree 65/2017 promotes the quality of the educational program, relying on teachers and education staff with university qualifications and their continuous in-service training, the collegial dimension of the work, and pedagogical partnerships across the territory. The decree also specifies that the university degree necessary for becoming an educator in a childhood program is the three-year degree in Educational Science with a specific focus on childhood (programs that are already active in several universities), though the degrees required by specific regional regulations and earned before the date on which the decree took effect continue to be valid. The activation of pedagogical partnerships across the territory and of continuous in-service training for all education staff and teachers is among the strategic objectives of the “Integrated System”, and, even though in various geographic areas these initiatives have already been active for many years, involving all of the public and private education services and preschools in the region, the challenge will be to encourage their proliferation and consolidation throughout the country.

The Limits of the Surveys of Italian Children and of Save the Children’s Study

Despite the fact that the studies and data cited in the previous chapters provide a general overview of the situation regarding educational policies for early childhood, they also demonstrate several obvious limitations. First of all, these studies focus on access to and coverage of the services; few of them also monitor the cognitive, socio-emotional, or physical development of the children before they begin primary school. Furthermore, in many cases information is lacking which would make it possible to disassociate the data regarding access to or attendance in programs, from the socio-economic conditions of the family, their origins (migrant or not), and even certain individual characteristics (for example, disability). Instead what they provide is the minimum information necessary for beginning to understand the inequalities that manifest in the first years of life. Despite its outstanding pedagogical tradition, Italy is historically lacking in its study of early childhood educational policy and its effects on educational poverty. In recent years several studies have been conducted in an effort to bridge the gap with other countries in this field.

continuous structured curriculum are the greatest obstacles to upgrading (and maintaining) the qualitative standards of preschool. Maurizio Parente, From Law 107/2015 to its Application: Reflections on the Standard Requirements of Educational Services for Children Ages 0-6, in Zerosei Up Magazine, 05/16.

The Studies Conducted in Italy on the Effects of Childcare Centre Attendance

In 2010, professors Daniela Del Boca and Silvia Pasqua conducted a study on the effects of childcare centre attendance on the scholastic performance and behaviour of children in primary school. Specifically, the analysis was based on data provided by ISFOL (the Institute for Professional Development and Training of Workers, 2007) regarding the mother’s work and the use of childcare centres, and on a survey by INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of the Educational and Training System, 2009-2010) regarding children’s proficiency levels⁴⁸. In particular, children who attended childcare centres showed better results in maths in grades II and V of primary school. This positive relationship continued into secondary school as well. Furthermore, childcare centre attendance is positively associated with a greater ability to listen and concentrate and with better relationships with peers. The data regarding children from disadvantaged socio-economic conditions is particularly significant. Among these, those who attended a childcare centre achieved higher levels of academic proficiency which, in many cases, bridged the gap between them and children from a medium-high socio-economic background. What this study reveals is that positive results are obtained only with attendance at a quality childcare centre.

In 2012, a team of researchers made up of professors Pietro Biroli, Daniela Del Boca, and Nobel Prize laureate in economics James Heckman, conducted a particularly extensive and in-depth survey among the children of Reggio Emilia, Parma, and Padua in order to understand the effects of the so-called “Reggio Emilia Approach”⁴⁹. The study revealed that attending an early childhood education and care program which applies the Reggio Emilia Approach significantly increased the medium to long-term results obtained by children with regard to socio-emotional abilities, academic results in high school, and employment as compared to their peers who did not attend any program. No differences emerged, however, when compared to children who attended childhood programs that do not apply the Reggio Emilia Approach.

⁴⁸ Daniela Del Boca and Silvia Pasqua, ‘Esiti scolastici e comportamentali, famiglia e servizi per l’infanzia’ [Academic and Behavioural Results, Family and Services for Childhood], Fondazione Agnelli, 2010.

⁴⁹ Pietro Biroli, Daniela Del Boca, James Heckman, ‘Evaluation of the Reggio Approach to Early Education’. IZA Discussion Paper No. 10742, 2017.



CHAPTER 2

THE IDELA TOOL
IN ITALY

2. The IDELA tool in Italy

In 2019 Save the Children, in collaboration with the Centre for Child Health and Development, conducted the first explorative pilot study in Italy carried out directly with children, the objective of which was to analyse the inception and crystallisation of inequalities between them before entering preschool, and the potential “equalising” effect of childcare centre attendance.

The study took place in 10 Italian cities and provinces - Brindisi, Macerata, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Prato, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Salerno, and Trieste – and involved 653 children between the ages of 3 ½ and 4 ½ years old who attend public or private schools, and their parents. The study was conducted using the IDELA (International Development and Early Learning Assessment) tool, developed by Save the Children International, which observes children’s development before they enter primary school.

What is IDELA?

The International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) is an investigative tool that measures children’s progress between the ages of 3 and 6, taking into account four areas of skills and development: physical-motor, mathematical, linguistic, and socio-emotional. The areas analysed by IDELA reflect the “21st century competencies”. IDELA was conceived as an open-source tool that can be adapted to various linguistic and cultural contexts.

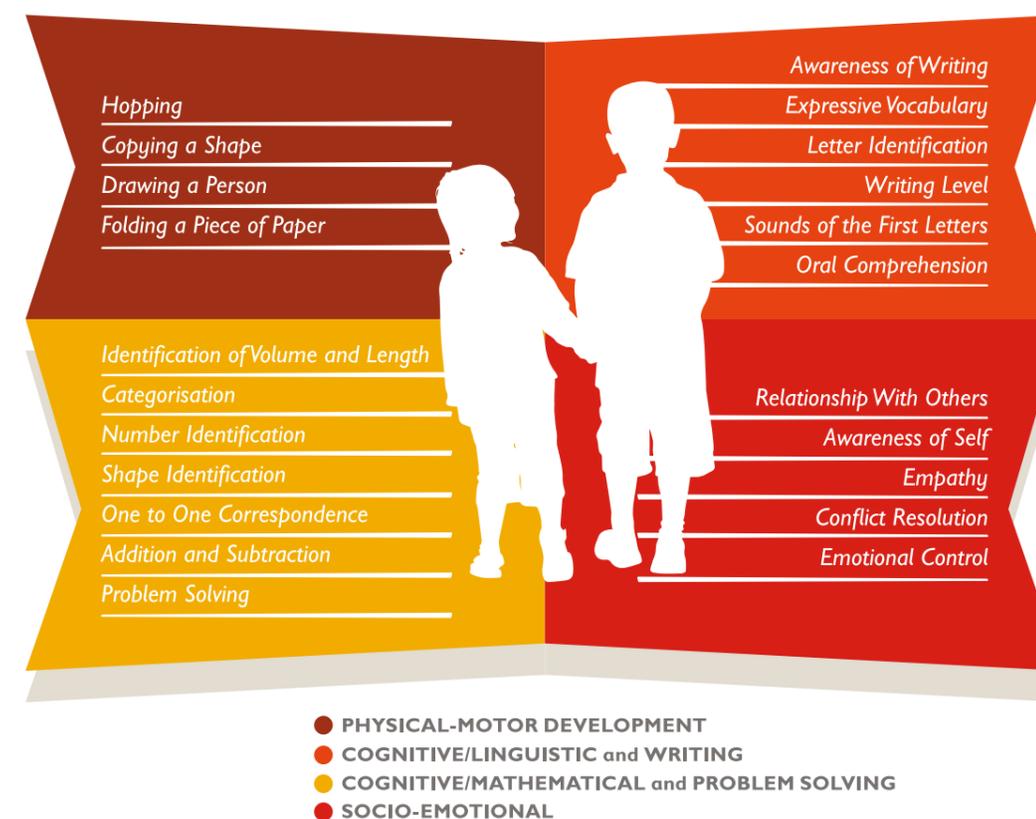
The IDELA tool was conceived in 2011 with the intention of overcoming the limits of the studies which have generally been conducted at the international level on early childhood policies, especially in reference to the availability of information regarding individual areas of childhood development, primarily cognitive skills, and the fact that the questionnaires are usually submitted to parents and teachers rather than directly to the children⁵⁰. IDELA borrows from, integrates, and adapts the tools from existing studies on childhood development⁵¹, creating a new, thorough, and holistic approach that can be directly administered.

The assessment tool is made up of 22 questions, divided into four areas of development: physical/motor (4 questions), cognitive/mathematical and problem solving (7 questions), cognitive/linguistic and writing (6 questions), and socio-emotional (5 questions).

⁵⁰ Lauren Pisani, Ivelina Borisova, and Amy Jo Dowd, *International Development and Early Learning Assessment Technical Working Paper*, 2017.

⁵¹ Among which the Denver Developmental Screening Tests ([https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476\(67\)80070-2/abstract](https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(67)80070-2/abstract)), the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (<https://agesandstages.com/>), the Bayley Scales of Child Development (<https://www.pearsonassessments.com/store/usassessments/en/Store/Professional-Assessments/Behavior/Adaptive/Bayley-Scales-of-Infant-and-Toddler-Development-%7C-Third-Edition/p/100000123.html>), and the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (https://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_69846.html).

Areas and questions of the IDELA research tool



The thoroughness of the IDELA tool, from a psychometric standpoint and in terms of its adaptability to various contexts, is derived from its validation via pilot administration and via subsequent evaluation studies carried out over the course of three years, from 2011 to 2014, in eleven developing nations⁵². Since 2014 IDELA has also been experimenting in medium-high income countries, in Spain, in Eastern Europe, and in the United States⁵³.

The administration of the IDELA survey takes about 40 minutes per child. It is important to note that the administration method for this assessment tool was conceived and presented as a recreational activity, a game that can be interrupted by the child at any time.

⁵² Bangladesh, Bhutan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Zambia.

⁵³ Lauren Pisani, Ivelina Borisova, and Amy Jo Dowd, *International Development and Early Learning Assessment Technical Working Paper*, 2017.

Today IDELA is used in 55 countries worldwide to observe children's development and therefore construct childhood education policies that are effective in reducing educational inequalities that begin in the earliest years of life.

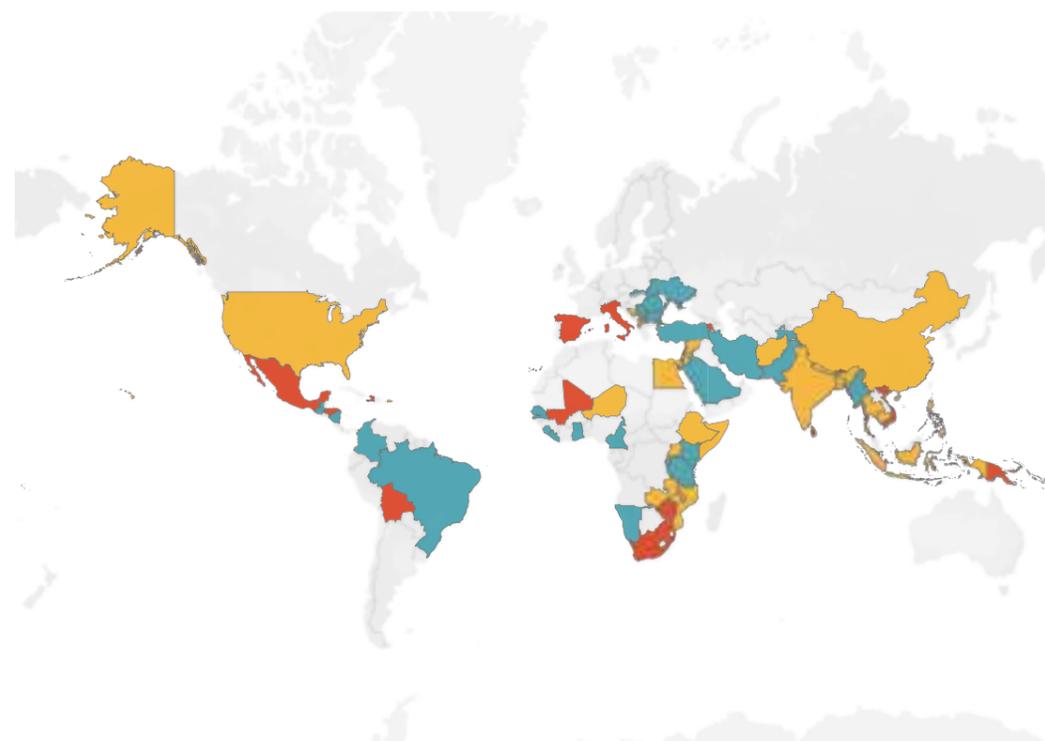


Fig.8: World map showing use of the IDELA tool, updated in 2019⁵⁴.
Source: idela-network.org

⁵⁴ The map does not include subsequent experiments in Australia.

IDELA Pilot Study in Italy

Measuring skills in the first years of life is extremely complex. This is because, at that age, every child develops his or her own knowledge and abilities at different times. The objective of the assessment tool is not, therefore, to measure the development of each individual child, but rather to observe certain trends in the sample population and, specifically, notice if inequalities in development emerge, as well as potential protective factors, in an effort to valorise the latter through appropriate public policies and subsequent financial support.

In December 2018, Save the Children Italy conducted, in collaboration with the Centre for Child Health and Development in Trieste, a pilot administration of the IDELA tool in order to evaluate the validity of the Italian translation and make any necessary changes which would better adapt it to the Italian cultural context. The assessment tool was successfully administered in three Italian cities – Brindisi, Rome, and Trieste – to a group of 46 children between the ages of 3 ½ and 4 ½ years old from various social backgrounds

Alongside the IDELA tool, specific to children, another questionnaire was produced for the parents of the children involved, with questions related to the socio-economic and cultural context of the family and the child's participation in early childhood education and care programs, from birth to the age of three.

Specifically:

- child's gender;
- parents' Italian or foreign citizenship and language spoken at home;
- parents' highest level of formal education and occupation;
- parents' marital status and household composition;
- full or part-time attendance at a childcare centre, or conditions of early entrance in preschool, the frequency of other integrative services, or home care;
- type of childcare centre (public, private, or affiliated), duration of attendance in terms of the number of months;
- type and frequency of activities carried out by the parents with the child, such as reading, listening to music, going to theatre, or attending concerts and also the time that the child spends doing physical activities outdoors.

The parental questionnaire included basic information used to measure the factors which contributed to the child's educational disadvantage and the eventual redistributive effects of his or her attendance at a childcare centre. The results of the pilot administration were subjected to the opinion of a scientific committee which highlighted the tool's feasibility in the Italian context and introduced several limited modifications in order to facilitate administration.

Therefore, between March and June 2019 IDELA was administered to 653 children between the ages of 3 ½ and 4 ½ years old who attend preschool in ten cities: Brindisi, Macerata, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Prato, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Salerno, and Trieste. These results were integrated with 627 questionnaires filled out by the parents.

The study was conducted in collaboration with the following partners:

- University of Macerata, Department of Political Science, Communication, and International Relations.
- Centre for Child Health and Development, Trieste.
- Istituto degli Innocenti in Florence.
- Azienda speciale Servizi Bassa Reggiana (ASBR)/Childhood Project..

The on-site survey was conducted by a team of professionals with training in the educational and pedagogical field, who administered the survey in the cities of Brindisi, Macerata, Palermo, Prato, Reggio Emilia, and Trieste, and teachers from the E.D.I. Non-Profit Cooperative who administered the survey in the cities of Milan, Naples, Rome, and Salerno.

All of those who administered the survey were trained in the administration of IDELA and on the policies which protect children and adolescents⁵⁵.

The survey could not have been conducted without the help of the teachers and principals of the schools involved and, in the case of Prato, the city's Pedagogical Coordination - U.O.C. Educational Services Coordination.

⁵⁵ Child Safeguarding Policy, Save the Children, see pag.56.

The schools were selected, according to criteria established by the scientific committee, in order to obtain a sufficiently variable sample – in particular, children from various socio-economic conditions who did and did not attend a childcare centre or other type of service – and be able to analyse the associations between family backgrounds, childcare centre attendance, and the IDELA results. The selection of schools was made using ISTAT's survey on the safety conditions and state of disrepair of these metropolitan cities and their outskirts⁵⁶, including mapping of the urban areas according to household income, education level, and employment and the presence of services. Smaller provincial cities were included alongside major urban centres in order to further broaden the variability of the sample. An over-sampling of the most disadvantaged children who attended childcare centres was also conducted for the same reason. The children who completed the IDELA survey were randomly selected from within the schools. The data collected, regarding both the results of the IDELA survey and the information related to the family context, were anonymously reported in order to protect the privacy of the parents and children. It is important to note that the IDELA survey, due to the size and characteristics of the sample group, cannot be considered representative of the Italian context, and therefore the results of the analysis are to be interpreted only in relation to the children who directly participated in the pilot experiment.

The Description of the IDELA Participants

The group of children from 3 ½ to 4 ½ years old who participated in the IDELA survey was made up 51.8% of girls and 48.2% of boys (Fig.9). The percentage of children with foreign parents was 13.2% (Fig.10). The native language of all of these parents was foreign.

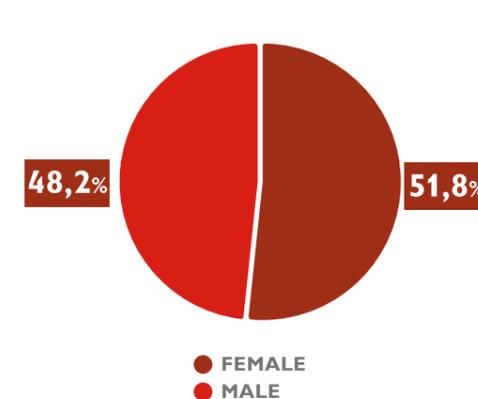


Fig.9: (%) female and male.

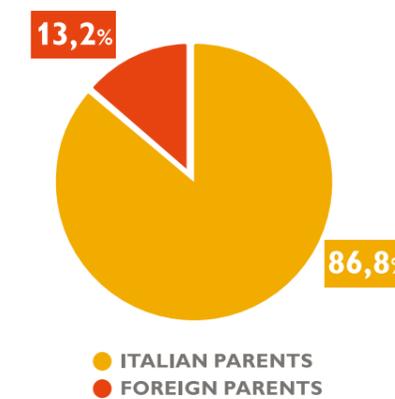


Fig.10: (%) children with parents of foreign or Italian origin.

⁵⁶ See ISTAT Online: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/202052>.

40.1% of the children had at least one parent with only an elementary or middle school education, 40.2% a parent with a high school diploma (approximately half of which had both parents with an elementary or middle school education), and 17.9% a parent with a university degree. Meanwhile 1.8% had parents with no formal education whatsoever (Fig.11).

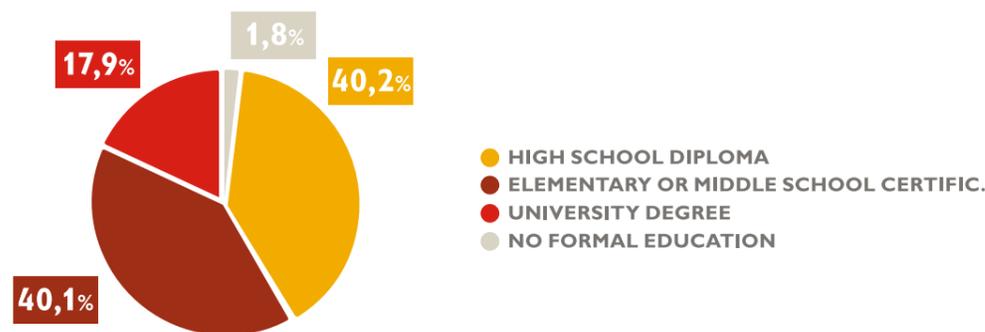


Fig. 11: (%) parents' education.

Other information collected had to do with the type of jobs the parents work and the composition of the household. In terms of employment, 9.7% of children had at least one parent who works a manual job (labourer or self-employed), 29.4% and 10.5% of the parents pertained respectively to the white collar middle class (low-level to medium-level management or employee) and to the professional class (upper-management, entrepreneur, or freelance professional); 23% had at least one parent devoted to caring for the family and home and 13% of the children had at least one unemployed parent, while 4.3% indicated a type of job that was different from the options provided in the questionnaire⁵⁷.

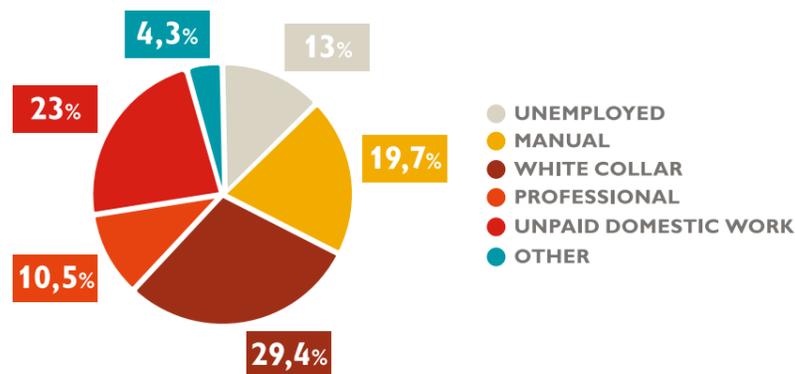


Fig.12: (%) parents' type of work.

⁵⁷ ISTAT, Definition of the groups and their financial characteristics, 2017.

Furthermore, almost all of the children - 90.8% - live with both of their parents (of these, 2/3 are married and 1/3 live together but are not married), while 16.5% of the children live in large families (made up of mother, father, and three or more brothers/sisters).

56.4% of the children who participated in the study attended childcare centres (38.4% attended full-time, 18% attended part-time). For the purposes of the study, children who attended traditional childcare, micro-childcare, and company childcare, as well as those in early-entry spring sections, were all grouped together in the childcare category (Fig. 13). Among those children from disadvantaged socio-economic contexts (with at least one parent with only an elementary or middle school education or no formal education), 44.2% attended a childcare centre either full-time or part-time⁵⁸. Meanwhile, the remaining 3.2% attended other integrative education services like play spaces, home childcare, and parent-child centres, and 1.7% were enrolled earlier than usual in preschool. 35.4% did not attend any program (remained at home with a family member or baby-sitter), while 3.3% provided an answer that was different from the options provided in the questionnaire (Fig. 13).

Among those who attended a childcare centre, 63.9% attended a public program, 20.7% a private program, and the remaining 15.4% an affiliated private program. Attendance at a childcare centre began, on average, at 11 months. 65.1% attended a childcare centre for a period of 12 months or more, 24.7% for a period of 13 to 24 months, and 10.2% for a period of 25 to 36 months.

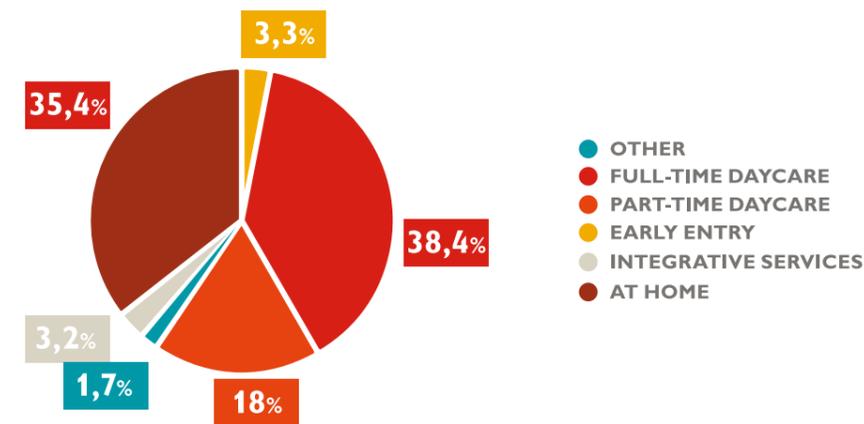


Fig.13: (%) attendance at a childcare centre or other childhood service.

⁵⁸ The percentage of children, in Italy, that attended a childcare centre either part-time or full-time or an early-entry spring section is 21.7%. Among these, a portion of the children were from families in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. A markedly lower percentage than that present in the sample population surveyed by IDELA. The oversampling of disadvantaged children who attended a childcare centre was carried out in order to guarantee the significance of the analysis.

67.8% of parents stated that the decision to not attend a childcare centre or to attend an integrative program, was primarily due to a choice, on the part of the parents, to care for the child at home, while 27.3% cited disappointment with the services offered: high cost (12.2%), lack of available spots (9.4%), or lack of services in their area (5.7%).

Finally, 22.4% of the parents read a book with the child every day, 6.5% at least 4 times a week, 28% several times a week, 22.2% several times a year, and 10.9% almost never (Fig.14). 52.1% of the children shared musical experiences with their parents (for example singing, listening to music, using musical instruments or objects that produce sounds) every day or almost every day, 33.2% once or twice a week, 8.8% several times a year, and 5.8% almost never (Fig.15). Furthermore, 49.3% of children engaged in physical activity outdoors with their parents or other children every day or almost every day, 44.1% once or twice a week, 4.3% several times a year, and 2.3% almost never (Fig.16). Finally, 2.7% of the parents took their child to the theatre or to see a musical performance many times during the year, 49.7% several times, and 37.6% never (Fig.17).

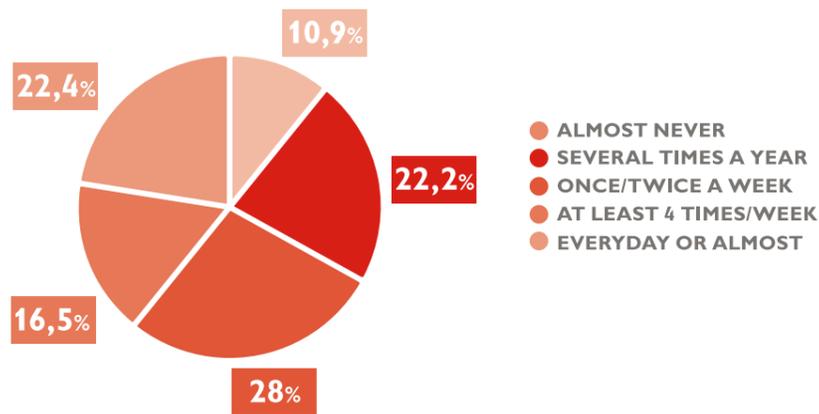


Fig.14: (%) frequency of parents reading books to their children.

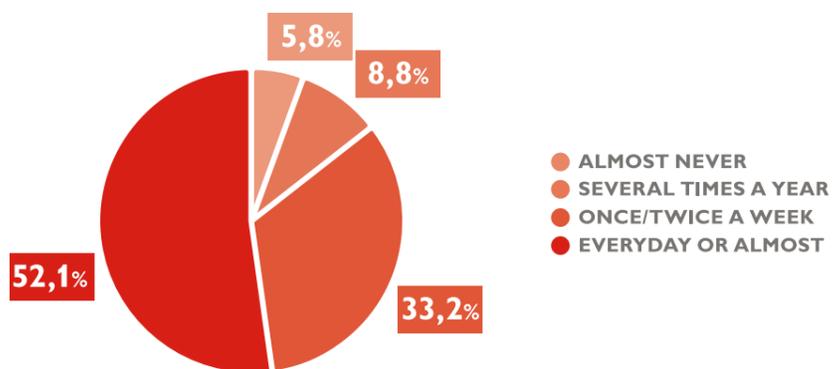


Fig.15: (%) frequency of parents' musical experiences with their children.

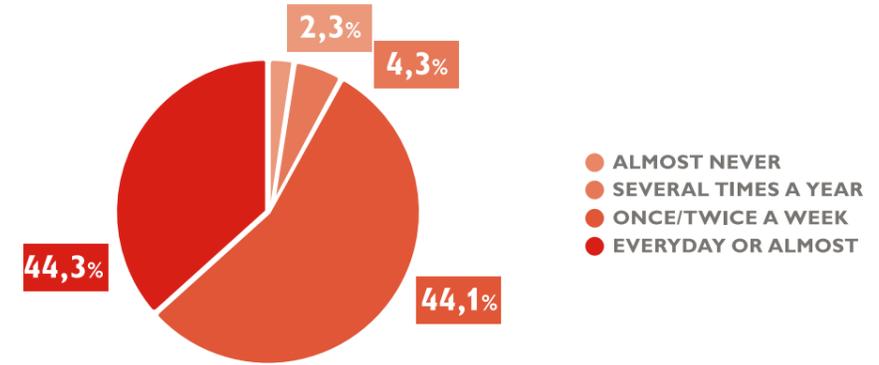


Fig 16: (%) frequency of outdoor physical activity with parents and children.

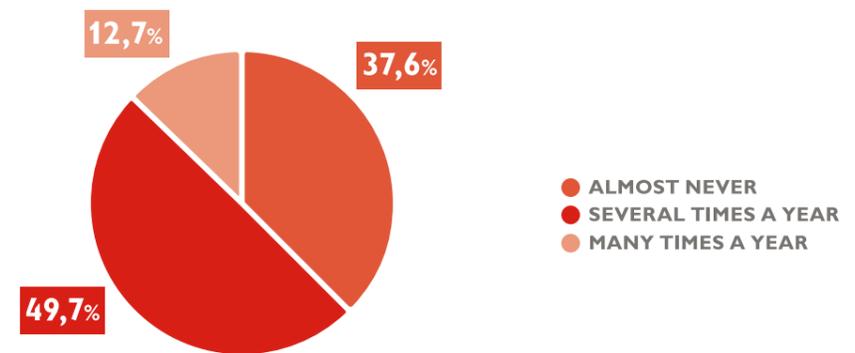


Fig.17: (%) frequency of parents' theatrical experiences with their children.

The Inequalities That Emerge in Early Childhood

The children who participated in the study answered 44.6% of the IDELA survey's questions appropriately. Looking at the data relative to the individual areas of childhood development, the children appropriately completed 44.9% of the exercises provided for physical/motor development, 46.8% of those for cognitive/mathematics and problem solving, 40.4% of those for cognitive/language and writing, and 46.2% of those pertaining to the socio-emotional category⁵⁹. 2.4% did not answer (children who refused to answer and/or abandoned the survey).

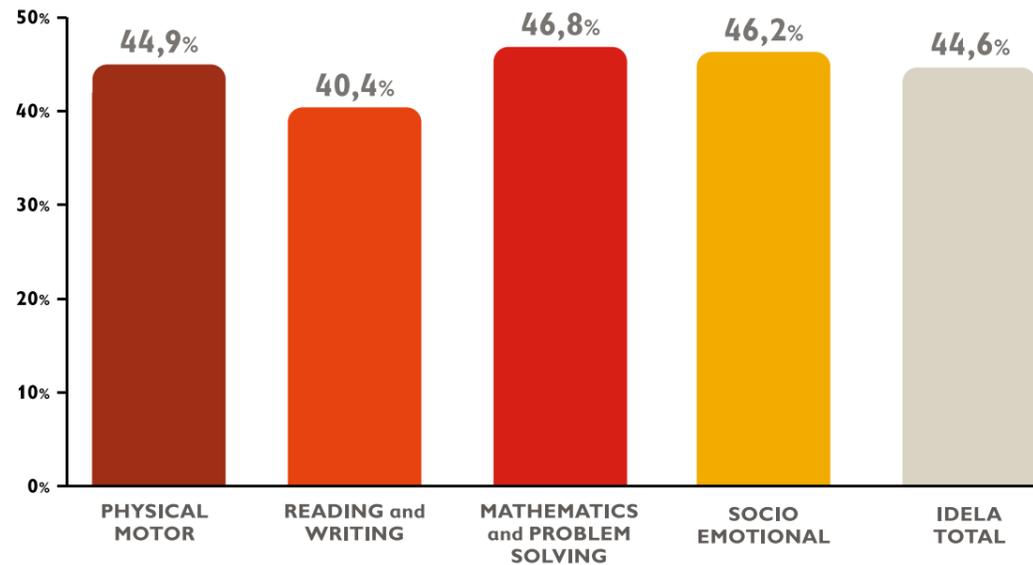


Fig.18: IDELA appropriate answers (%) according to area of child development.

In the cognitive/mathematics area, when the children were shown twenty numbers, 36.7% of them were not able to identify any. The same percentage was able to identify between one and five numbers, while 9.5% identified between six and ten numbers and 7.1% identified between eleven and twenty (of these only 1.5% recognised all of them). Furthermore, the children recognised between two and three of the twenty letters of the alphabet indicated in the included table. 58% of the children did not identify any letters, 26.9% between one and five letters, 6.2% between six and ten letters, and 8.9% between eleven and twenty (of these only 1.5% recognised all of them).

⁵⁹ To calculate the IDELA score, first the percentage of correct answers out of the possible total for each of the questions in each of the four areas is calculated (Motor, 4 questions; Language, 6 questions; Mathematics, 7 questions; Socio-emotional, 5 questions). For each area a sub-index is calculated, resulting from the average % of the correct answers. The IDELA total represents the unweighted average of the results of the four sub-indices. The percentage of children who did not answer (those who refused to respond and/or abandoned the survey) does not affect the analyses.

Figure 19 illustrates the emergence of inequalities and the influence that the level of formal education of at least one of the two parents has on them. Specifically, children with at least one parent with no formal education answered 38.4% of the IDELA survey questions appropriately, a result that is substantially below the average for the children who participated (44.6%). A very similar percentage is found for the children with at least one parent with only an elementary or middle school education: 40.4%. This percentage increases substantially, however, when at least one of the parents possesses a high school diploma (45.7%) or a university degree (52.4%). These differences are striking also when examining each area of the IDELA survey. In mathematics, for example, there is a 14 point gap between children with a parent with an elementary/middle school education and those with a parent who earned a university degree, in reading and writing the gap is approximately 12 points, in physical and motor development approximately 8 points, and in socio-emotional development approximately 14 points⁶⁰.

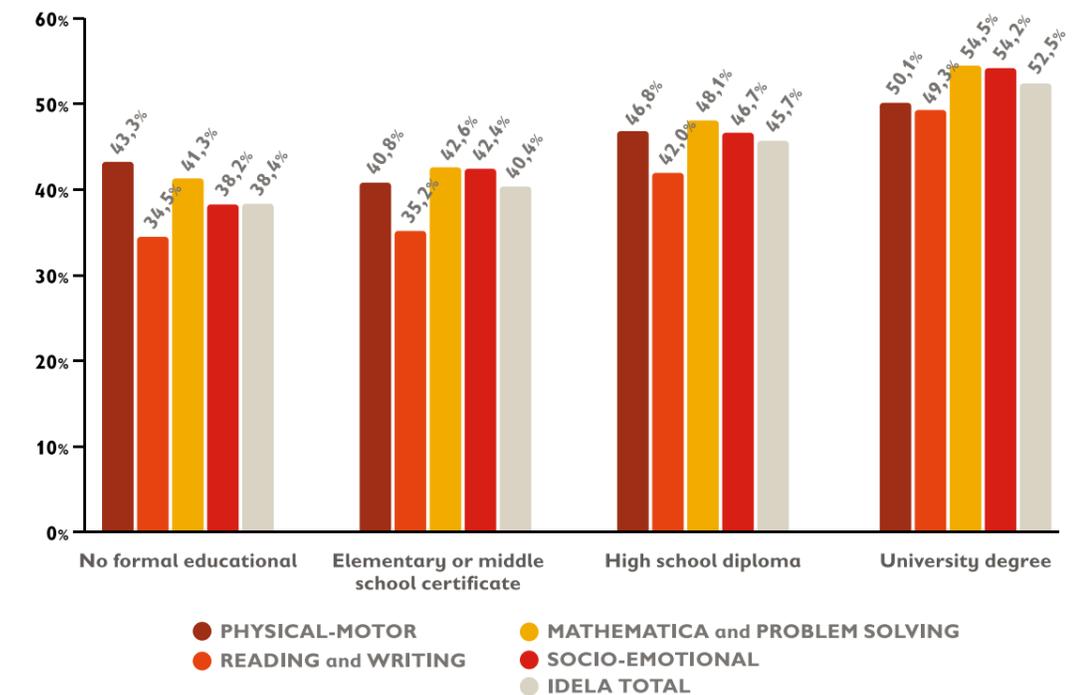


Fig.19: IDELA appropriate answers (%) according to parents' formal education.

From the analysis conducted as part of the IDELA survey, it appears that children from a family in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions seem to have a cumulative delay in the acquisition of mathematical, reading and writing, physical and motor, and socio-emotional skills already at 4 years old. Even with the awareness that in the first six years of a child's life individual development can follow many different trajectories, the IDELA survey nevertheless reveals certain trends that highlight inequalities related to the family's socio-economic conditions beginning in early childhood.

⁶⁰ All of the differences reported in the text are statistically significant at a value of p equal to or less than 0.001 (or rather the probability that the difference is zero or less than 0.1% and therefore to be considered extremely significant). Only the results of the variables that proved significant to the multivariate analyses have been reported.

It is important to note that among the families involved in the study, the parents with less formal education tended to be unemployed or work manual jobs. The inequalities associated with the parents' level of education, as found by the IDELA survey, can therefore be attributed to a reduced capacity for economic investment, as well as a lower level in the quality of time parents (whose energy is primarily focused on ensuring the basic subsistence of the family) spend with their children. Welfare and initiatives that provide parental support could play a fundamental role in reducing these kinds of inequalities.

If certain specific questions are analysed in the cognitive-mathematic and reading and writing categories, rather pronounced differences emerge in relation to the amount of numbers and letters identified by children. In figures 20 and 21 we see that the percentage of children who do not identify any number is greater for those with at least one parent with no formal education or with only an elementary/middle school education, 47.4% as compared to 29% for children with at least one parent who has a medium to high level of formal education (high school or university). In reading the difference is 67.6% to 50.7%, while the identification of 6-10 numbers was significantly lower (11.7% vs. 25.3%) as was that of letters (3.7% vs. 8.2%). Meanwhile, the gap in the identification of 11-20 numbers or letters is approximately 4pp. Children with parents with a medium-high level of formal education recognise, already at 4 years old, twice the amount of numbers and letters, as compared to their peers who come from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

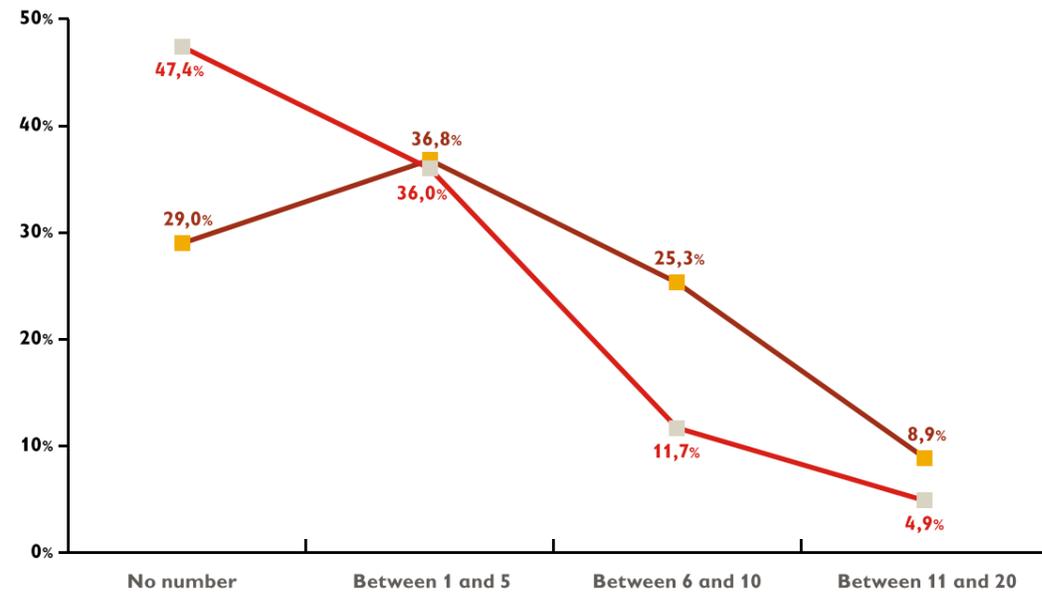


Fig.20: numbers identified by children (%) according to parents' formal education.

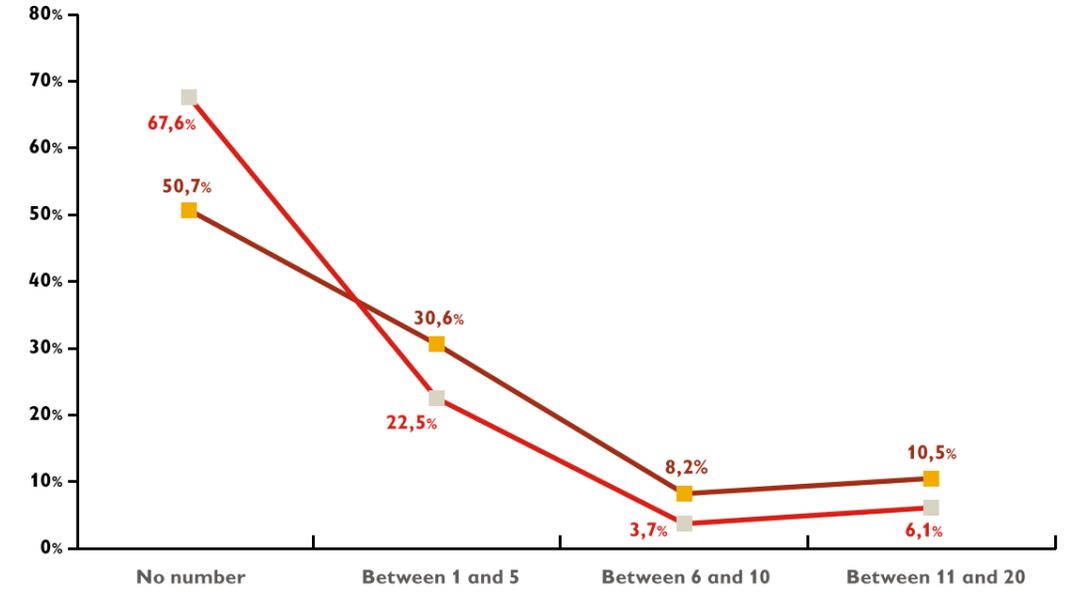


Fig.21: letters identified by children (%) according to parents' formal education.

If we turn our attention to the parents' employment and focus specifically on the mother's job, the correlation between type of work and no work (which also includes unpaid housework) is very strong. Specifically, children whose mothers do not work respond appropriately to 38.4% and 43.1%, respectively, of the IDELA survey questions. A percentage that is significantly lower as compared to those children whose mothers work a manual job, 48%; an office job, 51%; or an upper level job (manager, entrepreneur, or freelance professional), 54.9%. Very similar trends were found in each of the IDELA categories (Fig. 22).

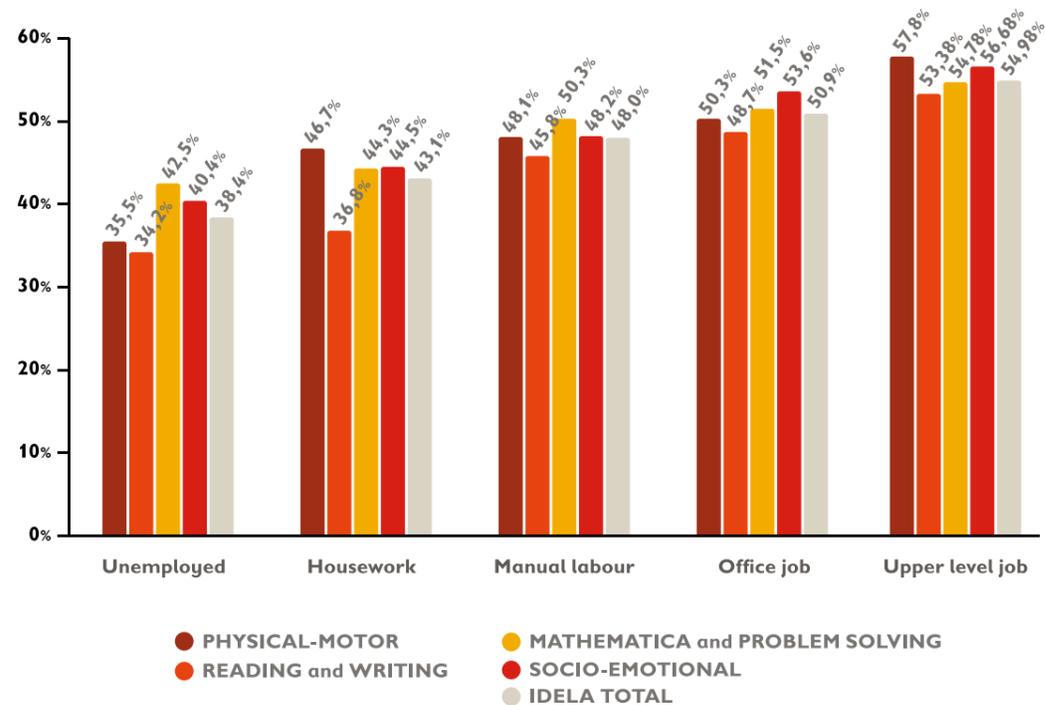


Fig.22: IDELA appropriate responses (%) according to mother's type of work.

Very similar results were found in several studies mentioned in the introductory sections and illustrate that female employment in no way constitutes a risk factor in the acquisition of skills by very young children⁶¹. This is because it is the quality of the parent's time (the second parent's as well), intended as the ability to structure the parent's relationship with the child, focusing it on early learning, more than the amount of time in and of itself, that has a positive influence on a child's development⁶².

Finally, from the analyses conducted, significant differences emerged with respect to gender and parents' country of birth. In fact, the difference in appropriate answers provided during the IDELA survey was 3pp more for girls. In particular, girls surpassed boys by more than 10pp in the motor and socio-emotional categories, while they were equivalent in mathematics and reading. This data is particularly important if examined alongside the results of other studies which focus on adolescent skills. Consider, for example, the PISA study, which measures skills at 15 years old, in which boys scored 20 points higher than girls in mathematics.

⁶¹ It is important to note that there is a strong correlation between the type of job the mothers in this sample group work, and the level of their formal education. For example, most of the mothers who take care of the home and family, or who are unemployed, tend to have only an elementary or middle school education. Furthermore, the correlation between the % of appropriate answers and the size of the household was found to be meaningful (smaller families, with at most two children; and large families, with at least three children), but the difference was very limited, less than 5pp. Meanwhile, differences regarding the parents' marital status were not found to be significant due to the sample's low variability (more than 90% of the parents were married or lived together).

Despite the fact that it is difficult to compare two methodologically different studies, conducted at different times in a child's life, these findings suggest that gender inequalities in the learning of scientific disciplines begin to form during the period of compulsory education, or even sooner, thus cancelling out the "learning advantage" that the girls had in other areas of evaluation. In any case, the differences tend to intensify over time, further confirming the need to prevent the propagation of gender stereotypes within the academic context and to promote targeted programs aimed at overcoming this gap, as well as to encourage young women to enter scientific programs of study and professions. Meanwhile, the negative gap for children with foreign-born parents is 5pp in each of the IDELA survey categories, except for physical-motor development in which significant differences are not found. The results in mathematics and reading for adolescents with parents who were not born in Italy (first generation immigrants) are significantly lower as compared to those whose parent are second generation immigrants and other non-migrant 15 year olds⁶³. This aspect highlights the importance of investing in the acquisition of the second language (L2) starting in early childhood.

Childcare Centres Help to Reduce Inequalities

Early childhood education and care are considered to be fundamental in reducing educational poverty in the first years of life. Analyses conducted at the international level and in Italy have demonstrated how the benefits of attending a childcare centre can be particularly significant for children growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged families.

In general, the studies conducted on the topic tend to analyse the effects of attending early childhood education and care programs after many years, in primary school, secondary school, and even as adults. The IDELA survey, on the other hand, makes it possible to observe the effects of these programs on the level of children's skills and development in the period immediately after, when they are in preschool. Furthermore, having constructed the survey on a group made up not only (as is often the case) of children who have, or have not, attended a childcare centre, but also other, less structured services (like integrative programs or early preschool entry), can help to provide a more complete picture of the impact that these programs have on educational poverty in the first years of life.

An initial and important finding is the presence of significant differences in the results of the IDELA survey with respect to attendance at a childcare centre⁶⁴. Children who attended a childcare centre (full or part-time, in traditional childcare, micro-childcare, company childcare, or early-entry Spring sections) appropriately completed 46.9% of the proposed exercises, as compared to 41.6% for those who attended integrative services (child-parent centres, play spaces, home education services, etc.), who entered preschool early, or who remained at home and therefore did not take advantage of any service.

⁶² See Emilia Del Bono, Marco Francesconi, Yvonne Kelly, and Amanda Sacker. *Early Maternal Time Investment and Early Child Outcomes*. Univ Essex Discussion Paper Series, 2014.

⁶³ Elaboration of data by Save the Children - Source OECD PISA, 2015. The minimum skills are equal to a score of 420.07 in mathematics and 407.47 in reading. For higher skill levels, please use as reference a score greater than 607 in mathematics and 626 in reading.

⁶⁴ All of the differences reported in this paragraph are statistically significant at a value of p equal to or less than 0.01.

With regard to the mathematical and socio-emotional areas, the gap is approximately 4.5pp, in the physical-motor area it is 7pp, and in reading it is 6pp..

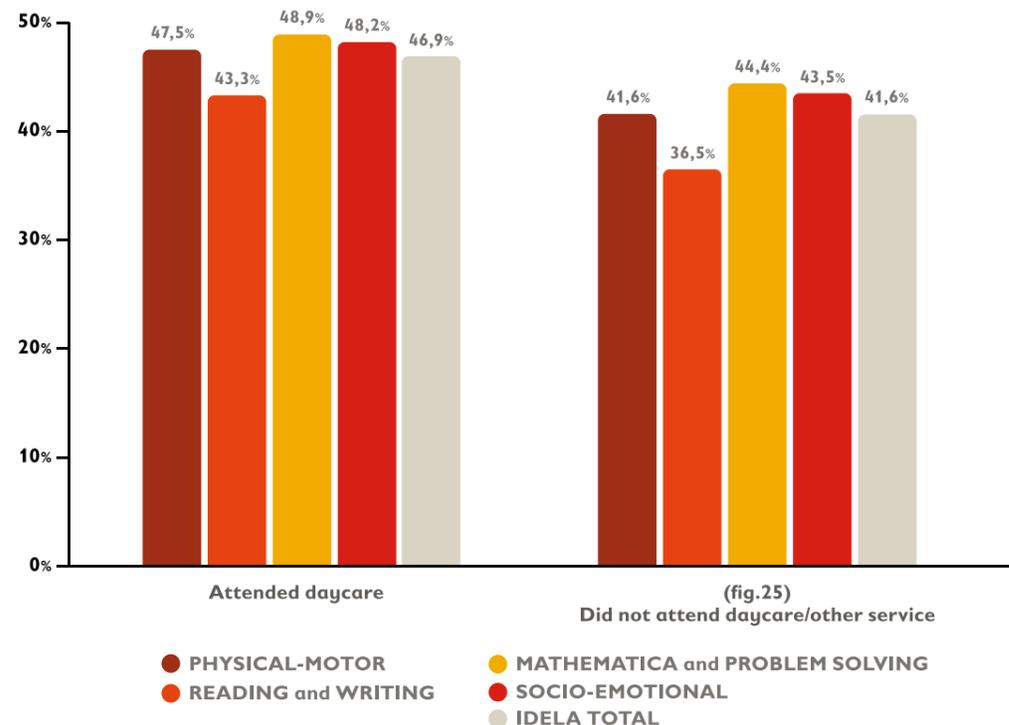


Fig.23: IDELA appropriate answers (%) according to childcare centre attendance.

Of particular significance is the relationship between childcare centre attendance and the results of the IDELA survey for children in socio-economically disadvantaged families⁶⁵. Among these, those who attended a childcare centre answered 44% of the IDELA survey's questions appropriately. The percentage falls to 38% for those children who attended an integrative service, entered preschool early, or did not take advantage of any service (Fig. 24)⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Children with at least one parent with a low level of formal education (no degree, diploma, or certificate). Classification of the socio-economic groups is generally the result of a multi-dimensional approach. Meaning that various aspects are considered: financial (income, state of employment), cultural (formal education), and social (citizenship, size of the household, type of city or town of residence) (ref. ISTAT, Definition of social groups and their description, 2017). The limited size of the sample group did not allow for the creation of multi-dimensional socio-economic categories. The choice of using only formal education as a proxy variable of the families' socio-economic level was made in relation to the characteristics of the sample group itself, but also with respect to international literature which emphasises the extent to which the parental level of formal education is one of the main predictive factors in a child's development trajectory in the first years of life (for example, ref. Pedro Carneiro, Costas Meghir, and Matthias Parey, 'Maternal Education, Home Environments, and the Development of Children and Adolescents', Journal of the European Economic Association, 2013). It is important to note that there is a strong correlation between level of formal education and the type of job held. 90.3% of those with only an elementary or middle school education work in manual labour, are unemployed, or dedicate their time to unpaid housework.

⁶⁶ No significant differences emerged with respect to the type of childcare centre attended (public, private, or affiliated).

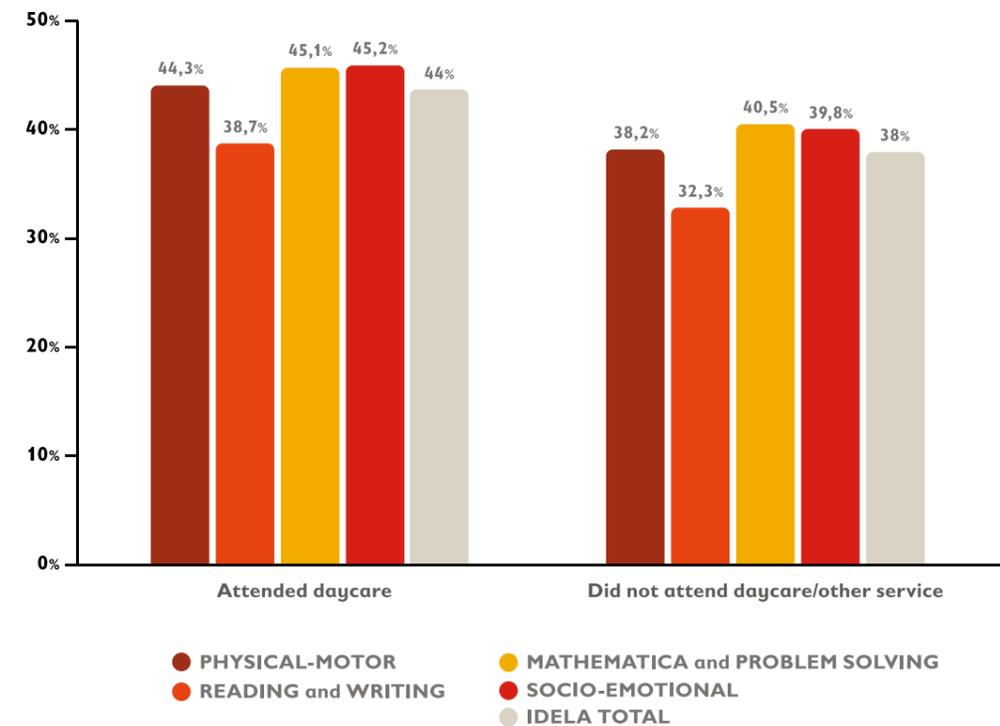


Fig. 24: IDELA appropriate answers (%) according to childcare centre attendance among children from families in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions.

If we analyse, in detail, some of the specific questions regarding cognitive/mathematical development, 44.1% of the children in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions who attended a childcare centre did not identify any number, as compared to 50% of the same children who attended another program or no program. The trajectories are reversed with an increase in the amount of numbers identified (Fig. 25). Very similar dynamics were observed with respect to the identification of letters (Fig. 26).

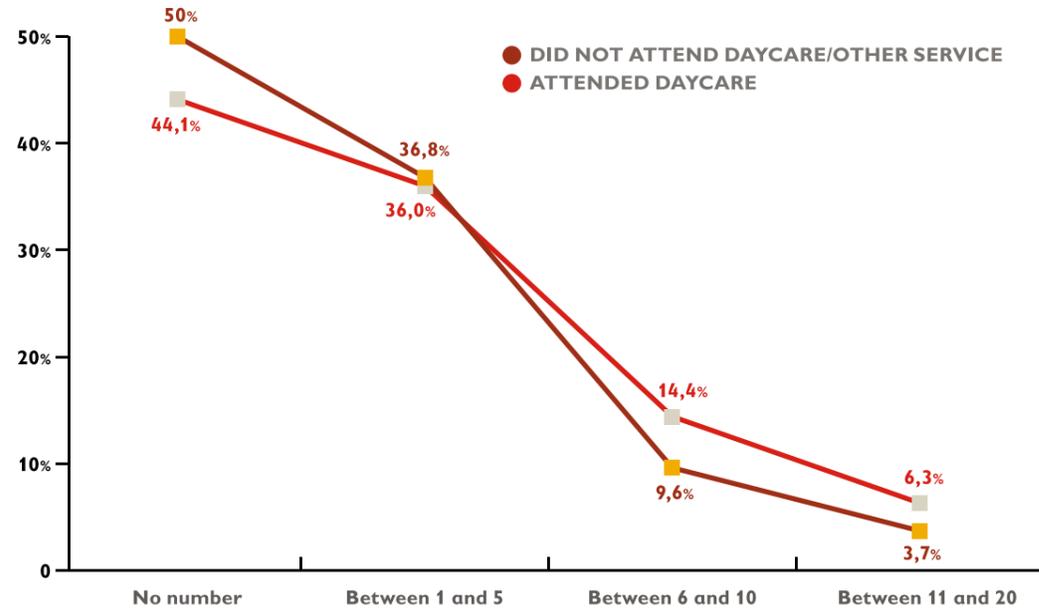


Fig.25: numbers identified by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families according to childcare centre attendance (%).

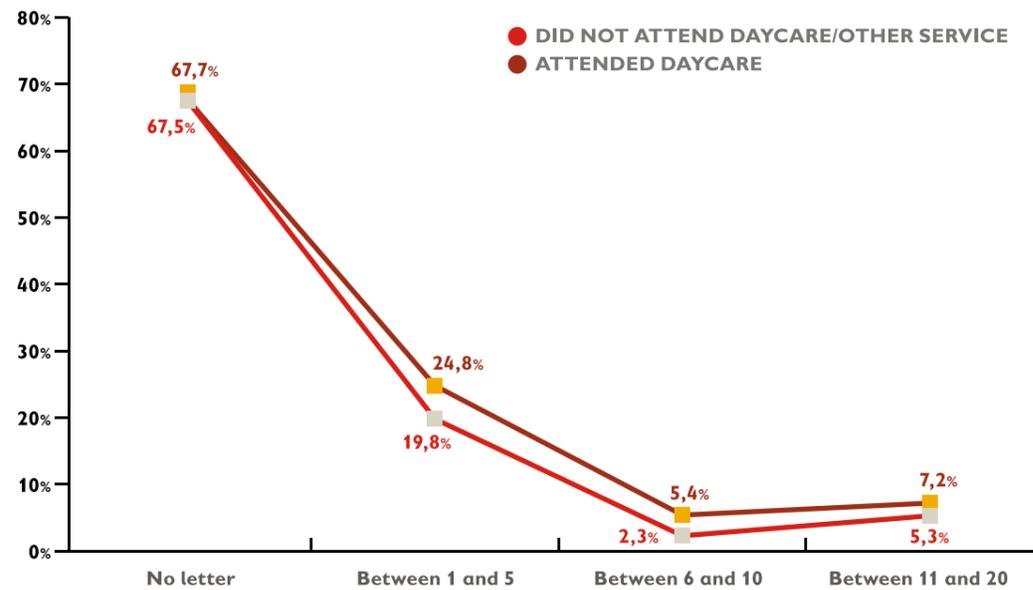


Fig.26: letters identified by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families according to childcare centre attendance (%).

The duration of childcare centre attendance, calculated in terms of the number of months, proved to be a determining factor in the acquisition of skills in each IDELA area, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged children. Fig.27 clearly illustrates the correlation between the duration of attendance and the child's skill development. Children from socio-economically disadvantaged families who attended a childcare centre for 36 months responded appropriately to 50% of the IDELA survey questions, as compared to 42.5% in the case of those who attended for 12 to 24 months, and 38% for those who attended for a year or less. These differences are very pronounced in each of the IDELA areas (especially socio-emotional), while in terms of mathematics only one and two years of attendance proved significant.

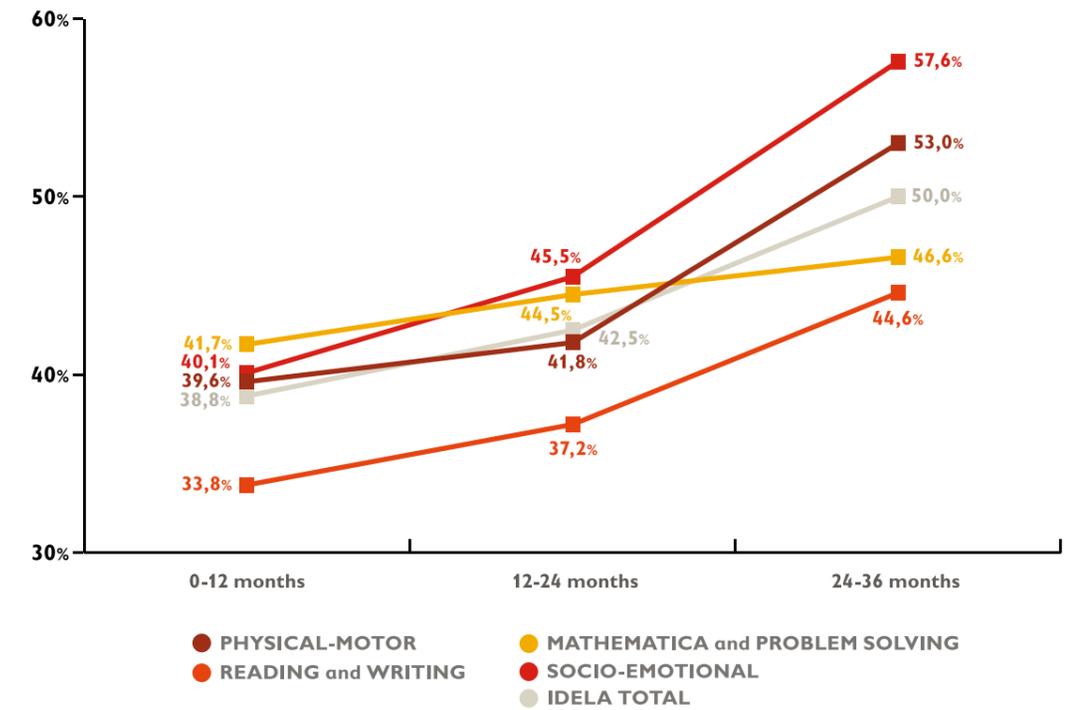


Fig.27: IDELA appropriate answers (%) by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families according to duration of childcare centre attendance (number of months).

It is fundamental to note that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families who attended a childcare centre for an extended period of time not only showed better results in each of the IDELA survey areas as compared to their peers from the same socio-economic background, but were able to reduce the gap with other children (who also attended childcare centres), as illustrated in Fig.28. The differences in physical-motor and socio-emotional development, representing the so-called non-cognitive abilities, were particularly pronounced.

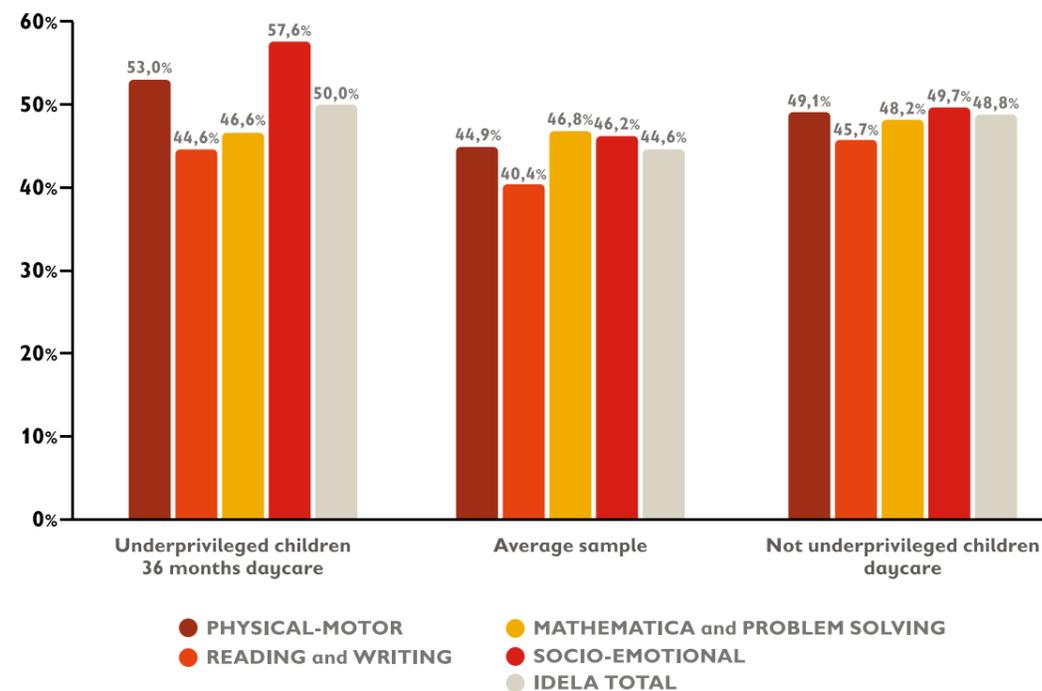


Fig 28: % of appropriate answers in the various developmental categories by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families and not.

These results confirm the effectiveness of participation in structured early childhood education and care programs (full or part-time childcare), in particular the redistributive potential of these programs and the need, therefore, to create a system of universal services that are capable of guaranteeing every child's right to quality early education. The structured nature of the program, in addition to the type of childcare and attendance, also refers to the quality of the infrastructure, the training of the personnel, the inclusiveness of the pedagogical approach, and the integration of parental training programs.

It is important to note that childcare centres alone are unlikely to be able to effectively contrast educational poverty in the first years of life. In fact, analysis shows that the parents' level of formal education represents a more significant predictive factor in a child's development. Therefore, it becomes necessary to promote programs that aim to stimulate early learning practices at home, especially in contexts where childhood services are not present or in which parents choose to not take advantage of them. However, these programs must be accompanied by welfare policies that provide parents with support, not only financially but also in terms of work-family conciliation.

Activities with Parents: Another Key Factor in Reducing Educational Poverty

The positive role that cultural and recreational opportunities play in promoting educational resilience among the most disadvantaged children has been extensively demonstrated through international studies and surveys promoted by Save the Children.

In particular, the results of a study conducted in 2018 in collaboration with the University of Tor Vergata⁶⁷ showed that 15-year-old boys and girls from the lowest socio-economic and cultural quartile (25% of disadvantaged families), but who live in contexts that offer greater opportunities to participate in cultural activities (like going to the theatre, attending concerts, visiting museums or archaeological sites, or participating in sports) or who read a higher number of books at home, are three times more likely to achieve minimum proficiency levels in mathematics and reading, measured through the PISA test conducted on 15-year-old students⁶⁸.

Through the IDELA survey, Save the Children sought to understand if these same dynamics already manifest themselves in early childhood. To this end, data was collected regarding the time that parents spend engaging in a series of activities outside of the academic context with their children, like: reading children's books, sharing musical experiences (for example singing, listening to music, using musical instruments or objects that produce sound), going to the theatre or to concerts, or engaging in recreational activities outdoors.

The analysis conducted shows that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, but who read children's books at least once/twice a week with their parents, answer 42% of the questions appropriately, as compared to 36.8% of those who almost never read a book with their parents or who do so only a few times a year. These differences turn out to be significant in every category of the IDELA survey. In reading and writing, and in mathematics and problem solving, the gap is approximately 5pp; in physical-motor and socio-emotional development it is more than 7pp and 8pp (Fig. 29).

⁶⁷ The analysis conducted by the University of Rome Tor Vergata measures the probability of disadvantaged 15-year-old boys and girls (therefore from the lowest socio-economic and cultural quartile) to be resilient, or rather to achieve the minimum level of educational proficiency, measured through the PISA test in mathematics and reading. In terms of the data regarding cultural and recreational activities conducted by the children, the ISTAT survey, Aspects of Daily Life, was used.

⁶⁸ This finding refers to 2012.

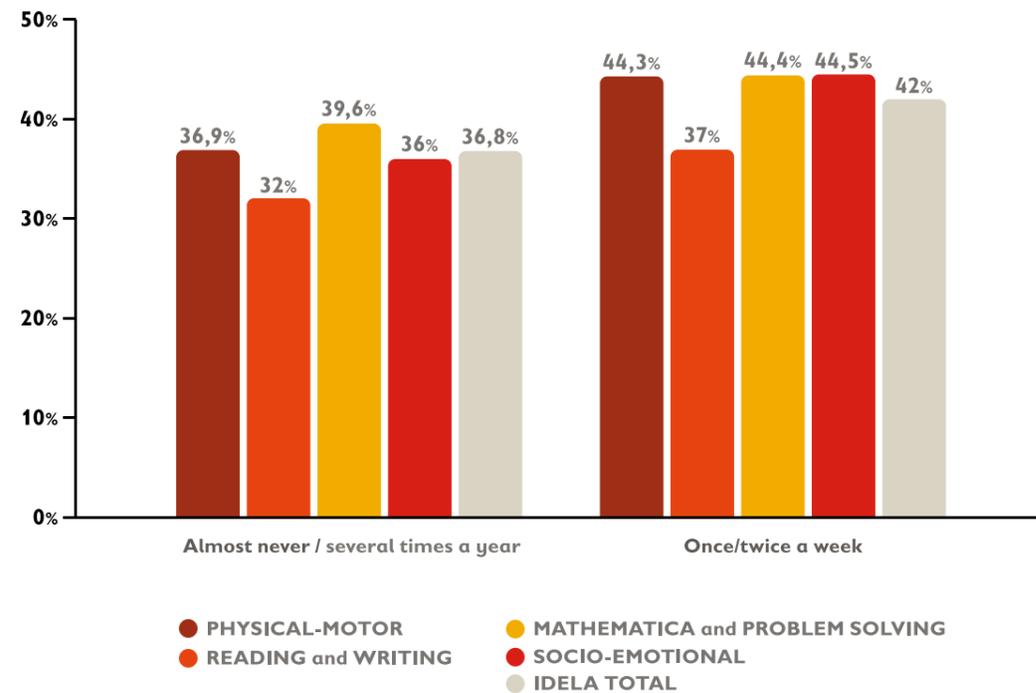


Fig.29: IDELA appropriate answers (%) by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families in relation to how often their parents read children's books with them.

Very similar results are observed with respect to engaging in recreational outdoor activity with their parents at least a couple of times a week: 42% of appropriate answers as compared to 36.8% for children who almost never do so or do so only a few times a year. Differences are present in each of the IDELA categories: physical-motor, 41.6% vs. 31.1%; mathematics 42.4% vs. 37.5%; reading and writing, 35.3% vs. 27.7%; and socio-emotional 41.1% vs. 31.1 (Fig.30)⁶⁹.

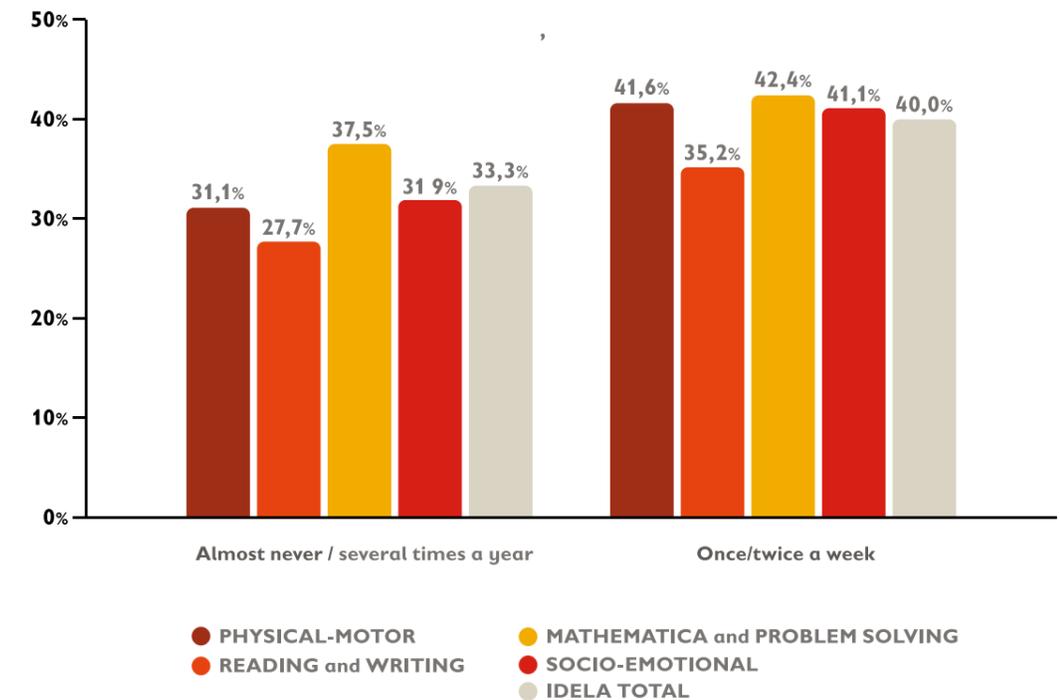


Fig.30: IDELA appropriate answers (%) by children from socio-economically disadvantaged families in relation to how often they engage in physical activity outdoors with their parents.

It is interesting to note the “holistic” effect of engaging in cultural and physical activities. In fact, among children from families in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, reading books is associated not only with better results in skills that are more directly related, like reading and writing, but also in areas like mathematics and physical-motor and socio-emotional development. Likewise, the effects of engaging in physical activity outdoors with parents does not merely affect physical-motor development, but also cognitive and, above all, non-cognitive skills. Generally speaking, parents’ engagement in cultural activities (in particular shared reading) and physical activities with their children reflects a willingness on their part to structure and use the time that they have available to spend with their children to encourage early learning. This fact emphasises the need to launch programs aimed at stimulating educational practices at home, not only integrating them within childhood services (inserting parental training and interaction with parents into the services’ pedagogical program), but also conducting them outside of the services themselves.

⁶⁹ All of the differences reported in this paragraph are statistically significant at a value of p equal to or less than 0.05. Meanwhile, significant differences were not found with regard to musical activity (both musical experiences and attending concerts or theatre), but this is probably due to the nature of the question which does not specify the kind of experience or the quality of the same.

The Approaches Promoted by Save the Children in Programs That Support Early Childhood Development Around the World

Given the extensive experience it has acquired in providing early childhood education and care to children in various countries around the world, Save the Children has developed two approaches that make use of methods and tools which have proven to be effective when working with an age range as delicate as that from birth to 3 years old (Building Brains Common Approach) and from 3 to 6 years old (Ready to Learn Common Approach). These approaches were developed by integrating what was learned from past experiences in order to address the specific problems or needs of children in this age range. They can be adapted and replicated in various countries and contexts, including emerging ones.

Up to the child's third birthday, Save the Children works primarily to provide adequate support to parents, or legal guardians, and to educators (*caregivers*). These last in particular take on a key role in defining and creating an environment that is suitable and stimulating for children's cerebral and cognitive development and in helping these children to take their first steps in life. To this end, individual meetings are organised and promoted, as are home visits and group projects with all those whose role it is to look after and care for children, in order to provide them with methods and tools that are useful in stimulating and building positive relationships. The *Building Brains Approach* aims to make the *Nurturing Care Framework*, launched by OMS, operative, providing technical support for the implementation of two of its fundamental components: care and attention and early learning.

Parents and caregivers are therefore trained to acquire skills and behaviours in three main areas:

- Play using everyday objects.
- Early communication through reading books, telling stories, and describing images.
- Care and active communication aimed at developing trust and a sense of attachment, fuelling the child's socio-emotional sphere, and encouraging a respect for and adoption of behaviours capable of building empathy and confidence.

The implementation of the Building Brains Common Approach requires multi-sector initiatives related to health and nutrition, protection, and education as well as a strong collaboration between the various ministries involved.

In pre-primary school age, from 3 to 6 years old, Save the Children works to ensure that all children develop the basic skills which permit them to begin primary school "Ready to Learn". The approach focuses on providing support and training to parents and educators (in both preschools and in community centres), by promoting the use of materials (including everyday objects) and educational recreational activities to stimulate the development of specific reading and calculation skills like, for example: language and listening, book discovery, counting, classification, geometry, measuring, and comparison. The approach requires that this learning take place through play and can be implemented in two main areas:

- In the formal context of preschools in which the adoption of a packet of 100 recreational activities to be used within the academic program is promoted.
- In family and community contexts, with particular attention paid to children who do not have access to pre-primary school services. In this case a strong involvement on the part of parents and caregivers, who receive training in a series of simple activities that can be performed at home, is expected.

The informal dimension of the approach is particularly effective in reducing inequalities in access to early childhood education and care. Just think that, worldwide, 50% of children between the ages of 3 and 6 - more than 175 million, do not have access to preschools, and in low-income countries up to 78% of children - approximately 8 in 10 - are excluded⁷⁰. The IDELA tool is useful in helping to orient national policies, update programs, and influence, for example, the development of preschool curricula.

Both of the approaches, the Building Brains Common Approach and the Ready to Learn Common Approach, can be adapted and applied to emerging and developing contexts, with the Building Brains Common Approach implemented in 21 and 20 countries⁷¹ and the Ready to Learn Common Approach implemented in 20⁷².

⁷⁰ A World Ready to Learn. Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education (UNICEF 2019).

⁷¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, El Salvador, Egypt, the Philippines, Guyana, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Rwanda, Thailand, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia

⁷² Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Niger, OPT, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia.

The Child Safeguarding Policy

Save the Children is committed to the application of the *Child Safeguarding Policy*⁷³ aimed at protecting, on a daily basis, all of the children reached by its projects, including those projects organised in collaboration with numerous partners, such as associations, volunteer groups, and more. Furthermore, it is strongly committed to ensuring that every structure in turn, whether public or in the social private sphere, adopt its own safeguarding policy. Specifically when it comes to early childhood education and care, the primary objective of the *Child Safeguarding Policy* is to prevent and minimise the risk of inappropriate behaviour that may infringe on a child's rights, first of all in terms of protecting children within childcare centres. This system is based on current legislative regulations (municipal, national, and international) and on procedures that are already mandatory in terms of the safeguard of children's rights, valorising them and ensuring that they are unambiguous and accessible to all of the adults who are a part of the educational community. Save the Children therefore promotes the adoption of this policy in childcare centres, as a binding agreement with the community, which requires that all personnel involved are adequately trained on the guidelines and on the proposed educational approach.

The *Training Manual for the Safeguarding of Children from Inappropriate Behaviour, Abuse, and Maltreatment*⁷⁴, published in 2017, was conceived as a tool with which to support the realisation of training courses on the safeguarding of children's rights.

⁷³ Save the Children elaborated the *Child Safeguarding Policy*, summarised in the *Adulti a posto [Adults in Their Place]* document, a system which imposes specific criteria on the selection of personnel, the adoption of a behavioural code, and a system for reporting and responding to suspected abuse which is known to all of the relevant adults and to all of the children who benefit from its activities

⁷⁴ The manual was elaborated by the City of Rome's Municipality XIII for its own childcare centres, thanks to the contribution of Save the Children Italy and the E.D.I. (Educazione ai Diritti dell'Infanzia e dell'Adolescenza [Education on Childhood and Adolescent Rights]) non-profit cooperative. For more information please visit <https://www.savethechildren.it/cosa-facciamo/pubblicazioni/adulti-posto-un-sistema-di-tutela-di-bambine-bambini-e-adolescenti>.

Save the Children Italy's 0-6 programs

Through its specific programs dedicated to mother and child and which target children aged 0-6, in effect across the country, Save the Children Italy seeks to provide support in some of the most critical situations, starting in the womb, in order to be able to safeguard children's rights and promote their well-being, with the objective of leaving no child behind. The program Fiocchi in Ospedale [Ribbons in Hospital] is dedicated to new-borns and their families and includes access to a low-threshold service for listening, orientation, accompaniment, and assumption of care. It targets future and new parents, in particular those in a socio-economically or psychologically vulnerable position. Today Fiocchi in Ospedale is present in twelve hospitals (in the cities of Milan, Turin, Rome, Naples, Bari, Sassari, Pescara, and Ancona).

This initiative is accompanied by a program, offered by Spazio Mamme, dedicated to parents and children up to 6 years old which provides support to adults and experiments with models that activate regional communities as well as services that provide care, education, cultural opportunities, and social support. There are currently nine Spazi Mamme active in the cities of Turin, Milan, Rome, Naples, San Luca (RC), Bari, Brindisi, and Palermo. These are accompanied by four parenthood programs organised within the Punti Luce of Rome, Genoa, Catania, and Sassari.

Since 2016 Save the Children has been a partner of the NEST (Nido, Educazione, Servizi, Territorio [Childcare, Education, Services, Territory]) project selected by the "Con i Bambini" social enterprise as part of its mission to contrast educational poverty in childhood. NEST, with its four regional centres, promotes a range of services that incorporate educational activities for parents and children, a recreational area for children from 0-3 years old, parental support activities, and family services.

In 2019, on occasion of its one hundredth anniversary, Save the Children launched the Per Mano project, the objective of which is to take responsibility for 1000 children born in Italy in extremely disadvantaged conditions between May 2019 and March 2020. Each child will be supported and accompanied towards a stable system of protection and progressive levels of working and familial autonomy. For 200 cases in particularly fragile physical, economic, or psycho-social conditions, a personalised program will also be created, and shared with the parents (or other responsible adult) for a duration of 18 months, which will be characterised by a greater intensity of support-oriented initiatives and by a systematic effort to strengthen the parents' skills.



CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The IDELA pilot study, conducted by Save the Children in collaboration with the Centre for Child Health and Development, involved 653 children, and the same number of families, from the cities of Brindisi, Macerata, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Prato, Reggio Emilia, Salerno, Rome, and Trieste.

The results of the IDELA survey confirm that which numerous international studies have shown: that inequalities begin to develop in the very first years of life and well before the start of compulsory schooling⁷⁵. Among the children who participated in the survey, those from family contexts characterised by socio-economic disadvantage had greater difficulty in responding appropriately to the questions of the IDELA survey in each of the categories of childhood development. Of particular significance is the impact of the parents' level of formal education (especially that of the mother): at approximately 4 years old, children of parents with only an elementary or middle school education or no formal education at all recognise half as many letters and numbers as compared to other children of the same age whose parents have a high school diploma or university degree. Their answers are less satisfactory in the physical-motor and socio-emotional developmental areas as well. Level of formal education, therefore, rather accurately reflects, aside from obvious exceptions, the socio-economic status of the parents.

The girls who participated in the IDELA survey generally performed at a higher level than the boys, except in the mathematical and reading categories, in which performance was equal. This data, if examined in relation to other observations regarding skills in adolescence (for example the PISA tests⁷⁶), which reveals a sizeable gap, for example between boys and girls in mathematics, favouring the former (while girls show better results in reading), could imply that these gender inequalities begin forming in the years following early childhood, or even earlier, strengthened by the negative stereotypes regarding girls and mathematics and the positive stereotypes regarding reading and, in general, the other components of academic performance. Meanwhile, a negative gap is observed for children of parents of foreign background who only recently emigrated, due most likely to linguistic difficulties, except in the area of physical-motor development.

The inequalities that appear in the very first years of life are not inevitable.

As neuroscience shows us, the neuro-biological foundation for cognitive and non-cognitive skills are particularly sensitive to the opportunities provided by the environment in which a child lives during his or her first phase of life⁷⁷.

Among these opportunities, the quality of the relationship and interactions between children and their parents or caregiver holds particular weight, as does attendance at a high quality educational structure. Our study also confirmed the latter to be an element that significantly protects against educational poverty. The children from families with little formal education and in unfavourable work situations, but who attended a childcare centre for at least one year, had a greater likelihood of responding appropriately to the questions of the IDELA survey in all areas of childhood development, as compared to their peers who attended only an integrative service, as well as those who entered preschool early or who did not attend any program at all.

The duration of childcare attendance was particularly important: the more months attended, the better the results in the IDELA survey. Children from families in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, who attended a childcare centre for a period of 24 to 36 months, were able to bridge the gap with other children (also those who attended a childcare centre themselves), and in some cases, in terms of physical-motor and socio-emotional development, to surpass them. These results confirm the findings of both national and international studies⁷⁸.

Another finding that clearly emerges from the survey and that is rich in theoretical and practical implications, is the protective effect of reading: children whose parents read to them regularly respond appropriately to a higher percentage of questions, also if one excludes the effect of the parents' level of formal education and state of employment. The findings, which confirm the results of international studies, are doubly significant: on the one hand it indicates the independent effect of a practice that can be transferred to the family, all families, even in the lack, absence, or non-attendance of educational structures; and on the other hand, as with the effects of childcare attendance, the benefits are greater for children from socio-economically disadvantaged households⁷⁹. Therefore, an effort must be made to ensure early access to high quality educational services and to provide families the opportunity, right from the very first months, to spend quality time with their children, engaging in activities that are demonstrably effective in fostering early development of skills. These two actions are synergistic to one another⁸⁰.

⁷⁵ Flavio Cunha and James Heckman, *Investing in our Young People*, 2006; James Heckman, *The case for investing in disadvantaged young children*, 2008.

⁷⁶ Ref. *Rapporto Save the Children, Illuminiamo il Futuro [Save the Children Report, Illuminating the Future]* 2018.

⁷⁷ Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips (ed.), *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, 2000.

⁷⁸ James Heckman, *The Case for Investing in Disadvantaged Young Children*, 2008; James Heckman and Dimitri V. Masterov, "The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children", *Review of Agricultural Economics*, 2007; OECD *Pisa in Focus: Does Participation in Pre-Primary Education Translate into Better Learning Outcomes at School?*, 2011.

⁷⁹ James Law et al., *Parent-Child Reading to Improve Language Development and School Readiness: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, Newcastle University, 2018; Alexander Manu et al., "The Association Between Availability of Children's Books and the Literacy-Numeracy Skills of Children Aged 36 to 59 Months: a Secondary Analysis of the UNICEF Multiple-Indicator Cluster Surveys Covering 35 countries". *Journal of Global Health*, 2019.

⁸⁰ Pia Britto et al. "Nurturing Care: Promoting Early Childhood Development", *The Lancet*, 2016; Maureen Black et al. "Early Childhood Development Coming of Age: Science Through the Life Course", *The Lancet*, 2016; Anduena Alushaj and Giorgio Tamburlini, "Tempo materno, tempo di nido e sviluppo del bambino: le evidenze" [*Time at Home, Time in Childcare, and Child Development*], *Medico e Bambino*, 2018.

Despite the fact that the trends which emerged from the survey are in line with the results of international studies, it is important to note that the IDELA survey is an initial exploratory pilot experiment, the results of which, due to its non-random characteristics and the limited size of the sample group, cannot necessarily be considered representative of the entire population of children who live in Italy and attend childhood programs there. Various issues emerged during the survey, both in relation to the tool used and the methods with which the survey was offered. In particular, the research team dedicated time and effort to explaining, to the parents and teachers involved, the opportunity of conducting the survey directly with the children, with the objective of evaluating public policies that benefit childhood.

To this end, it must be noted that the IDELA tool was constructed and created in order to ensure non-invasive administration. The questions (please see the annex with several examples), are organised and posed as games and the children have the right to abandon the survey at any time.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the IDELA tool is administered to children individually, the objective is to observe the emergence of educational poverty and, more in general, inequalities that exist among groups of children in early childhood so that policies and programs may be oriented in such a way as to effectively support development. It must also be emphasised that this goal is currently a priority of international agencies which deal with childhood, education, and development (UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and others still). Effort are currently being made to develop valid tools and methods of assessment, unlike any others in the world, which would make it possible for the members of the United Nations to pursue the Objectives of Sustainable Development (SDGs) and, in particular, Objective 4.2 which states that every child must attend at least one year of pre-primary school education, in order to ensure his or her cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical development in the first years of life⁸¹.

It is believed that the limits of this survey and tool in no way nullify its ability to provide a useful support for the design of public policy and actually highlight the need, also in Italy, for the adoption of survey tools that are capable of describing and analysing childhood development in the pre-primary school period, this in keeping with the recommendations of international agencies.

The IDELA survey revealed how important it is to invest in quality socio-educational services for early childhood in order to reduce educational and developmental inequalities which emerge in the very first years of life. To pursue this objective we must increase the availability of services, reduce the family's financial contribution, and adopt access criteria that also make it possible for the children of parents in particularly disadvantaged conditions (for example both unemployed or indigent) to take advantage of the service.

⁸¹ See *Global Scale for Early Development (GSED)*, <https://earlychildhoodmatters.online/2019/the-global-scale-for-early-development-gsed/>

Universal access to the range of early childhood education and care available, alongside an effort with communities to promote awareness of the importance of early childhood attendance at quality educational programs, guarantees all children the right to development, thus representing an effective way to contrast the “Matthew Effect” which leads those with the greatest need to take much less advantage of these services.

Childcare centres being equal, the quality of the time spent with parents is a fundamental factor in effectively combatting educational poverty in the first years of life. The study found that parents' level of education is an initial predictive factor in identifying educational and developmental inequalities in the first years of life. But it was also observed that children from socio-economically disadvantaged families who, for example, read children's books or engage in physical activities outdoors with their parents, show better results in each of the developmental areas measured by the IDELA tool. It is therefore essential to promote parental support programs and, in particular, effective practices for childhood development, like shared reading⁸², as part of a family's routine.

These programs not only can represent an important opportunity for the child's development as well as the development of the relationship between the child and his or her parents/caregivers, but are also able to promote awareness of the importance of investing in early childhood education and care and, therefore, the “demand” for childcare to be a structured educational experience.

In fact, we must remember that it is also (if not primarily, as some of the data in the survey seems to indicate) the demand for these services, and not only their availability, that is lacking. These programs must, therefore, be integrated within the practice of all childhood education services – health related and social – and promoted for all families, in particular those in disadvantaged socio-economic conditions. Ensuring that parents have the tools with which to structure the relationship with their child, in such a way as to contribute to the development of his or her skills and abilities, means guaranteeing the availability of time as well as cultural and financial resources, something which requires policies that facilitate work-family conciliation, income support for poor families, and education throughout life, as well as an investment in cultural, athletic, and musical opportunities, especially in geographic areas where these opportunities are particularly lacking.

⁸² James Law et al., *Parent-Child Reading to Improve Language Development and School Readiness: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, Newcastle University, 2018; Pia Britto et al. 'Nurturing Care: Promoting Early Childhood Development', *The Lancet*, 2016; Giorgio Tamburlini, 'Lettura condivisa in famiglia e sviluppo del cervello nel bambino' [Shared Reading in the Family and Brain Development in Children], *Medico e Bambino*, 2015; Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*, 2015. To this end, please see “Nati per Leggere” [Born to Read], a national program that promotes reading, targeting families with pre-primary school age children, promoted by the Associazione Culturale Pediatri, the Associazione Italiana Biblioteche, and CSB Center for Children's Health non-profit organisation. Cfr. <http://www.natiperleggere.it/>

Based on the results of the study conducted, and also considering the data that has emerged from studies and analyses carried out in Italy and abroad by Save the Children, **the Organisation recommends that the Ministry of Education, University, and Research and other competent institutions** at the regional and national level:

- Ensure implementation of the “integrated system for education of children aged 0-6 years” reform, in particular guaranteeing:
 - that the role of coordinator be entrusted to the Ministry of Education, University, and Research, which has the task of addressing, coordinating, and promoting the integrated system for children aged 0-6 years, ensuring the effective implementation, as soon as possible, of a specifically-created management structure, the launch of a system which monitors the pedagogical and organisational quality of the integrated system, and the introduction of an articulated governance model that is capable of keeping a dialogue open between the various institutional entities that operate in the 0-6 age-range system, thus exploiting the specificities and differences of the various regional communities;
 - the coordination of investments in early childhood through the integrated management structure, in collaboration with the regions and local institutions, so that the ambitious objective of 33% coverage cited in the reform’s implementing decree may be met. It is fundamental that these investments, also those made by other associations (ex. PAC-Piano Azione e Coesione and FEAD-Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) especially in those regions where the network of services is less developed, be dedicated to providing technical assistance to local institutions as well, in order to increase their capacity for programming and implementation;
 - the integrated planning of services for children aged 0-3 and 3-6 years, strengthening the overall selection of children’s programs for children under 3 years of age, as specified in the monitoring report by the Istituto degli Innocenti⁸³, optimising investments and renovating a portion of the preschool spaces which will not be used to capacity due to the expected decrease in the number of children in that age range (3-5 years);
 - the uniformity of the service in the national territory, not only in terms of availability and quality (increasing the prevalence of socio-pedagogical approaches that also incorporate parental support), but also in terms of accessibility, thus indicating, through specific guidelines established with local institutions, standardised admission criteria based on equal and uniform parameters;
 - education services that are capable of promoting and supporting parental skills and developing children’s centres, defined by the reform as “places of

⁸³ Istituto degli Innocenti, *Rapporto di monitoraggio del Piano di sviluppo dei servizi socio-educativi per la prima infanzia [Monitoring Report for the Development Plan of Early Childhood Socio-Educational Services]*, 2018, <https://www.minori.it/it/Minorilrapporto-di-monitoraggio-del-piano-nidi-al-31-dicembre-2016>

experimentation, research, and innovation that are flexible and open to the region” so that they may become true education hubs in which to launch programs which support parenthood, self-help, professional assistance that promotes health (intended as healthy eating and healthy lifestyle), legal and administrative orientation, consumer education, and combatting and preventing domestic violence;

- the development of an “integrated regional system”, through the adaptation of local regulations to the reform, in particular by complying with the provisions of legislative decree n. 65/2017 which defines the structural, organisational, and qualitative standards of childhood educational services and by allocating specific resources in support of the institution of regional pedagogical systems, where not present.
- Guarantee that early childhood education and care become accessible to all children, recognising their educational significance and the subjective right to them through the modification of their current legal status, from “individually requested service” to “universally accessible service”.
- Strengthen the network of childcare centres, guaranteeing a substantial financial, structural, and formative investment which ensures that the range of services be extended across the country, starting with the most disadvantaged areas, like inner cities and outlying neighbourhoods, ensuring necessary coverage of available spots, satisfactory qualitative standards, and conditions of accessibility that are equal to and compatible with families’ spending capacity.
- Guarantee the harmonisation of investments in early childhood policies and in educational services with the largest portion going to other welfare policies and initiatives to contrast poverty, as well as policies of work-family conciliation, in order to reduce income inequalities between families. In particular, it is necessary to promote women’s employment and gender equality and to extend paid maternity and paternity leave. It is also necessary to:
 - support households that are in greater distress and at risk of social exclusion, ensuring coordination between these measures and those that are potentially part of the personalised programs included in the measures to contrast poverty;
 - harmonise and coordinate existing measures through an organic plan which provides support to parents and mothers, which does not focus on localised or one-time initiatives and which includes multi-year planning that intervenes in various family and work-related dimensions. In particular, this plan would promote structural measures that provide support to parents through targeted investments that respond to needs related to birth and allow for continuity that is compatible with the needs of both private and work life. This plan would also include initiatives aimed at supporting educational practices at home, like reading and participation in recreational and cultural activities, in order to ensure quality time with parents.

- Implement an Italian Agenda that contrasts educational poverty and which includes resources and coordinated initiatives aimed at eliminating early childhood poverty, increasing the quality of scholastic programs for all students starting with childcare, and supporting an increase in the selection of free extra-curricular activities, first of all in areas suffering from greater socio-economic disadvantage. In order to actualise specific urgent educational initiatives aimed at contrasting children's educational poverty in Italy, it is necessary to:

- define measurable parameters and indicators through tools that can be adopted from ISTAT, with the objective of identifying priority areas for the initiatives, based on not only periodic surveys, but also on the integrated use of administrative sources. The identification of areas characterised by educational poverty, also at the sub-municipal level, could represent a profoundly important step in the design of effective policies aimed at responding to different regional situations;
- create a system of resources dedicated to social, educational, and cultural spending and also evaluate the impact and the contribution of the many experiments activated in Italy thanks to the Fund for contrasting the educational poverty of minors⁸⁴ and of the many other initiatives launched locally which contribute to fuelling, at the methodological and policy-making level, the creation of the Agenda. This Agenda will have to operate under a single leadership that encompasses all of the relevant players, signalling the initiation of a large-scale initiative which focuses on the battle against children's educational poverty in all of its forms;
- recover unused public spaces, which could otherwise be put to good use in providing quality extra-curricular activities for families in disadvantaged economic conditions, starting in early childhood, thus guaranteeing participation in informal educational activities to all children who live in the most disadvantaged areas. The Organisation strongly recommends that a mapping of these spaces across the national territory and an action plan aimed at their recovery and use, for the benefit of children and adolescents, be one of the priorities of the Italian agenda to contrast educational poverty;
- pair the universal nature of the services with approaches that promote the principle of compensation in disadvantaged situations. In particular, concentrating additional resources on promoting access to early childhood education and care as well programs that provide quality parental support in geographic areas characterised by below average social and educational indicators, using, as monitoring and evaluation parameters, the level of material and educational poverty of residents. In order, therefore, to measure educational poverty in early childhood, it is essential to develop surveys aimed at understanding the holistic development of children's cognitive skills in their first years of life;

⁸⁴ For more information on the social initiative "Con i Bambini" [With the Children], the objective of which is implementation of the fund's programs for contrasting children's educational poverty, please see <https://www.conibambini.org/contrasto-alla-poverta-educativa-minorile/>

- guarantee that in the context of the Italian government's policies and initiatives for Equal and Sustainable Well-being (BES- Benessere Equo e Sostenibile) and for the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS-Strategia nazionale per lo sviluppo), as well as in the context of the commitments which Italy has assumed as part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particular attention be given to the realisation of objective 4.2 so that children have access to quality education in their first years of life.

Furthermore, we recommend that the **European Commission**:

- Support the financing proposal, within the Multi-financial Framework Perspective for the next seven-year period, from 2021-2027, of the so-called European "Child Guarantee" promoted by the European parliament. The Child Guarantee, the feasibility study of which is about to be concluded by the European Commission, has the objective of contrasting poverty and social exclusion of disadvantaged children in the European Union (with a focus on children from families in precarious economic and housing conditions) by providing free access to - among other things - early childhood care and education, healthcare, adequate nutrition, and suitable housing for all children.

ANNEX

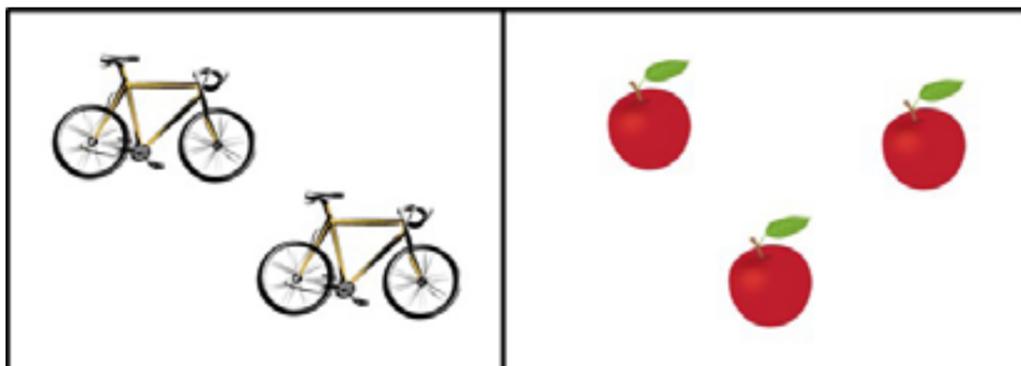
Some examples of questions from each of the IDELA developmental categories

Mathematics and Problem Solving

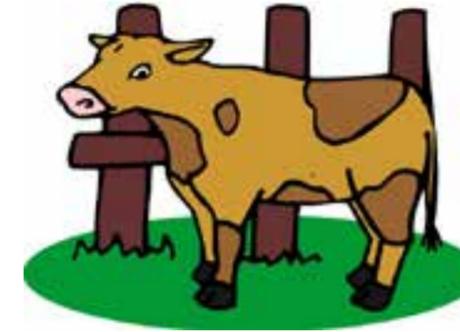
The children were asked to identify the largest amount of numbers from the 20 indicated in the following table.

2	4	10	5	7
9	6	8	3	1
13	17	14	19	16
15	18	11	12	20

With regard to the ability to perform the simple mathematical operations of addition and subtraction, the administrator placed three beans on the table. Then he/she added two, leaving a small space between the two groups of beans, and asked the child to count them and to indicate the total. Therefore, the sum of 3 and 2, 2 and 2, and the subtraction of 1 from 3. For this question, beans were used before anything else.



The children were asked to put together this 4-piece puzzle:



Language and Writing

The children were asked to identify the largest amount of letters from the 20 indicated in the following table.

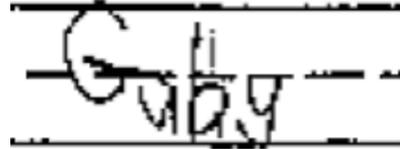
E	T	A	N	I
O	S	H	R	D
L	C	U	M	F
G	W	B	Y	P

The medium level, on the other hand, is evaluated in terms of the child's ability to produce legible letters of a word.

Example from the IDELA manual

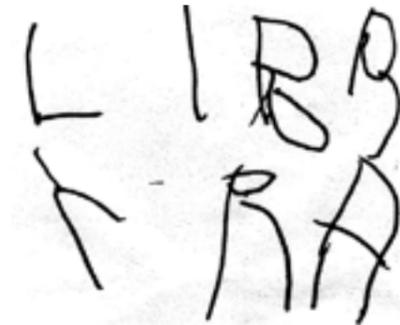
Level 4

Writes his or her name or another word.



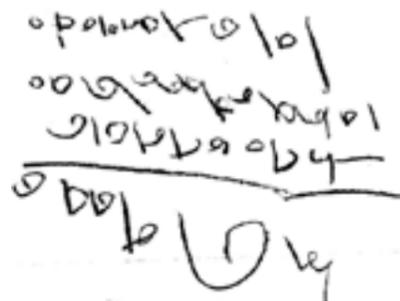
Level 3

Writes some letters.



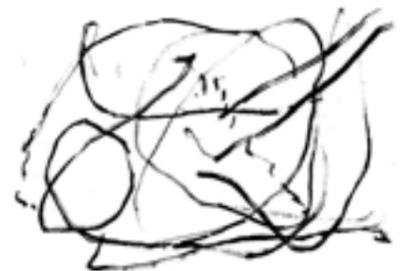
Level 2

Scribbles in an orderly way or draws shapes similar to letters.



Level 1

Draws or scribbles without order.



Level 0

Does not write anything.

Physical-Motor

The children were asked, for example, to hop on one foot ten times in a row, in a straight line, and in one attempt. They were also asked to draw a person in two minutes.

Socio-emotional

The children were shown the following picture of a girl crying and were asked: "How do you think the little girl in the picture feels?", "What would you do to make her feel better?" This activity had to do with the ability to feel empathy, or rather to recognise another person's sadness, as well as to identify an action (or more than one action) that can be performed to make people feel better.



We at Save the Children want every child to have a future.

We work hard every day, with passion, determination, and professionalism, in Italy and around the globe, to give children the opportunity to grow up healthy, to receive an education, and to be protected.

When there is an emergency, we are among the first to arrive and among the last to leave.

We collaborate with regional associations and partners to create a network that helps us to meet the needs of minors, guarantee their rights, and hear their voices.

We considerably improve the lives of millions of children, including those that are the most difficult to reach. For 100 years Save the Children has fought to save at-risk children and to guarantee that they have a future.



Save the Children
100 YEARS

Save the Children Italia Onlus

Piazza San Francesco di Paola 9 - 00184 Rome

tel + 39 06 480 70 01 - fax +39 06 480 70 039

info.italia@savethechildren.org

www.savethechildren.it