

**NURSERY SERVICES BEYOND PRIMARY CARE,
SUPPORTING FAMILY EDUCATION IN HUNGARY**

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Abstract:

In the present study, we present the activities of Hungarian nursery services focusing on supporting families. Our research is based on a questionnaire survey carried out between March and June 2018. We used the database of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries that includes 1225 nursery schools in Hungary and we sent the online questionnaire to each of these institutions. We received answers from 289 institutions which are 23.6% of the nurseries in the database. The aim of the research: is to examine the changing system of nurseries and to present the family support services beyond the basic nursery services in Hungary. As a result of the research, it can be concluded that the basic program-of nurseries allows for the provision of other family support services in addition to the basic care and education tasks, but this is not extended to nursery services.

Keywords: nursery services, family support, temporary child-care, on-duty, playgroup, child-hotel

Disciplines: social policy

A BÖLCSŐDÉK ALAPELLÁTÁSON TÚLI, CSALÁDI NEVELÉST TÁMOGATÓ SZOLGÁLTATÁSAI MAGYARORSZÁGON

Absztrakt:

Jelen tanulmányban a magyarországi bölcsődéknek a családok támogatására fókuszáló tevékenységét mutatjuk be. A kutatást kérdőíves módszerrel végeztük 2018. március-június közötti időszakban. A kérdőívet online módon megküldtük valamennyi Magyarországon működő, összesen 1225 bölcsődének.

289 intézménytől kaptunk választ, amely az adatbázisban szereplő bölcsődék 23,6%-a. A kutatás célja a bölcsőde átalakult rendszerének vizsgálata és a magyarországi bölcsőde alapszolgáltatásain túl megvalósuló családtámogató szolgáltatások bemutatása. A kutatás eredményeként megállapítható, hogy a bölcsődék alapprogramja lehetővé teszi a gondozási, nevelési alafeladatok mellett egyéb családi nevelést támogató szolgáltatások biztosítását, de ez nem terjedt el a bölcsődei szolgáltatások között.

Kulcsszavak: bölcsőde, családtámogatás, ideiglenes gyermekfelügyelet, ügyelet, játszóház, gyermekhotel
Tudományterületek: szociálpolitika

Introduction

The upbringing of young children is highly sensitive to educational processes due to their developmental stage. Across the world societies are investing in early childhood education and care systems to complement parental upbringing and optimise children's development (Miller et. al, 2017). The structure of the nursery network in Hungary is quite specific, there are only a few countries in the world that have a similarly elaborated institutional system of this type. For this reason, this type of institution may be of interest to foreign professionals involved in the education of young children. Despite that, the literature on this topic can be considered rather scarce, so the investigation of the functioning of the nursery system is also important for filling these gaps.

Hungarian family policy pays attention to supporting families, not only in terms of cash benefits but also in terms of services in the broader sense. Hungary spends almost 12 percent of GDP on families and children in cash and in-kind, compared to 8.2 percent in the EU (Makay, 2018). Day nurseries provide daycare for children, helping to improve employment rates for women. In recent years, there has been significant development of nurseries in Hungary, with an increase in the number of nurseries from 2018 to 2019, with an increase of 1,533 three free places in all types of

provision combined, with the most dynamic increase (997) in the number of places in mini nurseries (KSH, 2019).

Child daycare offers significant support for families by providing care, education, and supervision for their children. For many families, feeding children is also a great help (Rákó, 2017). Over the past few years, Makay (2011) (2018) and Földvári et al. (2016) have examined the main operational characteristics of nurseries.

The network of nurseries in Hungary - in response to needs and demands - has expanded significantly, especially since 2017 (All nursery schools in Hungary operate on the basis of the National Core Program of Nursery Education. (Decree 15/1998. (IV. 30.) NM). The operation of the nurseries provides assistance to families with young children, in these institutions services related to children can be used from the age of 20 weeks to the age of 3, or up to 4 years in the case when a child is not ready for school. At the same time, children with special educational needs (disabled persons) can be admitted to the nursery until the age of 6.

The "traditional" nursery

The "traditional" nurseries, which operate with a large number of children still can be considered as the most important elements of the system. The

operating rule for this type of institution is that up to 12 children can be treated in one group-unless all children have reached the second year of age, in which case the maximum number is 14. If a child with special educational needs is included in the group, the maximum number of children is reduced. In case of one child with special educational needs, the reduced number is 11, in case of 2 children it is 10, and in case of 3 children the maximum size of the group is 6.

New forms that come into effect with the regulation change in 2017

- Mini nursery. In the mini nurseries, up to seven children can be educated and cared for in a nursery group unless all children in the nursery group have reached the age of two, in which case the maximum number can be eight. If a child with special educational needs is also included in the group, the maximum number of children is reduced, similarly to the “traditional” type. In case of one child with special educational needs, the reduced number is 6, in case of 2 or 3 children the maximum size of the group is 3.
- Workplace nursery. A workplace nursery is a nursery care service provided by the employer primarily for the provision of care for the children of the employees. Up to seven children can be educated and cared for in a group at the workplace unless all children in the nursery group have reached the age of two, in which case the maximum number may be eight. If a child with special educational needs is being nurtured, then the maximum number of children - similar to the mini nursery regulations - is reduced to the same extent.
- Family nursery. A nursery care service provided by the service provider in his/her own home or in another room designed for that purpose. Up

to five children can be educated and cared for in the family

- Integrated kindergarten-nursery. At the time of our research, there were still integrated kindergarten-nurseries in Hungary, but on August 31. 2018, this form of care ceased to exist. In many cases the nursery group operating in kindergarten could provide a solution for the 0-3 year-olds in those settlements, where there is little chance to operate an independent nursery. (Szombathelyiné Nyitrai-Bakonyi, 2008)

Research goals

An important purpose of operating nurseries is to contribute to the well-being of the child, to increase his sense of security, and to support his healthy physical and mental development. This goal is best achieved if parenting, community, and nursery education for children pursue the same objectives - both for the development of the child and for ensuring a smooth social functioning - so they can result in a mutually reinforcing synergistic effect.

The aim of the research: is to examine the changing system of nurseries and to present the family support services beyond the basic nursery services in Hungary. We were looking for the answers to the question of how nurseries stay in contact with the families.

Research methodology

In the course of the research, we aimed to fully map the Hungarian nursery system, including all types of nursery schools:

- integrated kindergarten-nursery
- “traditional” nursery
- mini nursery
- family nursery
- workplace nursery

Our research is based on a questionnaire survey carried out between March and June 2018. In line with the topic of our research, we compiled a questionnaire, which includes several question groups. We used the database of the Hungarian Association of Nurseries that includes 1225 nursery schools in Hungary and we sent the online questionnaire to each of these institutions. We received answers from 289 institutions which are 23.6% of the nurseries in the database. Participation in the questionnaire survey was voluntary, research participants had their anonymity and privacy respected. During the research, not any kind of personal information of children or childcare workers was recorded. (In this study, we have only elaborated the research questions related to our main topic, other parts of the questionnaire will serve as a basis for our further publications).

Main results

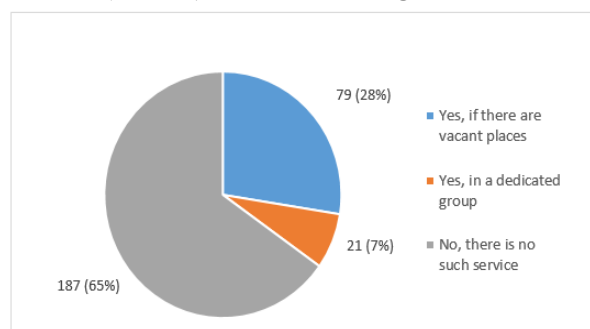
Nurseries play an important role in supporting families. They provide basic services to ensure the supervision, care, and education of children whose parents are working or studying and cannot provide daycare themselves. The nursery takes a systemic approach to the family, supporting not only the child but the whole family through its services. There are a number of ways nurseries can provide family support, among other things, through additional support services.

Nurseries are allowed, or we can say, encouraged to organise these services: for example playgroups, periodic childcare, „child hotels”, toy, and equipment hire and educational counselling up to the age of six.

In our research, we investigated which of the above-mentioned family support services are provided by Hungarian daycare centers in addition to their basic tasks - child care and education - and

how they maintain contact with parents. The results are presented below.

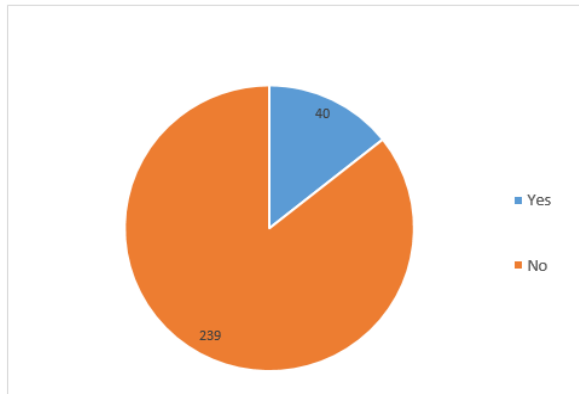
Figure 1. Does the institution provide temporary childcare? (N=279) Source: Own editing



Periodic (temporary) childcare is a service provided for children at the requested time and the requested duration demanded by the parent. It can happen in a group set up for this purpose or in the temporarily or permanently vacant places of the group. Temporary childcare allows parents to request for the services for shorter periods. According to Figure 1, the majority of responding nurseries (65%) do not provide this service, 28% of respondents provide childcare if there are vacant places and only 7% provide this form of childcare in a dedicated group. The responding institutions providing this service offer care for children for 2-3 hours a day. This may be due to parents' lack of awareness of the service and also because that in this case, too, it is necessary to gradually introduce the child to the parent, preferably by the parent.

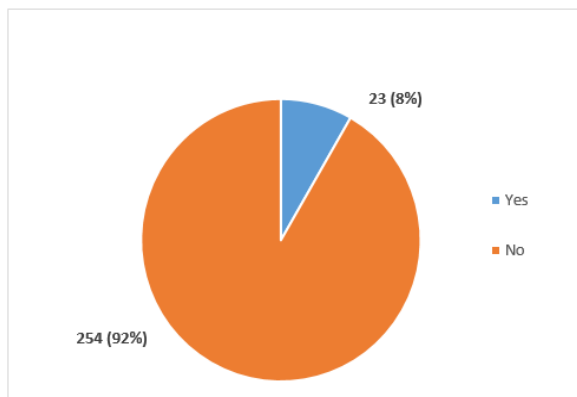
The next form of additional service is the playgroup. A playgroup is an opportunity for the child and the parent to play together - the caregiver is present but the parents care for the child - in a separate group outside the nursery group or sometimes in a group providing childcare, but not at the same time as the nursing takes place.

Figure 2. Do you run a playgroup where parents can play together with their child? (N=279) Source: Own editing



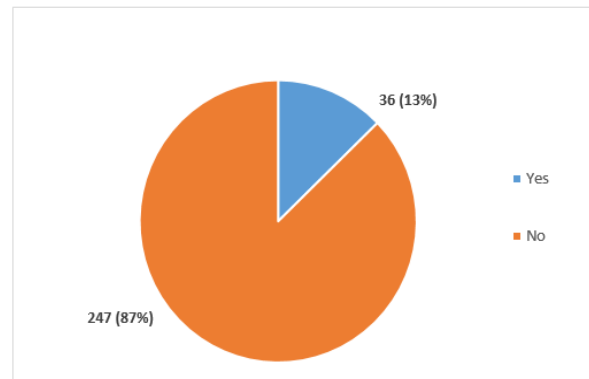
That means that it is a service separated in time or space or both from regular services. This is not really common in the nurseries in Hungary, as you can see in Figure 2, 14% of them responded that they run a playgroup. The majority of these institutions (51%) provide this service on a daily basis or several times a week. A playgroup can have the advantage of familiarising children with the nursery before they settle in, and it also provides parents with an opportunity to exchange experiences.

Figure 3. Is it possible to borrow toys and equipment in your institution? (N=277). Source: Own editing



To the question regarding the renting of toys and equipment - furniture, scales, etc. – 92% of respondents said no, and only 8% provide such services for families (Figure 3.). Toy and tool hire could help families who find it a financial burden to buy developmental toys, furniture, etc. Right now this service is likely to be quite complicated by the need to disinfect the equipment after the loan, which is the responsibility of the nursery.

Figure 4. Does the nursery provide on-duty care for children outside the daily opening hours? (N=283). Source: Own editing



The provision of on-duty services can be a significant help for families. The nurseries and mini nurseries can provide on-duty care for children outside the daytime. The childcare provider may set a separate fee for the use of on-duty services. On-duty time may not exceed three hours a day, with a maximum of 19 hours in the afternoon. When we asked whether on-call duty is provided outside the daily opening hours, the majority of respondents (87%) answered no.

The next family support service is the child hotel, which can be requested by the parent for a fixed period of time, up to twenty-four hours of continuous care, in case the parent is temporarily unable to care for the child due to a busy schedule.

The service may be provided at weekends and on public holidays as well, but may not exceed ten days of care per child per school year. Only six of the respondents provide this type of service.

Forms of communication with parents

The nursery plays a significant role in supporting families, not only the education and care of the child—but also the counselling for the parents, the parental meetings, and the organization of the parent groups can make a significant contribution to the development of parental competencies.

According to our results of the research, the most frequent forms of communication between the parents and the nursery were not equally perceived by the parents and heads of institutions. Institutions/service providers (apart from one activity, the conversations with parents) have reported having a higher proportion of using the methods of contacting in their daily work than the parents. (Földvári et al. 2016)

Individual conversations

Nearly two-thirds (63.3% of 183 institutions) of the responding institutions reported that the caregivers speak with the parents individually several times a week, and over 80% (235 institutions) have a conversation with them at least once a week. The fact 83% of the responding service providers (240 institutions) have separate rooms for this purpose indicates that individual discussions are considered important by the majority of the institutions. The opposite pole is represented by the 17 institutions (5.9%) in which the individual conversation is limited to only a few occasions a year. Overall, this individual form of liaison, that is, the individual treatment of families is sufficiently intense in most cases.

Collective forms of communication

These forms typically include the organization and operation of parent groups, the family day, and the common excursions.

While ensuring communication, these activities also serve to establish and strengthen the community of nurseries.

Contrary to personal conversations with parents, these activities play a much smaller role in the everyday life of the institutions. It is undisputed that organizing these meetings is time-consuming and requires energy expenditure from both the nursery and the parents (on a family day or even more on a field trip, there may be more problems than on an average day in the nursery), and at the same time it entails higher risk and thus responsibility, so obviously fewer opportunities are available for these activities. At the same time, one or two times a year is not enough to create a foundation for a nursery community. In this case, these activities only try to formally fulfil this task.

In most of the responding institutions, this latter practice is more evident, the least time-consuming and resource-intensive activity, the organization of parent groups can be observed in 60.6% of the institutions (175 institutions) at least 3-5 times a year. On the other hand, only 32.2% of the service provider have a family day (93 institutions), only 3.1% (9 institutions) organized field, trips and 66.8% of the responding institutions (191 institutions) never organize a trip for the families.

Counselling

An important tool for the care, education and development of children can be counselling, provided by the institutions to parents. In 36% of responding institutions (104 institutions), less than 20% of parents and in another 20.4% of institutions (58 institutions) 20-40% of parents use this option. Therefore, more than half of the parents do not discuss the issues regarding the education and care of their children with the specialists of the institutions. Looking at these two data altogether - namely a lower rate of parental participation collective forms of communicating and counselling - this may also indicate a quite individualized attitude of parents.

A high percentage of nurseries and parents probably think of child care as a private matter, something that does not belong to others or can be seen as a service and not as a communal part of their life. This may be suggested by the fact that in many institutions relatively few people take advantage of nursery counselling. (Rákó, Soós & Szabó, 2019)

Connecting by the institution: family visits

The National Core Program of Nursery Education and Care, which was renewed in 2017, places great emphasis on cooperation with the family. It is a significant change compared to the previous core program, that the family is approached in a systemic way, i.e. it focuses not only on the child but also the whole family, keeping complexity in mind. In order to achieve that, building connections with the family is a must and a family visit is one of the possible ways. The principles of nursery education include, among other things, the systematic approach of the family and respect for the primacy of family education. According to the latter, the nursery respects and strengthens the values and traditions of the family. It also allows parents to engage in crèche life.

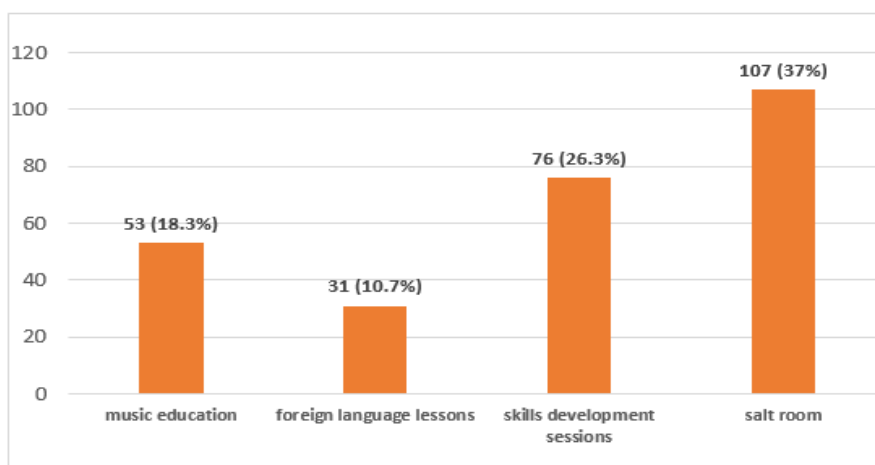
Early childhood research also highlights the importance of family visits for children, especially in the case of families with low socio-economic status. „They noted that Hungarian parents and ECEC practitioners tend to combine established and new ways to make contact: ...dialogue between pedagogues, home visits, parents' evening.

They said that Hungarian, ... pedagogues are not really able to address the parents individually ... there are better ways than parent-practitioner group meetings and they advocated that engagements with families of low SES should feature: ... empathy: understanding the situation and difficulties of parenthood” (Murray et al., 2018, 601.).

In nearly three quarters of the responding nursery schools (215 institutions, 74.4%), this form of contacting the parents is part of everyday practice.

At the same time, 15.9% of the respondents (46 institutions) do not visit the families at all, and 6.9% (20 institutions) only after the adaptation process that means almost a quarter of the responding nurseries fail entirely or partially to complete this important professional activity (Rákó, Soós & Szabó, 2019, 50).

Figure 5. Which of the following services are available in your institution? (N=289). Source: Own editing



These were the typical, and probably the most important additional services. But we also wanted to know what other services the nurseries offer to support children's development. Of the nurseries surveyed, 107 have a salt room, which aims to prevent respiratory diseases in children. 76 establishments have activities to develop various skills, 53 have music classes and 31 also organise foreign language activities for children (Figure 5).

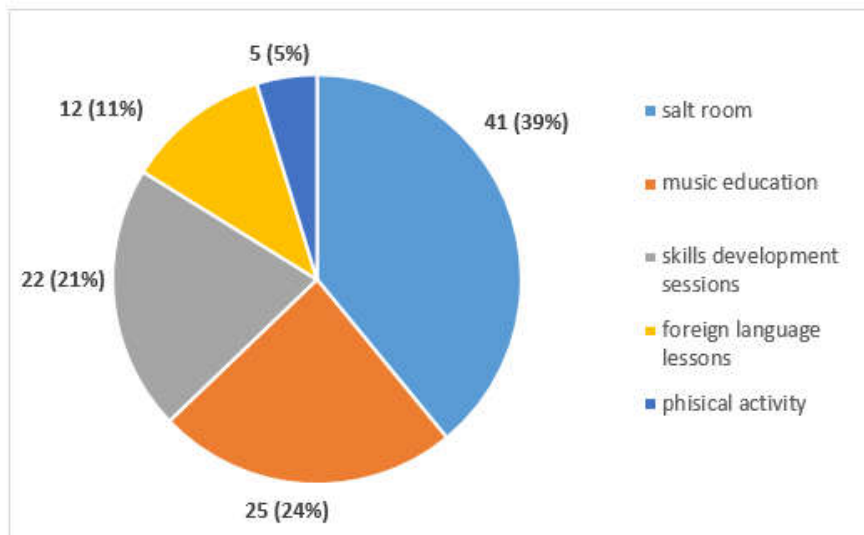
Figure 6 shows which services would be particularly in demand from parents. Of course, the really interesting research would have been if we could have asked parents about this, but we haven't had the chance to do that, these figures here show what the heads of the nurseries think about this issue. We can confirm here that there is a significant demand for these services and it is safe to assume that we would have got even higher numbers if we had had the chance to ask the parents. Similar to the results of Földvári et al. (2016), salt room (41) was the most frequently

mentioned required service, which is followed by music nursery (25), development (22), and foreign language education (7 more than physical activity, which was also mentioned by 5 respondents). As in Földvári et al. (2016), the highest demand for services beyond primary care was for playgroups (27) and periodic childcare (20).

The children's hotel was mentioned by only five managers, the toy and equipment hire service was mentioned by four managers, and only two managers indicated that parents would require counselling. Only 14 managers indicated that there was no demand for these services from parents. To summarise the above, based on the responses received from managers, we can say that there is a strong demand from parents for some of the services beyond primary care - periodic childcare, playgroup.

However, the capacity of the nurseries is likely to be insufficient and this could be addressed by allocating extra resources to the nurseries.

Figure 6. Which services are in demand from parents? (N=105). Source: Own editing



We also assumed that there would be significant differences between the presence of additional services and the type of the nursery and specifically we assumed that family nurseries, which are service providers in their own right, would place more emphasis on this, i.e. they would have a higher proportion of these additional services. In our sample, the proportion of family nurseries was 17 percent, which is broadly in line with the actual proportion of them in Hungary.

For our analysis, we used cross-tabs using SPSS software to see if there was a correlation between the type of the nursery and the services. Chi-square tests were used, in Table 1 you can see the significance levels.

Table 1. Correlation between the type of nursery and the additional services provided. Source: Own editing

Additional services	p values
Temporary childcare	0.023
Playgroups	0.636
Renting of toys and equipment	0.360
”On-duty” services	0.000
”Child hotel”	0.000

We cross-referenced the type of nursery (practically that means that we compared “traditional” and family nurseries) to whether the given service is available in the institution. Of course, the significance level only gives information about the strength of the relationship, not its direction. However, the cross-tabs clearly show that in all cases where there is a correlation between the variables, there are more additional services in the family nurseries. Where the value is below 0.05, there is a significant relationship, so we can state that it is more common in family daycare centers to have periodic childcare, but e.g. for playgroups, there is no difference between private and public. Based on the chi-square test, it can be

concluded that there is a significant connection between the different types of nurseries and the forms of service they provide. Thus, we found a significant correlation between family nurseries and the temporary childcare they provide. In other words, family nurseries are more likely to support families by providing, among other things, e.g. temporary childcare. But we cannot say that family nurseries provide more additional services in every aspect, e.g. for playgroups we found no difference between family nurseries and other nursery types.

We also need to emphasize that we can come to any conclusions with caution, because the item numbers are pretty low in most cases and this affects the usability of the data. For the "child hotel" service, the number of yes responses was extremely low, there were 6 institutions only, where this service was provided, however all of them are family nurseries. This might indicate a tendency even if it is not statistically worth analysing.

Table 2. Correlation between the type of nursery and the parents’ demand for services. Source: Own editing

Additional services	p values
Salt room	0.000
Music education	0.000
Skills development sessions	0.000
Foreign language lessons	0.000

Our other assumption was that in family nurseries there is a higher demand for these services – you could say that if parents are already paying a lot of money for family nurseries’ services, they are more likely to expect to receive more additional services, Table 2 show the results of our analysis. In this case, our assumption was fully confirmed. As you can see, there is a very strong correlation between the type of nursery and the expectations of the parents. According to the opinion of the heads of the institutions, parents

who send their children to the family day nursery have a significantly higher expectation of having e.g. a salt room or music education.

Summary

On the basis of the summary of the data, it can be concluded that those working in nurseries consider cooperation with parents important. At the same time, active and intense contact with parents can take place in a variety of ways and according to our findings institutions and parents prefer individual and informal forms (conversation against participation in counselling).

From the above, we can confirm that additional family support services beyond primary care are poorly provided in the childcare centres we interviewed. This may be due to the lack of service capacity in the nurseries, primary care has priority. Other papers also found that the provision of these additional services are not favourable for parents: although services like periodic/temporary childcare would be very popular among them, there is significant demand – they are typically not available for most families. Generally speaking, parents are happy for their child's care institutions to provide other services to help their children develop. In the case of sports and salt rooms, they found that the rate of parental demand was twice as high as the incidence rate of the services provided.

Overall, it can be concluded that the basic program of nurseries allows for the provision of other family support services in addition to the basic care and education tasks, but this is not extended to nursery services.

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