

SOWELL

Social dialogue in welfare services



Employment relations, labour market and
social actors in the care services

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The case studies analysis
A comparative overview.
COMPARATIVE REPORT WP2

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Tools and solutions.....	4
2.1 Using and extending local collective bargaining	
2.2 Local initiatives and welfare agreements	
2.3 New organisational forms	
2.4 Re-internalisation and hybrids	
2.5 Public procurement	
3. Actors, processes and arenas.....	16
4. Local and national level.....	19
5. Conclusions.....	22
References.....	25

1. Introduction

The first and second part of this report described and compared the main characteristics of the labour market, working conditions and employment relations in the ECEC and LTC services, in the seven countries included in the project, highlighting the main existing issues and problems and how social partners and the other actors tackle them at national level.

In the third part of the report, the comparison focuses on the case studies presented in the individual country reports. In each country, four cases were selected (two in the ECEC sector and two in the LTC sector) by each research group. Case studies aim at describing and analysing practices and arrangements, which represent a solution addressing key issues and problems identified at national level. Cases illustrate how the social dialogue and the actors respond or deal with these issues at local level and how they interpret or frame them to find a solution, which can be adopted in other local contexts and at national level.

These solutions can be innovative or even experimental. However, they can also be practices which are not innovative but “work well” in a context, contributing to solve a problem; practices which could be adopted in other local contexts and situations. Drawing from the OECD Oslo Manual (2018), we consider innovative solutions as practices or arrangements, which distance themselves and challenge the established practices of labour regulation in the care services in the analysed country. This means that what is innovative in a country can be “ordinary” in another one. The innovative solution has an impact on working conditions, employment relations and job quality in the care services and it can affect directly or indirectly service quality. Local case study analyses need to take into consideration the relevant variability existing in the ECEC and LTC sector in the seven countries, both in the multilevel service governance and in the multilevel structure of employment relations. This means that it is necessary to focus, on one hand, on the scope and the level of autonomy by local government institutions, which can play different roles in the design and implementation of the local solutions, on the other hand, on the relationship between the national and the local/decentralised level of social dialogue and its actors, which show significant differences among countries.

Moreover, beyond social partners and public institutions, other actors could play an important role in the decision making and implementation process at local level, such as service providers, service users and local communities, or local associations. Together with social partners, these actors could be part of a “participatory framework”, which promotes and supports the practice or solution at local level. The cooperation between social partners, public institutions and all these other actors can represent an important asset to tackle the labour market and employment relations issue at local level. However, the relationships among the actors at local level can also hinder the process aimed at finding and implementing a local solution; cooperation cannot be taken for granted, as the actors’ objectives can be different or

contrasting. In particular, as is well known, unions and service users can cooperate but they could have contrasting interests and strategies.

The case studies show a high variability in the kinds of tools and solutions chosen by local actors to tackle the targeted issues. There is not a close relationship between the issue and the solution adopted, as the same tools and solutions can be used for different issues and the same issue can be dealt with a plurality of solutions, in different national contexts. Rather, local actors seem to choose the solution, which is more suitable to the institutional context they are embedded and peculiar conditions they are confronted with. Institutions shape actors' opportunities and constraints, while contingencies provide opportunities, suggest strategies and encourage experimenting tools in order to pursue their targets.

In the selected case studies, the main solutions adopted at local level concern:

- 1) Local collective bargaining
- 2) Welfare local agreements and bipartite or tripartite initiatives
- 3) New organisational forms
- 4) Re-internalisation and hybrids
- 5) Initiatives to change public procurement and the contracting-out and service management regulation

In the following pages, we will examine these solutions, the reasons why they were chosen and the main implications¹.

2. Tools and solutions

2.1 Using and extending local collective bargaining

In some of the case studies, social partners make recourse to local collective bargaining and agreements, that is, to a typical tool of employment relations. In our selection, this solution has been adopted in countries with very different employment relation systems.

1. Denmark (ECEC, Copenhagen). In the case of the City of Copenhagen, local actors sign a collective agreement including recruitment and retention measures in the municipal ECEC services, based on a one-off supplement to promote new hiring and continuity in employment. As illustrated in the Danish report, the agreement contained also a number of initiatives aimed at retaining senior staff. This agreement was imitated by other municipalities and local wages became a quite common recruitment tool.

2. Hungary (ECEC, Budapest). In the case of the City of Budapest, in 2016, after a national strike, the municipality decided to promote a new local agreement, which included a significant wage increase for the nursery employees. Although this policy has changed after the election of a new administration, the

¹ In this comparative report, we will refer to local case studies analysed in the Sowell national reports, in the section on local case studies (WP3): the references are Hansen and Mailand (2022) for Denmark; Gottschall and Abramowski (2022) for Germany; Breuker, Mori, Neri and Pavolini (2022) for Italy; Bors and Kahancová (2022) for Hungary; Tros and Kuijpers S. (2022) for the Netherlands; Holubová (2022) for Slovakia; Molina, Godino and Rodriguez-Soler (2022) for Spain.

municipality followed the tradition to promote local agreements in a system in which employment relations are very weak at local level (see the Hungarian report).

3. Hungary (LTC, Veszprém). In order to increase the very low level of the salaries and to retain staff in the LTC services, the municipality of Veszprém decided to establish a specific contract with those (especially doctors), who provide health care services within the LTC sector. The so-called Performance Contract has a duration of five years and includes an extra salary and other economic benefits for doctors and other staff, which incentive them to stay in the LTC services and not to move to the healthcare service.

4. Hungary (LTC, Budapest). In 2021, the social partners, the public sector-based trade unions, and the City Council of Budapest signed an agreement about the development of the Budapest wage policy for the period of years 2021 and 2024. In relation to this agreement, the City Council established a special wage bonus for those employees employed in the companies or institutions where the owner is the City of Budapest. The amount of money allocated to this extra-bonus is far from enough to solve the issue of low salaries in LTC and in social services, and unions went into a strike. However, the same unions consider it a good step forward as a mitigation of the problem. As the authors of the Hungarian report underline, this case was chosen not because it is innovative, but because it is an important tool in the Hungarian public administration and can be managed at local level by municipalities and social partners in quite a flexible way.

5. Slovakia (ECEC, Bratislava region). After a national strike and long mobilisation by teachers and school unions in 2022, a new collective agreement was signed with a wage increase for 2023 and 2024. This national agreement was translated into local agreements by municipalities and regions in the ECEC sector, including the Bratislava region in which salaries are lower than the national average. Local and regional action by unions is strengthened by the local mobilisation by professional associations, which are often stronger than unions at local level in the ECEC sector.

6. Slovakia (LTC, Slovak Health and Social Services Trade Union). In this case, the national level of trade unions supports local collective bargaining to improve working conditions as well as the enforcement of health and safety rules, which are frequently violated by some local providers. The national union levels also provide to the local levels legal counselling, technical support, model of collective agreements and training.

7. Spain (LTC, Vitoria-Alava). In the case of the home care service workers of the Vitoria city council and Alva provincial council, workers and local unions entered into an indefinite strike in 2018, to unblock the ongoing provincial collective bargaining process to increase wages. This bottom-up strategy was successful as the Provincial Council of Alava and the City Council of Vitoria-Gasteiz approved a new proposal, which recognised substantial wage increases. The proposal, approved by a large majority of workers, resulted in a new collective agreement for the Álava Home Help Service, valid for two years (2019-2020).

These cases illustrate different examples of use of the collective agreement at local or regional level, to face problems of staff shortage, as in Denmark, of low wages, as shown in Hungary, Slovakia and Spain, or

precarious working conditions, as in one case in the LTC sector in Slovakia. In the Danish case, an economic incentive (a one-off supplement) is the main tool identified by the local collective agreement to recruit and retain the educational staff: collective bargaining is used as a means to introduce a specific component of the salary aimed at inducing a specific behaviour of the workers on the labour market. This element is present also in the case of Veszprém in Hungary.

The recourse to collective bargaining takes place both in employment relation systems, which are very structured and with a strong representation of social partners at local level, such as in Denmark, and in others (Hungary and Slovakia), which are weak and not well-structured especially at local level. In the first case, local collective bargaining is embedded in strong, well-established, institutional relationships, which are in many ways autonomous and self-sufficient from the national level. Although employment relations and union representation at local level are not as strong as in Denmark, even in the Spanish case workers can take advantage by a high and autonomous capacity of mobilisation at local level.

In Hungary and in Slovakia, the national level and its mobilisation helps promote and support the local action, which is not embedded in institutionalised employment relations and by a low level of worker representation. In the case of the City of Budapest, national union action is unsuccessful, but it triggers learning processes and initiatives at local level. Given the weakness of the unions and social partners, these initiatives are often taken by municipalities and other actors, such as professional associations. In one case, in Slovakia, the national level provides technical expertise to the local level, with a function of legal consultancy and support. This case is an example of the benefits of local social dialogue vertically coordinated by the sectoral trade unions. Local collective bargaining is addressed to protect and improve local working conditions, instead of wage issues.

8. Germany (LTC, Hessen and Bremen). Christian non-profit providers are traditionally not willing to sign collective labour agreements and offer employment contracts based on consensus-oriented guidelines which do not allow strikes (the so-called 'third ecclesiastic way'). This case analyses two exceptions: a collective agreement signed between service sector unions and local Protestant service providers in the federal state of Hessen (subcase a) and another collective agreement signed with Protestant and Catholic service providers in the city-state of Bremen (subcase b). These agreements allowed securing better wages and working conditions to employees.

9. Germany (LTC, Luneburg and ABVP and GÖD). This case shows two collective agreements signed by private commercial providers, renouncing unilateral wage setting, which is common among for-profit providers. The first example is a private residential care provider in the city of Luneburg, which negotiated an agreement with the main service sector union (subcase a). The second example consists of a collective agreement negotiated between a private homecare employers' association and a small Christian union (subcase b). As explained in the German report, private employers, difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled workers,

keeping motivated and skilled workers played an important role in the employers' willingness to engage in collective wage bargaining and setting.

The Hungarian and Slovakian cases as well as these cases from Germany show the vitality of collective bargaining, as a tool which is provided with great potential to improve pay and working conditions, also at local level, both in the ECEC and in the LTC sector. The continuing importance of collective bargaining emerges in two cases illustrated in the German report. In these cases, collective bargaining does not extend its scope from the national to the local level, but from one kind of employers to others, who had previously refused to use it. Moreover, collective bargaining allows shifting from unilateral to collective determination of pay and working conditions and, in particular, of wage setting, for religious and also for private commercial providers which refused collective bargaining.

This change is highly relevant in the case of religious providers, was accepted and in some ways also promoted by the involved employers to deal with the staff shortage in the labour market. Labour market conditions, especially for skilled workers, and the increased competition among providers to attract workers and users as well, made collective wage setting determination acceptable. The potential of collective bargaining to help solving the problems of the labour market and service providers in the care sector is evident.

2.2 Local initiatives and welfare agreements

1. Denmark (LTC, Herning). In the Danish report, the Herning Municipality launched a wide variety of initiatives taken to enhance recruitment and retention of staff in the LTC sector in the medium term. On one hand, this resulted in measures aimed at enlarging the labour force, by recruiting foreign labour and upskilling of local labour; on the other hand, there were initiatives targeted at retaining existing staff and reducing educational dropout rates. This initiatives involved social partners as well as education and training institutions for social and health workers. Many of these measures are innovative in their content and can be considered "experimental", as the authors of the Danish report maintain.

2. Denmark (ECEC, Elsinore). In 2020, the Danish government entered into welfare agreements with two municipalities, enabling them to exempt from the majority of state and local government regulation concerning ECEC for a three-year trial period. The Danish country report illustrates the case of Elsinore Municipality, which was one of the two municipalities involved in this experiment, undertaken to find new, smart ways of carrying out welfare tasks locally. This new ways were supposed to strengthen professional discretion and citizen involvement in the care services. Learning processes activated by the experiments are expected to stimulate the design of new organisational arrangements and simplified procedures, which could improve local and state regulations beyond the three-year trial period. Following the welfare agreements, the municipality introduced innovative programmes focused on new ways of learning and new professional

roles in the ECEC services (such as the “Immersion educator”). These innovations helped staff to enhance quality in their educational tasks with the children and made their work more stimulating and attractive.

3. Netherlands (ECEC, commercial childcare organisation). In this case, a commercial childcare organisation offering services for children aged between 0 and 12 years old, adopts several practices to recruit and retain sufficient pedagogical workers, within an environment characterised by competition among employers to recruit pedagogical staff. As described in the Dutch report, measures are targeted to manage vacancies in an effective way, to reduce fragmentation in the contracts of pedagogical workers offering continuative and full working days (also thanks to the wide range of sport activities, to ensure a number of staff which is well above the professional-child ratio. As a result, working conditions are significantly improved and this helps reduce the staff shortage problem.

4. Germany (ECEC, Bremen). In order to address staffing levels and the mix of qualifications in the educational staff, the City state of Bremen entered a tripartite dialogue articulated in several projects. One of the projects was aimed at ensuring better working conditions in ECEC centres (subcase a). Another project was addressed to achieve better staffing in large ECEC centres located in neighbourhoods with social problems (subcase b).

5. Germany (ECEC, Bremen). Other local initiatives by the City state of Bremen, targeted to reduce staff shortage and improve the quality of teaching, articulated in two programmes. The first introduced a reform of the established 3–5-year school-based vocational training for child care assistants and early years educators, by allowing an alternative track of practice-oriented training with remuneration. This type of training should attract a broader spectrum of potential staff, such as male and migrant workers. The project was included in the measures suggested by the tripartite dialogue (subcase a). The second programme introduced new regulations to remunerate both school-based and on-the-job training (subcase b).

6. Hungary (ECEC, , Veszprém). During the pandemic emergency and the periods of service closure, the municipality as the employer and the unions cooperated to ensure the success of local initiatives taken to avoid employment cutbacks in the nurseries, including online activities for children, seminars for both children and parents, programmes for homework activities. Cooperation favoured the attribution of wage bonuses to employees after the end of the emergency.

7. Slovakia (ECEC, Bratislava). In one of the most populated Bratislava district, since 2018 the municipality increased the ECEC capacity to meet the demand for pre-primary childcare by citizens, at a time when the ECEC accessibility became a policy priority. As low job quality and poor working conditions resulted in a lack of workforce, the municipality developed a strategy for increasing and retaining staff, including special recruitment processes for young teachers, stabilisation allowances, favourable rental apartments and lifelong learning programmes.

Local initiatives represent another way to tackle most common issues in the ECEC and LTC sector, going from the staff shortage to poor working conditions and low wages, to the need to increase staff qualification (or

the share of qualified staff employed in the services). The initiatives aimed to increase the salaries are not as fundamental as in the case of collective bargaining, but they are still important, as they are part of the strategies employed to attract and retain the workforce within the case services, therefore mitigating the staff shortage. Local initiatives are often addressed to improve staff training and qualification. These kinds of measures are taken not only to provide workers with more attractive jobs and careers, but also with the direct purpose to improve service quality, especially in the ECEC sector. In this case, local institutions and social partners recognise a relationship between job quality and service quality.

In many initiatives, local government institutions (municipalities or city-states in the German federal state) play a pivotal role in promoting and implementing the initiatives. Social partners and other local actors seem to play a minor role. A partial exception is the tripartite social dialogue in the German cases, and, above all, the case of Joint cooperation during the pandemic emergency in Hungary. This experiment shows an active role played by social dialogue in finding out solution at local level, acting autonomously by the national level. It also shows a different and more varied picture in the relationship between the national and the local level of social dialogue in Hungary, compared to the other selected cases. According to what emerged by the Hungarian report, the most common situation is that of a predominance of the national level, but there are exceptions and cases in which the local level of social dialogue is able to implement solutions, which could be extended in other cases and also generalised at national level.

2.3 New organisational forms

New organisational forms have often been identified by local actors as a viable solution to tackle the issues raised at national and local level. Compared to the national level of governance and that of employment relations, the local level has more opportunities to experiment organisational arrangements. These can be considered as pilots to be tested locally, before generalising them. Moreover, organisational innovations can be experimented in local contexts, which seem favourable to change, without causing the same reaction and, possibly, oppositions, which would be triggered by an organisational innovation introduced nationwide. Finally, new organisational forms may originate from local problems, which then reveal a much wider scope. In the LTC sector, one new organisational form is spreading across countries, originated in the Netherlands, where it has been introduced in recent decades. The “Buurtzorg model” (Neighbourhood care model) is based on self-governance arrangements by homecare nurses. The model proved to be very effective at increasing the autonomy and reducing the regulatory pressure on staff, with positive effects on service quality as experienced by users. As explained in the Dutch report, the main premise of the approach is that it improves both the quality of service as well as the quality of work: nurses are allowed to organise the care for patients themselves – such as managing budgets, organising staff planning and recruitment – and in this way they provide better care, as it corresponds to their own knowledge and experience (Monsen, Deblok, 2013).

These features made it attractive for many countries. Beyond The Netherlands, in our project, cases of organisational arrangements following the Buurtzorg model have been studied in Denmark, while they are reported also in Spain. However, in this project a Spanish case study shows another organisational innovation, although it shares some features with the Buurtzorg model. Moreover, while the model was invented in home care, the Dutch case presented in this project is an example of adoption of the model in residential care; in this sub-sector, it represents an innovative experiment even in The Netherlands.

1. Denmark (LTC. Ikast-Brande). Following the Buurtzorg model, the Ikast-Brande was the first municipality to create self-governing teams in LTC. The aim is to improve working conditions and work satisfaction by giving more autonomy and self-organisation to the staff and, in particular, nurses. The larger autonomy can be used to tailor the local service to specific user needs, increasing user satisfaction. The improvement on service quality proved to be substantial. The example of Ikaste-Brande was followed by many other municipalities in Denmark.

2. The Netherlands (LTC, Buurtzorg model in residential care). As mentioned, the Dutch report presents a case of translation of the Buurtzorg model to residential care, which is particularly interesting because the use of self-governing teams in residential care has been criticized in the Netherlands because of the managerial workload it places on care workers. As illustrated by the case, this required continuous attention and improvements in managing self-governing teams, if proponents would like to get the benefits of the new organisational model in terms of workers' autonomy, working conditions and service quality.

3 Spain (LTC, Barcelona). The case of the Super-blocks model in Barcelona shows the adoption of a new organisational model based on local groups of workers organising themselves, collectively commenting and assessing cases, and being a reference in each area. This made it possible to increase working hours for LTC staff, which was one of the main demands raised by unions and workers, thus responding to one of the main unions' and workers' demands. Staff usually had fragmented contracts and were paid only for their working hours, which seldom filled the whole working days. The project was implemented by the City Council of Barcelona and a cooperative as the service provider. Improvement in working conditions was evident.

As mentioned, these organisational arrangements have the double purpose of improving working conditions and workers' satisfaction, and of improving service quality. Positive effects on the attractiveness of working in the sector are also expected. In our cases, these innovations are assumed by municipalities and private not-for-profit providers. Unions have a secondary role in what seem to be managerial initiatives.

In the ECEC sector, integrated childcare organisations are a well-recognised tool to improve service quality. Integration can involve pre-primary and primary schools, as happens in the Netherlands, or services for children aged 0-3 years old and those for children aged 3-6 years old, as in the dual ECEC systems. An integrated organisation makes the work more attractive by offering more career opportunities, by widening

tasks and promoting professional exchanges and enrichment within the organisation. Therefore, an integrated childcare organisation can mitigate the problems of staff recruitment and retentions, while improving the quality of work. From the user perspective, it contributes to ensure the continuity in education and care, so it can improve the service quality.

Integrated care centres have also been introduced in LTC. In this case, the challenge is to integrate health and social care by ensuring continuity of care and improving service quality, in particular in community care. Pilot experiments at local level can anticipate national reforms and innovations. Positive effects are expected not only in service quality, but also in work satisfaction and in the reduction of the workload. Improvement in service efficiency should help manage budget constraints more effectively.

4. The Netherlands (ECEC, integrated childcare and school provider). In the Dutch report, a formal collaborations between schools and childcare organisations, which offer integrated childcare and primary education services is analysed. The case study shows how interprofessional collaboration can improve the opportunities for professional development. In addition, pedagogical workers are able to get more stable hours of employment and less fragmented contracts by combining tasks in childcare and education. The selected integrated centre adopts innovative methods of education and it was awarded a prize and quality marks for the service quality and the level of integration.

5. Slovakia (LTC, Banská Bystrica). An integrated social and health care centre was set up in Banská Bystrica region. This innovative experience was aimed at addressing the fragmentation in health and social services, geographical inequities and also to deal with budget constraints. The new “Model of Integrated Care for the Elderly” was designed and implemented in cooperation with the World Bank and the national government. Although it represented a top-down project, it relied on the community involvement and participation in designing a necessary set of provided services and in defining the tasks of the social workers.

In both sectors, the integrated centres show how new organisational arrangements introduced to have a direct impact on service quality and user satisfaction can have an impact on the way staff work, by widening their tasks and offering more opportunities of professional exchange and development. In these cases, it is not the change in the quality of work which has an impact on service quality, but, quite the opposite, it is the service quality which affects the quality of work.

2.4 Re-internalisation and hybrids

In Spain and in Italy, one solution adopted to tackle the main issues existing in both sectors involved the change in the nature of the provider and of the service management. Previously contracted-out services were re-internalised, shifting from outsourcing to insourcing solutions: this decision represents a substantial revision of the previous, longstanding trend to externalisation. While it seems a more consolidated option in Spain, so far re-internalisation has constituted an exception in Italy. However, even in this country contracting

out and externalisation to private (for-profit and non-profit) providers have been largely questioned, because of their implications in terms of worsening of staff pay and working conditions and of the risks to the service quality. As a result, service transfer to hybrid organisations emerged as an alternative option to “pure” externalisation to private organisations: these organisations are owned or controlled by local government or other public institutions, but they can derogate from local government legislation and they are provided by a special autonomy from public administration regulation. These features can also be ensured by a private legal status. As they are owned or directly controlled by local government institutions, service externalisation to hybrids is expected to provide minor risks in terms of service quality and to contain the worsening in pay and working conditions, compared to the service externalisation to for-profit and non-profit providers.

1. Italy (LTC, Marradi). In 2021, a LTC residential home, contracted out to a social cooperative, was re-internalised by the Local Health Authority in a small municipality in Tuscany. Staff were employed by a temporary employment agency, remunerated by the Local Health Authority. This allowed to bypass the constraints in staff hiring and expenditure by the Local Health Authority. After the insourcing, the public sector national collective labour agreement of the local government was employed for the staff, instead of the national collective labour agreement of the non-profit social cooperatives. Improvements in wages and working conditions, connected to the revision of job grading, were substantial. The re-internalisation is perhaps a unique case in care services in Italy and it was caused by the decision, by the social cooperative, not to continue providing the service, complaining of an inadequate service remuneration by the Tuscany Region and the Local Health Authority. Regional tariffs for the management of LTC residential services have not been renewed for 12 years and therefore are frozen to 2010 levels. Given the budget constraints on the NHS, this situation is not limited to Tuscany, but shared nationwide. However, the decision to re-internalise was quite surprising, although it has been considered in the context of the debate on LTC service re-internalisation in Tuscany.

2. Spain (LTC, Barcelona). One selected case concerns the re-internalisation of three early childhood centres in Barcelona, which had been managed by external companies, which applied the collective agreement with the worst conditions for ECEC staff. The decision, by the municipality, to insource these centres (basically nurseries) entailed a change in the labour collective agreement, with the staff and, in particular, the educators shifting to the Collective Agreement for Public Employees of the City of Barcelona (as civil servants). This determined a substantial improvement in staff salary and working conditions.

3. Spain (ECEC, Arenys De Munt). In the small municipality of La Petjada-Arenys De Munt (Catalonia), the only nursery, managed by a private organisation, was converted into a public service management company in a process going from 2011 to 2016. This kind of public organisation, controlled by the municipality, is partially out of the scope of the local government legislation and of its strict budget constraints. The nursery and its related childcare services was praised as the best ECEC centre in Catalonia in 2013. This recovery did not

entail a swift and drastic improvement in staff working conditions, as workers remained covered by their respective collective agreements. However, there were some improvements, such as better leave for illness or other personal circumstances. There were also other improvements in service quality, but the Public service management company is conditioned by the municipal budget constraints. In 2020, negotiations began on a new collective agreement in 2020, then signed in December 2022: working conditions were substantially improved compared to the previous private sector agreement.

4. Italy (ECEC, Modena). From 2013 to 2021, in the municipality of Modena, a medium-size city in Emilia-Romagna, many municipal ECEC services (12 kindergartens and 12 nurseries) were progressively transferred to a Foundation, totally owned by the municipality, but provided with a private legal status. This change allowed the municipality to recruit kindergarten teachers and educators, who were very difficult to hire, because of the constraints and limitations posed by national austerity policies to staff hiring and expenditure by local government. The constitution of Foundation totally controlled by the municipality was preferred to the service externalisation to private organisations, because of the opposition of employees, service users and local communities. Foundation employees are covered by a private sector agreement: this determined a worsening in pay and working condition, which was strongly opposed by the great majority of the unions. However, company-level agreements mitigated the differences in pay and working conditions with those applied in the local government agreement, in the following years. The differences were significantly reduced by the company-level agreement and a joint statement signed by the municipality, the Foundation and all the unions in 2022.

The first two cases show the different reasons, which can explain the re-internalisation. In Spain, the decision was taken by the municipality to improve staff pay and working conditions, which were reputed particularly low, and to better protect service quality. Re-internalisation was highly consistent with the political orientation of the Barcelona local administration, thus responding to a general political orientation.

In Italy, the re-internalisation determined an improvement in staff and working conditions, but it arose for other reasons: the refusal by the service provider to keep on the service provision with the existing funding by the Local Health Authority, strictly limited by the austerity policies imposed on the NHS and the public administration. Strict limitations and constraints on staff hiring and expenditure led to reliance on a temporary employment agency to hire the residential home staff. Besides this single case, national legislation imposes very strict limitations in the possibility to increase staff expenditure by public administrations, largely explaining why re-internalisation is an exception in Italy.

Budget constraints on local government institutions are relevant also in the case of Arenys De Munt in Spain. Here the legal limitations imposed on service management and expenditure by small municipalities induced to opt for transferring the ECEC services to a public service management company, instead of insourcing by municipal directly managed units. Public service management companies share some of the characteristics we attributed to hybrids and, in some ways, they can be associated to them. However, while in Italy (not only

in the case we illustrated), the recourse to hybrid organisations represents an alternative to the service externalisation from public (municipal) to private providers, in the Spanish case it is used to transfer the management of public services from private (for-profit or non-profit) providers to public ones. In both cases, local government institutions are induced to opt for hybrids because of legal and budget constraints imposed on public administration and, in particular, on the services provided by municipal directly-run units. Therefore, they exploit the opportunities provided by the special legislation applied to hybrid organisations. In all these cases, the role of social partners is limited and, in the case of the Italian hybrid organisation, unions are largely against this solution, fearing that its spread could represent another way to externalisation of still publicly run services. The opposition does not seem motivated by the local situation, which justifies in many ways the choice made by the municipality, but it is explained mainly by more general reasons, which have more to do with the national and regional situation of the care services.

2.5 Public procurement

In these cases employment relations actors try to affect pay and working conditions for LTC and ECEC workers employed by private providers in outsourced, contracted out or accredited services by intervening on the criteria of public procurement and accreditation system. As explained in the Italian report, the contractual relationships between public administrations (commissioner and funders of the services) and private providers are not only key in the overall governance of both sectors, but it can have a fundamental impact on working conditions, in the care sector as in other sectors. Therefore, unions are very interested in conditioning the criteria and the conditions set in the contractual relationships between public administrations and private providers. This makes public procurement a relevant arena of employment relations.

In our case studies, some institutional preconditions made negotiations aimed at improving working conditions via acting on public procurement possible. In some cases, the existence of “framework agreements” on public procurement negotiated by the territorial confederal trade unions and public administrations at the territorial level enabled the social partners to intervene ex-ante in the definition of the labour and technical standards set in tenders. These “framework agreements” identify define specific substantial and procedural conditions that local administration need to observe when procuring goods and services from private providers.

In other cases, unions could rely on the existence of established collaborative triangular relationships between trade unions, employer associations the local government and public administration at the territorial level (local or regional one). These relationships allow the social partners to play an active role in the definition of the requisites applied by the region to identify and select the private providers entitled to provide the socio-care services on behalf of the public authorities. These requisites can involve, directly or indirectly, staff pay, working conditions, qualifications and training. Given the connection existing between

job quality, in all its dimensions, and service quality, intervening on public procurement by improving working conditions protect and also improve the quality of the services provided to users. By contrast, it could have negative effects on service costs by stressing budget constraints and restrictions in public finance.

These relationships can be used also to affect other ways to attribute public service provision to private organisations, which are alternative to public procurement. This is the case of the accreditation system. The accreditation is the procedure through which a public administration formally recognizes an organization (public or private) the possibility to provide services financed with public resources, by verifying their compliance with clear criteria in terms of labour standards applied to the personnel, services standards offered to users, as well as structural, organizational and operational standards. By intervening in advance in the definition of accreditation criteria, the trade unions have the possibility to protect and also improve working conditions within the accredited services. In Italy, the accreditation, which is defined at regional level, was first used in healthcare, since the mid-1990s, and then adopted in many areas of welfare service such social care, vocational training and childcare.

1. Italy (LTC, Florence Province). A first case concerns some social cooperatives providing home care services, as contractors for the Local Health Authority, in the North-West area of the Florence Province. A significant part of the staff was employed with the wrong job grading (and therefore a lower remuneration) by the social cooperatives. A higher grading was made nearly impossible by the low level at which the services provided by the two social cooperatives were remunerated by the Local Health Authority, according to the kinds of services recognised in the tender. Therefore, unions intervened in the drafting of the new tender for the new contractual term 2021-2024. In February 2021, the Local Health Authority published a new tender, which included service requirements, qualification of the personnel to be hired and corresponding economic remuneration for socio-health services, in such a way as to allow private providers which would have won the bid to ensure the workers the correct job grading and remuneration. After the assignment of the contract, an agreement between the unions and the two companies, which were awarded the tender, recognised the new job grading and the corresponding remuneration.

2. Italy (ECEC), Florence. In the kindergarten and schools in the municipality of Florence, support services for disabled pupils (aged 3-18 years old) are provided by social cooperatives. The tenders defined by public institutions often recognise an economic remuneration of these services which is based on a lower job grading of the educators. This forces social cooperatives to apply an incorrect grading to these workers and a lower wage, as in the previous case study. Thanks to the existence of a specific protocol on public procurement with the Municipality of Florence, trade unions were able to participate in the definition of the call for the new tender and to affect it. The new tender defined a higher workers' job grading and increased the economic resources attributed to these services. This resulted in an increase in the wages of the educators.

3. The Netherlands (LTC, regionalisation of public procurement). In the Netherlands, the introduction of public procurement decentralised at municipal level caused problems both in the quality of services and in the quality of work in the LTC homecare sector, with municipalities not equipped to design and manage tenders, bids and all the process of monitoring and controlling service providers. The case study analyses a regional partnership created by a large group of municipalities to manage public procurement in more professionalised way. This experience resulted in many innovations in public procurement aimed at improving the selection and management of providers, introducing an integrated system of quality control and ensuring an effective enforcement of both service and work regulation.

4. Italy (ECEC, Emilia-Romagna Region). In the Emilia-Romagna region, the accreditation system for LTC services usually recognised the Anaste national collective agreement as the reference labour contract for private providers. However, wages and working conditions set in the 2017-2019 renewal were deemed too low and poor, compared to other private sector contract renewals, by the main regional trade union confederations. These refused to sign the Anaste contract renewal, which, instead, was agreed on by other unions. As explained in the Italian report, the confederation unions exerted many kinds of pressure and actions to push the Region, first, to revoke the accreditation to the providers applying the Anaste agreement and, then, to discourage the application of the Anaste contract as a way to improve general working conditions in LTC services. This second option, which was partially successful, was carried out by limiting the financial reimbursement recognised to the providers allying the Anaste agreement. In this attempt, unions found a great willingness by the regional governments, which recognised it as a strategy to contrast contractual dumping in the LTC sector.

In the case of the Netherlands, unions do not intervene on the specific prescriptions and requirements to be met by service providers, but they contribute to promote a partnership among municipalities to manage the public procurement process. In the Italian cases, unions do not ask for a change in the structure and in the governance of the public procurement, but they affect the service requirements and features to be met by providers, in particular those concerning the staff and its working conditions. In both the countries, the unions' final purpose is to safeguard and improve staff pay and working conditions. In the case of the accreditation system, unions adapt their action to this different mechanism to select public service providers and to allocate them public funds. In all the situations, the aim to improve working conditions is not pursued by a direct action on service providers, but by exploiting the relationships with municipalities and regions as they finance and regulate service provision. Cooperation and, also, a certain degree of goal sharing with public authorities looks necessary, in order to make this strategy successful.

3. Actors, processes and arenas

The cases highlighted the existence of a plurality of arenas, in which labour issues in the care services are dealt with, at local level. Although it nearly impossible to identify general rules and situations shared by all

cases, these arenas usually show differences in terms of the actors involved and of their role. However, there are also important differences in terms of the actors involved across the cases. In the collective bargaining arena, social partners predictably play a role of primary importance and the municipality acts as the employer. In some cases, the initiatives are taken by the municipalities and the unions seem to play a subordinate role: two Hungarian concerning the Municipalities of Budapest in the ECEC services and Veszprém in the LTC services illustrate this point. However, unions usually display a strong role in the collective bargaining cases.

In the cases of local initiatives and welfare agreements, the decision-making process takes place mainly in the political-administrative arena, the municipalities are usually the main actors, involving unions and employees. Municipalities can play both the role of employers and that of public authorities, as they usually play an important role in the service governance. Local, regional or city-state government institutions (such as in Germany) often shape the initiative, involve unions and employers associations, search for a shared agreement in a tripartite way, as, for example, the German cases show well.

As public authorities, the cases highlighted the importance of the function of market regulator. In this role, local and regional governments can create incentives for self-regulated collective bargaining autonomy at the local level, as in the LTC German cases, or can promote, directly or indirectly a regulation contributing to improve wages and working conditions, as shown not only in the German cases, but in the Dutch and Italian case studies concerning public procurement and accreditation. This action is carried out in both sectors, although it looks particularly strong in the LTC service.

Private employers are often placed in a secondary role, but this is not always true: the case of the commercial ECEC organisation shows the potential of entrepreneurial capacity to find viable solutions in a relevant issue such as staff recruiting and retaining. Local employers' will, even against the opinion of the central levels, proved to be decisive in the definition new local collective agreements in the German for-profit and religious LTC and ECEC sectors.

Moreover, when the issues tackled mainly within the political-administrative arena, a larger variety of stakeholders and actors is involved, going from users and users' associations, to professional associations, to experts or other local actors. The kind of actors involved depends also on the issue at stake: in the case of training and staff qualification programme, professional schools and universities play a relevant role, although they do not start the process.

A common factor for success is the consensus between different stakeholders about the problem definition, as emerges in the German cases, or also about the solutions. In particular, within the constellation of actors, a cooperative relationship among municipal or regional governments and the unions seems to be key of success in many cases. This relationship is often rooted in a tradition of relationships, which can take place with the local government institutions. These can play the role of employers or those of funders and regulators, as in the cases of intervention by unions on public procurement and accreditation. In the Italian

cases illustrating this point, unions are legitimate to act on juridical procedures and mechanisms, which are prerogative by the public institutions, because there is a shared tradition of stable and cooperative relationships. Moreover, unions and municipalities or regional governments share the same objectives, as shown also in the Dutch case of regionalisation of the public procurement. In the case of the LTC accreditation system in Italy, some interviewees emphasised that unions did not have the same possibility to intervene in other regions, where a cooperative relationship with the regional government has not been so well-established as in Emilia-Romagna, and even shared objectives are limited and uncertain.

The study case of a hybrid organisation in Emilia-Romagna is particularly relevant also because it shows a serious break of a highly consolidated network of cooperative relationships between unions and local government institutions. The ECEC Foundation was created in a conflictual environment, where the municipality had not only to tackle the unions' opposition but also that of social cooperatives and local employer associations. Fundamental was the support by the service users' and local community, which ensured the success of the Foundation. In this case, along the municipality, mobilisation of users and local community played a very relevant role in the decision-making process, in the political arena.

However, over the years, the municipality and the local unions search for recovering the cooperative relationships, bypassing the highly controversial issues. As explained in the Italian report, this process, which takes place in the middle between the political and the employment relations arena, needed many years, but it was successful. Main factors of success were, on one hand, the willingness by the municipality to reduce the scope of its cost containment objectives by acting on labour costs, on the other hand, the removal of some vetoes to compromise solutions, coming from the regional level of the main unions. However, this story shows the importance attributed to cooperation relationships by both municipalities and local unions: despite unfavourable conditions, both parts constantly searched for returning to stable collaboration and consensus.

The role of users and local communities in defining the problem, shaping and supporting the solution has been relevant in other cases of our selection, in particular in Germany and Slovakia, in the ECEC sector. Users are mainly interested to service quality and, in the ECEC sector, their mobilisation is part of the increasing pressure to improve service quality in childcare. They can exert a pressure on local government institutions and find convergent goals with unions, when improving service quality is pursued by improving working conditions and training of the service staff. In this field, there is large capacity for a coordinated or at least convergent action between users and user associations, employees and unions. A convergent action usually takes place in the political and social arena, as service users and their associations tend not to enter the employment relations arena. However, unions and service users can also find themselves on opposite sides: in the case of the Italian ECEC Foundation, service users and local communities supported the hybrid solution from the beginning, while unions had opposed it for a long time.

In other cases, service users are often a fundamental part of the solutions, because they are based on user involvement and a better understanding of user needs, to improve service quality. In our study, this was the case of many organisational innovations, in particular those based on the introduction of arrangements inspired to the Burtzoorg model. Users needs and perceptions are aimed at shaping the service and its organisation, or they are called on to take direct part in the provision of the service, up to the “co-production” models. But this role of users is out of the scope of our research.

Professional associations can also be important, as in particular a Slovakian ECEC case illustrates. These organisations tend to place themselves in the middle between the political-administrative arena and the employment relations one, especially in countries where local employment relations and local unions are weaker. However, they can exert their influence mainly towards the political institutions. A different situation is that of another kind of employees’ organisation: the German Chamber of Employees, whose role was analysed in Bremen and which provides services and legal support to workers. As an organisation provided with a high status and legal legitimisation, the Bremen Chamber of Employees played an important role, supporting the Federal City and the unions in finding effective solutions in the ECEC sector. All these associations and organisations are an important part of the local networks supporting the solutions to tackle the identified problems at local level. Local participatory networks are usually an important factor of success. Therefore, policies at the various level of government should support their creations and strengthening.

4. Local and national level

In the local cases, the service governance, the functions of the local government institutions and the employment relations systems are linked, or rather, embedded into national institutional structures and regulations, which differ considerably among the analysed countries. Therefore, the role of the local dimension or level and its relationship with the national one show a great plurality of situations.

Considering the political-administrative dimension, there are cases in which the link between the national and the link level is very close and others in which the decision-making processes, from the beginning, exclusively or nearly exclusively takes place at local level. In first group of cases, local government can take advantage of national programmes and funds to launch their initiatives (also applying to take part in nationally funded programmes), or the initiative can be directly assumed by the national government. However, even in the cases of real top-down solutions, the local level seems to play an important role. As noticed in the German report, activation of local, public and non-public actors is crucial, even if service governance is mainly centralised. Indeed, provision of a care service has to take place within the local context and this stays true in those cases in which the role of the national level is prevailing in decision-making. In all the case studies, the local dimension shows a certain flexibility and autonomy in the implementation of effective solutions. This lies in the knowledge of local problems and relationships by the local level, which makes the role of the local level fundamental.

These characteristics are evident in the cases in which all the process can take place mainly or exclusively at local level. The majority of the cases are initiated and conducted by local actors. They represent a response to mainly local challenges and are funded by the municipalities' budgets. The role of the social partners and of other local stakeholders can be emphasized in these situations, although the importance of each actor varies according to the single cases. When higher levels are not directly involved, the role of what we called the participatory framework is very important in supporting the local initiatives.

One critical juncture between the local and the higher levels is usually the financial dimension, which can represent a leverage by the national level on the lower ones, or simply a source of constraints on the local actors. Local initiatives can benefit by national funds, but also can be limited by restrictions imposed by the national level and nation regulation in public finance. The ability to manage the budget constraints, by both national and local actors, is at the core of the quadrilemma. In some cases, such as the Danish and some Italian ones, this issue emerges clearly, showing a fluctuating ability by local actors to tackle it. The limited available resources, along with the decentralization of care services, emerged as a very critical issue in the case analysed by the research project in the Netherlands. However, it is an underlying dimension to be taken into consideration in all the countries.

Along with the financial resources and constraints, local actors may exploit the opportunities and face the constraints determined by national and (where existing) regional regulations. This is, obviously, a common challenge shared by all the municipalities and, partially, also by State-city actors such as that of Bremen. In the case of small municipalities, constraints can also be stricter, such as in Spain. The two cases of hybrid organisations in the ECEC sector (the childcare foundation in Modena, Italy, and the nursery public management company in Arenys de Munt, in Spain) highlight a strategy of "muddling through" rules, constraints and budgetary restrictions by the local government institutions. Muddling through was exacerbated by austerity policies of the last decade. A connected strategy consists of derogating by the national rules. This should open municipalities more viable routes to tackle the contrasting pressures by the quadrilemma. However, the potential of strategy is often overestimated: the Danish report highlights that most of the measures adopted out the scope of the national and local government regulation should have been taken within this scope.

The relationships between the national and the local level of employment relations is often mutually beneficial. On one hand, national levels can support the local ones, as is evident especially in some cases, such as that related to local bargaining in the LTC sector, in Slovakia. On the other hand, social partners can experiment solutions, at local level, which would not be accepted at national level. The use of wage supplements and other contractual tools to staff recruit and retaining, as shown by some Dutch and Danish cases, can be acceptable at municipal level, but would be hardly possible at national one.

Local social partners can also learn from national initiatives and conflicts, which was seemingly a failure: for example, this is the case of the 2021 local agreement for the LTC workers, which was signed between the

City of Budapest and the unions after the failure of a national strike and important dispute in 2016. Local initiative can also get to local or company-level agreements, which can be pioneers for the national context, such as in the local collective agreements for non-profit and for-profit providers in Germany.

In several cases, the link between the national and the local level of employment does not emerge. In these cases, the interplay with the national level of employment relations was not relevant. This can be seen as a lack of interference by the national level, as happens in the case of unions, which consider the cases as referring to local issues, or to an inability to affect the local level by the national ones, as is more frequent in the case of employers. However, there are also some cases, in which, far from being supportive, the national level of social partners was an obstacle to the definition and implementation of the local solutions: the ECEC foundation (hybrid organization) in Italy is the most evident case, but also national social partners contrasted the adoption of collective bargaining in the religious LTC sector in Germany. In the first case, users and local communities were fundamental in carrying out the solution defined at local level, that is service externalisation by means of a hybrid organisation. In the German case, local social partners and, in particular, employers showed a great degree of autonomy by the national level.

The political-administrative and the employment relations system, at local level, obviously show many relationships. This seems particularly evident when the issues at stake concern wage and employment conditions. The processes often entail close dialogue between management, staff and local shop stewards, promoting cooperation and mutual understanding, as shown, for example, in the Danish and in the Spanish cases. In Spain, collaboration looks easier at local than at national level. Social partners seem to perceive the strengthening of these relationships as important and fruitful, irrespective of the result of the initiatives.

Broadly, local administrators and politicians are the actors, who are in the best position to connect the political-administrative and the employment relations systems, or arena, at local level. However, this role of *trait d'union* can be played also by other actors: in Slovakia, professional teacher associations exploit their local networks both in the society and in the local political systems to support local weak unions in their requests for higher wages and better working conditions.

Moreover, the increasing number of actions and measures taken by municipalities to improve service quality by improving the quality of work (training, qualifications, staff requirements) increases the overlapping areas between the two systems. As already mentioned, on one hand, the role of the local and regional governments in service funding and regulating provides opportunities to intervene into employment relations matters, on the other hand, unions and social partners as a whole learned the importance not only of financing but, also, of the regulation to affect working conditions: the cases of public procurement and accreditation in the Netherlands and in Italy illustrate this point well.

5. Conclusions

The case study selection highlighted a great plurality and variety of tools and solutions, which are used to tackle with the contrasting pressures and trends summed up in the quadrilemma. Given the request for expanding the service provision or for ensuring its continuity under conditions of budget restrictions or of real austerity, the responses of local actors tend to focus on the issues of low wages and precarious working conditions (job quality), or on those related to staffing and training (service quality aspects). Many problems are largely shared, as low wages (or its perception) and staff shortage involve most of the countries analysed in the research. However, priorities partially vary according to the countries, depending on the specific condition in the labour market, working conditions and the characteristics of the care systems, which exist (and are perceived by actors) in each country, as described in the first and in the second part of this report and, more in detail, in the country reports.

Collective bargaining showed a remarkable vitality in all the countries considered, although it was revealed in different ways. As to the issues, collective bargaining tends to deal more with matters related to pay and working conditions, by its nature. However, as wage increases and bonus or enhancement in working conditions are often used to make care work more attractive and therefore to contain the staff shortage, there is an indirect but clear impact on the service quality. This creates a link between the issues of pay and working conditions and those concerning staffing, professionalisation and quality. Improvements in pay and working conditions are perceived by professionalised staff as a re-valuation of their work, responding to the demands of a greater consideration by care workers, which emerged both in ECEC and in LTC in all the countries.

Moreover, collective bargaining has also expanded in the care sector, as is happening in Germany by involving kinds of providers, which were not covered by it, and also in Eastern countries, where its extension occurs at local level. This trend shows that collective bargaining is considered an institutional tool, which is suitable for tackling current issues in the sector. Thereafter, a policy action is recommended to promote its application and expansion in the care sector, both at sub-sectorial and at local level, according to national and subnational context.

Measures and programmes focused on education, vocational training and professional or inter-professional networks of collaboration are often at the core of the local government initiatives and, even more, of the new organisational innovations analysed in many case studies. These kinds of programmes and practices emphasis professionalism and collaboration among staff within a organisation and between the organisations involved in the design and implementation of care services.

While wage bonuses are measures which seem close to the New Public Management prescriptions, these arrangements show a trend shift towards the New Public Governance (Osborne, 2010) approaches in public administration and in the governance of the care services. Both kinds of measures, practices and

arrangements seem useful to the purpose of improving working conditions and enhance service quality by intervening on the conditions of employment and on job quality.

On the basis of these last considerations, we recommend to policy makers, at all levels, to invest in programmes, which match economic incentives with measures targeted to enhance the level of qualification and the career opportunity provided in the care sector, as well as to stimulate professional and inter-professional collaboration. Experiences analysed in this report usually show a tendency to privilege, alternatively, one or the other kind of measures, relying more on market incentives or on professional values. A challenge for both the social partners and the political and administrative systems will be to find the best mix, in each context, between these two kinds of tools and mechanisms, in order to improve working conditions, job quality and service quality.

In most of the cases, local involvement is considered a value in itself, even it does not always bring to effective results. Local social partners' participation shows to be important also in the top-down solutions, at least in their implementation. Local social partners not only have a knowledge of the local aspects of a problem, which higher levels cannot have, but they often revealed to have a flexibility in designing and implementing a solution, which can be a valuable asset to ensure the success of the adopted solution. In countries such as Spain, collaboration at local level revealed to be easier than at national level, where more general concerns or also politics factors can interfere with the search for viable solutions.

Beyond social partners, the case study analysis highlighted the role of a more extended participatory framework, made up of service users and their associations, employee and professional associations, local communities, experts and other potential stakeholders. This plural set of actors can play an important role in promoting and supporting the local solution, helping social partners and the municipality to approve and implement it. Although users proved to be in contrast with unions in some cases, by and large users and the participatory framework share a common interest to improve working conditions and job quality, by means of it, the service quality. As they are interested mainly in the solution of the local problem, they can put pressure on the municipality and social partners to be flexible in accepting flexible solutions which are suitable for the local case. Moreover, local support by a larger participatory framework is a powerful source of legitimation for local or company-level solutions. For all these reasons, a policy action targeted to strengthen the role and involvement of users, associations and local communities in the care sector could be important.

This advice concerns both the service governance, especially at local level, and the employment relations systems. In this latter case, finding the ways to involve users and their association as well as other stakeholders in social dialogue is a tough challenge. Although the potential role of social care users in issues dealt with this labour and working conditions system has been recognised by specialised literature (Kessler and Bach, 2011), the participatory framework described in the case studies tends to be excluded by the employment relations systems, especially when the forms of participation do not involve employees. The

participatory framework usually makes pressure on political-administrative system and, in this way, it is able to influence decisions concerning service staff and its employment conditions.

However, our research showed that users, local associations and communities can play a relevant role, especially when social dialogue is weak or social partners are split at local level. This evidence calls for a more clear and institutionalised involvement by users' association and other local stakeholders in local social dialogue, in the care service. Multipartite social dialogue in educational and social services, instead of bipartite or tripartite social dialogue, would help improve working conditions and service quality in many circumstances.

Social partners at local level, unions in particular, were able to intervene on administrative tools, which are usually far from the scope of their competence. In public procurement and accreditation, unions used their stable relationships with the actors of the political and administrative system to pursue their objectives in an indirect but potentially highly effective ways. By doing this, they focused their actions on the mechanisms regulating markets in the care services after the neo-liberal reforms of the last decades. National legislation and EU regulative action could foster the possibility to intervene in the definition of these mechanisms by social partners, even in institutionalised forms, which are suitable for each country.

Sectoral differences between ECEC and LTC did not prove to be very pronounced in the kinds of solutions adopted and in the involved actors. This reflects the common pressure and demands to which both sectors or sub-sectors have to respond to, and the common characteristics shared by ECEC and LTC in the labour market conditions and in the employment relations. In our case study selection, the recourse to collective bargaining solutions is in part greater in the LTC sector: this could depend on the fact that pay and working condition issues seem to have greater priority in the LTC than in the ECEC services, where, on the contrary, actors and solutions are increasingly oriented more on quality issues. This difference in priorities between the two sub-sectors is more evident in Northern Europe countries, in which the action to improve pay and working conditions is less often an objective in itself, and more frequently a means to pursue staffing and service quality objectives.

However, all the selected countries present signs of partially diverging trends in the development of the two analysed care sectors or sub-sectors. ECEC services, even those addressed to children aged 0-2 years old, are progressively losing their nature of "social" services to become pure "educational services". Broadly speaking, this is the result of the increasing recognition of early childhood education as a children's right, and of its importance in the children's future, both for their school results, opportunities and success in the labour market, and for their formation as citizens. Therefore, social and political pressure and investments aimed at improving service quality, include aspects such as staff training and professionalisation is more marked and also socially legitimated than in the LTC services.

If we recall the possible solutions to the quadrilemma identified in this project, these differences in the existing trajectories in the two care sectors could bring to a greater differentiation: while the LTC sector could

be more steadily oriented towards the “soft privatisation” solution, the ECEC sector could progressively be increasingly oriented to the solution defined as “care provision integration”. This process may be already emerging in some Northern Europe countries. If this differentiation consolidate, it is likely to have an impact also on the labour market in the two sectors, which will tend to be more and more differentiated. In turn, the implications on actors, strategies and logics of the employment relations system could be of great importance.

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