

A hand in a blue sleeve is placing a blue block on top of a stack of colorful blocks. The stack consists of a yellow block at the bottom, followed by a blue block, an orange block, and another blue block. The hand is holding a blue block above the top blue block of the stack.

WHO CARES?

KINDERGARTENS IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Oksana Dutchak
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Who cares? Kindergartens in the context of gender inequality. —

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What is the significance of kindergartens for society? How do they affect the economic activity of young mothers? What are the working conditions and salaries of kindergarten workers? How should a network of preschools be developed to improve the situation of women and overcome gender inequality? The publication presents the results of a study of the problems of Ukrainian kindergartens from the perspective of both mothers and employees of the institutions. The authors offer a vision of preschool reform and recommendations that would positively affect the development of children, improve the situation of kindergarten employees and mothers, as well as families with children.

The study was conducted with the participation of Nina Potarska and Iryna Chorna.

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OUT OF FOCUS: KINDERGARTENS AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

You know, I'm surprised that someone is interested in this sphere, which in many senses is still in the 20th century.

Kindergarten educator,
17 years of experience,
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Kindergartens play an important role in society as they are the first out-of-family institutions dealing with children's education and development. Besides, these institutions take over preschool childcare. Kindergartens are the second institutional brick (after childcare leave) which has a decisive effect on the situation of women and thereby on the structure of gender inequality in society. This is because they determine when most mothers are able to return to stable economic activity.

Kindergartens are a part of the care economy. And, as all the care economy sectors (such as healthcare, school education, social work), they employ mostly women. The funding of kindergartens directly affects the position of their employees. It is the low wage in the 'female' sectors of the economy that is one of the key factors resulting in the gender pay gap—the gap between the average salary of men and women in a country.

For most of us, kindergartens are part of our life experiences. This makes it even more dissonant that labour conditions and wages in kindergartens, as well as general funding of these institutions, are almost never discussed in our society. Despite the important role of kindergartens in society and their significance for achieving gender equality, the problems of preschool education are often left out of focus. Schools, which also have a lot of problems, including teachers' wages, are widely discussed in Ukraine. Every election we hear loads of promises (mostly empty) to significantly increase school teachers' salaries, but never those of the kindergarten teachers.

The authors of this study know from their personal experiences how difficult it is to combine work and childcare under the current system of kindergartens with its reduced schedule and crowded groups. We also understand how hard teachers and other employees of kindergartens work and, at the same time, how underrated their work is. Mothers, children and kindergarten workers find themselves trapped by the situation of chronic underfunding. However, such an alternative as commercialisation of the sphere would deprive most families of the opportunity to use the care infrastructure. Communal kindergartens remain the most affordable form of out-of-family childcare, and a significant increase in their funding must back up slogans on gender equality and women's return to the labour market.

This study is an attempt to initiate a thorough discussion of the role of kindergartens and the numerous problems that mothers of preschool children, as well as workers looking after and educating the children, face. This is an attempt to begin a discussion about the ways to solve the problems.

METHODOLOGY

This research aims at a comprehensive analysis of the state-owned infrastructure of preschool childcare in the context of gender inequality and the care economy.

Conceptualising reproductive and care work, we derive from the feminist perspective¹ as well as modern approaches to defining and typologizing care work that the International Labour Organization² and the International Trade Union Confederation³ employ in their studies.

The European Institute for Gender Equality defines 'care economy' as 'part of human activity, both material and social, that is concerned with the process of caring for the present and future labour force, and the human population as a whole, including the domestic provisioning of food, clothing and shelter.'⁴ This activity is being realised through care work, which can be unpaid or paid (healthcare, kindergartens, social workers).

The infrastructure of preschool childcare is an important link in the care economy. Affordable and decent kindergartens improves mothers' prospects for employment by freeing up their time for paid work; reduces poverty of families with children; improves employment prospects in the economy as a whole by creating new jobs both directly in the field of childcare and in related industries (such as construction); in the long run, it brings additional tax revenues that allow to reimburse the initial costs.⁵

1 Daly M. Care as a Good for Social Policy / Mary Daly // *Journal of Social Policy*.—2002.—Vol. 31. № 2.—P. 251–270;

Folbre Nancy. Who care? A Feminist Critique of the Care Economy / Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office, 2014;

Geissler B., Pfau-Effinger B. Change in European care arrangements / Birgit Geissler and Birgit Pfau-Effinger // *Care and Social Integration in European Societies Variations and Change*; ed. by Birgit Pfau-Effinger and Birgit Geissler.—Bristol: Policy Press, 2005.—P. 3–17;

Glenn E.N. Creating a Caring Society / Evelyn Nakano Glenn // *Contemporary Sociology*.—2002.—Vol. 29, No. 1, *Utopian Visions: Engaged Sociologies for the 21st Century*.—P. 84–94.

2 Care work and care jobs. For the future of decent work / International labor organization, 2018.

3 Investing in the care economy. A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries / International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016.

4 Care economy / European Institute for Gender Equality (<https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1056>).

5 Investing in the care economy. A gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries / International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016.

Many jobs related to care (care occupation, care jobs) are considered 'natural' continuation of unpaid reproductive labour¹ that (predominantly) women perform in families. As a result, these jobs are perceived as unprestigious; they are devalued and underpaid. While meeting people's care needs, care workers usually perform emotional labour as well, which is difficult to quantify. This makes care jobs fundamentally different from other forms of economic activity.

The Ukrainian preschool education gained little research attention, though some reports and papers can be found—both from general perspective and from the perspective of gender inequality.² However, no comprehensive analysis of the problem has been done so far; in particular, the situation of kindergarten workers has remained out of focus. This focus is essential due to the fact that, first, the number of workers, their working conditions and wages are linked to the quality of care and education in kindergartens; second, as in most of the 'female' sectors, preschool education has one of the lowest wage rates in Ukraine. This horizontal segregation in the labour market (low wages in 'female' sectors) is one of the key factors in the gender pay gap in the country.

STAGES OF RESEARCH, RESEARCH SAMPLING AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Our study covers structural conditions and practices of the functioning of the communal infrastructure for preschool childcare in the context of gender inequality and care economy. The structural conditions are created by legislative and socio-cultural regulators, while practices are represented by everyday, routine aspects of kindergartens' functioning.

The first stage of this research involves analysis of current legislation and existing statistics on the preschool education system in Ukraine. At the second stage, we interviewed mothers whose children attend communal kindergartens, as well as women employed at such kindergartens (teachers, assistant teachers, methodologists, managing supervisors, etc.).

1 Reproductive labour includes caregiving and other domestic work which reproduces labour power.

2 For example: Comprehensive study of the state of the preschool education system in Ukraine. Analytical report / [Horskyi A., Budanova O., Barmatova I., Ovchar O.]—K.: All-Ukrainian Charitable Organization 'Public Social Council', 2013.—115 c; Peters J. Improving the quality of preschool education and child care in Ukraine.—VBJK. Gent, 2018.—44 c; Strelnyk O. Care as labour. Maternity in the focus of sociology—K.: "Krytyka", 2017; Zharova L. Nurseries and kindergartens: cost and availability in Ukraine / Gender in Detail 2018 (<https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/mater-batkiv/yasla-ta-ditsadki-tsina-i-dostupnist-v-ukraini-134674.html>); Zharova L. How much does the state spend on child care and why does it do so / Gender in Detail, 2018 (<https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/mater-batkiv/skilki-vitrachae-derzhava-na-doglyad-za-ditmi-ta-navischo-vona-tse-robit-134667.html>); How to increase women's employment and why it is important for economic development / Center for Economic Strategy, 2019.

Research design involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The method of *online surveying* on the principle of self-selection (through an open invitation to participate) allowed us to survey 1480 mothers and 5032 kindergarten workers. The survey was conducted in May 2020 and covered settlements of different types in all macroregions of the country.¹

Information on the distribution of respondents by types of settlements, as well as the distribution of employees by length of work experience and positions are given in diagrams 1.1-1.4.

Participants of the *in-depth interviewing* (June-August 2020) were:

- 1) 20 mothers from different macroregions, oblasts and settlements.
- 2) 35 kindergarten workers of different work experiences and marital statuses, from different macroregions, oblasts and settlements.

Participants of in-depth interviews were recruited through the contact details they were offered to leave while completing the survey questionnaire.

Additionally, expert interviews were conducted with an accountant auditor, the head of a territorial community department of education and a methodologist of the city department of education.

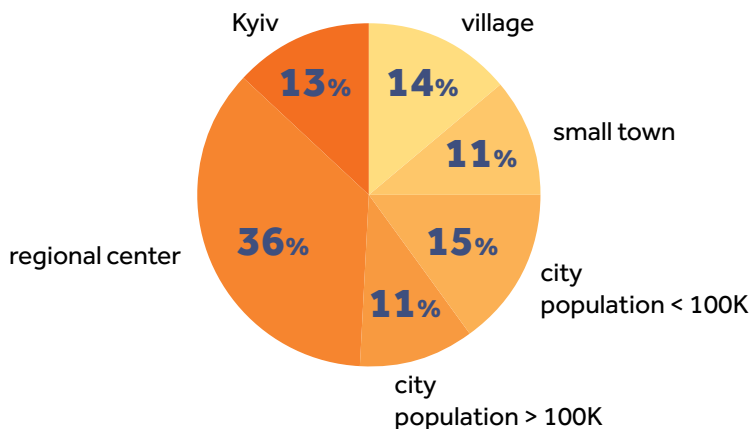
The results of the online survey cannot be considered statistically representative as the respondents were those having access to the internet and using social media. To reduce the risks, the data set for the survey of kindergarten workers was weighted in accordance with the State Statistics Service data. At the same time, the online survey allowed us to ensure a greater anonymity of respondents, as well as their frankness.

The fieldwork was conducted when most kindergartens did not work due to the COVID-19 quarantine restrictions, which could affect the results. Therefore, the questions about a kindergarten's working regime and a balance between paid and unpaid reproductive work were followed by a clarification that a question was about working and life conditions before the quarantine.

1 In the data analysis, the following division of oblasts by macroregions was used. Western macroregion: Volynska, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska, Lvivska, Rivnenska, Ternopil'ska, Khmelnytska, Chernivetska Oblasts; Central macroregion: Kyiv city, Kyivska, Vinnytska, Zhytomyrska, Kirovohrad'ska, Poltav'ska, Sumska, Cherkaska, Chernihiv'ska oblasts; Southern macroregion: Dnipropetrov'ska, Zaporizh'ska, Mykolaiv'ska, Odeska, Kherson'ska oblasts; Eastern macroregion: Kharkiv'ska, Donetsk, Luhansk oblasts (territories controlled by Ukraine).

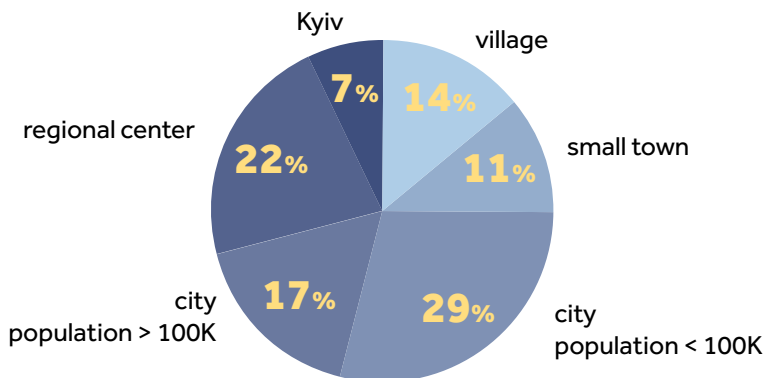
1.1. DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED MOTHERS BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT

(online survey, n = 1480)



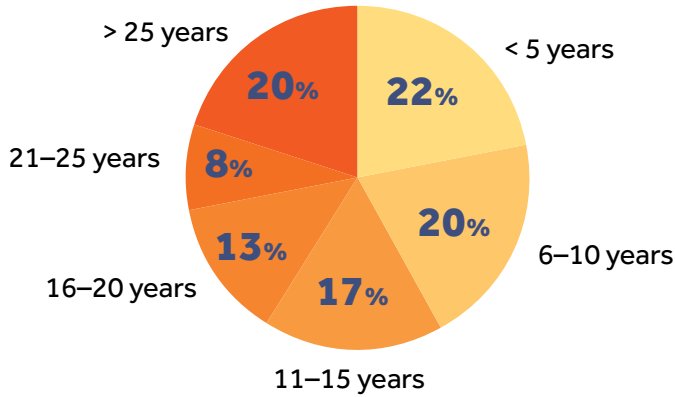
1.2. DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS BY TYPE OF SETTLEMENT

(online survey, n = 5032)



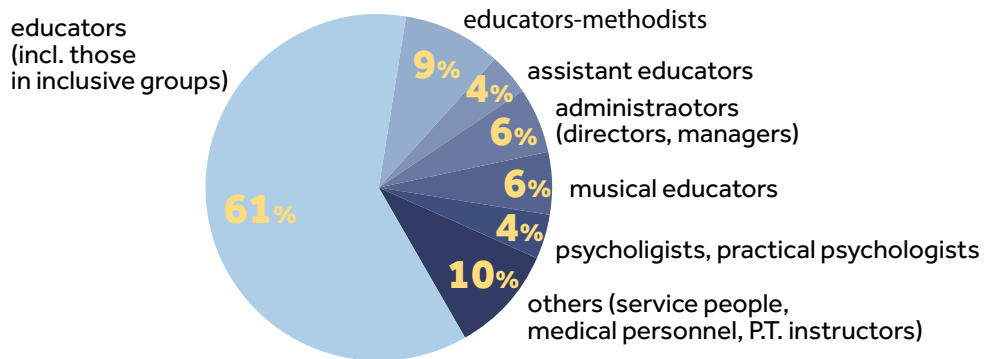
1.3. DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS BY EXPERIENCE

(online survey, n=5032)



1.4. DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS BY POSITION

(online survey, n=5032)



PRESCHOOL STATISTICS

Funding needs to be changed. If, for example, schooling is funded by the state budget, there's a subvention that is allocated for the salaries of teachers [...], then kindergartens are fully funded by a local budget. If there was any support from the state, it would greatly facilitate the work of local authorities.

Education department official, 3 years of experience, city, South

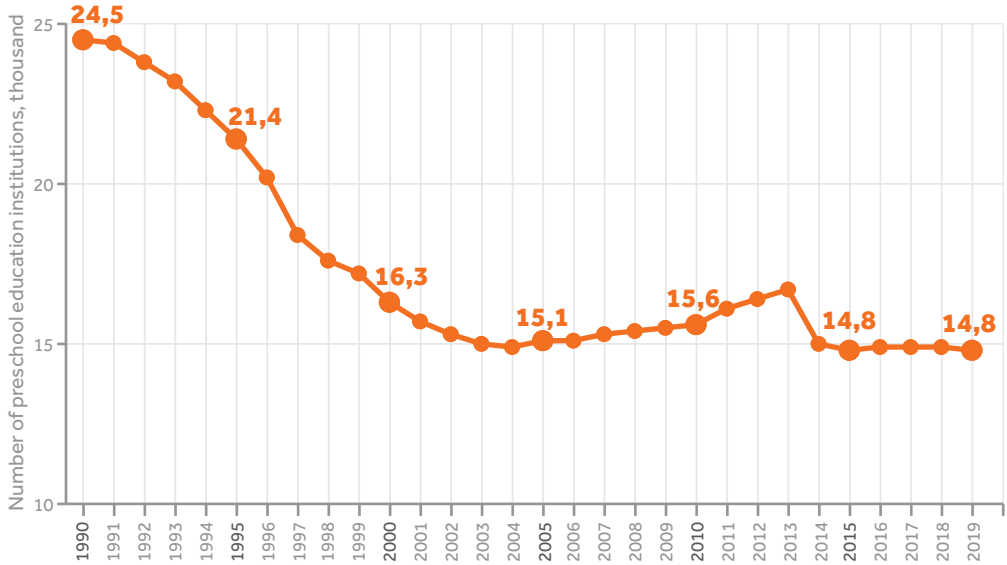
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INFRASTRUCTURE

As of 2019, there are 14.8 thousand preschool educational institutions (PEI) in Ukraine with 1 million 155 thousand¹ places, which covers 58% of children aged 3 to 6. Loss of control over certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and changes in the methodology of calculation (until 2014, the statistics took into account institutions that did not actually work) does not allow to accurately assess the dynamics of the number of institutions (Figure 2.1) but it is clear that the number of institutions had been gradually declining since 1990, and some stable positive dynamics began in 2004. After the 2013 decline (due to the loss of control over part of the country's territories), the number of institutions remains relatively stable.

Since 2014, the number of places in institutions has been growing slightly. However, the problem of overcrowding remains—in 2019, the number of children in kindergartens exceeded the number of places by 75 thousand (Figure 2.2). This is the lowest difference between the capacity of kindergartens and the number

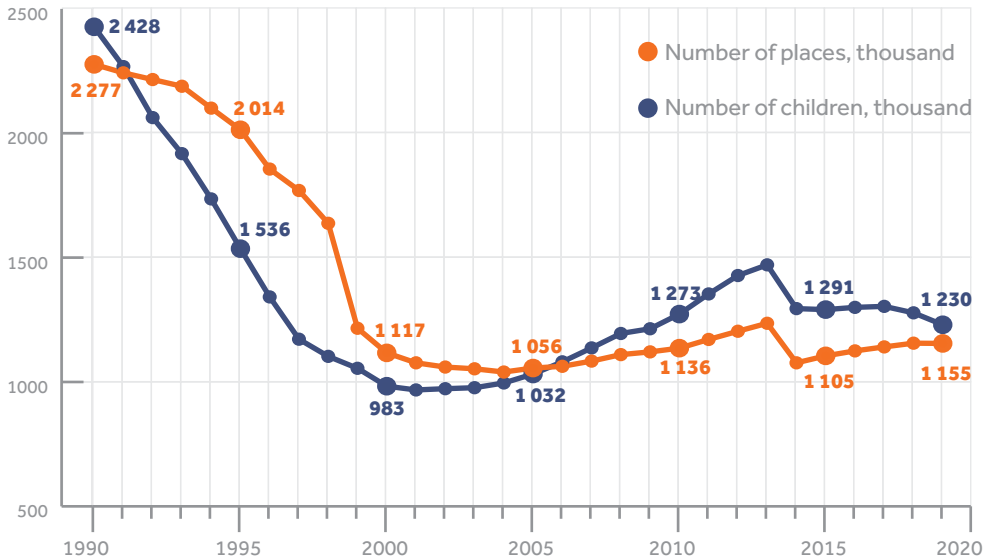
¹ Preschool educational institutions / State Statistics Service (http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2005/osv_rik/osv_u/dz_u.html).

2.1. NUMBER OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



According to the State Statistics Service

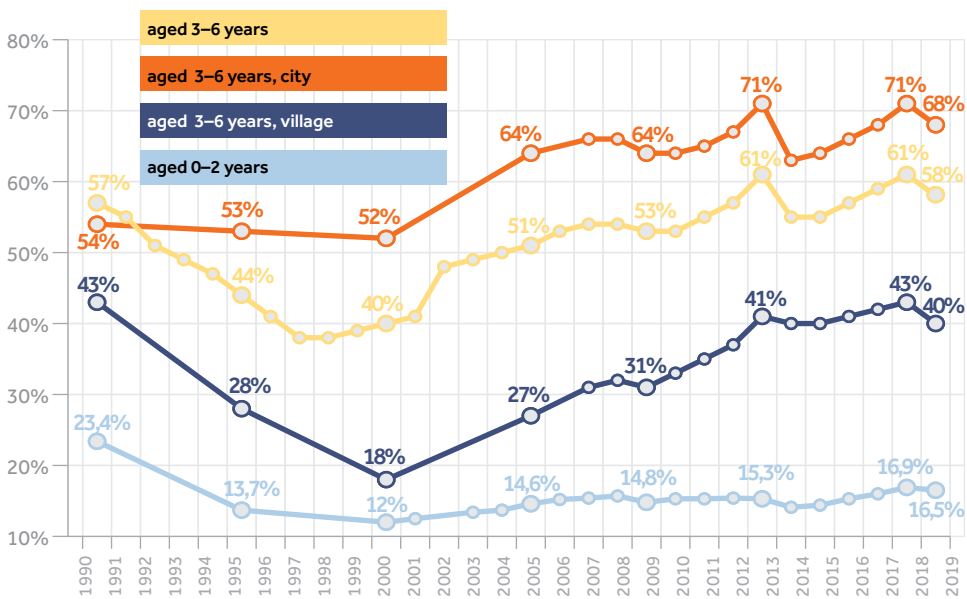
2.2. NUMBER OF PLACES IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



of children since 2008. In 2015–2018, the queue at kindergartens decreased by 63%¹; the number of children per 100 places in institutions decreased from 120 in 2012–2014 (129–132 in cities and 94 in rural areas) to 105 in 2019 (115 and 80 respectively). However, it is hard to tell which part of the problem was solved by creating new kindergartens and which—by violating the norms of groups capacity or changes in demographic processes.

Speaking of the coverage of children in preschool education (Figure 2.3), the coverage rate at the age of 3 to 6 years had been gradually increasing since 1998 until it stabilised during the last four years at about 60% (58% in 2019). In 2019, the coverage was 68% in urban and 40% in rural areas. However, it should be noted that since 2013, the coverage of PEIs also includes socio-pedagogical patronage. Although such patronage can perform an educational function, it does not provide childcare, that is, it does not create conditions for young mothers' return to economic activity.

2.3. COVERAGE OF CHILDREN BY PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



According to the State Statistics Service

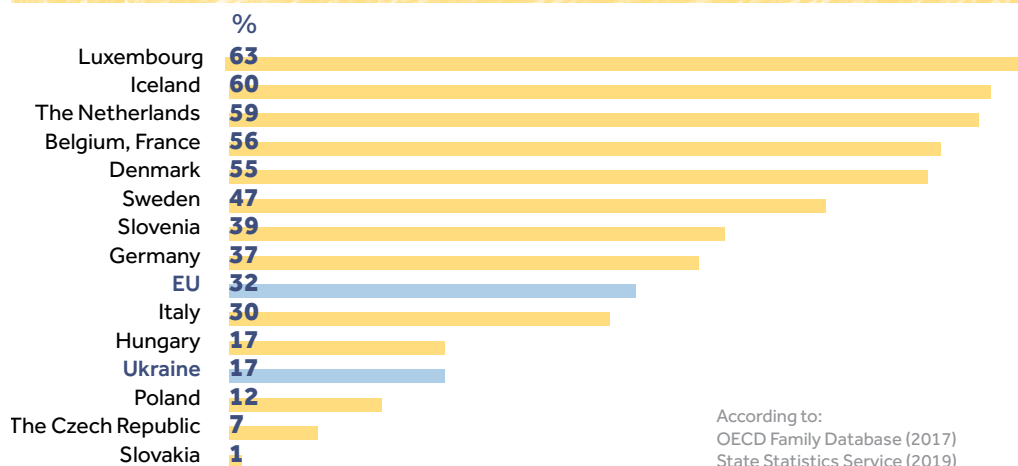
At the same time, the coverage of preschool education for children under 3 years of age remains low—at 16.5% in 2019. Even in this share, these are mostly children

1 Conclusions and prospects for the development of preschool, general secondary and extracurricular education in Ukraine / Educational Analytics of Ukraine, № 2 (6), 2018, p. 120.

aged 2 to 3—in preschool education as of 2019, there are only 31 child under 1 year and 11486 children aged 1 to 2 (0.1% of the total).¹ The data of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that in Ukraine, the proportion of children under 3 years of age covered by institutional or out-of-family care services is much lower than in most European countries (Figure 2.4).

2.4. PROPORTION OF CHILDREN UNDER 3 YEARS OF AGE COVERED BY OUT-OF-FAMILY CARE

(visit day care centers or are cared for by licensed nannies)



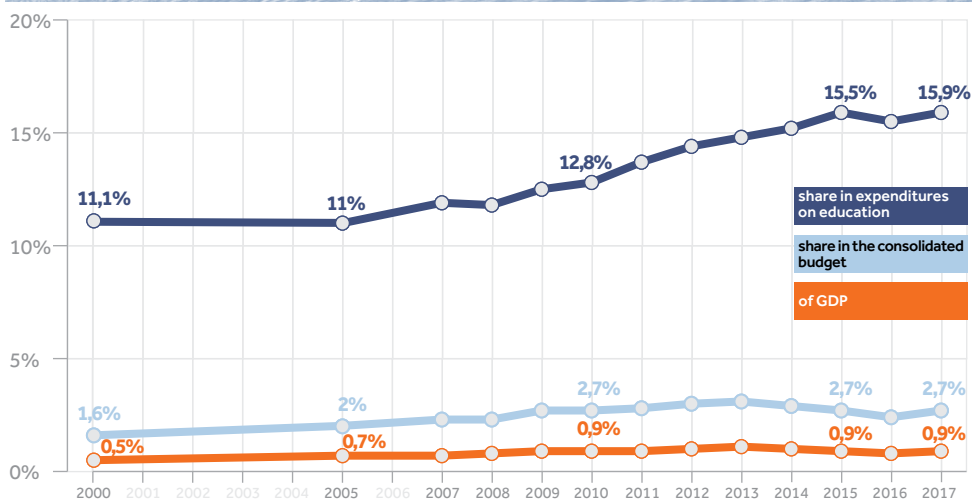
The state offers a tiny variety of options for caring for young children—there is no infrastructure and conditions for this. Given that mothers are on virtually unpaid care leave during this period and most of them cannot return to economic activity, this situation negatively affects their economic independence and the general situation of families with preschoolers.

FUNDING OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

The share of preschool education expenditures in GDP grew until 2012, was the highest in 2012–2014 (1–1.1%) and stabilised at 0.8–0.9% of GDP since 2015 (Figure 2.5). The share of preschool education expenditures in the unified state budget was the highest in 2013 (3.1%) and in recent years has decreased slightly—to 2.7% in 2017. In education expenditures, the share of preschool education had been gradually increasing since the early 2000s, reaching 15.9% in 2017–2018.

¹ Preschool education in Ukraine in 2019. Statistical information / State Statistics Service (http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2005/osv_rik/osv_u/dosh_osvit/arch_dosh_osv.htm).

2.5. EXPENDITURES ON PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN UKRAINE



According to: Preschool education in Ukraine [2010–2017]. Statistical bulletins / State Statistics Service

The share of preschool education expenditures in education expenditures at 15.9% is one of the highest compared to OECD countries (higher only in Sweden and Chile). However, in 2013, absolute constant dollar¹ expenditures per child per year in neighboring EU countries were much higher: 2.1 times in Poland, 2.3 times in Hungary, 2.4 times in Slovakia and 2.7 times more in the Czech Republic.² In other words, the high share of expenditures on preschool education is offset by the generally low funding of education in Ukraine (6% of GDP in 2017) and the small size of the total budget.

Also, in contrast to school education, local budgets, which do not receive subventions from the central budget for this sector, are in fact fully responsible for expenditures³ on preschool education in Ukraine. In 2019, a total of 6.4% of local budget expenditures went to kindergartens.

PERSONNEL OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

More than 300 thousand people work in state and communal PEIs, including more than 130,000 pedagogical personnel and approximately 175,000 technical personnel (Figure 2.6). The vast majority of both pedagogical (99%) and technical (82%)

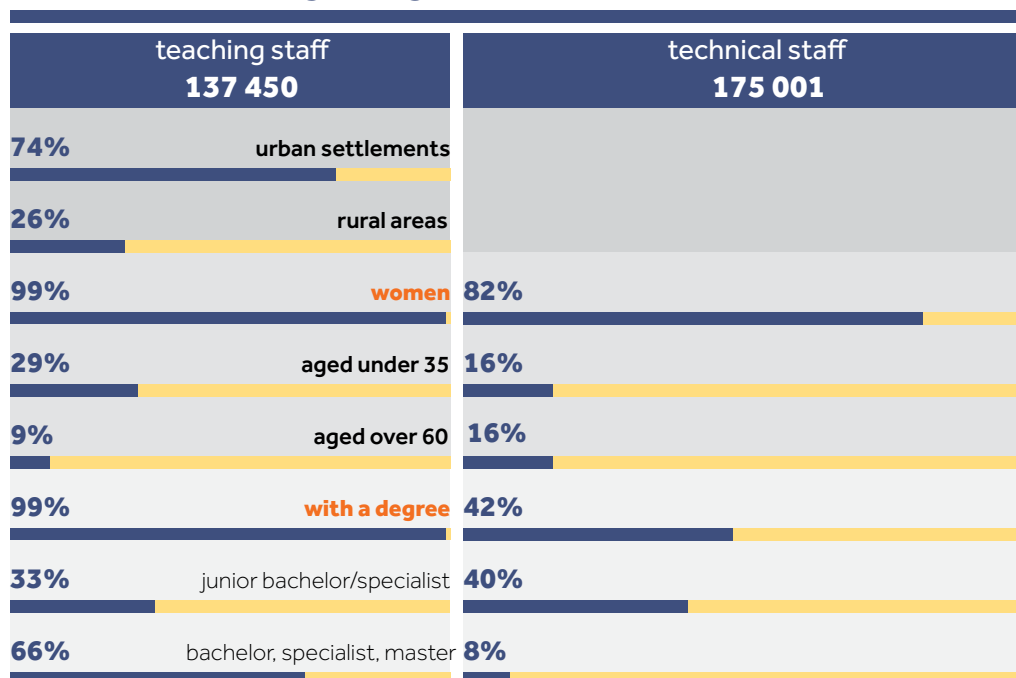
1 Notional currency used for comparisons between different countries.

2 Preschoolers and their... salary / Dzerkalo Tyznia, №22–23, 2019 (https://zn.ua/ukr/EDUCATION/doshkilyata-ta-yihnya-zarplata-314537_.html).

3 Calculations based on: Open Budget (<https://bit.ly/2JJeO6C>).

2.6. REGISTERED NUMBER OF STAFF IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, 2019

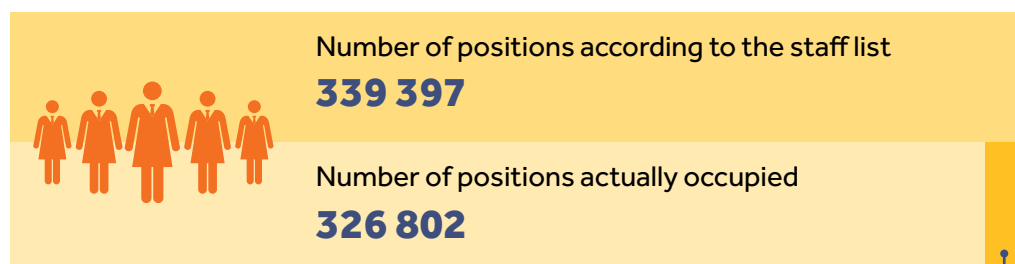
total **312 451***



According to the State Statistics Service

* 99% in state/communal institutions

2.7. STAFF OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, 2019



Number of vacant positions
12 595 = 3,7%

According to the State Statistics Service

* 99% in state/communal institutions

personnel are women. In other words, preschool education is a traditional 'female' sector, which plays an important role in women's employment, working conditions and wages, and therefore in the situation of women in Ukraine.

Almost all pedagogical employees (99%) and almost half of the technical personnel (48%) have a degree. 66% of pedagogical personnel have a bachelor's, master's or specialist degree.

Let's compare the need for the PEIs staff with the number of actually occupied positions (Figure 2.7). It is obvious that the institutions lack personnel, and this problem worsens over time. If in 2010, 1.6%¹ of positions were unfilled, in 2015 it was 3%,² and in 2019—3.7%. On average, there is a vacancy in each institution.

Neither the Ministry of Education nor the State Statistics Service provides information on average salaries in preschool education. According to the data in this study (which will be discussed in detail below), kindergarten teachers of general development groups in the spring of 2020 received an average of 5051 UAH (after all deductions), and at that time, it was only 55% of the average salary in the country. To understand whether the situation with such a devaluation of labour in communal kindergartens is universal, it is necessary to make a comparison with other countries (Figure 2.8).

Compared to those countries for which the necessary information is available, the work of Ukrainian kindergarten teachers is the most devalued. On average, in OECD countries, kindergarten teachers' salaries reach 80% of the average salary. It is equal to or exceeds the average values for the economy in many countries, particularly in Greece, Israel, Chile, the Netherlands, Australia, Lithuania, Portugal. In Finland, which was once the focus of efforts to reform the preschool education system in Ukraine, teachers' salaries are 77% of the average wage.

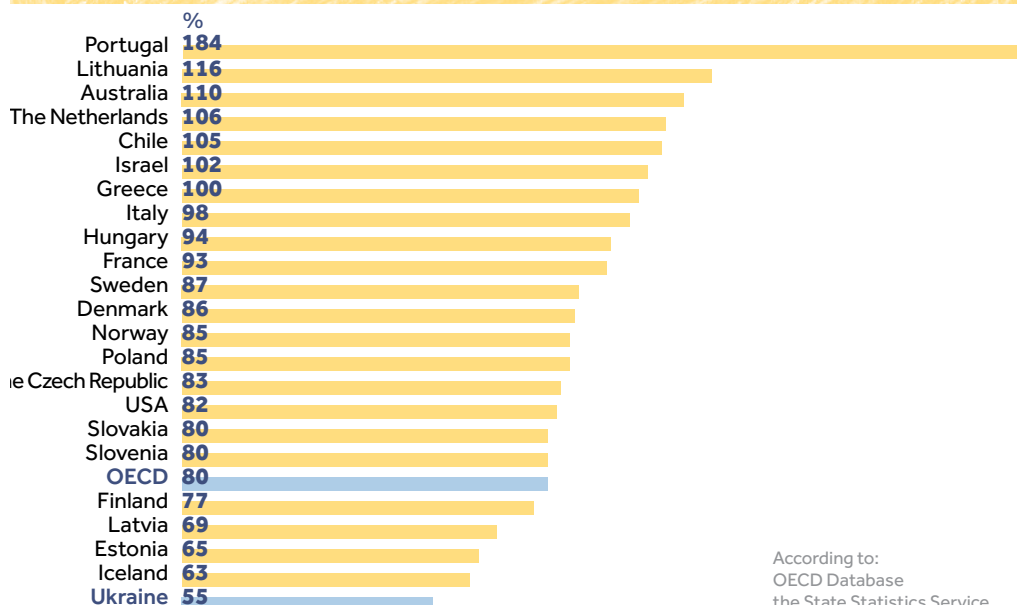
If we compare salaries in international dollars³ (Figure 2.9), the salaries of Ukrainian kindergarten teachers are the lowest among the countries for which data is available. The closest 'neighbor' is Estonia, where the average monthly salary of kindergarten teachers is more than twice as high as in Ukraine. Ukrainian kindergarten teachers have almost seven times lower salaries than those in the Netherlands, who are at the top of the list. In Finland, which has already been mentioned, kindergarten teachers receive almost 4 times higher salaries than in Ukraine.

1 Calculations based on: Preschool education in Ukraine in 2019. Statistical information / State Statistics Service (http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2005/osv_rik/osv_u/dosh_osvit/arch_dosh_osv.htm)

2 Calculations based on: Preschool education in Ukraine in 2019. Statistical information / State Statistics Service (http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2005/osv_rik/osv_u/dosh_osvit/arch_dosh_osv.htm)

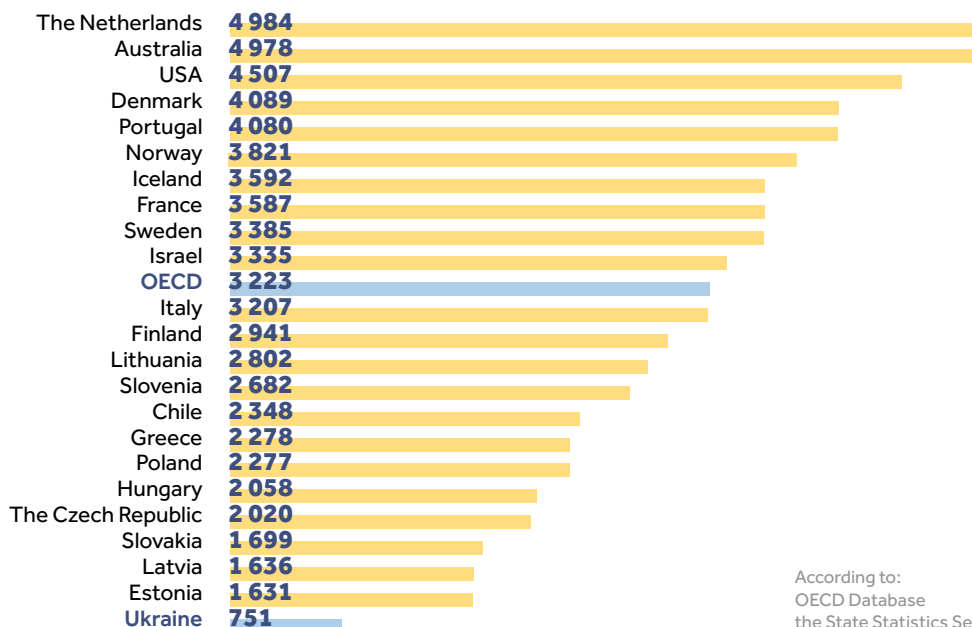
3 Notional currency that allows you to compare local currencies adjusted for their domestic purchasing power.

2.8. SALARIES OF EDUCATORS IN STATE/COMMUNAL KINDERGARTENS (% of average)



According to:
OECD Database
the State Statistics Service

2.9. SALARIES OF EDUCATORS IN STATE/COMMUNAL KINDERGARTENS (before deductions, PP USD)



According to:
OECD Database
the State Statistics Service

SUMMARY

The high share of funding for preschool education in total educational expenditures is insufficient to ensure the proper functioning of the existing infrastructure of PEI, not to mention their development—in quantitative and qualitative terms, as well as in indicators of expanding age coverage. This leads to many problems that make it difficult for mothers with young children to return to economic activity and negatively affects their situation.

The important role that kindergarten teachers play in society, as well as their high qualifications, is at odds with low wages. This leads to the difficult financial situation of women and their families and creates staffing problems, which negatively affects the ability of kindergartens to perform their functions..



KINDERGARTENS AS SEEN BY MOTHERS

The survey concerned mothers' assessment of various aspects of the functioning of kindergartens: nutrition, living conditions, qualifications of educators, work schedule, location, etc.

KINDERGARTENS AND THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF MOTHERS: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Enrolling a child in a kindergarten

Early return of mothers to work is hampered by a lack of institutional capacity to combine paid and reproductive labor. The lack of these opportunities, among other things, is due to the fact that even nurseries do not actually accept children under 2 years. At the same time, the availability of kindergartens hinders the economic activity of mothers, because according to various data, only about 1% or 2% of men take childcare leaves.¹

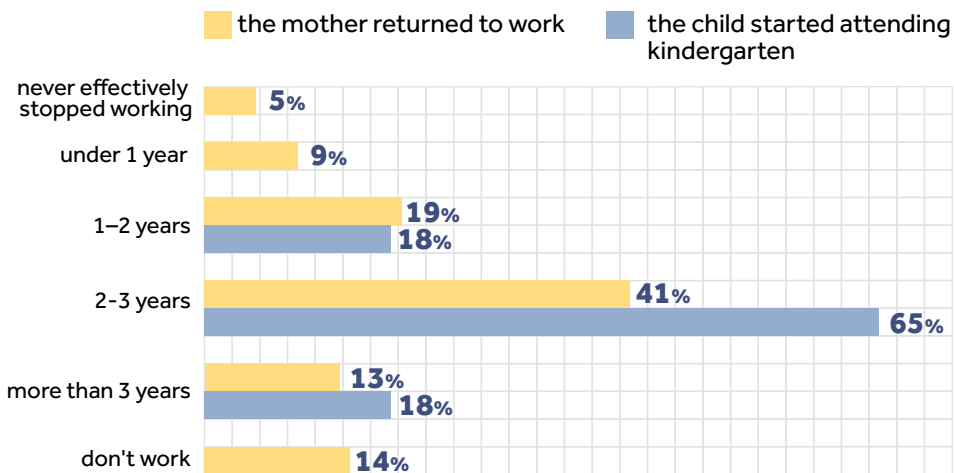
According to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", the minimum age for admission of children to kindergartens is 3 years. Nurseries, nurseries combined with kindergartens and combined establishments accept children aged 1 year; compensatory type kindergartens admit "children with special educational needs" aged 2. Until 2017, such children were formally admitted to nurseries at the age of 2 months, but in fact the norm was not met. For example, in 2015, there were only 8 children under the age of 1 in the whole of Ukraine (and 31 children in 2019).

1 The State Statistics Service and the Ministry of Social Policy do not regularly record the number of men on parental leave. The latest official data were published in 2014 in the annual report of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights. At the end of 2013 this share was 1%. As of January 1, 2019, a total of 1,104,000 people received financial assistance at the birth of a child, of which 15,000 were men (1.4% of all recipients of this assistance). Such assistance is often issued to parents who plan to go on parental leave, because this meager income makes it possible to include the period of childcare in the insurance period. However, these data are approximate. Source: Dad on parental leave. What prevents men from taking childcare leave more often / Hromadske.UA, 2019 (<https://hromadske.ua/posts/tato-v-dekrety-sho-zavazhaye-cholovikam-chastishe-brati-vidpustku-po-doglyadu-za-ditinoju>).

There are also informal practices of regulating a child's admittance to kindergartens, which are not tied to age but to the skills of self-care: "we were told that she could also hold the cup by herself, and that she would already do without a pacifier, that she ought to go to the potty without a diaper and moro or less be able to dress and undress there." (Regional capital city, East of Ukraine).

The vast majority of surveyed mothers (64%) indicated that their children started going to kindergarten at the age between 2 and 3 years, only 18% said that this happened at the age between 1 and 2 years (mostly a bit less than two years). Effectively, kindergartens are inaccessible to children under two years of age. One in five respondents (18%) said that the child went to kindergarten after being three years old, which probably complicates the return of mothers to work (Figure 3.1).

3.1. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS:
"How long after the birth of a child (or the youngest of them) did you start or return to full-time or part-time work?"
"At what age did your child (or the youngest of them) start attending kindergarten?"



However, the vast majority of mothers surveyed (88%) said that their child went to kindergarten when they wanted / planned. This is due, among other things, to socio-cultural expectations about the optimal age of the child to start attending kindergarten, as well as the understanding that there are no conditions for young children to stay in Ukrainian kindergartens. In the minds of our informants, this age is two or three years:

[The best age is] from three years, because a child at the age of three already understands more, can say more [...] to be understood. And in general, that emotional state: [the child is] no longer so attached to mom, dad, and then [the child] can be more confident, and adaptation is easier later.

City, West

Well, the queue is very long, for example, and there are a lot of kindergartens that are fully booked. That's why the problem is big near my house. In places that are growing fast, many new houses are being built, but schools are not being built and there will be no kindergartens.

Regional center, South

Only 9% said that their child went to kindergarten later than they planned, due to reasons related to kindergarten, such as lack of places. This was more often indicated by residents of Lviv (22%), Volyn (19%), Odesa regions (14%) and Kyiv (14%), where the kindergartens are more crowded.

According to the state building norms "Planning and development",¹ there should be 135 places in schools and 38 places in kindergartens per 1,000 inhabitants of the settlement. However, these rules are often violated, which causes problems with availability of places.

The electronic queue in cities makes this process more transparent, and in small towns and villages the lack of such a mechanism leaves the process of enrolling a child in kindergarten opaque. Lack of places in kindergartens sometimes pushes the administration to ambiguous requirements, such as employment certificates. In this way, the administration of the institutions is trying to somehow solve the problem of overcrowding, but this decision is very ambiguous, especially in a country with a large share of people who are informally employed.

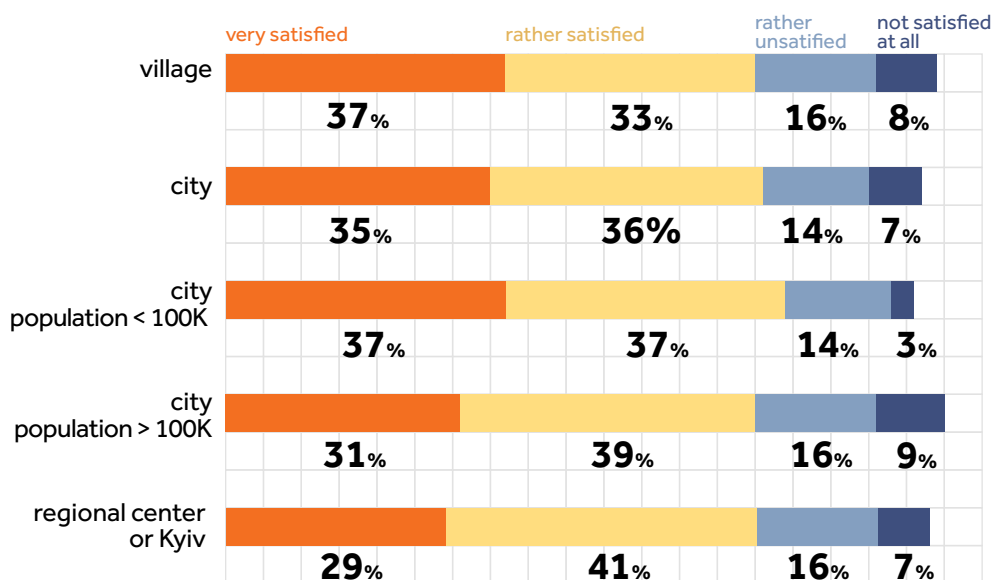
¹ State construction norms of Ukraine. Planning and development of territories / Ministry of Regional Development, Construction, and Housing of Ukraine, 2019 (<https://dreamdim.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DBN-B22-12-2019.pdf>).

“Run fast”. Temporal and spatial aspects of the work of kindergarten

71% of respondents are satisfied with the schedule of their kindergarten. However, almost every fourth respondent (23%) of the online survey is dissatisfied with the schedule. No significant differences were found between urban and rural respondents (Figure 3.2¹).

3.2. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

*“Are you satisfied with the schedule of the kindergarten?”,
depending on the type of settlement*



The schedule can be a problem especially for residents of large cities or for mothers who do not have the resources of family support in the event that they can not pick up the child from kindergarten on time:

Prior to quarantine restrictions, the group, of course, worked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. I know there have been situations [when parents] actually work, like, for example, until 6pm, and they... We are in [a big city] and the trip, for example, to kindergarten is very long, it can take about an hour [...] And it's sometimes very, very, very difficult for some parents.

Regional center, South

¹ Here and afterwards, the percentage of respondents who chose the option «difficult to answer» is not given.

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", the duration of children's stay in kindergarten is set by the founder. The general recommendation is 10.5 or 12 hours from Monday to Friday. At the same time, the letter of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine №1/9–36 dated 24.01.2007 "On the mode of operation of preschool educational institutions" states that the ministry receives complaints from parents that the duration of work is often reduced, sometimes being as short as 5 hours. The Ministry of Education and Science reminded that in establishing the regime by the founder, a preliminary study of the demand of parents is mandatory. For children under 4 years of age, a 12-hour work schedule of each group is recommended, for children aged from 4, there should be at least one group with a 12-hour stay. However, in reality, if the founder (mostly local government) lacks funds, these recommendations are not implemented.

The reduced duration of work of kindergartens is sometimes due to the lack of funding, when the salaries of educators are reduced, and hence their working hours are reduced, too. Simultaneously with the officially established time of the start and end of the work of kindergarten, there are informal practices of schedule regulation, which complicates the organization of daily child care for working parents:

In our kindergarten, we have one teacher and one nanny per group. They get one and a half of a salary rate, and they get very tired, so they demand to pick up the children at 16.30 or 17.00, which is generally unacceptable if the parents work. It's always like a conflict, if you come at 5.30 pm they look at you askance and as if you were a bad mother, you leave your child longest, and the child feels as if the child were abandoned.

Kyiv

Mothers complain that such schedules significantly complicate, and sometimes simply make it impossible for them to be fully employed after the childcare leave ends. For women who do not have the opportunity to hire a nanny and cannot use the help of relatives, this actually means the impossibility of stable employment. In this case, the kindergarten does not cope with the function of supporting the economic activity of young mothers. Such restrictions can affect the occupational trajectories of mothers:

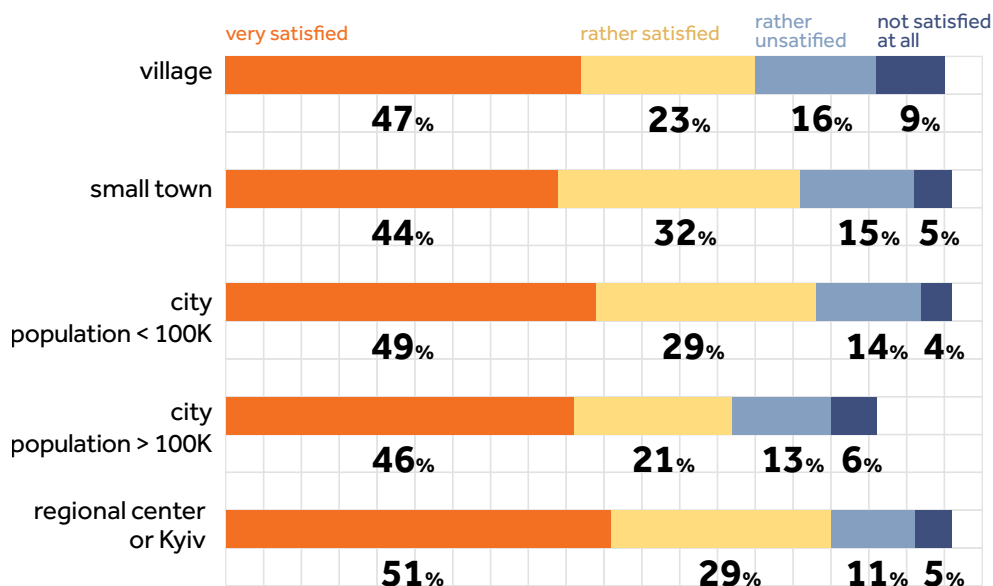
I specifically chose a job that was associated with having enough time, and even kindergarten is actually as close as possible to my workplace, not our home.

Kyiv

77% are satisfied with the location of the kindergarten, and almost one in five respondents (18%) are dissatisfied with the location. Despite the widespread notion that the problem of long distances is inherent in large cities, rural residents are more often dissatisfied with the location (25% compared with 16% of residents of regional centers and the capital) (Figure 3.3).

3.3. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

"Are you satisfied with the location of the kindergarten (distance from home and / or transport)?", depending on the type of settlement



According to the state building norms "Planning and development",¹ a pedestrian accessibility way to the nearest kindergarten in the city should be shorter than 300 m, in the village, shorter than 500 m.

¹ State construction norms of Ukraine. Planning and development of territories / Ministry of Regional Development, Construction, and Housing of Ukraine, 2019 (<https://dreamdim.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DBN-B22-12-2019.pdf>).

Mothers from rural areas complained that they had to travel several kilometers to the kindergarten on their own, and even when the local authorities organized a bus, it was possible to travel in it only in one direction. After taking the child to kindergarten, a mother has to return home on her own.

Long distances to kindergarten in rural areas create time challenges and sometimes danger:

[The child went to the garden at] five. Due to the distance, due to the fact that the way is through the forest, therefore, it is very dangerous in the village here, very dangerous. How many cases, how many small children die here, how many died in the village, how many ... in general, it's scary to let just a child into the kindergarten. [He walks by himself] about three kilometers.

A hamlet, Center, mother of many children

A separate problem is the lack of conditions for children with special educational needs, which makes it impossible for mothers to be employed:

Paying a personal tutor is entirely shouldered by the parents, and it is simply impossible for one of the parents to go to work, because the child is only in the group until 1 p.m. There is talk of leaving the child to sleep until 3 pm, but it doesn't matter whether you are sitting at home or hiring a babysitter in addition to the tutor to pick up the child from kindergarten. And few people work if they have a child with a disability.

Regional center, South

CONDITIONS IN KINDERGARTENS

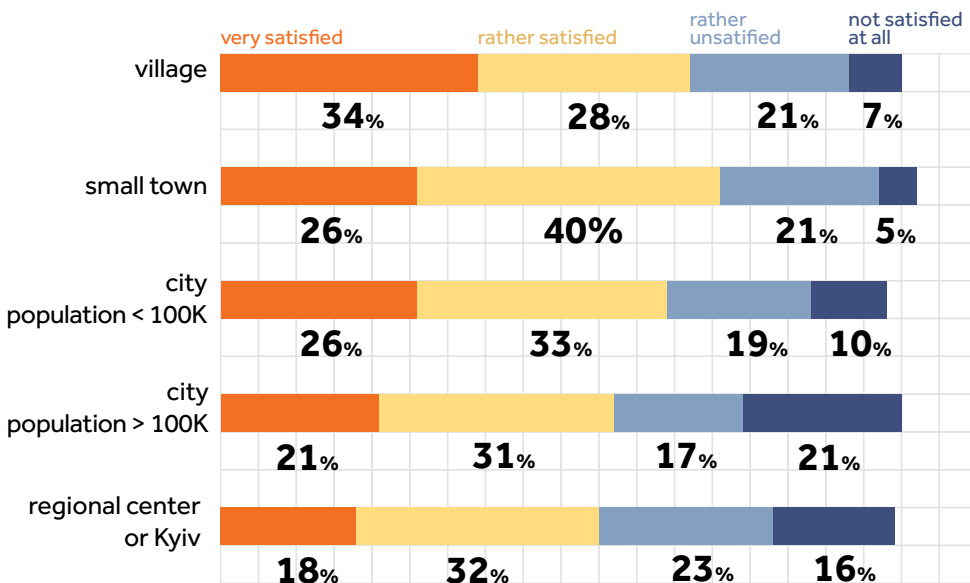
Number of children in groups and temperature in the room

According to the Law of Ukraine "On Preschool Education", the maximum number of children aged 3–7 years in a group is 20, for children under 1 year it is less than 10, for children 1–3 years less than 15 children. The same number should be in groups of children of different age groups and during the recovery period (from June 1 to August 31). Groups with short-term and round-the-clock stay should have fewer than 10 children, and inclusive groups should include no more than three children with special educational needs. For specialized kindergartens, the norms of group occupancy depend on the profile of the kindergarten.

In general, one in three respondents (35%) are somewhat dissatisfied with the group size: 26% of respondents in rural areas, 29% in cities with a population of more than 100 thousand (not regional centers), and 39% in regional centers and the capital (Figure 3.4), where the norm is sometimes exceeded one and a half to two times.

3.4. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

*"Are you satisfied with the number of children in groups?",
depending on the type of settlement*



There are 45 children in our kindergarten group, of course, not all of them actually attend. In another kindergarten, something like 51 children in a group... This I was told and I know it's true.

Regional center, South

Kindergarten conditions and overcrowded groups can negatively affect a child's adaptation to kindergarten and increase maternal stress.

Some living conditions, such as indoor temperature (may be either cold or too hot), lack of ventilation, and lack of outdoor activities can potentially reduce the economic activity of mothers due to frequent illness of children:

Most sanitary and hygienic norms remain prescribed in great detail. For example, windows must be washed at least three times a year, the sandbox closed at night, there should be a separate entrance for early age groups, one should keep the temperature between 19 and 23° C and humidity between 40% and 60%, ventilate the room every 1.5–2 hours for at least 10 minutes, as well as before and after children's sleep. Children should go outdoors at least 2 times a day. The optimal time to be spent outdoors is between 3.5 and 4 hours a day. Personnel should carry out thorough cleaning and disinfection. After the introduction of quarantine restrictions through COVID-19, disinfection and cleaning were prescribed every two hours.

One in three respondents (36%) said that their child gets sick several times a year or almost never, one in four respondents (25%) said that their child gets sick several times a few months, one in five (22%) stated several times in half a year, 13% said it was several times a month.

When the winter and autumn period comes, we have a very big problem with [heating]. We have electric heating, and they try to economize terribly. They save so much that it is simply impossible. Heating is normally turned on only after 10 o'clock. And at three or whatever it is already turned off. When a child goes to the bedroom in winter, it is incredibly cold there.

Village, West

Food in kindergartens

The organization of feeding is regulated by the order of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science of 17.04.2006 №298 / 227 "On the approval of the Instruction on the organization of children's nutrition in preschool educational institutions". Children should be fed according to a clearly established schedule every 3–4 hours. Regarding food norms, in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of November 22, 2004 № 1591¹, for example, with 4 meals a day, children aged 3 or older should receive 100 grams of fresh fruit, 110 grams of meat, 50 grams of fish, half an egg, half a liter of milk or dairy products per day.

56% are generally satisfied with the nutrition in kindergartens, but a third of mothers (24% in villages and 36% in cities) noted its unsatisfactory quality. In rural areas, there is a practice when the administration, in addition to paying for food, offers parents to bring food: "We bring 40 kg of potatoes annually, 6 kg of beets, carrots, onions, etc." (Small town, Center).

But a more common problem pointed out by mothers is when their own products, on the contrary, are forbidden at the institution, even if the parents in this way want to somehow improve the nutrition of their children:

The issue of including more fruits and vegetables in children's diets has been repeatedly raised. The parents were ready to provide this with their own funds and efforts, but the manager did not allow it. Moreover, she noted that a moderate diet and abstinence from excess food is useful not only for adults but also for children.

Regional center, Center of Ukraine

This creates special problems for mothers whose children suffer from food allergies and have other special nutritional needs:

1 Nutrition standards in preschool educational institutions (except sanatoriums) for children older than one year (Appendix 2 to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of November 22, 2004 № 1591) / Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2004 (<https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/10287721>).

My child has lactose intolerance. First, I was denied the opportunity to switch to individual cooking. And then I turned to the district administration, they said it was possible. Then they agreed to cook porridge for us separately [...] Then I discovered problems with borscht, it didn't suit my child either, they used I don't know what sauce. My child got increased acetone levels. So I had to transfer her to a short stay without food, without eating.

Regional center, South

However, each kindergarten has its own rules governing this issue. Sometimes parents are not allowed to bring their own food, the child eats almost nothing during the day, but parents have to pay for the food in full. Parents are offered to solve this problem in specialized kindergartens for children with food allergies, but there are not enough places in such institutions, mothers say.

By parents themselves and at their own expense: the practice of informal contributions

Assessing various aspects of the work of kindergartens, the interviewed mothers expressed the greatest dissatisfaction with the condition of institutions and their material base.

During the survey, 30% complained about the condition of the premises. 36% indicated inadequate provision of toys and teaching materials. The greatest dissatisfaction among the surveyed mothers (53%) is caused by the condition of playgrounds and the territory. Due to the lack of finances, apparently, they are arranged in the last turn: "The arrangement of playgrounds is very bad, most often as remained from the Soviet times" (City, Center).

Much of the problems of kindergartens in the context of a lack of funding is solved through 'charity' contributions from parents themselves. 36% of surveyed mothers paid a 'charity' contribution when enrolling their child in the kindergarten (38% in large cities, 29% in villages), 63% reported that they make informal contributions (72% in regional centers and the capital, 45% in villages).

All repairs, didactic materials, toys, detergents, building materials are at the expense of parents. Kindergarten management is not interested in reporting their problems to the education department.

Regional center, Center of Ukraine

An additional challenge is the new preschool education programs (in particular, "Sure Start"), the didactic and methodological support of which is also shouldered by parents and educators:

Now they want to transfer all groups to new programs, and parents need to buy not only notebooks and manuals for children, but also a program and a textbook for educators, which costs a lot of money, almost 400 UAH.

City, West

Some informants realize that educators often find themselves under pressure and have no choice but to ask for money from parents: *"In many cases, educators become hostages of the situation, forced to ask for money from parents, and if they fail, they pay themselves."* (Regional center, West).

The issue of qualification: "It is necessary to put one's whole soul into this work"

66% of surveyed mothers are satisfied with the qualifications of the staff, and 68% are satisfied with the psychological state of the child (the child goes to kindergarten with pleasure). Mothers who encountered unprofessional behavior of educators or nannies emotionally described their experiences, and some reported cases of violence against children:

At first, my child did not trust the staff. I could feel it, but the child didn't speak well, and I couldn't understand what was going on. Then, when she started talking better, she started telling me some moments, and I was shocked. For example, because she did not want to clean the toys, she could be spanked, they could shout at children there.

Regional center, South

There were also respondents who clearly saw the connection between educators' qualifications, their attitude to work, and the lack of funding. The administration often simply has no other person for replacement at such a low pay:

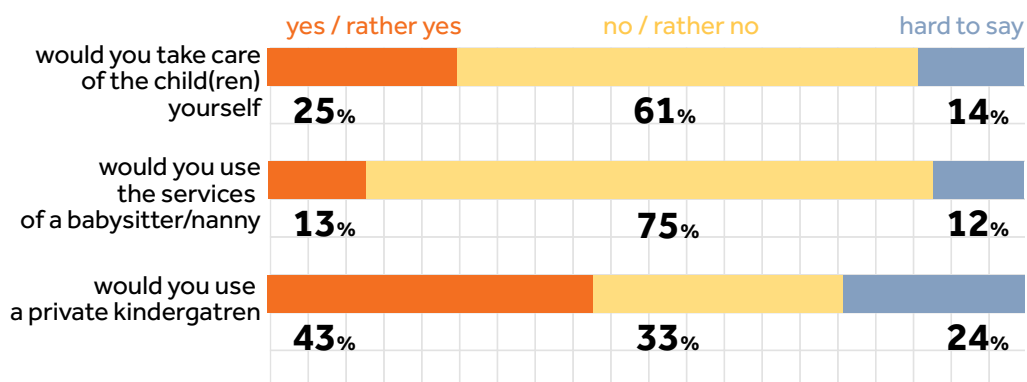
Low payment for educators for the work performed. I really understand how difficult it is to deal with 20 young children every day. Educators often resign because of this and go to private kindergartens or change their field of activity. It is necessary to put one's whole soul into this work, but the state pays too little for it, and the management of kindergartens has very high demands on educators.

Regional center, South

THE MAIN ROLE OF KINDERGARTEN: ECONOMIC NECESSITY OR AN INDISPENSABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIALIZATION?

In the opinion of the vast majority of respondents, kindergarten is a necessary environment for socialization and development of the child: only 25% of respondents, if possible, would take care of the child on their own (Figure 3.5).

3.5. ALTERNATIVES TO PUBLIC KINDERGARTENS: BABYSITTER/NANNY, PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN, SELF-CARE (if there were enough resources)



The vast majority of respondents consider kindergartens as a necessary environment for socialization and development:

We would definitely attend [kindergarten], because, nevertheless, the development of both speaking and motor skills, and communication with children, I think, in kindergarten is better than at home with parents. The child is more likely to adapt to society through kindergarten.

Village, South

Ideas about a good kindergarten are concentrated mainly on a favorable psychological atmosphere, an individual approach to the child:

I believe that a child should like to go to kindergarten, have a rest, and communicate with other children [...] The child should feel comfortable, like at home.

Regional center, East

Also when speaking of the idea of a good kindergarten, mothers focus on safety, healthy lifestyle, and nutrition:

This is, first of all, an opportunity for children to be outdoors a lot. Secondly, it is food. As for food, I have repeatedly suggested to parents in the group (we have not done so yet) to provide water. Just constant access to clean water [...] I would like children to be given more healthy food.

Regional center, Center of Ukraine



Some informants emphasize the importance of improving the conditions and remuneration of kindergarten workers:

[We need] material and technical base, and it must be provided at the expense of taxpayers from the local budget, not at the expense of additional contributions of the parents and [pedagogical] team. We are very lucky when we have a teacher who loves children and it is felt. It is important for me that those people who work in the kindergarten are not burnt out [...] And what is important for me in the kindergarten is that the work of teachers and all employees must be properly evaluated.

City, Center

The educational function of the kindergarten is not a priority in the views of our informants:

For me, first of all, it is important not what the child will be taught there and how the child will be prepared for school. Because if we lack something, we'd better go somewhere. But it is important to me that the child just feels calm there, that the child feels protected.

Regional center, South

However, this feature is more important for rural residents, who often do not have alternative opportunities for preschool education:

[What we lack is] additional classes with a teacher of English. I would like my child to study. Because they are already starting in city schools, they have been practicing this for a long time. And children, when they go to first grade of school, they already know words and some spoken language...

Village, East

SUMMARY

Accessible and high-quality kindergartens are a key part of the economic activity of mothers of preschool children. From the perspective of mothers whose children attend communal kindergartens in Ukraine, institutions generally cope with their main functions.

The vast majority of respondents are generally satisfied with the condition of kindergartens. Dissatisfaction most often relates to aspects that are directly related to lack of funding, such as food, the condition of premises and playgrounds, poor provision of toys, and overcrowded groups, especially in cities. Most active in the block of the online questionnaire is the format of "free line", where respondents could speak freely about the problems that primarily concern them, and here most complained about the poor material base and, consequently, the practice of informal payments to ensure daily work of kindergarten. At the same time, the highest level of satisfaction concerned the teaching staff. 69% of respondents (completely or rather) are satisfied with the attitude of employees to children, 68% said that the child goes to kindergarten with pleasure, 66% said they are satisfied with the educational, and developmental function of kindergartens, and 66% are content with the staff qualifications. The next section is devoted to the working conditions of kindergarten workers.

KINDERGARTENS "FROM WITHIN": WORKING CONDITIONS AND THE POSITION OF KINDERGARTEN WORKERS

I graduated from the Pedagogical Institute. First the professional school, then the Institute. I spent nine years studying. And the state does not think that I should live with dignity.

Educator, 3 years of experience, salary 5400 UAH, Kyiv

Kindergarten work has a direct impact on the situation of women not only because kindergartens take on the function of caring for preschool children, giving young mothers the opportunity to return to economic activity. The pre-school education sector is also crucial for the position of more than 300,000 people working in it, and they are mostly women.

KINDERGARTEN WORK: FINANCIAL DIMENSION

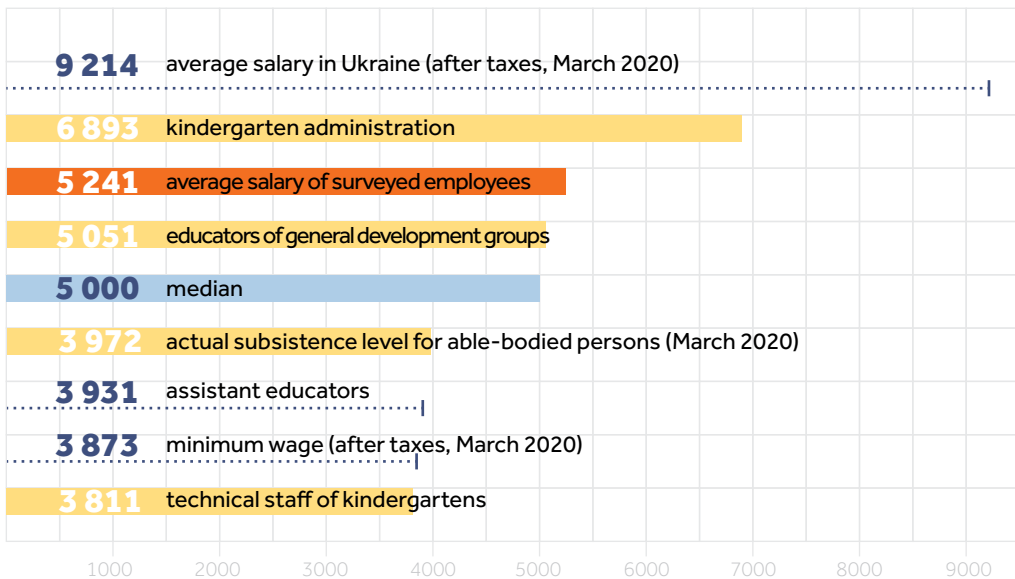
Remuneration: "This simply should not be so"

I say—we will pull everything, everything will be fine! Just give us, I don't know... well, not four thousand. Well, to survive, well, at least around ten thousand. To everyone. To be able to save, to be able to eat, to get dressed, the elementary things. Elementary! I'm not talking about something...

Educator, 16 years of experience, salary 4500 UAH, city, Center of Ukraine

The biggest and most obvious problem for kindergarten workers is low wages. According to the survey, until the lockdown closure of institutions in the spring of 2020 the average monthly salary of employees of communal kindergartens was UAH 5,241 (Chart 4.1) [here and further—after taxes]. This is only 57% of the average salary in Ukraine in March 2020. Half of the respondents received less than UAH 5,000 per month.

4.1. AVERAGE MONTHLY SALARY OF SURVEYED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS, UAH (after taxes, before the closure of institutions in the spring of 2020)



The administration had the highest average monthly salary (directors, heads of kindergartens, deputies) of UAH 6,893, and technical staff (cleaners, janitors, cooks, etc.) had the lowest of UAH 3,811. Among educators, the largest group consists of educators of general development groups, whose average salary was UAH 5,051. On average, methodologists, educators of inclusive groups, special teachers (for example, speech therapists), as well as music teachers received more than UAH 5,000 per month. On average, psychologists / social educators, group leaders, physical education instructors, and medical staff received less than UAH 5,000 per month. Teachers' assistants received an average of UAH 3,972.

Wages in the pre-school education sector, as in other public sectors of the economy, are based on the so-called 'tariff grid', which since 2017 has been tied to the subsistence level, which is underestimated by at least a half. Thus, the central government has a direct influence on basic wages in kindergartens: *"The tariff grid should be completely revised today. Minimum wages go up, but there is no wage raise. This simply should not be so"* (head of kindergarten, 40 years of experience, salary 7000, regional center, South).

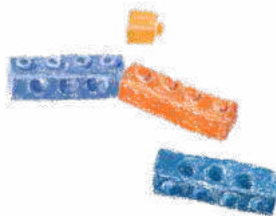
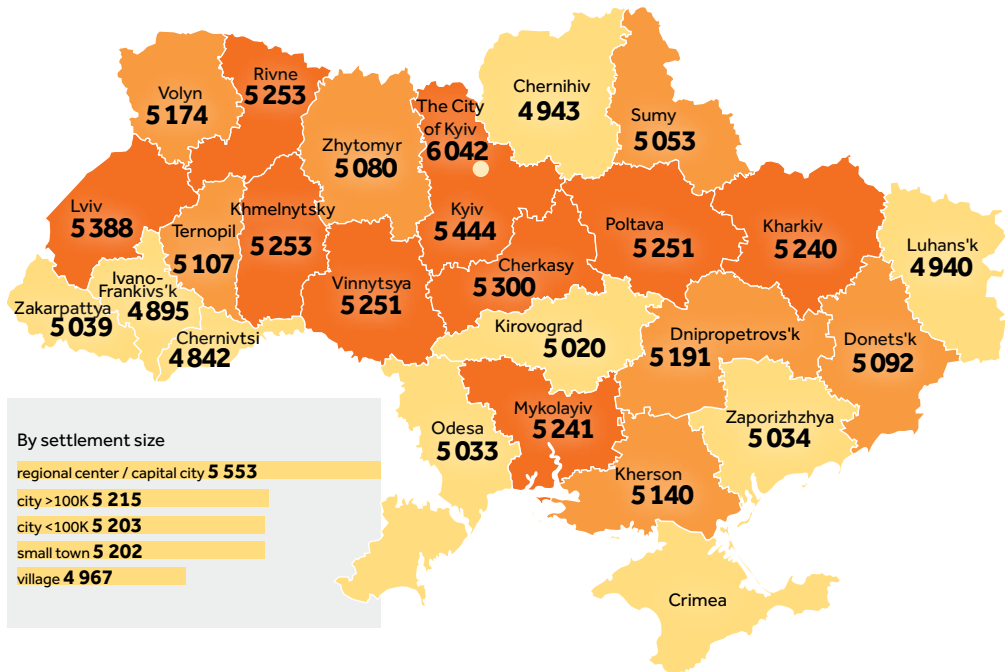
The salaries of kindergarten workers, as well as other "state employees", are determined by a single tariff grid. From 2017, the tariff has been tied to the subsistence level for able-bodied people, not to the minimum wage. However, this contradicts the Law on Remuneration of Labor, according to which wages cannot be lower than the minimum wage. Therefore, if the accrued salary of an employee who has fulfilled the monthly work rate is lower than the minimum, the employer makes an additional payment. In practice, this leads to the fact that for many employees part of the surcharges (for years of service, etc.) goes simply to "catch up" the minimum wage. In addition, in accordance with Article 61 of the Law "On Education", the salary of a teacher of the lowest qualification category is set at three minimum wages. That is, in the spring of 2020, the amount should have been at least UAH 11,400 "net". And each subsequent qualification category must add at least 10%.

The state has assigned these salaries for us. And that's it. And above that [the local government cannot pay], there is the tariff, it is signed and determined by the state, that's all. And the state somehow constantly bypasses preschool [workers], they believe that we should eat the Holy Spirit.

Educator, 21 years of experience, salary 4,600 UAH, village, South

However, it is the local government which actually determines the number of positions in institutions, as well as the size of various surcharges, and also fully finances preschool education. Accordingly, wages differ significantly between different regions and types of settlements (Figure 4.2).

4.2. GEOGRAPHY OF SALARIES OF SURVEYED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS, UAH (after taxes, before the closure of institutions in the spring of 2020)



According to the "Law On Remuneration of Labor", the amount of allowances, surcharges, and bonuses is set in accordance with the law, as well as general, sectoral, and territorial agreements. This is prescribed in the collective agreement or agreed with the trade union or other body authorized to represent workers. For educators, the payments are: allowances according to years of service (10% for more than 3 years, 20% for more than 10 years, and 30% for more than 20 years), 20% for certification for the duration of the certificate, surcharges for work in inclusive groups up to 20%, for overcrowding of groups¹, 10% for assistant educators for working with disinfectants, from 5% to 30% for prestige², surcharges, allowances, bonuses for the use of foreign languages, modern technologies, implementation of innovative projects, etc. However, since all these payments are also made to local budgets, they are often paid at the minimum allowable level.

The highest average salaries were registered in the regional centers and the city of Kyiv, UAH 5,553 (UAH 6,042 in Kyiv if calculated separately). At the same time, salaries in the villages were the lowest. On average, they amounted to UAH 4,967.

The economic development of the region, the relationship between rural and urban areas, the priorities of local authorities all affect the difference in wages between regions. Average salaries below UAH 5,000 were recorded in Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk, Luhansk, and Chernihiv regions. The highest were registered in the Kyiv region (5,444 UAH), Lviv (5,388 UAH), Cherkasy (5,300 UAH) regions.

Everyone complains about the salary, but at the same time, where do we go? Where do we go? Today the girls received an advance of 1,000 hryvnias, and they stand there and cry and they say: "We will now bring this 1,000 hryvnias to the store." They took food on credit to feed their children. They will be left without anything again today. And I just want to cry in such a situation.

Head of kindergarten, 23 years of experience,
salary 4,200 UAH, village, Center

1 How to pay extra for exceeding the planned capacity of groups (<https://www.pedrada.com.ua/article/1363-yak-doplachuvati-za-perevishchennya-planovo-napovnyuvanost-grup>).

2 On amendments to some resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine / Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2018 (<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/23-2018-%D0%BF#Text>).

Material base: “with an outstretched hand”

And sometimes you feel, you know, like in a circus: when you have to juggle in front of everyone to [...] put this sign of equality between [kindergarten and school]. We feel a little different. [...] The emphasis is very high on school, and as for us, zero, just zero.

Head of kindergarten, 6 years of experience,
salary 7,200 UAH, village, West

Poor material support of kindergartens is a problem that affects not only the living conditions of children in the institutions, but also working conditions of educators and others. The workers complained about the lack of household goods, materials for training, methodical materials, stationery, toys, equipment. Without all this, it is impossible to perform their professional duties at the proper level.

Representatives of the administration of kindergartens, who are forced to somehow coordinate the needs of the kindergartens and the critically low level of funding for these needs by the local government, who has to constantly be asked for funds, also complained about inadequate material support.

When it comes to insufficient provision of the basic needs of the kindergarten, this is critical in case of such things as modern equipment necessary for proper operation:

Of course, they demand a high level from us! We cannot show this in some old pictures, old cubes, that is, it must be modern, this is like our slogan. It's awful. That is, you should at least have either a laptop or a tablet. [...] I had to buy a tablet last year, because I understood that my salary wasn't enough for a laptop. Thank you for paying us our healthcare money on time. And so, I "get better health", I bought myself a tablet for work.

Educator, 4 years of experience, salary 4,300 UAH, city, East

Local authorities do not provide enough funds for the material needs of kindergartens, but expect (and sometimes require) a “high level” of work. At the same time, the official policy of recent years is that asking something from parents becomes risky, as workers and officials have repeatedly said.

However, it is clear that in such conditions in which kindergartens are placed, it is simply impossible for them to do without the financial help of the children's parents. As a result, workers, sometimes under pressure from the administration, sometimes

on their own initiative, are forced to carefully ask the parents for help, risking retaliation (and sometimes getting into) trouble if one of the parents complains to the relevant local authorities: "We are asking, so quietly, we say to the parent committee: *"Maybe you will write to the parents?"* Because we do not have the right to write about what we lack"(educator, 17 years of experience, salary 5,700 UAH, Kyiv).

Everything in the group is there thanks to the parents. Everything from a chair to those blinds or curtains, that's all thanks to the parents.

Educator, 9 years of experience, salary 4,100 UAH, city, South

However, some workers do not want to take risks and to ask the parents to raise money for material support, especially if they have experienced complaints from parents and, as a result, had problems with relevant local authorities. Some people just get tired of asking every time, especially for "small" running costs or costs that parents may perceive as their own whims. Or they simply feel humiliated by such a situation and rely solely on the initiative of the parents themselves.

As a result, in conditions of chronic underfunding, many workers are forced to make materials for their own hands, bring something from home, or buy materials at their own expense.

The kindergarten opened, there was not much, it was necessary to buy. Brushes to wash toys, basins, trays had to be bought for the kitchen, drying shelves. Half was bought, half was not. They [the administration] came and told the girls something like this: you have to ask for something somewhere. We have to stand endlessly with an outstretched hand, you know. And if you do not want to be humiliated, go and buy it at your own expense.

Educator, 1 year of experience, salary 4,400 UAH, small town, West

In the context of the pandemic, when kindergartens had to organize special conditions for children, part of the burden was again placed on the shoulders of parents and employees. Despite government assurances that everything needed, like non-contact thermometers, personal care products, antiseptics, paper towels and disposable tableware will be provided for from the budget, this was often provided for only at first or from time to time.

KINDERGARTEN WORK: SCHEDULE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Working hours and workload: "How much more could we give to children!"

Yes, we do not have enough workers. And it turns out that we work at one and a half workload. [...] Because for such a salary, well, not everyone will come and work here. And secondly, everyone understands that this work is morally difficult.

Educator, 6 years of experience,
salary 5,000 UAH, city, East

Given the low wages, 57% of women surveyed reported that their workplace was characterized by: overtime (27%), unpredictable working hours (31%), and weekend work (20%). In other words, despite the officially reduced working week for a number of categories of PEI employees, most respondents work above the established norms (Figure 4.3).

4.3. WORKING HOURS OF INTERVIEWED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS

(until the closure of institutions in the spring of 2020)

57%



31% unpredictable working hours



27% overtime work,
irregular working day



20% work on weekends +
work at home

43%

nothing
of the above-mentioned



According to the Law on Preschool Education, educators of the general development group must work 30 hours per week, assistants 40 hours per week, educators of inclusive groups and compensatory groups 25 hours per week, assistants in such groups 36 hours per week. According to the Labor Code, overtime work, work on holidays or weekends must be remunerated at double the rate. The maximum number of overtime hours should not exceed 120 hours per year.

High responsibilities combined with low salaries lead to a chronic shortage of staff in many kindergartens, as well as forcing employees to agree to work more than one workload rate in order to be able to earn a little more. Often educators actually have no choice but to work for two people, because there is simply no replacement worker for a group. On the other hand, the lack of funding in small settlements can lead to too few rates for kindergarten, reducing working hours and forcing female workers to earn less than the minimum rate.

We work 12 hours a day. We are very exhausted! [...] I don't want to work for 12 hours, for example, because I need to do something at home, my father is old. But I am forced! They will say, "What do you mean, you won't work? Who will?"

Educator, 17 years of experience, salary 5,700 UAH, Kyiv

If it's not one thing to do, it's something else to finish. Then we will all stand together, and we will also do this other thing. A "five minute meeting", as usual, lasts for a few hours. The methodical hours, the pedagogical councils. [...] Some children may not be picked up, and you sit there until your parents remember their child.

Educator,
23 years of experience,
salary 4,500 UAH,
regional center, West

In the off-hours there are often methodological unions, parent meetings, individual communication with parents, children's so-called morning parties (even if they are not in the work shift of the educator). In some kindergartens, in non-working hours, employees undergo mandatory preventive medical examinations¹. Due to

¹ In addition, workers sometimes undergo medical examinations at their own expense if local authorities do not cover the costs.

the lack of staff, kindergarten workers are sometimes forced to combine their direct responsibilities with the work of cleaners, janitors, farm managers, nurses, teachers, accountants, methodologists, mostly without additional pay.

There are usually two reasons for working from home: preparation for classes and paperwork. If the educator has her own minor children, the educator is often forced to prepare for classes at night, sacrificing basic rest. If she wants to modernize, refresh the program, show children something new and interesting, she needs to spend her own time and sometimes money.

After work, you can't get away from it. We are preparing for classes. I have a child, he constantly told me: "Mom, will you ever give me time?" Because when I come home, I start by writing plans, looking for information. You always cut something, glue, invent something from what there is. This is a constant thing, this happens every day.

Educator, 4 years of experience,
salary 4,300 UAH, city, East, single mother

Another problem is the large amount of paperwork related to control, reporting, and planning.

This paperwork is endless. Filling all these unnecessary plans, magazines, documentation, reports. A lot, an infinite number. Magazines, plans. Long-term plans, calendar plans, daily plans. Then reports. Quarterly, monthly, filling logs. There is no time to deal with children. This should be the most important thing, that we spend time with children. But we have almost no time for that.

Educator, 9 years of experience, salary 4,100 UAH, city, South

The burden of paperwork reduces the time that educators can devote meaningfully to children: "If it weren't for this stupid paperwork, how much more could we give to children!" (educator, experience 4 years, salary 4,300 UAH, city, East). The big problem is also that extra hours of work, at home and on weekends, are not taken into account in any way when calculating salaries.

Lack of staff and long working hours are often accompanied by overcrowding of groups, which further increases the workload on female workers. This problem is especially common in large cities, but the number of children in groups is often too large in smaller settlements, too. In extreme cases, the staff shared their experience with nursery groups with more than 30 children on the list and

with older groups with more than 50 children. Of course, not all of them attend kindergarten every day, but actual attendance may be significantly higher than the legal norm.

According to the Law “On Preschool Education”, the maximum number in the group for children under 1 year is 10, for children 1–3 years up to 15 people, and for children aged 3–7 years up to 20. Up to 15 children should be in different age groups and during the so-called health-improving period (from June 1 to August 31). Up to 10 children should be in groups with short and round-the-clock stays, and in inclusive groups there should be no more than three children with special educational needs. Educators and assistants should be paid extra for exceeding the planned occupancy of groups and for the performance along with the main work of the duties of temporarily absent employees.¹

Groups are crowded. Groups are overcrowded and overcrowded... If there should be 15 children in the nursery group, according to [norms], and we have 32, 30 and 28. This is in one group.

Educator, 33 years of experience, salary 4,500 UAH, city, South

This situation with the number of children, together with the lack of staff and low wages, leads to excessive workload, emotional burnout and health problems. In addition, it negatively affects the comfort and safety of children in kindergartens, reduces the opportunities for their development and education in the institutions.

¹ Instruction on the procedure for calculating the salary of educators / Ministry of Education of Ukraine, 1993 (<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0056-93#Text>).

Job satisfaction and stress level: “the educator has no rights at whatsoever”

It's difficult, psychologically. You are nervous, because not only do you not have time for anything, you also have no money and no one appreciates you.

**Educator, 9 years of experience,
salary 5,000 UAH,
regional center, West**

The majority of respondents are generally satisfied with their jobs (Figure 4.4): 31% of respondents indicated the level of 3 points, and more than half of respondents, 54%, chose an assessment level of 4 or 5 points (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means very dissatisfied, 5 means very satisfied). During the interviews, the answers of most of the employees to the questions of what they liked the most at work were surprisingly similar. They said that they like to work and to communicate with children, they like to see their development, and the result of their work.

I like children. I like working with them, I want to work with them. The first thing I like is children, the second thing I like is working with children. That is all.

Educator, 9 years of experience, salary 5,000 UAH, regional center, West

The high level of job satisfaction is sharply contrasted with the extremely high level of stress at work (Figure 4.4) which employees were asked to rate on a 10-point scale (where 1 point means almost no stress, 10 means very high stress). The vast majority of respondents (78%) rated the stress level from 5 to 10 points. More than half (57%) chose the assessment level from 8 to 10 points.

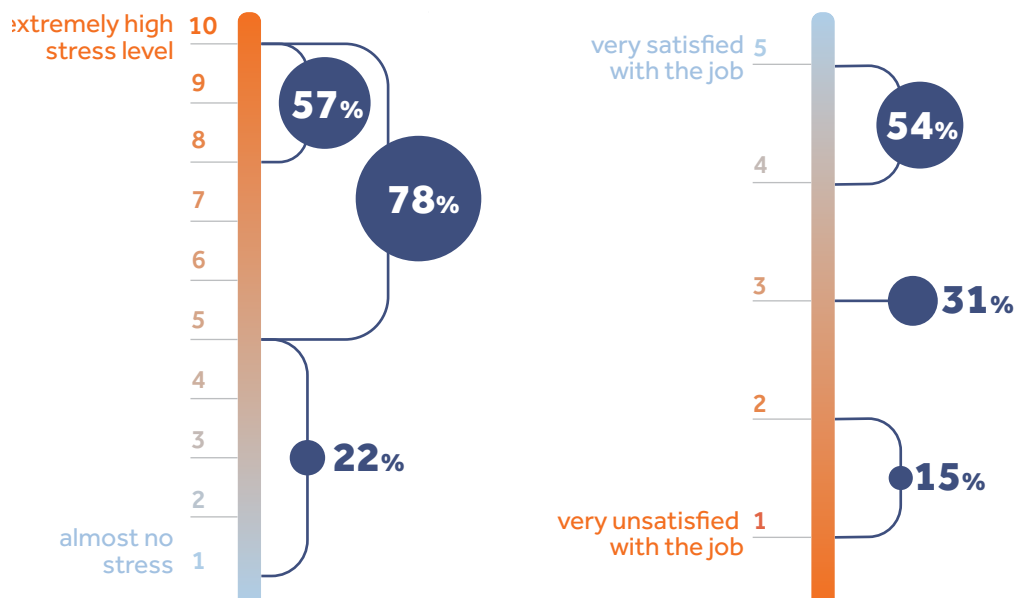
During interviews, the stressors mentioned included high levels of responsibility and psychological pressure, conflicts with parents and the administration of the institution, large amounts of paperwork, overcrowding of groups, and the behavior of individual children.

High stress, again, is due to the administration and parents. These are the two factors. Kids can be stressful too, you know. If somewhere, God forbid, something happened, it's stress, yes.

Educator of an inclusive group, 14 years of experience, salary 7,000 UAH, city, Center

It should be emphasized that a part of the employees stated that they had no conflicts with either the administration of the kindergarten or children's parents. In addition, some employees stressed that kids' parents support them in every way, and the administration is making every effort to develop the kindergarten: "We have a manager, she will not be allowed into the village council soon. She knocks out their doors, she walks in, soon the door will be closed [in front of her]" (assistant educator, 4 years of experience, salary 3,800 UAH, small town, East). However, the rest of the workers spoke of misunderstandings, conflicts, problems.

4.4. LEVEL OF STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION OF INTERVIEWED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS (self-assessment)



Among the causes of conflicts with parents which the workers named were: parental funds, injuries, children's behavior, different visions of methods of education, devaluation of the status of educator.

It is very difficult, because each parent has their own character, with their own vision of life, and the educator, in fact, is alone on the battlefield... Often they just break down on educators and teachers. Because everyone thinks that only [we] are obliged. These [educators] are some kind of disenfranchised creatures who only have duties and are obliged. It is sad.

Educator, 4 years of experience, salary 4,300 UAH, city, East

Among the causes of conflicts with the administration, workers who have experienced such conflicts, named: corruption, nepotism, working conditions, problems with vacations and sick leaves, division of responsibilities. Some employees pointed to mobbing by the administration.

Low wages, high workloads, conflicts all lead to stress, emotional burnout, and health issues. Female workers feel vulnerable and unprotected, and some of them directly point to the need for psychological and legal assistance for kindergarten staff.

When we take courses, [we must] have a psychologist. To work with us, give us legal aid. Otherwise, it turns out that we only have responsibilities, we have no rights. The educator has no rights at all. These are great stresses.

Educator, 21 years of experience, salary 4,600 UAH, village, South

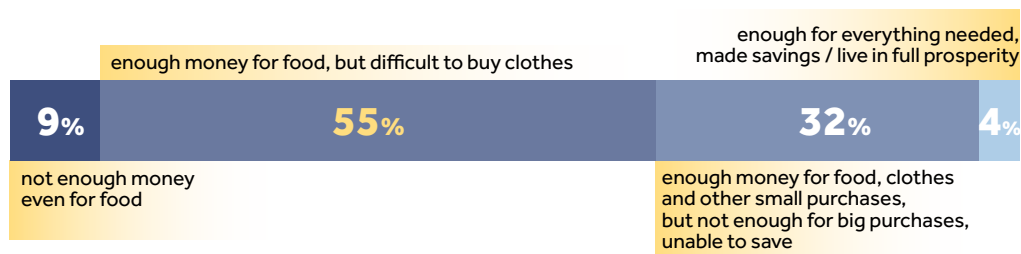
Living conditions of employees: "I don't even dream of buying anything new"

What do I save on? On everything. Really, I save on everything. I save on everything. [...] I save on shoes, I save on clothes, I save on food, I save on medicines.

Educator, 9 years of experience,
salary 5,000 UAH,
regional center, West

Assessing the financial situation of their families before the closure of kindergartens in the spring of 2020 (Figure 4.5), 9% of respondents said that they did not even have enough money for food. The majority (55%) chose the option "enough money for food, but it's difficult to buy clothes", 32% chose "enough money for food, clothes and other small purchases, but not enough for large purchases, could not save." Only 4% said that they had enough money for everything they needed, they were able to save or lived in full prosperity.

4.5. WELFARE OF THE FAMILIES OF THE INTERVIEWED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS (self-assessment)



During the interviews, workers who rated their financial situation rather positively usually had significant additional resources in the family, mostly a relatively high husband's salary¹: "Well, the salary is only enough to eat. That's all. And everything else

¹ In some cases, female workers or their husbands received a substantial pension, for example, because they had worked in hazardous conditions for some time.

is already my husband's earnings. And so, to support our child, it's all my husband's merit" (educator, 9 years of experience, salary 4100 UAH, city, South). This situation is problematic because it reproduces the inequality between men and women and makes women completely dependent on their partner's earnings. Sometimes, however, these women also worked two shifts or had extra work.

Well, I'll tell you honestly, because I worked in two shifts, at two rates, then, so to speak, we did not have to save. Because of my salary, plus my husband's salary, we, in principle, had enough. And even enough to save a bit.

**Educator of an inclusive group, 23 years of experience,
salary 5,500 UAH, regional center, South**

Apart from a small number of female workers whose financial situation is relatively secure, the vast majority of respondents are forced to make ends meet, saving on many things, especially their own needs: "Well, as always, you save on yourself, everything is spent on children" (educator, experience 1 year, salary 4,400 UAH, small town, West). The composition of the family and the age of the workers are crucial here. Having minor children means significantly higher costs; younger age means no old-age pension and less work experience, which generally means lower wages.

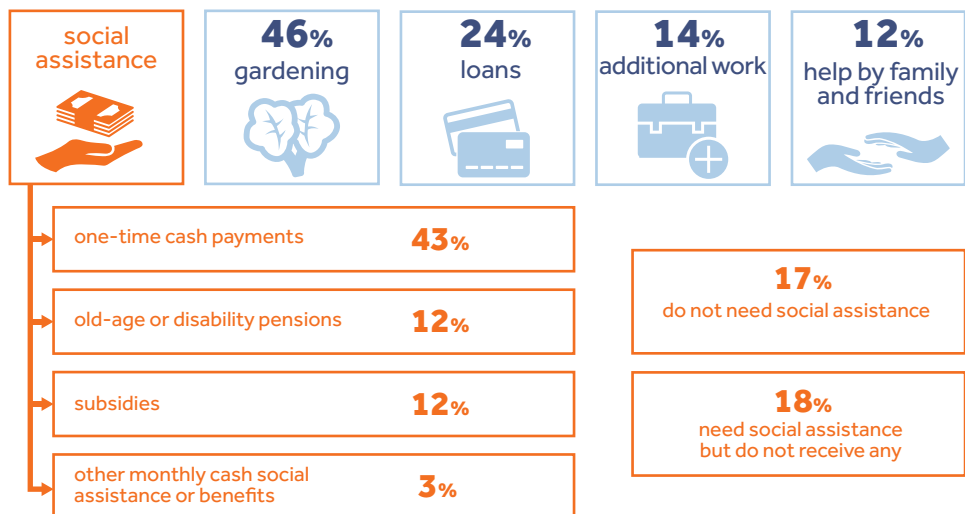
We save on clothes. Thank God, there is "Humana", I have everything for work from there. "Humana", the second-hand shops. I do not even dream of buying anything new. I don't even dream of it! You know, for me, it's just fantastic, because I have children, they need to be fed. Even on food, of course, we save on that. On summer vacation ... of course, we can't afford anything.

Educator, 17 years of experience, salary 5,700 UAH, Kyiv

Most workers have their own housing, but some live with relatives (parents, siblings) or in housing that needs major repairs. There are also those who are forced to rent, which is an additional heavy burden on the family budget.

Under such conditions, many workers are forced to use additional sources of material resources (Figure 4.6). Among the regular social benefits or allowances that respondents or their family members receive are: old-age or disability pensions (12%), utility subsidies (12%) and other monthly social assistance / benefits (3%). 17% of respondents said that they do not need social assistance, and 18% of respondents said that their families need social assistance but do not receive it.

4.6. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES OF THE INTERVIEWED KINDERGARTEN WORKERS



Among additional sources of money or food, 46% of respondents use products from their gardens, 14% have other part-time jobs, 12% receive financial assistance from relatives or friends, and 24% use loans (both from banks and from acquaintances).

Among the additional part-time jobs those related to working with children are common: nanny, tutor, coach, animator. However, kindergarten workers also work in shops, as manicurists, cleaners, they knit/sew to order, sell goods from their own gardens, become seasonal workers, and so on.

Until I had a son, I also worked as a nanny. But it's generally penny earnings. I spent my vacation in that way, we can say. I used to knit to order. That's also a penny. I worked as an animator. It's also a penny for a small town. [...] Well, that is, I tried different options. What else did we do? We kept chickens: half to eat, for ourselves, half were sold. Well, in general, it's such hard work, and the income, well...

Educator, 16 years of experience,
salary 4,500 UAH, city, Center of Ukraine

Despite the main work, additional sources of resources and savings, most employees are not able to save: "What is there to save? The communal utilities 'ate' our money, and what was left was merely enough for food" (educator, 21 years of experience, salary 4,600 UAH, village, South). And for any large planned expenses or in case of force-majeure, workers are forced to borrow money from acquaintances and/or take bank loans.

Working in two shifts, additional part-time jobs, and gardening are all attempts to somehow improve the difficult financial situation of the families, which is a consequence of low wages in the sector. However, for many employees, all of these strategies also lead to chronic fatigue, lack of rest, health problems, and lack of time. Lack of time is a particularly acute problem for women who have children or other family members who need care¹. The situation of female workers raising children on their own is particularly difficult.

When you think: should I pay for electricity, for gas now, or in autumn, when the cold weather already begins? Or, what boots do I buy? Rubber boots for my child to go to school, or take winter shoes already? It's an eternal choice. You feel like just some kind of an idiot, an absolutely failed person. You bang your head against the wall, and everything is useless. It's sad to have fun like this with three higher educations.

Educator, 4 years of experience,
salary 4,300 UAH, city, East, single mother

¹ In total, 47% of the workers who took the online survey had children under the age of 12 in their families, and 27% had adults who needed daily care (people with disabilities, the elderly).

SUMMARY

The results of online surveys and in-depth interviews with kindergarten workers indicate extremely low wages, high job satisfaction and, at the same time, high levels of stress among kindergarten staff. The high level of job satisfaction is mainly due to the love of children, the pleasure of communicating with them. At the same time, overcrowding of groups, great responsibility, conflicts with the administration and parents, excessive paperwork, overload due to lack of staff all lead to high stress at work. Due to low wages and the lack of social assistance from the state, workers have to work overtime, run home gardens, look for additional part-time work, rely on financial assistance from family and friends, and live in debt. Even more difficult is the situation of workers with children or adult relatives who are unable to work due to ill health and who need care. Perhaps the worst situation is that of single mothers.

The work conditions and wages in Ukrainian kindergartens lead to the lack of money and time, financial instability, burnout, and health problems. They negatively affect both the situation of (mostly) women working in the sector and that of their families. Existing problems impair the ability of kindergartens to provide a comfortable living environment for children, proper care, education, and development.



THE "GOOD" KINDERGARTEN AND REFORM OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

They are ruining all our preschool education. And they say: we shall look at Finland, and we'll make [such] reform. But it's ridiculous, you know? One person will never be left alone with so many children on hands in Finland!

Educator, 17 years of experience,
salary 5,700 UAH, Kyiv, works 12 hours a day in a group with 30 children

The communal kindergarten is a basic infrastructure that provides young mothers with the opportunity to return to economic activity after the birth of a child. However, in practice there are many problems with the implementation of the care function of kindergartens: limited number of places for children under three years, lack of places, overcrowded groups (especially in cities), lack of sufficient facilities in rural areas, sometimes reduced working hours, and remote location. All this negatively affects the situation of mothers.

The interviewed mothers of children who attend communal kindergartens complain the most about the condition of playgrounds and premises, material base, food, overcrowding of groups. In the absence of funding from the central budget and chronic underfunding at the local level, some of the burden is shifted to the shoulders of parents, and sometimes of the employees of these institutions.

The good kindergarten is described in our legislation. It means no more than [20] children in a group, it means quality food. [...] What else? Apparently, a high-quality kindergarten is one in which there is not one teacher in one group, but two. And a nanny, an assistant. One where there are no money extortions.

Mother, regional center, South

The interviewed mothers are most satisfied with the "human factor", i.e. the qualifications and attitudes of kindergarten workers, the care and development they provide for children. Some mothers are concerned about the conditions and remuneration of staff, emphasizing that without improving their situation, no reform of preschool education will be effective.

Reform should not start with programs or new bright walls! It should start with increasing the level of satisfaction of the educator: wages should not be ridiculous, in groups of 40–50 children, educators should not paint playgrounds, and before that beg for money from parents to buy paint. And they need to rest! Because no new program will function well at the minimum wage!

Mother, regional center, South

Kindergarten workers also criticize the reform of the preschool program without solving the problem of chronic underfunding. After all, they have to implement the new program without proper logistics, relying on the "good will" of parents, investing their own money and unpaid time. All this, in conditions of often overcrowded groups, and sometimes overtime.

We worked on "Sure Start", exactly the program that is gradually blending into the "New Ukrainian School". Well, it was very «wonderful» when everything is new, and you have nothing for it. Well, absolutely nothing. Completely. Nothing. Nothing! And we had to invent from scratch. [...] And here, everything is so new and creative, everything is cool, beautiful notebooks in three parts, beautiful albums, but, excuse me, the material base is equal to zero!

Educator, 4 years of experience, salary 4,300 UAH, city, East

The chronic lack of funding directly and universally affects the situation of kindergarten workers, the vast majority of whom are women. A significant part of kindergarten workers feel that the importance of preschool and the status of an educator is devalued by low pay, working conditions, attitude on the part of the authorities, and sometimes on the part of the administration of institutions and parents. All these problems lead to high stress and burnout, they negatively affect the financial situation and emotional well-being of workers.

What needs to change? Well, first of all, we have become a [...] «service». Maybe that's right. But somehow, the educator used to be, well, there was some respect. We don't have that now, our parents perceive us as some kind of a servant, some kind of service staff. And why is it so? [...] Our industry is not regarded as a foundation, although we are a foundation. There will be no us and there will be no further [education]. Because it all starts with us.

Kindergarten manager, 17 years of experience,
salary 9,500 UAH, city, East

However, communal kindergartens are not a "service" that should simply meet the individual needs of an individual consumer. They are the basic social infrastructure that provides care for preschool children, their education and development; which fundamentally affects the position of women in society, including both women workers and young mothers and their families. The functioning of this infrastructure cannot be improved by rewriting educational programs, and its reform does not make sense without addressing the chronic problems of underfunding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study of the problems of preschool education institutions, recommendations have been developed aimed at: improving equal access of families with children to preschool education institutions; improving the conditions of children's stay in institutions, the level of care, safety, and education in kindergartens; improving the pay and working conditions of employees of institutions; stimulating the economic activity of mothers of preschool children, reducing the level of poverty of families with children. In total, these measures are aimed at improving the situation of women in Ukraine. It should be emphasized that the implementation of recommendations to central authorities is a priority, as it is they that determine the actual material possibilities of implementing the recommendations by local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRAL AUTHORITIES:

- Index the legal subsistence level at least to the level of the actual subsistence level calculated by the Ministry of Social Policy.
- Adjust the tariff grid in accordance with the indexed subsistence minimum or minimum wage.
- Ensure compliance with Article 61 of the Law of Ukraine "On Education", according to which the minimum wage of a pedagogical worker may not be less than three minimum wages.
- Provide state subventions from the central budget for preschool education in order to prevent inequality of access, conditions and wages in communal kindergartens.
- Reform the preschool education system, which should be based on measures aimed primarily at increasing the number of places in institutions, creating comfortable and safe living conditions for children, improving conditions and ensuring decent wages (in particular, expanding the network of institutions, solving the problem of overcrowded groups, resolving and reducing the ratio of the number of children per educator, increasing wages).
- Create a single methodological portal (resource) for pedagogical staff of preschool educational institutions.

- Introduce extended vacations and financial assistance for rehabilitation of workers who are directly and permanently involved in working with children, in particular pedagogical workers and assistant educators.
- Work on the introduction of paid childcare leave, the duration of which should ultimately be equal to the age of admission of a child to a communal kindergarten (where safe and comfortable living conditions for children of the appropriate age should be created).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES:

- Include the development of childcare infrastructure, in particular kindergartens, in strategic documents for the development of regions and communities (development strategies, programs and plans for socio-economic development, targeted programs), including indicators of their implementation, in particular, through the real indicators of the coverage of preschool education (in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals). The development of such infrastructure in general, as well as its inclusiveness for children with special educational needs, should be prioritized not only as a part of preschool education itself, but as an important tool to stimulate economic activity of young mothers and reduce poverty of families with children.
- Ensure the development of the network of preschool institutions, for example, by returning the buildings of institutions that are used for other purposes; the creation of new institutions.
- Provide funding for the appropriate number of all staff and tariff rates in preschool education institutions for: actual implementation of standards for recommended working hours and workload of employees (number of children per adult); preventing an increase in the responsibilities of female employees that are not related to their direct responsibilities.
- Take into account the actual hours required to set wage rates: for example, include in the payment a certain number of hours per week workers need to prepare for classes and perform other direct duties.
- Optimize and reduce the amount of reporting and other paperwork to be performed by kindergarten staff within the limits that are reasonably necessary and do not interfere with the basic functions assigned to employees (direct work with children: care, development, education).
- Improve the funding of the material base of preschool education institutions, investing appropriate funds, in particular for educational and methodical materials, stationery, toys, modern technical base.

- Cover the costs of activities necessary for employees to perform their direct duties, including preventive medical examinations, training courses.
- Complement training courses with components such as psychological assistance / training, legal assistance and legal literacy for female workers (regarding their rights and mechanisms for defending these rights).
- Identify the needs of working parents regarding the work schedule of PEI and the need to ensure the delivery of children to kindergartens (especially in rural areas). Optimize the work schedule of kindergartens in accordance with the identified needs.
- Identify the level of parental satisfaction with the quality of food, providing (if necessary) nutrition opportunities for children with special nutritional needs (eg, allergic reactions).



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Who cares?
Kindergartens in the context of gender inequality

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