

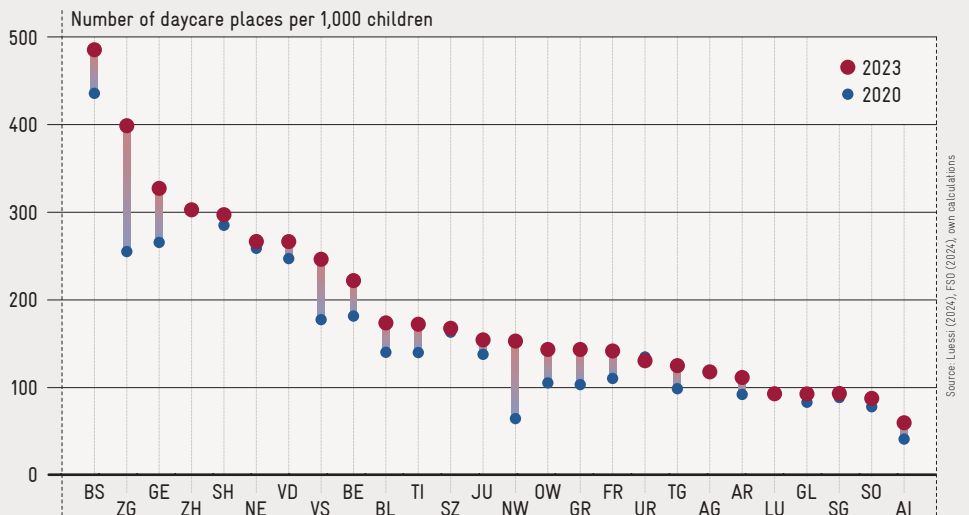
Family-Centered Childcare Policy

Good and affordable childcare does not require a federal solution. Responsibility lies with the cantons and municipalities, which are closer to the local needs of parents.

Situation

For a long time, there were widespread complaints about a shortage of daycare places. Today, some cities are even facing an over-supply. Nevertheless, policymakers are not stepping back – on the contrary: alongside cantons and municipalities, the federal level is now taking a more active role in childcare policy. This is problematic because cantons and municipalities are closer to the needs of families. At the same time, this development is hardly surprising: childcare policy pursues ambitious objectives. It is meant both to promote labor force participation and to support early childhood development.

More childcare places available



Since 2020, the number of childcare places has increased by an average of 20%.

Facts

4 out of 10

In 2023, around 40% of children aged 0–3 attended daycare. Grandparents also remain important, caring for about 42% of children, sometimes in addition to daycare.

■ (Un)attainable goal

Childcare policy aims to boost parents' labor force participation. However, studies show that subsidies have little effect on employment. Institutional childcare often replaces private forms of care such as grandparents. In these cases, parents do not work more, leading to significant deadweight effects.

■ Unclear responsibilities

In most cantons, preschool childcare is a shared responsibility between municipalities and cantons. Permanent involvement by the federal government would undermine a clear division of responsibilities.

■ Bureaucratic regulation

In some cases, cantons regulate in extremely detailed ways what requirements childcare centers must meet – even down to specifications for floor coverings. Some regulation is necessary, but excessive regulation increases costs and reduces the diversity of services.

■ Inefficient funding

The cantons rely on different subsidy models: start-up aid, deficit guarantees, or direct support for individual daycare centers. More targeted instruments such as childcare vouchers are rarely used.

Recommendations

A well-designed childcare policy rests on three pillars: First, it is most effective where families benefit from it directly – at the **municipal level**. There, they can express their preferences and at the same time, bear the financial consequences of their decisions. Second,

any public support should flow **directly to parents**, ideally through childcare vouchers. This allows for targeted assistance and free choice among different childcare options. Third, daycare providers should face as few **unnecessary barriers** as possible.

