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Choice and equal access in early childhood education and care: The case of Germany

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ABSTRACT

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This paper wants to contribute to the political and scientific debate that focuses on the question, how different early childhood education and care (ECEC) system features relate to aspects of parental choice, quality, and equity. In order to do so, it discusses different aspects of ECEC configurations in Europe in general and their implementation in Germany against the background of educational equality. Despite the issue of biased access, within its general framework legislation German ECEC policies seem to allow parents to choose and to ensure equal access to high quality services at the same time. However, a perspective on system characteristics at country level conceals processes at local level that lead to inequalities, such as segregation. Based on data of one example municipality in North Rhine-Westphalia, the paper illustrates such segregation patterns at the local level. As these relate to the type of provider of ECEC services, this is discussed against the background of market mechanisms.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care; Educational Equality; Parental Choice; Segregation

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1. Introduction

It is a widespread presumption that social and cultural inequalities can be tackled by early years’ policies, so one of the policy rationales that inform the provision of services in early childhood in Europe is social justice (see Lloyd & Penn 2014, p. 387f.). Despite this common agenda, systems of early childhood provision vary greatly between European countries. The political and scientific debate that evolves from this variation focuses on the question, how different system features relate to aspects of parental choice, quality, and equity. In this paper I will evaluate the German early childhood education and care (ECEC) system in relation to that question. In order to do so, I will first discuss different aspects of ECEC configurations in general and their implementation in Germany against the background of educational equality. Section 2 describes central characteristics of the German ECEC system that evolve around the principles of federalism and subsidiary, the resulting market structure and its regulation as well as funding of ECEC services in Germany. I will then focus on more recent developments relating to entitlements and coverage in section 3. My interim conclusion is that within its general framework legislation, German ECEC policies seem to allow parents to choose and to ensure equal access to high quality services at the same time. Problems of biased access, however, will be mentioned. Based on the assumption that a perspective on system characteristics at country level conceals processes at local levels that might lead to inequalities, section 4 focuses on segregation in ECEC. Based on data of one example municipality in North Rhine-Westphalia, I will illustrate such segregation patterns at the local level. The paper ends with a short discussion in section 5.

2. Basic ECEC system characteristics in Germany

In their comparative review of 30 European countries, Plantenga and Remery (2009, p. 60) describe two basic models of current day care practises and debates in Europe: They call the first model “the parallel model” where after a period of parental leave parents have the choice between childcare provision or home care allowances. While the authors acknowledge that this model ranks highly from the perspective of parental choice, they voice the concern that it increases differences between families and/or men and women in working and caring patterns. The other model, which the authors call “the sequential model”, intends that after a period of leave most parents opt for childcare services. The debates in Germany concentrate on the optimal design of this sequential model. Currently, parents are entitled to twelve months of paid parental leave, 14 months if the partner takes at least two months. Parental allowances account for about 65% of parents’ previous income with a minimum of 300€ and a maximum
of 1,800€ per month. As soon as the child is one year old, it has the right to enter day care services.\(^1\)

2.1 Federalism and subsidiarity as key principles of ECEC in Germany

The German ECEC system is complex and highly decentralised. Three layers of government intersect and communicate with private providers, allowing great scope for diversity (OECD Country Note for Germany 2004). This is the result of two basic political principles: federalism and subsidiarity (see also Oberhuemer 2015; OECD Country Note for Germany 2006). Federalism characterises Germany as a federal State with three levels of government: federal, the 16 states/city-states, and the municipalities (some 13,000). As the German ECEC system is not part of the education system but belongs to the social welfare system, it mainly lies in the responsibility of the federal states and local authorities. It is therefore what Helen Penn (2014) calls “part unitary” as powers are devolved to regional or local authorities resulting in considerable regional variation in provision. As a consequence, there is not one system of ECEC but 16 or even more different implementations of general framework legislation. The state governments regulate, provide funding, and direct children’s services through the ministry responsible and through the autonomous State Youth Welfare offices. The municipalities plan and ensure the provision of ECEC services but must align to the principle of subsidiarity. Generally speaking, this principle requires societal tasks to be undertaken by the smallest possible social unit. Private organisations are therefore given priority in the provision of services, with local authorities stepping in only when private organisations are unable to provide. Thus, private bodies, called “Freie Träger der Jugendhilfe”, deliver the majority of ECEC services in Germany. They receive public money from the states and municipalities to fulfil their task.

2.2 The childcare market and its regulation in Germany

In 2016, only about one third of ECEC settings were statutory while two thirds were in private organisation, providing state subsidized ECEC alongside state providers. From 1998/99 to 2012/13 there has been an increase in private provision. In terms of child day care centres there has been a plus of more than 7,000 centres (from 28,116 to 35,254), and the change in the number of children in private settings increased by 30.5%. At the same time the number of state providers decreased from 20,087 to 17,230, and the number of children in public instit-

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\(^1\) Home care subsidies, which encourage parents to keep their children out of services, have been in place shortly in Germany but have been declared unconstitutional by the Federal Constitutional Court in 2015. The court decision has not been informed by a substantial perspective but resulted from structural problems relating to responsibilities. Put simply, the subsidies have been implemented at the federal level while responsibilities lie within the states and local authorities.
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tions decreased by 17.5% (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2014, p. 8). Compared to other OECD countries, Germany is ranked as one of the countries with above-average percentage of pupils enrolled in private institutions in pre-primary education (OECD 2016) (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils enrolled in private institutions in 2014 (OECD 2016, p. 302).

In that regard, the German ECEC system can be described as what Lloyd and Penn (2014) call a childcare market where private and state provision co-exist within a mixed economy. These mixed economies are often discussed in terms of increasing social inequalities. According to Lloyd (2013, p. 8), “marketization and privatisation risk deepening, consolidating or widening inequalities of access to ECEC provision and driving qualitative differences between types of provider”. However, while private providers are eligible for generous state subsidies in Germany, state funding is supply led, i.e. the subsidy is given directly to the private provider on a per capita basis and not to the parents themselves. Furthermore, there are licensing and regulatory regimes in place, which makes all providers to abide by quite strict regulatory conditions including curricular frameworks, staff qualifications, and working conditions of employees. Each state sets standards and monitors them by the independent Youth Welfare Office. Standards generally also cover the number of places, opening hours, parent fees, building requirements and maintenance, group sizes, staff-child ratios, and space, both indoor and outdoor (OECD Country Note for Germany 2006; Penn 2014).
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According to Lloyd and Penn (2014), these mechanisms – supply-led funding, equivalent subsidies available to all types of providers, and tight regulations – in combination with parental fee capping enable governments to intervene in childcare markets to prevent undesirable and promote desirable outcomes by establishing a fairly homogeneous, integrated, and universal market system. The authors argue that within these constraints little profit can be made, and the for-profit sector tends to keep away. Following, the share of private-for-profit childcare businesses is very small in Germany, accounting for only about 3% of all settings caring for only about 2% of all children (see figure 2; see table 1 in the appendix for more details).

Figure 2: Structure of the German ECEC market as of March 2016 (Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics 2016)

Most of the private partners are not-for-profit organisations like different Welfare Organisations, the German Red Cross or the Protestant and Catholic Church. The latter two care for more than 30% of all children “making Germany unique, at least within Europe, in the major role that religious bodies play in the provision of ECEC services” (OECD 2006, p. 336). About 4% of all children visit so called “parent initiatives” which are run and organised by parents and account for 8% of the settings in Germany. With 95% most parent initiatives are private non-profit organisations.

In its Starting Strong II report the OECD (2006) describes this kind of market structure as “social markets” (p. 119), where a network of mixed provision leads to choice and innovation while a sense of national and community responsibility for services remains. According to the report, such “public supply-side investment models managed by public authorities brings more uniform quality and superior coverage of childhood populations” (p. 114).
2.3 Funding of ECEC services in Germany

In Germany the federal states and the local authorities cover most of the costs for childcare provision. Funding lies in the responsibility of the states and the municipalities, but private providers and parents bear parts of the costs. Figure 3 shows that expenses have increased steadily over the past fifteen years and that this affects all involved parties. In 2015, expenses totalled 26.9 billion Euros, which are mostly covered by the federal states and local authorities with about 10 billion Euros each. Parents and private providers account for 6.3 billion Euros in total. On average, the providers themselves cover about five percent of all costs but this varies depended on the type of provider. In North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, the local authorities have to allocate 88% of a per capita lump sum to religious bodies and 96% to parent initiatives.

Figure 3: Expenses for ECEC services in Germany in billion Euros (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth 2016, p. 60)

In comparison to other European countries Germany belongs to that group of countries in which parents have a relatively low share in the costs (Penn & Lloyd 2013). However, prices differ by region or even municipality (Plantenga & Remery 2009, p. 48). In 2010, parents had to pay between nine percent and more than 25% of the ECEC system expenses dependent on the state they live in (Bock-Famulla & Lange 2014, p. 22f.). In ten out of the 16 states they have to pay for the services all the time. In three federal states the year before school entry is non-contributory. Berlin does not charge parents three years before the child’s school entry, Rhineland-Palatinate bears all costs when a child turns two years old, and Hamburg does not
collect charges at all for a certain amount of hours. However, the duration in terms of daily hours for which fees are waived in the respective states differs between four hours up to whatever has been agreed to between parents and providers.

Aside from this, parental fee capping is in place everywhere. Parents also pay an income-related fee, but low-income households are charged relatively more in comparison to middle- and high-income households. Compared to the costs of public childcare, informal care arrangements are normally more expensive (Plantenga & Remery 2009, p. 49). It is more expensive to have children under the age of three cared for, and of course the duration of the care arrangement plays a role. Sometimes siblings are given a “discount”. It is not possible to give a full overview of the range of costs that might arise for parents, but an example might be sufficient to give a first impression. In Münster, for example, in 2016 costs ranged from zero if the parents’ yearly income lies under 37,000 Euro up to 748 Euro per month for a full-day care arrangement of a child under three years old. In Hamm, which is only 40 km further south, parents are only freed of all charges if their yearly income lies under 17,500 Euro. However, the most they have to pay are 396 Euro per month. Charges for childcare services may not only vary between federal states and local authorities but also between providers within a local authority as allowances for food, for example, are usually not included in the fee regulations implemented in a local authority and can vary between providers. Additionally, parent initiatives, for instance, are often organised as registered associations and usually charge an additional membership fee.

3. Entitlement and coverage: Recent developments in Germany

Bennett, Gorden, and Edelmann conclude from their 2012 report to the European Commission on ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds that a universal entitlement to publicly funded, affordable ECEC provision from the end of parental leave is a necessary prerequisite to engage disadvantaged children and families in these services. Regarding effective entitlements to early childhood services, they describe good practice in the Nordic countries and Slovenia, where the local municipality has the statutory obligation to provide a place in a local early childhood service. Germany could now be added to this list as there have been fundamental developments in terms of entitlement and coverage especially for younger children.

3.1 Entitlement

In Germany early childhood provision is organised as a universal system, which means that it is available to all children of a certain age group by choice (Fuller 2009; Greene 2006; Lasser
& Fite 2011). Since 1996, children aged three and older have had a legal right to visit a childcare centre until compulsory schooling starts at the age of six. Regarding children who are younger, there have been some significant changes lately. As of the first of August 2013, the entitlement to early childhood provision has been expanded to all children who are one year old. Children who have not yet reached their first birthday have a right to provision if their parents work, are job-seeking, in school or any other kind of training; if they live on benefits; or if it is required from the perspective of the child’s development.

In distinction to the older children’s right, provision for children under the age of three is not based on centre-based day care alone but includes a more non-formal sector of in-home family day care where a qualified and acknowledged childminder takes care of a maximum of five children in his or her own home. Childminders have the option to team up, find themselves a facility, and look after up to 15 children. Childminders are also organised and controlled by a public structure, and they have to be registered and qualified and need to fulfil certain regulatory standards. In Germany there is no explicit distinction between education and care, but one could argue that family day care is more about care while centre-based day care has a stronger focus on education.

On federal level the law does not specify daily hours children are entitled to. Some federal states specify this in their implementation laws, others don’t. Saxony-Anhalt and the Free State of Thuringia guaranty ten hours per day for all children, other regulations – if specified – vary between four and seven hours. In this regard the general question is whether the child gets a half-day or part-time placement or a longer care arrangement. The local authorities are responsible to determine a child’s need. In principle childminders can be “booked” for any number of hours per month in contrast to centre-based childcare where some kind of half- and full-day provision is pre-specified. Here, the concrete models differ between the federal states. For example, parents in North Rhine-Westphalia can choose between 25, 35 or 45 hours per week. Berlin differs between four to five, five to seven, seven to nine or more than nine hours per day. Hamburg and Hesse, for instance, developed different structures depending on the children’s age. In Hesse, children under the age of three can choose between five, five to seven, and more than seven hours per day, older children have the option of six or eight hours per day. Hamburg is more flexible and offers between four and twelve hours with differences of two hours between every level of provision.

Despite these differences on state level the legislative framework that constitutes the right of access to ECEC in Germany is seen as a significant inequality-reducing feature of the
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system (Oberhuemer 2015). The municipalities have made great effort to meet parents demand for day care especially for younger children resulting in increased participation rates.

3.2 Coverage

Plantenga and Remery (2009) discuss the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany in terms of similar achievements and challenges in childcare provision:

“The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany are clearly moving towards a fuller coverage of childcare services. [...] In Germany, during recent years there has been some substantial progress with reference to extending the quantity and quality of subsidised childcare facilities, above all for children younger than 3 years. [...] Nevertheless it is unclear whether these aims will be reached, above all because of the extremely heterogeneous responsibilities and childcare regulations in Germany” (p. 58).

In 2015 95.3% of all children aged three to six participated in the German ECEC system, nearly reaching full coverage. For children under the age of three the respective proportion is 32.9% with major differences between the states. Coverage in this age group ranges from 25.9% in North Rhine-Westphalia to more than fifty percent in the Eastern part of Germany. With 5% only a small proportion is being cared for in family day care services.2

Efforts to expand the system have been enormous over the past years and started before the entitlement for younger children had been in place. In 2005 and 2008 two laws have been passed that promoted the quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of early childhood services answering to parents’ needs. The 2005 law specifies that an additional 230,000 places are to be created in day care centres or in-home family day care until 2010. In-home family day care is declared equally ranking to centre-based day care and quality standards are defined. The 2008 legal regulations further declare that until 2013 ECEC coverage should meet the demand that arises through the forthcoming legal entitlement for children aged one to three. 30% of the places are to be generated within in-home family day care.

From 2006 to 2013 the proportion of under-three-year-olds in day care increased in both Western and Eastern Germany and continues to do so. In 2006 16.7% and 72.5% of the two-year-olds were enrolled in institutional early childhood education in Western and Eastern Germany respectively. These numbers have increased to 46.6% and 83.2% in 2013 (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2014, p. 9). Different institutional players in policy making, research, and practice increasingly voice the concern that the quantitative expansion of the system leads to a decline in the quality of the services. Quality in German early childhood education settings has never been alarming, but it has not been excellent either. There are

2 If not otherwise stated, all numbers on participation in ECEC in Germany reported here are taken from the online state-by-state monitoring provided by the Bertelsmann Foundation (https://www.laendermonitor.de).
three studies that have been investigating quality issues in 1998, 2005, and 2012, and they all came to the conclusion that service quality is only mediocre at the most (Tietze 1998; Tietze et al. 2005; Tietze et al. 2012). Just recently (in mid-November 2016), the Federal/State Committee communicated goals of action that partly relate to quality improvement processes in centre-based ECEC and family day care. This declaration includes a definition of standards for teacher-child-ratios (1:2 for children under the age of one, 1:3 for children aged one to three, and 1:9 for children aged three and older) and teacher qualifications as well as a funding commitment on federal level. Regarding the demand-oriented expansion of the system there is still a discrepancy between available places and parents’ demand in all 16 states ranging from 4.2% to 14.1% in 2015 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Discrepancies between provision and demand (in %) in the 16 states in 2015 (www.laendermonitor.de)

3.3 Inequalities in ECEC participation
As the demand for childcare especially for children under the age of three is higher than the existing provision, parental choice is restricted. When there is a shortage of places, childcare centres often can and have to choose children and parents in accordance to eligibility criteria that include age, hours, and need. These criteria often include being a single parent and both parents’ employment status. The pattern of distribution of the restricted places therefore seems to at least partially benefit groups that are already privileged. In this context it is hardly surprising that participation is socially biased and that a basic right of access does not necessarily translate into equitable access (Oberhuemer 2015). A study that analysed parents’ demand and supply structures on the level of municipalities showed that

a) families participating in ECEC are usually also participating in the labour market, are highly educated, and do not have a migration background;
b) families not participating in ECEC although wanting to are planning to go back to work, are also quite educated but often have a migration background;

c) families who do not want to participate are rather uneducated and hardly inclined to participate in the labour market (Fuchs-Rechlin et al. 2014).

One could argue that such inequalities in participation decrease when participation rates increase. For example, in 2015 children under the age of three who have a migration background participated with 22% in early childhood education and care. In contrast, 38% of their peers without migration background were enrolled. On average, the participation rate in this age group is about 30%. If we take a look at older children, where nearly full coverage is reached, differences relating to children’s migration background decrease to 7 percentage points and reach 90% and 97%, respectively. However, recent statistics show that while children under the age of three years from all families participate to a greater extend in ECEC, the differences between disadvantaged and privileged population groups rather increase than decrease (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2016; Schober & Stahl 2014).

Additionally, one could argue that if services become more accessible for all – and thereby at least potentially more equal –, privileged families try to find new ways to reproduce their social advantage (Ball 2003; Ball & Nikita 2014; Brooks & Waters 2009). Wolf (2002, p. 203) describes for higher education that as “attendance increases, ambitious parents worry obsessively about whether their children are getting into the right university”. Similar processes could be assumed for early education as well. If the overall system becomes accessible for all, “middle class students and their families have to find new ways to reproduce their social advantage” (Brooks & Waters 2009, p. 1087). Ball and Nikita (2014) argue that advantage-seeking parents are able to use their capitals to negotiate diverse forms of provision and fuzzy rules of access in ECEC and, thereby, use choice as a class strategy. I will now present some of my own research to illustrate how this “means of ‘doing’ class” (ibid., p. 83) might translate into segregation processes and, thus, produce new inequalities.

4. Segregation in the German ECEC system

In principle parents are free to choose any ECEC setting according to their preference. Furthermore, their power as service consumers has been strengthened in the last decade by the introduction of marked mechanisms like demand-oriented funding principles. Earlier, service providers were funded to keep a certain amount of places available. Now in many states they are only paid on a per capita basis once a place is filled. The proponents of these developments expect that the market-orientation leads to a stronger consideration of parental needs
and an overall quality improvement (Lloyd 2013, p. 7). Others, by contrast, voice concerns that diverse supply structures and free choice might foster existing educational inequalities. They argue, for example, that not all parents are equally able to make an informed choice. Also, research on preschool choice shows that parental preferences and their decision making differ as a function of family characteristics and resources and might lead to segregation (Cryer et al. 2002; Early & Burchinal 2001; Grogan 2012; Peyton et al. 2001; Rose & Elicker 2008; Uttal 1997).

So far, there is not much empirical research on the extent of segregation in the German ECEC system. The evidence that exists, however, suggests that the settings’ proportions of migrant children or children from families with a low socio-economic status, for instance, vary from zero to 70% or even more, and that this is rather the rule then the exception. The 2014 National Report on Education shows that 32% of the children who do not predominantly speak German at home visit ECEC centres in which more than 50% of all children do not speak German at home either. Against the background that a) disadvantaged children often visit day care centres that are of lower quality (Barnett 2003; Hynes & Habasevich-Brooks 2008), b) a negative correlation between the proportion of migrant children in preschools and process quality was found in national studies (Kuger & Kluczniok 2008; Tietze et al. 2012), and c) learning experiences in a mixed demographic context are especially valuable for disadvantaged children (de Haan et al. 2013; Reid & Ready 2013; Schechter & Bye 2007; Sylva et al. 2004), it is of interest to better understand how the observed segregation patterns are formed and in how far they might relate to system characteristics.

From the school system it is known that private or denomination schools can lead to segregation, especially in combination with a policy of free school choice. Also, early years researchers increasingly focus on the role different types of service providers might play in segregation processes. At the heart of this discussion are commercial providers, which are said to be costly and selective (Lloyd & Penn, 2014). Ernst et al. (2014) argue that a simple differentiation between commercial and non-profit providers falls short of the systems’ complexity. From their perspective it is invalid to ascribe all commercial providers the same potential to segregate. However, we saw earlier that for-profit-providers do not play a major role in the German system. Even if they have a segregating effect, the dimension of its impact for the society as a whole is probably quite small. But the argument of Ernst et al. (2014) is still important as it might also be applied to the private non-profit sector. Especially in a system that appears to be equitable because mostly voluntary bodies provide childcare services in a rather regulated and state-funded context, these non-profit providers should be looked at more
thoroughly. I will do so by analysing in one example local authority a) whether there are any systematic differences in the type of provider children of certain populations groups attend and b) if this results in different demographic makeups of the settings.

4.1 Research context

Data are taken from the city of Münster in North Rhine-Westphalia. Münster is a medium-sized city of about 300,000 residents. Compared to other cities in the state, it is characterised by having a middle and upper class population and being rather wealthy (Hogrebe 2014). As of the summer of 2016, there are altogether 181 preschool settings available to parents that provide centre-based ECEC. There are 51 parent-run centres, 47 and 19 settings provided by the Catholic and Protestant Church respectively, 29 statutory facilities, and less than ten in the categories of each of the welfare organisations and others.

In terms of the application process, parents have to register in an online databank where they can search for and choose up to seven childcare facilities that match their needs in terms of location, the child’s age, daily hours, special needs, and pedagogical ideas. Although this online tool theoretically provides a foundation for a transparent and centrally organised allocation process, each setting decides for itself which children they take up. Rules of access are indeed what Ball and Nikita (2014) call “fuzzy”: Some settings state their selection criteria publicly, others don’t. Some mainly use the online tool to learn about their applicants, others implement additional procedures. It is thus highly advisable for parents to contact every site they consider an option in order to show interest and be invited to open days some of the settings organise, and/or complete additional information sheets. Often, it is not yet clear how many spaces will be available in the respective settings when parents have to make their choices. In the end, some families might be offered more than one place while others come away empty-handed. The latter are not informed that their child is still without a care arrangement. Rather, parents are told that if they haven’t been contacted, they should approach the Youth Welfare Office in order to find available places. Places for the next school year, which starts in summer, are usually allocated in February or March. If parents need to find a care arrangement in the course of the year, chances are compromised by a great deal in centre-based education and care. They have the option to file an additional application form at the Youth Welfare Office. All in all, the application process is quite demanding for parents and requires a lot of effort and system knowledge. Due to a shortage of places, the selection procedures are very competitive.
4.2 Data

Information on which ECEC centre children finally attend are taken from the school entry examination (SEE) in Münster. The SEE is obligatory for all children. It entails detailed assessments of about 2,500 children each year, background characteristics of the children and their families, and which preschool they attend. In the following, results from different studies and analyses conducted on the basis of these data are presented. As a consequence, the number of cohorts varies from five to eleven resulting in effective sample sizes of 11,834 to 26,497 children. Also, as there are no significant differences in the data structure between the years, results are presented using the respective samples as a whole.

The selection of variables is informed by the debate on risk factors that are linked to educational disadvantages: having a migration background, the language spoken at home, and participating in additional educational activities which is linked to parental school qualifications (Authoring Group Educational Reporting 2014). Children are ascribed a migration background if both parents report to have a non-German background. This applies to about 25% of all children. Additionally, physicians assess parents’ knowledge of the German language as displayed the examination process. If the parents lack communication skills in the German language, it is assumed that German is not the language spoken at home. This applies to about 8% of all children, but there was a decrease from 10% in 2010 to 6% in 2014. And finally, about 23% of the children have never experienced any additional educational activities in swimming, sports or music.

4.3 Results: Day care centre provider and child demographics

If we take a look at the type of provider of the day care centres the children of the respective population groups visit, interesting patterns become visible. Figure 5 shows this for the variable migration background.

Figure 5: Type of provider by migration background

Note. Data are based on nine cohorts from the years 2006 to 2014; n = 21,547 (16,240 without migration, 5,095 with migration, 212 missing).
The main differences can be summarised as follows: With 11% to 2% and 46% to 36%, respectively, children without a migration background visit parent initiatives and catholic preschools more often than children with a migration background; vice versa, with 35% to 23% and 13% to 6%, the latter visit state preschools and settings from non-profit welfare organisations to a greater extent than German children. No major differences can be observed regarding protestant, other religion or commercial preschools. The same structure is observable using the other two background variables (see Figures 6 and 7).

If we translate these patterns into odds ratios (see table 2), i.e. the probability to visit an ECEC centre of a certain type of provider for children from privileged backgrounds in comparison to children from disadvantaged families, parent-run centres are especially striking: The probability to visit a parent initiative is three, eight, and twelve times higher for children with additional educational experiences, without a migration background, and whose parents are proficient in the German language respectively.
Table 2: Odds Ratios

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>PI</th>
<th>PROT</th>
<th>CAT</th>
<th>AWO</th>
<th>DRK</th>
<th>PAR</th>
<th>COM</th>
<th>STAT</th>
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<td>0.86</td>
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<td>0.22</td>
<td>1.25</td>
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<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>11.94</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Ed.</td>
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<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table shows the probability to visit an ECEC centre of a certain type of provider for children from privileged backgrounds in comparison to children from disadvantaged families; PI = Parent Initiatives, PROT = Protestant Church, CAT = Catholic Church, AWO = Workers Welfare Organisation, DRK = German Red Cross, PAR = Paritätische Welfare Organisation, COM = Commercial, STAT = Statutory, OR = Other Religion

It is easy to image that the described differences translate into different demographic makeups of ECEC settings. Information on the centres’ demographic makeup is not available as such. But, as the school entry examinations also asks about children’s dates of entry to preschool, it is possible to compute the settings’ composition retrospectively. In the following analyses this has been conducted for two school years: 2009/10 and 2010/11. Figure 8 shows the results of these efforts for two groups of at-risk children. Here the settings’ mean proportions of children with migration background and without additional education are presented for the different types of providers. Highest proportions of disadvantaged children can be found in welfare organisations, followed by public preschools. Commercial and church-based preschools are closer to the population mean, with catholic settings having smaller proportions than protestant ones. Parent initiatives lack far behind with on average only about 5% of children with migration background and 11% of children without additional educational experiences.

Figure 8: Demographic makeup of preschool settings within provider categories

Note. Data are based on computed preschool compositions for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 (n = 169 preschools per year).

However, taking a closer look at differences in the centres’ compositions within a provider category, we can see that there is also quite some variation (see figure 9; for more details see
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table 2 in the appendix). Figure 9 shows the spans within provider categories that are defined by the two settings with the smallest and highest proportion of disadvantaged children. This shows that there are centres without any or only a small proportion of disadvantaged children in nearly all provider categories. Simultaneously, nearly all types of provider also have at least one setting that has fifty or more percent of disadvantaged children.

Figure 9: Spans of preschool composition within provider categories

![Figure 9: Spans of preschool composition within provider categories](image)

Note. Data are based on computed preschool compositions for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 (n = 169 preschools per year)

These spans, however, do not tell us anything about the typical demographic makeup of a provider’s day care centres. In order to have a wide span it is sufficient to have one setting that has a high or low proportion of disadvantaged children while all other settings might have low or high proportions, respectively. Alternatively, two settings might be located at the extreme ends while all the rest settles in in the middle of the spectrum. Thus, it is interesting to take an additional look at the distribution of a provider’s ECEC centres. Figure 10 displays this exemplary for the proportion of children with migration background in catholic, public, and the Workers Welfare Organisation’s preschools as well as parent initiatives. This figure conveys that parent initiatives as well as catholic preschools usually have rather small proportions of children with migration background while public preschools as well as settings belonging to the Workers Welfare Organisation run the whole gamut of demographic makeups. Further variance analyses reveal that there are significant differences in day care centres’ proportions of children with migration background (F(8) = 31.49, p < 0.01) and without additional educational experiences (F(8) = 10.16, p < 0.01) but that only parent-run centres and catholic preschools show significant differences in their demographic makeup to settings of other providers (see table 3 in the appendix for more details).
Figure 10: Distribution of provider’s ECEC centres in regard to their proportion of migrant children

Note: The figure shows the distribution of the proportion of migrant children in ECEC settings within four different provider categories. Data are based on the years 2009/10 and 2010/11. Number of settings per year: 49 parent initiatives, 51 catholic preschools, 23 public preschools, and 10 preschools organised in the Worker Welfare Organisation.

5. Conclusion and discussion

From a macro-perspective the German system of early childcare services seems to be rather equitable especially in comparison to the UK and other European countries. Since the summer of 2013 every child aged one or older is entitled to a place in ECEC which is to a great extend publicly funded. Fee capping is in place to positively discriminate parents who are not so well off. Also, the German childcare market mostly consists of non-profit players, and funding is tied to regulation and standards all service providers must abide to. Home care subsidies, which might encourage certain parents to keep their children out of services, have only been implemented for a short period of time.

However, there are still mechanisms at work that might lead to inequalities. In this regard, three issues have to be mentioned: First, federalism as well as subsidiarity leads to re-
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gional variations in terms of available places, funded hours of provision or costs. Second, a lack of sufficient provision especially for children under the age of three leads to socially biased participation rates. Third, diverse provider structures, albeit all non-profit in nature, create possibilities of distinction and, consequently, segregation. Both state-funded and state-provided ECEC are considered to be important to ensure equitable and universal access for all children (Lloyd 2013). The German ECEC system is to a great extent state-funded but only partially state-provided. The resulting diversity in provider categories makes room for differentiation and inequalities. This paper used data from one example municipality to demonstrate that there are systematic differences in the type of provider of the ECEC settings children visit dependent on family background characteristics. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds visit public preschools and settings of welfare organisations more often than children from privileged backgrounds. Contrary, the former are underrepresented in parent initiatives and catholic preschools.

These patterns might be interpreted as follows: The segregation effect that catholic centres evoke are to a large extent due to religion being one of the eligibility criteria. As most migrants in Germany are from Turkey, they are less likely to be of Catholic faith, which compromises their chances to be taken in from Catholic providers. The extreme segregation effects that spring from parent initiatives, however, should be discussed against the background of efforts of advantage-seeking parents. In a system with fuzzy rules of access, these parents find ways to reproduce social inequalities and maintain their privileges. One could assume that this “means of ‘doing class’” (Ball & Nikita 2014, p. 83) are used by both parents as providers and parents as consumers. The former implement access barriers in terms of additional fees, chores they impose on parents as well as competitive and selective admission procedures, which the latter are only able to negotiate if they comply with certain class strategies.
References


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## Appendix

Table 1: Settings and children by type of provider (Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Provider</th>
<th>Settings</th>
<th></th>
<th>Children</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Absolut</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Absolut</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>54,871</td>
<td>100,00</td>
<td>3,413,553</td>
<td>100,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statutory</strong></td>
<td>18,108</td>
<td>33,00</td>
<td>1,235,463</td>
<td>36,19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private</strong></td>
<td>36,763</td>
<td>67,00</td>
<td>2,178,090</td>
<td>63,81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private non-profit</strong></td>
<td>35,103</td>
<td>63,97</td>
<td>2,112,140</td>
<td>61,88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… Workers Welfare Organisation</td>
<td>2,454</td>
<td>4,47</td>
<td>174,200</td>
<td>5,10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… Paritätische Welfare Organisation</td>
<td>4,986</td>
<td>9,09</td>
<td>316,917</td>
<td>9,28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… German Red Cross</td>
<td>1,481</td>
<td>2,70</td>
<td>106,610</td>
<td>3,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… Protestant Church</td>
<td>8,748</td>
<td>15,94</td>
<td>535,237</td>
<td>15,68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… Catholic Church</td>
<td>9,306</td>
<td>16,96</td>
<td>593,933</td>
<td>17,40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… other religious communities</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>0,44</td>
<td>12,882</td>
<td>0,38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… Youth Organisations</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0,09</td>
<td>2,629</td>
<td>0,08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… other juristic persons/organisations</td>
<td>7,841</td>
<td>14,29</td>
<td>369,732</td>
<td>10,83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private for-profit</strong></td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td>3,03</td>
<td>65,950</td>
<td>1,93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… part of business</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>0,28</td>
<td>8,393</td>
<td>0,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… independent for-profit business</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>1,66</td>
<td>34,601</td>
<td>1,01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… natural person or juristic entity</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>1,09</td>
<td>22,956</td>
<td>0,67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table presents the number and percent of settings and children per provider as of March 2016.
Table 2: Proportions of disadvantaged children in early childhood education settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>settings</th>
<th>With migration (%)</th>
<th>No additional education (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>338</td>
<td></td>
<td>22,5</td>
<td>22,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>34,3</td>
<td>21,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td>21,8</td>
<td>17,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td>30,1</td>
<td>25,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>25,9</td>
<td>5,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWO</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>48,0</td>
<td>30,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRK</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>42,4</td>
<td>26,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paritätischer</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>49,0</td>
<td>20,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Initiative</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,8</td>
<td>7,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>25,5</td>
<td>16,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table presents the demographic makeup of different providers’ ECEC settings for the years 2009/10 and 2010/11. N = number, SD = standard deviation, Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum.

Table 3: Results of the variance analyses
Table 3: Results of the variance analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Migration</th>
<th>Additional educational experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>31.49</td>
<td>10.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

post-hoc-tests:  
- PI < PROT**, CAT**, AWO**, PAR*, STAT** OR*  
- CAT < AWO**, STAT**  
- PI < PROT*, CAT**, AWO*, STAT**

Note. The analyses are conducted on the basis of composition variables for 169 day care centres in the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 resulting in a sample size of n = 338. F = Levene test statistics, df = degrees of freedom, p = p-value. Games-Howell is used as post-hoc-test. PI = Parent Initiatives, PROT = Protestant Church, CAT = Catholic Church, AWO = Workers Welfare Organisation, DRK = German Red Cross, PAR = Paritätische Welfare Organisation, COM = Commercial, STAT = Statutory, OR = Other Religion  
*p < 0.05, **p < 0.00