



# The provision of childcare services

A comparative review of 30 European countries



European Commission

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# The provision of childcare services

## A comparative review of 30 European countries

European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE)

### The National Experts (\* indicates non-EU countries)

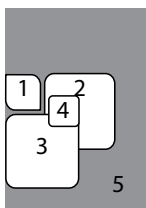
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# Country abbreviations

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IS	Iceland
IT	Italy
LI	Liechtenstein
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	The Netherlands
NO	Norway
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
SE	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom





# Executive summary (EN)

## Introduction

In recent decades, childcare services have become a matter of serious public concern. Affordable and good-quality childcare services may improve the reconciliation of work and family life and thus foster labour market participation and gender equality. Childcare facilities may also provide an important answer to declining fertility rates, by lowering the cost of childbearing in terms of labour market and career opportunities. Finally there is a growing tendency to see childcare services from a social pedagogical perspective. In this perspective the main policy rationale is no longer the reconciliation of work and care, but rather the contribution of childcare services to child development and socioeconomic integration. The importance of providing childcare services has also been recognised at the EU level. At the Barcelona Summit in 2002, some explicit conclusions and targets were defined with regard to the provision of childcare services. Confirming the goal of full employment, the European Council agreed that Member States should remove disincentives to female participation in the labour market and strive to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age. The importance of these targets has been reaffirmed as recently as 2008 in the employment guidelines (2008–10) adopted by the Council.

Taking into account recently published EU-SILC (European Union statistics on income and living conditions) data on the provision of (formal and other) childcare services, this report provides an analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative provision of childcare services for 27 EU Member States and three European Economic Area (EEA) countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It discusses the extent to which the demand for childcare is covered, the importance attached to childcare services within the national context, and the policies developed at the national level to improve the provision of childcare facilities. As such, the report updates and extends the discussion of childcare in a report by the Commission's previous network of gender experts (see Plantenga and Remery, 2005).

## Investing in childcare services

There are several reasons why countries might invest in childcare services. A classical argument refers to the fact that the availability of good-quality childcare services has a positive impact on the female participation rate. A higher participation rate may increase gender equality, foster economic growth and help improve the sustainability of the present-day welfare state, especially in the light of an ageing population. Another argument points to the fact that childcare services might increase fertility rates by making a child less

costly in terms of income and career opportunities. In fact, the fertility and participation arguments may be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. In the participation argument, the fertility rate is taken for granted and childcare services should facilitate the combination of care responsibilities with paid work. In the fertility argument, participation is taken for granted. Here childcare services are supposed to facilitate the combination of paid work with care responsibilities. In addition to the reconciliation argument, the provision of childcare services might also contribute to the goal of reducing poverty. Higher participation in the labour market reduces the risk of poverty over people's lifespan and especially in old age. The improved well-being of parents may also reduce child poverty and thus improve future outcomes for children. The effect on children may even be more direct: good-quality childcare services may serve a child-development purpose, providing them with a rich, safe and stimulating environment. As such childcare services may offer an important contribution to child development and socioeconomic integration.

The arguments in favour of childcare services are well known and most European countries have taken initiatives to increase the availability of (quality) childcare services. However, many Member States are far from reaching the Barcelona childcare targets. Barriers seem to be financial as well as ideological. Perhaps one of the most complicated challenges refers to the fact that the policy objectives on participation, gender equality, fertility and social integration are not always easily compatible. Child development concerns, for example, or the ambition to reduce child poverty may translate into a policy targeted at increasing childcare services, but may just as easily translate into a policy favouring extended leave facilities and/or increasing the provision of childcare allowances. Long parental leave facilities, however, or a favourable financial incentive structure may not promote labour supply and may result in large differences in male and female working time patterns. Another complicated matter refers to the issue of parental choice. Parents may differ in their preferences with regard to work and family outcomes and most public policies tend to enhance parental choice. The result may be a complicated mixture of time facilities, financial allowances and services that may not necessarily be very coherent and/or may not be very favourable from a gender equality point of view.

## Childcare services

Affordable and accessible quality childcare provision is extremely important for working parents. Throughout Europe, however, the availability and affordability of childcare differs extensively. The EU-SILC data indicate that in some countries parents make extensive use of formal centre-based arrangements (including education at pre-school), whereas in other countries they rely more on other arrangements (such as childminders and/or family,

friends or neighbours). In the age category 0–2, the use of formal childcare arrangements in 2006 varies from 73 % in Denmark to only 2 % in the Czech Republic and Poland. It appears that in seven Member States (Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and United Kingdom) and Iceland and Norway the use of childcare services is above or at the Barcelona target of 33 %. In a number of countries, though, childcare services are only used on a part-time basis and may not cover a full working week. The use of formal care arrangements increases with the increasing age of children. At age 3 up to the mandatory school age, Belgium ranks highest in 2006, with a use of formal childcare arrangements of almost 100 %. At the other end is Poland, with a use of 28 %. Of course the high user rate is to a large extent due to the inclusion of pre-school arrangements under the heading of formal arrangements and the high coverage rate of pre-school arrangements for children in this particular age category. According to the Barcelona target, the actual coverage rate should be at least 90 % in 2010. It appears that nine Member States (and Iceland) meet the Barcelona target or score rather high. When interpreting these figures, it has to be taken into account, though, that in most countries, pre-school is only part time, as a result of which working parents still need additional childcare facilities which may be much less available.

The use of childcare facilities does not directly answer the question of whether demand is fully met. The actual demand for childcare is influenced by the participation rate of parents (especially mothers), levels of unemployment, the length of parental leave, the opening hours of school and the availability of alternatives like grandparents and or other (informal) arrangements. A relatively low coverage rate may therefore not indicate shortages, but alternative ways of looking after young children, like extended parental leave facilities or a home care allowance. In the Nordic EU Member States childcare is framed as a social right (Denmark, Finland and Sweden). In other countries, however, the supply of high-quality and affordable childcare facilities may be insufficient. In particular, formal childcare facilities for the youngest children seem to be in short supply in quite a number of European countries. For children aged 3 years up to the mandatory school age, supply is higher but the opening hours of the facilities may not always match working hours. Moreover, in most countries there are clear regional differences.

In addition to availability, the quality of the service provided is also significant when it comes to parents' decisions to use childcare facilities. Quality of childcare refers to aspects that contribute to the social, emotional and cognitive development of the child. Problematic is the severe lack of harmonised statistics on this matter. More qualitative data indicate, again, a large variation across Europe. Staff–child ratios, for example, seem to differ widely between European countries. Another aspect is the educational level of childminders. In some coun-

tries childminders appear to have a rather low level of education. Furthermore, in almost all countries there is a large difference in education between nursery schools, pre-schools and crèches, on the one hand, and private childminders on the other. In regard to the former group, strict requirements are often set and inspected by government. Private childminders, however, usually have a significantly lower level of education.

In most countries childcare services are subsidised by one means or another. There are large differences, however, between Member States. With respect to the macrodivision of costs, the share that parents pay seems to vary from 8 % in Sweden to as high as 80 % in Poland. In most countries costs of childcare depend upon family income. The Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) have set a maximum to the childcare fee, while in other countries low-income groups may attend childcare for free. There are, however, also countries where low-income families pay relatively more than medium and high-income groups. In quite a few countries childcare is considered to be expensive. In addition, public childcare may be affordable, but private childcare is often expensive. Quite apart from the availability and affordability, cultural norms may also influence the demand for childcare services. In most countries attitudes vary according to the age of the child. Only in Belgium and France do childcare services seem to be generally accepted, including for very young children. In most other countries childcare facilities are generally regarded as positive for 'older children', but not for very young children. In addition, the number of hours may be an issue, resulting in a part-time use of childcare facilities. Even in the Nordic countries, where childcare (for older children) is accepted and used on a large scale, 'good motherhood' and the well-being of children in childcare are occasionally a topic for public discussion.

### Policy issues

From a policy perspective, the provision of childcare services raises several issues. An important question refers to the underlying motives for investing in childcare services, which may differ from ensuring future labour supply to promoting child development. A predominance of labour market concerns, for example, may lead to a rather strict policy with regard to availability, compared to a policy that emphasises the important role of childcare arrangements in terms of social inclusion. Another important issue refers to the policy mix between financial allowances, time facilities and services, given the particular policy ambitions. The decision on that issue may depend on fundamental debates about the most desirable organisation of society or on rather practical considerations about what is feasible from a financial point of view. In addition, the policy might be inspired by the conviction that parents should be allowed to choose between different options, given the fact that different parents will have different preferences.

In effect, a number of countries seem to raise the provision of childcare services, although the actual growth rate is sometimes disappointing, partly because of budgetary constraints. At the same time a number of countries are rebalancing the policy mix between the provision of services, time and money, with the aim to increase parental choice, to improve the labour market position of women or to promote family life. The result may not always be a coherent model that provides a continuum of support to families (the parents as well as the children). The period of leave, for example, is not in all cases attuned to the provision of childcare services. In addition, the emphasis on facilitating parental choice may translate into adverse effects in the sense that socioeconomic differences between families increase.

Another important policy issue refers to the quality of childcare services, in particular the quality of staff. Raising the level of training would enhance their status and bring their profession more in line with that of teachers. Several countries are trying to raise the level of qualifications. Again, however, there may be important budgetary constraints which decelerate the introduction of these policy measures. It is also important to decide on a coherent picture of quality requirements — that is for centre-based and home-based childcare, for private and public — in order to prevent negative interactions. Finally it is important

to note that the high profile of childcare services within the European employment strategy does have its impact at the level of the Member States. Although the Barcelona targets may not have a large impact on all national policy debates, the monitoring of progress within the Lisbon strategy does help to highlight the issue of childcare as an important policy priority.

### Summary and conclusions

The results provided in this report, the score of the European Member States on the Barcelona targets and the ongoing debates suggest that the childcare issue will remain an important policy priority in the near future as well. Despite all the efforts and improvements, high-quality and affordable childcare facilities are still in short supply in quite a number of European Union Member States. The availability of the EU-SILC data enables an assessment of the current state of affairs and allows for a careful monitoring of the measures taken in the different Member States. This information, in combination with the emphasis on the provision of childcare services within the context of the European employment strategy, should provide the necessary basis for a policy which is targeted towards a coherent socioeconomic infrastructure, keeping in mind the policy goals with regard to participation, gender equality, fertility and social integration.



# Résumé (FR)

## Introduction

Durant les dernières décennies les services de garde d'enfants sont devenus un sujet d'intérêt public important. Des services de garde d'enfants abordables financièrement et de qualité peuvent grandement contribuer à concilier travail et vie familiale, et promouvoir ainsi l'emploi et l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes. Les structures de garde peuvent aussi fournir une réponse importante aux taux de fécondité déclinants, car elles permettent de diminuer l'impact de la maternité sur les opportunités professionnelles et sur la présence sur le marché du travail. Il y a finalement une tendance croissante à considérer les services de garde d'enfants d'un point de vue socio-pédagogique. Sous cet angle, la principale justification politique consiste non plus à concilier travail et garde d'enfants, mais plutôt à la contribution que les services de garde apportent au développement de l'enfant et à l'intégration socio-économique. L'importance de l'offre de services de garde d'enfants a aussi été reconnue au niveau européen. Au sommet de Barcelone en 2002, des conclusions et des objectifs explicites ont été définis en ce qui concerne l'offre de services de garde. Tout en confirmant l'objectif du plein emploi, le Conseil européen de 2002 a décidé que les Etats membres devaient supprimer les éléments dissuasifs à la participation des femmes à l'emploi et s'employer à offrir des services de garde d'enfants d'ici 2010 à au moins 90 % des enfants dont l'âge va de 3 ans à celui de la scolarisation obligatoire, et à au moins 33 % des enfants ayant moins de 3 ans. L'importance de ces objectifs a été rappelée récemment à travers l'adoption par le Conseil des Lignes directrices pour l'emploi (2008–10).

Prenant en considération les données SILC récemment publiées sur l'offre (formelle et autre) de services de garde d'enfants, ce rapport fournit une analyse de l'offre quantitative et qualitative des services de garde d'enfants des 27 Etats membres de l'UE et de trois pays de l'EEE, l'Islande, la Norvège et le Liechtenstein. Ce rapport traite de plusieurs sujets, dont: la mesure dans laquelle la demande de services de garde d'enfants est couverte, l'importance donnée aux services de garde dans le contexte national, et les politiques développées au niveau national afin d'améliorer l'offre de structures d'accueil. Le rapport met à jour et développe la discussion sur la garde d'enfants présentée dans un rapport du précédent réseau d'experts sur le genre de la Commission (voir Plantenga et Remery 2005).

## Investir dans les services de garde d'enfants

Les Etats peuvent investir dans les services de garde d'enfants pour plusieurs raisons. Un argument classique se réfère au fait que la disponibilité de services de

garde d'enfants de qualité a un impact positif sur le taux d'emploi des femmes. Un plus haut taux d'emploi peut entraîner une augmentation de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, une croissance de l'économie, et aider à améliorer la viabilité du système de sécurité sociale actuel, surtout si l'on tient compte du vieillissement de la population. Un autre argument souligne que les services de garde d'enfants pourraient contribuer à augmenter le taux de fécondité en rendant le fait d'avoir un enfant moins coûteux en termes de revenu et d'opportunités professionnelles. En réalité, la fécondité et l'emploi des femmes sont des arguments qui représentent les deux faces d'une même médaille. Dans l'argument sur le taux d'emploi, le taux de fécondité est considéré comme acquis et les services de garde d'enfants devraient faciliter la combinaison entre responsabilités de garde et travail rémunéré. Dans l'argument sur la fécondité, l'emploi est considéré comme acquis. Dans ce cas, les services de garde d'enfants sont supposés faciliter la combinaison entre travail rémunéré et responsabilités de garde. En plus de l'argument sur la conciliation, l'offre de services de garde peut aussi contribuer à l'objectif de réduction de la pauvreté. Un taux d'emploi plus élevé réduit le risque de pauvreté tout au long de la vie, surtout durant la vieillesse. L'amélioration du bien-être des parents peut aussi réduire la pauvreté des enfants, et améliorer donc les perspectives futures des enfants. L'effet sur les enfants peut même être plus direct: des services de garde d'enfants de qualité peuvent contribuer au développement de l'enfant en lui procurant un environnement riche, sûr et stimulant. Ainsi, les services de garde d'enfants peuvent contribuer de façon importante au développement et à l'intégration socio-économique de l'enfant.

Les arguments en faveur des services de garde d'enfants sont bien connus et la plupart des pays européens ont pris des initiatives afin d'augmenter l'offre de services de garde (de qualité). Toutefois, de nombreux Etats membres sont encore loin d'atteindre les objectifs de Barcelone. Les barrières semblent être aussi bien de nature financière qu'idéologique. Un des défis les plus compliqués est peut être dû au fait que les objectifs politiques concernant la participation à l'emploi, l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, la fécondité et l'intégration sociale ne sont pas toujours facilement compatibles. Les préoccupations concernant le développement de l'enfant, par exemple, ou bien l'ambition de réduire la pauvreté des enfants, peuvent se traduire par une politique ayant pour but d'augmenter l'offre de services de garde d'enfants, tout comme elles peuvent se traduire par une politique qui vise à allonger la durée des congés (maternité ou parental) et/ou l'augmentation des allocations pour s'occuper des enfants. Toutefois, des congés parentaux de longue durée ou l'augmentation des allocations peuvent ne pas

promouvoir la présence des parents (et en particulier des mères) sur le marché du travail et peuvent résulter en de grandes disparités de nombre d'heures de travail entre hommes et femmes. Il faut aussi prendre en compte la problématique du choix des parents. Les parents peuvent avoir des préférences différentes concernant le travail et la famille et la plupart des politiques publiques ont tendance à favoriser le choix des parents. Le résultat peut être un mélange compliqué d'arrangements horaires flexibles de travail, d'allocations et de services (gardes d'enfants) qui peuvent ne pas être nécessairement très cohérents et/ou pas très favorables du point de vue de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes.

### Les services de garde d'enfants

L'offre de services de garde d'enfants abordables financièrement et de qualité est extrêmement importante pour des parents qui travaillent. Toutefois, en Europe, la disponibilité et le coût des services de garde d'enfants sont extrêmement différents. Les données EU-SILC indiquent que dans certains pays les parents recourent très souvent à des services formels basés sur les structures d'accueil (y compris l'éducation préscolaire), tandis que dans d'autres pays ils ont plus recours à d'autres types de services (comme les puériculteurs/trices privé(e)s et/ou le soutien familial, les amis ou les voisins). Dans la catégorie des 0-2 ans, l'utilisation des services formels en 2006 varie de 73 % au Danemark à seulement 2 % en République Tchèque et en Pologne. Il apparaît que dans sept Etats membres (Danemark, Pays-Bas, Suède, Belgique, Espagne, Portugal et Royaume-Uni), ainsi qu'en Islande et en Norvège, le recours aux services de garde dépassent l'objectif de 33 % fixé à Barcelone. Cependant, dans un certain nombre de pays, les services de garde sont utilisés à mi-temps et ne couvrent pas une semaine de travail entière.

Le recours aux services de garde formels augmente avec l'augmentation de l'âge des enfants. Dans la catégorie de 3 ans – âge de scolarisation obligatoire, la Belgique est la mieux placée en 2006 avec un taux d'utilisation des services de garde qui avoisine les 100 %. En bas de l'échelle se trouve la Pologne, avec un taux d'utilisation de 28 %. Naturellement, le taux d'utilisation élevé est dû en grande partie à l'inclusion de services préscolaires dans les services formels et au taux élevé de couverture des services préscolaires pour les enfants de cette catégorie particulière d'âge. Selon les objectifs de Barcelone, le taux de couverture devrait atteindre au moins 90 % en 2010. Il semblerait que neuf Etats membres (ainsi que l'Islande) atteignent les objectifs de Barcelone ou font même mieux. Quand l'on interprète ces chiffres, il faut toutefois prendre en considération que dans la plupart des pays les services préscolaires fonctionnent à temps partiel, ce qui fait que les parents qui travaillent ont besoin d'autres structures de garde pour compléter les journées, et celles-ci peuvent être bien moins disponibles.

Le recours aux structures de garde ne répond pas à la question du niveau de satisfaction de la demande. La demande réelle de services de garde d'enfants est influencée par le taux de participation parentale (mères) au marché du travail, par le taux de chômage, par la durée du congé parental, par les horaires scolaires et par la possibilité d'avoir recours à des solutions de remplacement en confiant la charge aux grands-parents ou en prenant d'autres dispositions informelles. Un faible taux de couverture n'indique donc pas nécessairement une demande non satisfaite mais peut refléter l'existence de modalités de garde différentes, par exemple les possibilités de congé parental ou l'allocation pour la garde des enfants à domicile. Dans les Etats membres nordiques, les services de garde d'enfant constituent un droit social (Finlande, Danemark et Suède). Toutefois, dans d'autres pays l'offre de structures d'accueil de qualité et abordables financièrement peut être insuffisante. En particulier, l'offre de services formels de garde d'enfants en bas âge est assez basse dans un grand nombre de pays européens. Pour les enfants entre 3 ans et l'âge de scolarisation obligatoire, l'offre est plus importante mais les horaires ne correspondent pas toujours aux heures de travail. De plus, il existe d'évidentes disparités régionales dans plusieurs pays.

Outre la disponibilité, la qualité du service offert a aussi un poids important dans les décisions des parents de recourir aux structures d'accueil. La qualité des services de garde des enfants se réfère aux aspects qui contribuent au développement social, émotionnel et cognitif de l'enfant. Le manque de statistiques harmonisées à ce sujet est problématique. Des données de type qualitatives indiquent, là encore, une forte variation d'un pays à l'autre. Le ratio personnel/enfant connaît, par exemple, de très fortes variations d'un pays européen à l'autre. Un autre aspect est le niveau d'éducation des puériculteurs/trices qui dans certains pays puériculteurs/trices semblent avoir un niveau d'éducation relativement faible. De plus, dans quasiment tous les pays il existe une grande différence au niveau de la formation entre les écoles maternelles, les pré-écoles et les crèches d'une part, et les puériculteurs/trices privé(e)s d'autre part. Ces dernières sont souvent soumises à de strictes conditions et sont souvent sujettes à des inspections par le gouvernement. Toutefois, les puériculteurs/trices privé(e)s ont souvent un niveau d'éducation bien plus bas.

Dans la plupart des pays les services de garde d'enfants sont subventionnés d'une façon ou d'une autre. Il existe toutefois d'importantes différences entre Etats membres. En ce qui concerne la division des coûts au niveau macro, la participation économique des parents semble varier de 8 % en Suède à 80 % en Pologne. Dans la plupart des pays, les coûts des services de garde dépendent du revenu familial. Les pays nordiques (à l'exception de l'Islande) ont fixé un plafond aux frais des services de garde, tandis que dans d'autres pays les catégories ayant un faible revenu sont exemptées de dépenses. Il existe toutefois des pays où les

familles à bas revenu payent relativement plus que celles disposant d'un revenu moyen ou élevé. Dans bon nombre de pays les services de garde sont considérés comme peu abordables. De plus, si les services de garde publics peuvent être peu coûteux, les services du privé sont souvent chers. Outre la question des coûts et de la disponibilité, les normes culturelles peuvent aussi influencer la demande de services de garde. Dans la plupart des pays les attitudes varient suivant l'âge de l'enfant. Les services de garde pour les enfants les plus jeunes semblent être généralement acceptés uniquement en France et en Belgique. Dans la plupart des autres pays les structures d'accueil sont généralement considérées positives pour les 'enfants plus âgés', mais pas pour les enfants en bas âge. De plus, le nombre d'heures peut constituer un problème, avec pour résultat une utilisation à temps partiel des structures d'accueil. Même dans les pays nordiques où l'utilisation des services de garde (pour les enfants plus âgés) est acceptée et utilisée à grande échelle, la problématique d'être «une bonne mère» et celle du bien-être des enfants dans les structures de garde sont périodiquement sujet de discussion au niveau politique.

### La question des politiques

Du point de vue des politiques l'offre des services de garde d'enfants soulève plusieurs questions. Un sujet important concerne les motivations sous-jacentes pour investir dans les services de garde, qui peuvent différer de la simple garantie d'une future offre d'emploi à promouvoir le développement de l'enfant. Une prédominance de l'intérêt du marché du travail peut conduire, par exemple, à une politique plutôt stricte de l'offre, surtout si on la compare à une politique mettant l'accent sur l'importance du rôle des services de garde des enfants en termes d'inclusion sociale. Une autre question importante concerne la combinaison politique concrète entre allocations financières, possibilités de congés (maternité et parental) et services. La décision concrète à ce propos peut dépendre des débats fondamentaux concernant le mode d'organisation souhaitable de la société ou porter plutôt sur des considérations pratiques sur ce qui est faisable financièrement. De plus, les politiques concrètes peuvent être inspirées par la conviction que les parents devraient avoir la possibilité de choisir entre différentes options, étant donné que des parents différents auront des préférences différentes.

En effet, un bon nombre de pays semblent augmenter l'offre de services de garde, bien que le niveau d'augmentation soit au final parfois décevant, en partie à cause de contraintes budgétaires. Dans le même temps, un certain nombre de pays est en train de rééquilibrer la combinaison politique concrète entre offre de services, temps et argent, avec pour but d'augmenter les possibilités de choix parental, d'améliorer le taux de participation

des femmes à l'emploi, ou encore de promouvoir la vie familiale. Au final le résultat n'est pas toujours un modèle cohérent offrant un ensemble de modalités permettant un soutien continu aux familles (aussi bien aux parents qu'aux enfants). La période de congé, par exemple, n'est pas toujours en syntonie avec l'offre de services de garde. De plus, l'accent mis sur la facilitation du choix parental peut se traduire par des effets nuisibles, dans le sens que les différences socio-économiques entre les familles peuvent augmenter.

Une autre question politique importante concerne la qualité des services de garde, et en particulier la qualité du personnel. Augmenter le niveau de formation pourrait améliorer leur statut et placer leur profession plus en ligne avec celle des enseignants. Plusieurs pays essaient d'augmenter le niveau des qualifications. Mais là encore, l'existence d'importantes contraintes budgétaires peuvent ralentir l'introduction concrète de ces mesures. Dans ce cas aussi il est important de définir un cadre cohérent des qualités requises – aussi bien pour des modèles basés sur la garde des enfants à domicile qu'à ceux basés sur les structures d'accueil et aussi bien pour le secteur public que pour le privé – de façon à prévenir des interactions négatives. Enfin, il est important de noter que l'importance donnée aux services de garde d'enfants dans la Stratégie Européenne pour l'Emploi a eu un impact sur le niveau des Etats membres. Bien que les objectifs de Barcelone puissent ne pas avoir un grand impact dans tous les débats sur les politiques nationales, le suivi des progrès réalisés dans le cadre de la stratégie de Lisbonne contribue à mettre en évidence le sujet des gardes d'enfants en tant que priorité politique importante.

### Résumé et conclusions

Les résultats fournis dans ce rapport, les performances réelles des Etats membres européens concernant les objectifs de Barcelone, et les débats en cours, suggèrent que la question des gardes d'enfants restera une priorité politique importante dans le futur proche. Malgré tous les efforts et malgré toutes les améliorations, l'offre de structures d'accueil de qualité et abordables financièrement est toujours peu élevée dans bon nombre d'Etats membres. La disponibilité des données SILC permet d'évaluer la situation actuelle et de réaliser un suivi minutieux des mesures prises par les différents Etats membres. Ces informations, en combinaison avec l'accent mis sur l'offre de services de garde dans le cadre de la Stratégie Européenne pour l'Emploi, devraient fournir les bases nécessaires pour une politique orientée vers une infrastructure socio-économique cohérente en lien avec les objectifs politiques de participation au marché du travail, d'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes ainsi que la fécondité et l'intégration sociale.





# Kurzfassung (DE)

## Einleitung

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten hat sich die Kinderbetreuung zu einer wichtigen Angelegenheit von öffentlichem Belang entwickelt. Eine bezahlbare Kinderbetreuung von guter Qualität kann die Vereinbarkeit von Arbeits- und Familienleben verbessern und damit die Teilnahme am Arbeitsmarkt und die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter fördern. Einrichtungen zur Kinderbetreuung können auch eine bedeutende Lösung für die sinkende Fertilitätsrate bieten, indem die Kosten für Kinder, die durch Einkommensverzicht oder reduzierte Karriere-möglichkeiten entstehen, gesenkt werden. Schließlich gibt es eine steigende Tendenz, die Kinderbetreuung von einem sozial-pädagogischen Gesichtspunkt zu betrachten. Von diesem Gesichtspunkt aus ist der wichtigste Grundsatz nicht mehr die Vereinbarkeit von Arbeit und Betreuung, sondern der Beitrag der Kinderbetreuungs-Einrichtungen zur Entwicklung des Kindes und der sozioökonomischen Integration. Wie wichtig es ist, Einrichtungen zur Kinderbetreuung zur Verfügung zu stellen, wurde auch auf EU-Ebene anerkannt. Beim EU-Gipfel in Barcelona 2002 wurden einige deutliche Schlussfolgerungen und Ziele im Hinblick auf die Bereitstellung von Kinderbetreuungs-Einrichtungen festgelegt. Der Europäische Rat hat das Ziel der Vollbeschäftigung bekräftigt und die Mitgliedstaaten aufgefordert, Hindernisse aus dem Weg zu räumen, die Frauen an der Teilnahme am Arbeitsmarkt hindern. Weiterhin sollten die Mitgliedstaaten sich darum bemühen, bis 2010 Einrichtungen zur Kinderbetreuung für mindestens 90 % der Kinder im Alter zwischen drei und dem Pflichtschulalter und für mindestens 33 % der Kinder unter drei Jahren zur Verfügung zu stellen. Die Wichtigkeit dieser Ziele wurden kürzlich im Jahre 2008 in den beschäftigungspolitische Leitlinien (2008-2010) vom Rat bestätigt.

Unter Einbeziehung der kürzlich veröffentlichten SILC-Daten zur Bereitstellung (öffentlicher und sonstiger) Kinderbetreuungsstätten, wird in diesem Bericht sowohl die mengenmäßige als auch qualitative Bereitstellung von Kinderbetreuungsstätten in 27 Mitgliedsstaaten und drei EWR-Staaten, nämlich Island, Norwegen und Lichtenstein analysiert. Im Zuge dessen wird der Umfang, in welchem der Bedarf an Kinderbetreuung gedeckt wird, die Bedeutung der Kinderbetreuungsstätten im nationalen Zusammenhang und die auf nationaler Ebene zur Verbesserung der Bereitstellung von Kinderbetreuungsstätten entwickelten Maßnahmen durchleuchtet. Demnach wird die im letzten Bericht dargelegte Diskussion des vorherigen Netzwerks aus Gender-Experten der EU-Kommission (siehe Plantenga und Remery 2005) über die Kinderbetreuung in diesem Bericht aktualisiert und erweitert.

## Investition in die Kinderbetreuung

Es gibt mehrere Gründe, die dafür sprechen, dass die Mitgliedsstaaten in die Kinderbetreuung investieren könnten. Ein klassisches Argument bezieht sich auf die Tatsache, dass die Verfügbarkeit von guten Kinderbetreuungsstätten eine positive Auswirkung auf die Teilnahme der Frauen am Arbeitsmarkt zur Folge hat. Eine höhere Teilnehmerate könnte die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter fördern, das Wirtschaftswachstum vorantreiben und die Nachhaltigkeit der heutigen Wohlfahrtsstaaten verstärken, vor allem hinsichtlich einer alternden Gesellschaft. Ein weiteres Argument weist auf die Tatsache hin, dass die Kinderbetreuung zur Erhöhung der Fertilitätsrate führen kann, indem die Kosten für ein Kind, die durch Einkommensverzicht oder reduzierte Karriere-möglichkeiten entstehen, gesenkt werden. In der Tat können die Argumente der Teilnahme und der Fertilität als zwei Seiten derselben Medaille betrachtet werden. Bei dem Teilnahme-Arument wird die Geburtenrate vorausgesetzt und die Kinderbetreuung sollte die Vereinbarkeit von Familien und bezahlter Arbeit erleichtern. Beim Fertilitäts-Arument wird die Teilnahme vorausgesetzt. Hier soll die Kinderbetreuung die Vereinbarkeit von bezahlter Arbeit und Familienleben erleichtern. Zusätzlich zum Argument der Vereinbarkeit kann die Bereitstellung der Kinderbetreuung auch zur Armutssenkung beitragen. Eine höhere Teilnahme am Arbeitsmarkt senkt die Gefahr der Armut, die im Laufe des Lebens entstehen kann, vor allem im Alter. Die bessere finanzielle Stellung der Eltern kann auch zur Senkung der Kinderarmut und somit zur Verbesserung der Zukunftsaussichten für das Kind führen. Die Auswirkung auf die Kinder könnte sogar noch direkter sein: Eine gute Kinderbetreuungsstätte könnte dem Zweck der kindlichen Entwicklung dienen, indem es dem Kind eine vielfältige, sichere und stimulierende Umgebung bietet. In diesem Sinne könnten Kinderbetreuungsstätten einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Entwicklung des Kindes und zur sozioökonomischen Integration leisten.

Die Argumente, die für die Kinderbetreuung sprechen, sind sehr wohl bekannt und die meisten Länder in Europa haben Initiativen ergriffen, um die Verfügbarkeit von (Qualitäts-) Kinderbetreuungsstätten zu erhöhen. Jedoch sind viele Mitgliedsstaaten weit davon entfernt, die in Barcelona gesetzten Ziele zu erreichen. Dabei stellen sowohl finanzielle als auch ideologische Aspekte eine Barriere dar. Eine der vielleicht kompliziertesten Herausforderungen ist die Tatsache, dass die politischen Ziele bezüglich der Teilnahme am Arbeitsmarkt, der Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, der Geburtenrate und der sozialen Integration nicht immer miteinander vereinbar sind. Die Entwicklung des Kindes beispielsweise oder die Bemühungen um die Senkung der Kinderarmut könnten zu einer Politik führen, die auf die Erhöhung der Verfügbarkeit von Kinderbetreuungs-

stätten ausgelegt ist. Sie könnte jedoch genauso leicht zu einer Politik führen, die einen längeren Erziehungsurlaub bzw. eine Erhöhung des Kindergeldes fördert. Allerdings sind der verlängerte Erziehungsurlaub oder eine erhöhte finanzielle Förderung für das Arbeitskräfteangebot nicht förderlich und könnten zu großen Unterschieden bezüglich der Arbeitszeit von Frauen und Männer führen. Eine weitere komplizierte Angelegenheit betrifft die freie Elternwahl. Die Entscheidungen der Eltern im Hinblick auf die Arbeit und die Auswirkungen auf die Familie können unterschiedlich sein und meist unterstützt die öffentliche Politik die freie Elternwahl. Das Ergebnis könnte zu einer komplexen Mischung aus Möglichkeiten bezüglich der Arbeitszeit, der finanziellen Förderung und der Dienstleistungen führen, die nicht zwangsläufig einheitlich ist bzw. sich nicht vorteilhaft auf die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter auswirkt.

### Kinderbetreuungsstätten

Erschwingliche und verfügbare Kinderbetreuungsstätten von hoher Qualität sind für berufstätige Eltern von enormer Bedeutung. In Europa ist jedoch die Verfügbarkeit und Erschwinglichkeit der Kinderbetreuungsstätten sehr unterschiedlich. Die EU-SILC-Daten deuten darauf hin, dass in einigen Ländern Eltern umfassenden Gebrauch von öffentlichen Einrichtungen (einschließlich Vorschulerziehung) machen, wohingegen Eltern in anderen Ländern mehr auf sonstige Lösungen (wie Tagesmütter beziehungsweise Familie, Freunde oder Nachbarn) bauen. In der Altersgruppe von null bis zwei Jahren variierte 2006 die Inanspruchnahme der Kinderbetreuungsstätten von Dänemark mit 73 % bis Tschechien und Polen mit nur 2 %. Es scheint, dass die Inanspruchnahme der Kinderbetreuungsstätten in sieben Ländern (Dänemark, Niederlande, Schweden, Belgien, Spanien, Portugal und Großbritannien) sowie Island und Norwegen über oder bei dem in Barcelona festgelegten Ziel von 33 % liegt. Jedoch wird die Kinderbetreuung in einigen Ländern nur in Form einer Teilzeitbetreuung in Anspruch genommen und deckt wahrscheinlich nicht die gesamte Arbeitswoche ab. Die Inanspruchnahme von öffentlichen Betreuungseinrichtungen steigt mit dem Alter der Kinder. Innerhalb der Altersgruppe von drei Jahren bis zum Pflichtschulalter war Belgien 2006 an erster Stelle, wobei seine Kinderbetreuungsstätten beinahe zu 100 % in Anspruch genommen wurden. Polen befindet sich mit 28 % an letzter Stelle im Ranking. Natürlich ist die hohe Inanspruchnahme größtenteils der Miteinbeziehung von Vorschuleinrichtungen unter dem Deckmantel öffentliche Einrichtungen und der hohen Deckungsrate der Vorschuleinrichtungen für die Kinder dieser Altersgruppe zu verdanken. Laut den Zielsetzungen von Barcelona sollte die tatsächliche Deckungsrate bis 2010 mindestens 90 % betragen. Es stellt sich heraus, dass neun Mitgliedstaaten (und Island) die Zielsetzungen von Barcelona bereits erreicht haben oder nahe daran sind. Bei der Deutung dieser Zahlen muss man jedoch bedenken, dass die Vorschule in den meisten Ländern eine Teilzeiteinrichtung ist, weshalb berufstätige Eltern weitere Einrichtungen zur Kinderbetreuung benötigen, deren Verfügbarkeit wiederum geringer sein könnte.

Die Inanspruchnahme der Kinderbetreuungsstätten liefert keine Antwort auf die Frage, ob der Bedarf vollständig gedeckt wird. Der tatsächliche Bedarf an Kinderbetreuungsstätten wird durch die Teilnahme der Eltern am Arbeitsmarkt (Mütter), die Arbeitslosenrate, die Dauer des Erziehungsurlaubs, die Öffnungszeiten der Schulen und die Verfügbarkeit von alternativen Optionen, wie beispielsweise der Betreuung durch Großeltern oder andere (nicht im öffentlichen Dienst stehende) Betreuungspersonen, beeinflusst. Eine relativ geringe Deckungsrate deutet nicht zwangsläufig auf Engpässe hin, sondern möglicherweise auf alternative Optionen der Kinderbetreuung wie auch auf einen längeren Erziehungsurlaub oder Zuschüsse für die Betreuung, die zuhause stattfindet. In den nordischen EU-Mitgliedstaaten wird Kinderbetreuung behandelt wie ein soziales Recht (Finnland, Dänemark und Schweden). Jedoch könnte in den anderen Ländern die Verfügbarkeit von hoch qualitativen und erschwinglichen Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen unzureichend sein. Vor allem scheint die Verfügbarkeit der öffentlichen Kinderbetreuungsstätten für die kleinsten Kinder in einigen europäischen Ländern gering zu sein. Die Verfügbarkeit ist für Kinder von drei Jahren bis zum Pflichtschulalter höher, wobei die Öffnungszeiten dieser Einrichtungen nicht immer mit den Arbeitszeiten übereinstimmen. Darüber hinaus gibt es in den meisten Ländern große Unterschiede auf regionaler Ebene.

Zusätzlich zu der Verfügbarkeit spielt die Qualität der Einrichtungen eine wichtige Rolle bei der Entscheidung der Eltern, Kinderbetreuungsstätten in Anspruch zu nehmen. Bei der Qualitätsbeurteilung der Kinderbetreuung spielen soziale, emotionale und kognitive Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten für das Kind eine Rolle. Der große Mangel an harmonisierten Statistiken zu diesem Thema stellt ebenfalls ein Problem dar. Verfügbare, eher qualitative Daten weisen ebenfalls auf große Schwankungen in Europa hin. Das Betreuer-Kind-Verhältnis, zum Beispiel, scheint sich sehr stark zwischen den europäischen Ländern zu unterscheiden. Ein weiterer Qualitätsaspekt ist das Ausbildungsniveau der Betreuungspersonen. In manchen Ländern scheint das Ausbildungsniveau der Betreuungspersonen eher niedrig zu sein. Darüber hinaus gibt es in den meisten Ländern große Unterschiede bezüglich des Ausbildungsniveaus des Personals in Kindergärten, Vorschulen und Kinderkrippen einerseits und des Ausbildungsniveaus von privaten Kinderbetreuern andererseits. An die erstgenannte Gruppe werden meistens strenge Anforderungen gestellt und deren Einhaltung wird auch staatlich überwacht. In der Regel verfügen private Kinderbetreuer jedoch über ein deutlich niedrigeres Ausbildungsniveau.

In den meisten Ländern werden Dienstleistungen im Bereich der Kinderbetreuung auf dem einen oder anderen Wege finanziell gefördert. Allerdings weisen die aktuellen Finanzierungsprogramme erhebliche Unterschiede auf. Bezüglich der Makro-Aufteilung der Kosten scheinen die von den Eltern geleisteten Beiträge von 8 % in Schweden bis hin zu 80 % in Polen zu variieren. In den meisten Ländern sind die Kosten für die Kinderbetreuung vom Familienein-

kommen abhängig. Die nordischen Länder (mit Ausnahme von Island) haben einen Maximalgebühren für die Kinderbetreuung festgelegt und in anderen Ländern können Eltern mit geringem Einkommen die Kinderbetreuung kostenlos in Anspruch nehmen. Es gibt jedoch auch Länder, in denen Familien mit einem verhältnismäßig geringen Einkommen höhere Beiträge leisten müssen als Familien mit mittleren oder hohen Einkommen. In einigen Ländern gilt die Kinderbetreuung als teuer. Darüber hinaus kann die öffentliche Kinderbetreuung erschwinglich sein, während die private Kinderbetreuung häufig teuer ist. Neben der Verfügbarkeit und Erschwinglichkeit können sich auch gesellschaftliche Normen auf den Bedarf an Kinderbetreuungsstätten auswirken. In den meisten Ländern ändert sich die Einstellung je nach Alter des Kindes. Nur in Belgien und in Frankreich scheinen Kinderbetreuungsstätten allgemein befürwortet zu sein. In den meisten anderen Ländern ist man der Meinung, dass Kinderbetreuungsstätten für größere Kinder, jedoch nicht für sehr kleine Kinder geeignet sind. Darüber hinaus kann die Anzahl der Stunden ein Punkt sein, der zu einer Inanspruchnahme der Kinderbetreuungsstätten in Form von Teilzeitbetreuung führt. Sogar in den nordischen Ländern, in denen die Kinderbetreuung (für größere Kinder) allgemein befürwortet wird und in großem Umfang genutzt wird, wird das Thema „Gute-Mutter-Sein“ und das Wohlergehen der Kinder in den Betreuungsstätten hin und wieder öffentlich diskutiert.

### Politische Angelegenheiten

Aus der politischen Perspektive wirft das Bereitstellen von Kinderbetreuungsstätten mehrere Fragen auf. Eine wichtige Frage bezieht sich auf grundlegende Motive für eine Investition in Kinderbetreuungsstätten und kann sich von der Sicherstellung des künftigen Angebots an Arbeitnehmern bis hin zur Entwicklungsförderung der Kinder erstrecken. Die vorherrschende Besorgnis bezüglich des Arbeitsmarktes kann beispielsweise zu einer sehr strikten Politik im Hinblick auf die Verfügbarkeit führen. Im Vergleich dazu gibt es auch die Maßnahmen, die die wichtige Rolle der Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen in Verbindung mit der sozialen Integration betonen. Ein weiterer wichtiger Aspekt betrifft die politische Mischung aus finanziellen Förderungen, zeitlichen Regelungen und Dienstleistungen. Dies ist jedoch von den gegebenen politischen Bestrebungen abhängig. Die tatsächlichen Entscheidungen bezüglich dieser Themen können an grundlegende Debatten über die erstrebenswerteste Gesellschaftsform oder eher an praktische Überlegungen in Hinblick auf die aus finanzieller Sicht sinnvollste Lösung gekoppelt sein. Darüber hinaus kann es sein, dass die aktuelle Politik von der Überzeugung geleitet wird, dass es den Eltern freistehen sollte, zwischen verschiedenen Optionen zu wählen, da die Wünsche von Eltern zu Eltern variieren.

In der Tat scheinen viele Länder die Verfügbarkeit von Kinderbetreuungsstätten zu erhöhen, obwohl die tatsächliche Wachstumsrate manchmal enttäuschend ist. Teilweise ist dies auf eingeschränkte Budgets zurückzuführen. Gleich-

zeitig versucht die Politik in vielen Ländern, einen Mittelweg bezüglich der Verfügbarkeit von Dienstleistungen, Zeit und Geld zu finden. Dabei ist das Ziel, die freie Elternwahl zu fördern, die Stellung der Frau auf dem Arbeitsmarkt zu verbessern oder die Familie an sich zu unterstützen. Das Ergebnis ist nicht immer ein kohärentes Modell, das ein Kontinuum der Familienförderung (für Eltern wie auch Kinder) bietet. Beispielsweise ist die Dauer des Erziehungsurlaubs nicht immer an die Verfügbarkeit der Kinderbetreuungsstätten angepasst. Des Weiteren kann die Betonung der freien Elternwahl nachteilige Auswirkungen mit sich bringen, die dazu führen, dass sozioökonomische Unterschiede zwischen den Familien vergrößert werden.

Ein weiterer wichtiger politischer Bereich betrifft die Qualität der Kinderbetreuungsstätten, besser gesagt die Ausbildungsqualität des Betreuungspersonals. Indem das Ausbildungsniveau angehoben wird, kann deren Position verbessert und deren Beruf dem Lehrerberuf angenähert werden. In einigen Ländern wird versucht, das Ausbildungsniveau anzuheben. Auch hier können sich bedeutende Budgetbeschränkungen auf die tatsächliche Durchführung dieser politischen Maßnahmen hemmend auswirken. Ebenso ist es wichtig, eine Entscheidung in Hinblick auf ein einheitliches Bild bei den Qualitätsanforderungen zu fällen, um negative Wechselwirkungen zu vermeiden. Dies gilt sowohl für die Betreuung in Einrichtungen als auch für häusliche Kinderbetreuung, für den privaten und öffentlichen Bereich. Schließlich ist es auch wichtig zu beachten, dass der hohe Stellenwert der Kinderbetreuungsstätten innerhalb der Europäischen Beschäftigungsstrategie einen Einfluss auf das Niveau der Mitgliedstaaten hat. Obwohl die Zielsetzungen von Barcelona keinen großen Einfluss auf alle nationalen politischen Debatten haben, ist eine Überwachung der Entwicklung der Lissabon Strategie hilfreich, um das Thema Kinderbetreuung als eine wichtige politische Priorität hervorzuheben.

### Zusammenfassung und Schlussfolgerung

Die in diesem Bericht dargelegten Ergebnisse, die tatsächliche Erfüllung der Barcelona-Ziele durch die europäischen Mitgliedstaaten und die fortdauernden Diskussionen deuten darauf hin, dass das Thema Kinderbetreuung in nächster Zeit eine wichtige politische Priorität darstellen wird. Trotz all der Bemühungen und Verbesserungen gibt es in einigen europäischen Mitgliedstaaten zu wenige hochwertige und erschwingliche Kinderbetreuungsstätten. Durch die SILC-Daten sind eine Beurteilung der aktuellen Lage sowie eine gründliche Überwachung der Maßnahmen, die in verschiedenen EU-Mitgliedsstaaten ergriffen werden, möglich. Diese Informationen sollten zusammen mit der Betonung auf die Verfügbarkeit von Kinderbetreuungsstätten in der Europäischen Beschäftigungsstrategie eine Basis für eine Politik bieten, die auf die einheitliche sozioökonomische Infrastruktur ausgerichtet ist. Dabei sind die politischen Ziele im Hinblick auf die Teilnahme am Arbeitsmarkt, die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter, die Fertilität und soziale Integration zu beachten.



# Introduction

In recent decades, childcare services have become a matter of serious public concern. Affordable and good-quality childcare services may improve the reconciliation of work and family life and thus foster labour market participation and gender equality. Childcare facilities may also provide an important answer to declining fertility rates, by lowering the cost of childbearing in terms of labour market and career opportunities. Finally there is a growing tendency to see childcare services from a social pedagogical perspective. In this perspective the main policy rationale is no longer the reconciliation of work and care, but rather the contribution of childcare services to child development and socioeconomic integration.

The importance of providing childcare services has also been recognised at the EU level. At the Barcelona Summit in 2002, some explicit conclusions and targets were defined with regard to the provision of childcare services. Confirming the goal of full employment, the European Council agreed that Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age. These targets are part of the European employment strategy and of the (current and past) integrated guidelines asking Member States to apply a life-cycle approach in their employment policies.

Since 2007, harmonised EU statistics on the provision of (formal and other) childcare services exist within the context of the EU statistics on income and living conditions

(SILC). On the basis of the SILC data it is possible to draw some comparisons across countries and to assess their progress towards the Barcelona targets. In addition, the SILC data contain information on the number of hours during a usual week for which childcare is received or for which school is attended. However, there remain some important gaps in information at the EU level. Little is known for example, about the quality, affordability and attitudes towards institutionalised childcare and about the link between the share of children covered by childcare, the Barcelona targets and the existence of an uncovered demand.

Taking into account the SILC data, this report provides an analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative provision of childcare services for the 27 EU Member States and three EEA countries — Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It discusses the extent to which the demand for childcare is covered, the importance attached to childcare services within the national context, and the policies developed at the national level to improve the provision of childcare facilities. As such, the report updates and extends the discussion of childcare in a report by the Commission's previous network of gender experts (see Plantenga and Remery, 2005). The report is organised as follows. Chapter 1 deals with the importance of childcare services within the context of labour force participation, gender equality, the fertility rate and social integration. Chapter 2 evaluates the availability, quality, and affordability of childcare services. Chapter 3 presents the recent policies developed at the national level with regard to the provision of childcare services. Finally, Chapter 4 provides a short summary and the main conclusions.



# 1. Investing in childcare services

There are several reasons why countries might invest in childcare services. A classical argument refers to the fact that the availability of good-quality childcare services has a positive impact on the female participation rate. A higher participation rate may increase gender equality, foster economic growth and help improve the sustainability of the present-day welfare state, especially in the light of an ageing population. Another argument points to the fact that childcare services might increase fertility rates by making a child less costly in terms of income and career opportunities. In fact, the fertility and participation argument may be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. In the participation argument, the fertility rate is taken for granted and childcare services should facilitate the combination of care responsibilities with paid work. In the fertility argument, participation is taken for granted. Here childcare services are supposed to facilitate the combination of paid work with care responsibilities. In addition to the reconciliation argument, the provision of childcare services might also contribute to the goal of reducing poverty. Higher participation in the labour force reduces the risk of poverty throughout people's lifespan and especially in old age. The improved well-being of parents may also reduce child poverty and thus improve future outcomes for children. The effect on children may even be more direct: good-quality childcare services may serve a child-development purpose, providing the child with a rich, safe and stimulating environment. As such childcare services may offer an important contribution to child development and socioeconomic integration.

The arguments in favour of childcare services are well known and most European countries have taken initiatives to increase the availability of (quality) childcare services. However, many Member States are far from reaching the Barcelona childcare targets. The Joint Employment Report (JER) 2006/07, for example, indicates that the potential contribution of women to raising the aggregate employment rate is still not fully exploited. 'Affordable and accessible quality childcare provision must be expanded to allow both parents to work, to better reconcile work and family life and to reduce high levels of child poverty' (JER 2006/07: 4). Barriers seem to be financial as well as ideological. Perhaps one of the most complicated challenges refers to the fact that the policy objectives on participation, gender equality, fertility and social integration are not always easily compatible. Child development concerns, for example, or the ambition to reduce child poverty may translate into a policy targeted at increasing childcare services, but may just as easily translate into a policy favouring extended leave facilities and/or increasing the provision of childcare allowances. Long parental leave, however, or a favourable financial incentive structure may not promote labour supply and

may result in large differences in male and female working time patterns. Another complicated matter refers to the issue of parental choice. Parents may differ in their preferences with regard to work and family outcomes and most public policies tend to enhance parental choice. The result may be a complicated mixture of time facilities, financial allowances and services that may not necessarily be very coherent and/or may not be very favourable from a gender equality point of view.

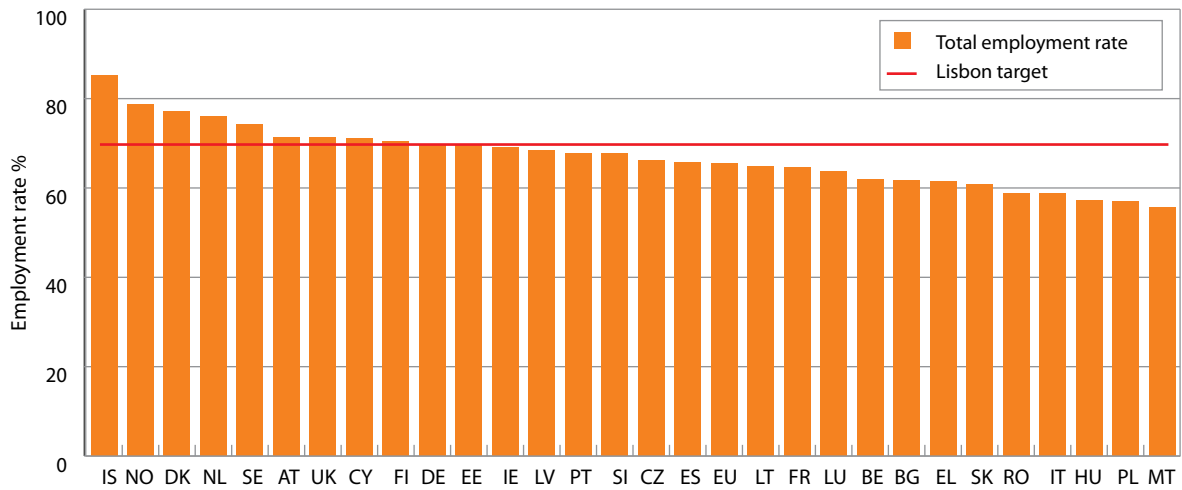
In the following pages the case for investing in childcare care services is outlined in somewhat more detail. Section 1.1 provides an overview of labour market outcomes and illustrates the impact of parenthood on the labour market behaviour of men and women. Section 1.2 focuses on fertility trends and changing patterns of family formation, whereas Section 1.3 elaborates on social inclusion and child development. Finally Section 1.4 contains a short summary. Each section provides an overview of cross-national differences as well as a short overview of the relevant literature on the effectiveness of childcare subsidies. As such this chapter serves a dual goal: to illustrate the differences between 30 European countries in work and family patterns and to assess the role of childcare services in this respect.

## 1.1 Improving labour market participation

The Lisbon targets of 2000 state that the employment rate in the EU should be raised to 70 % and the female employment rate to 60 % by 2010. Although recent economic developments have been quite positive, sustained efforts are needed to reach the target of 70 % (JER 2007/08: 4). Graph 1 shows the employment rates of all the EU Member States and the three EEA countries. The difference between the highest and lowest-ranking country is almost 30 percentage points, with Iceland having a total employment rate of 85.1 % and Malta an employment rate of 55.7 % (data for Liechtenstein missing). From the graph it also appears that among the EU Member States Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, the United Kingdom, Cyprus and Finland have already met the Lisbon target for total employment, with Germany, Estonia and Ireland close behind. At the lower end of the ranking are Hungary, Poland and Malta.

The female employment rates are summarised in Graph 2. It appears that the cross-national differences are larger among women than among the total labour force, at almost 48 versus 30 percentage points. Again the highest-ranking country is Iceland, with a female employment rate

**Graph 1. Total employment rate 2007**



NB: EU = EU-27.

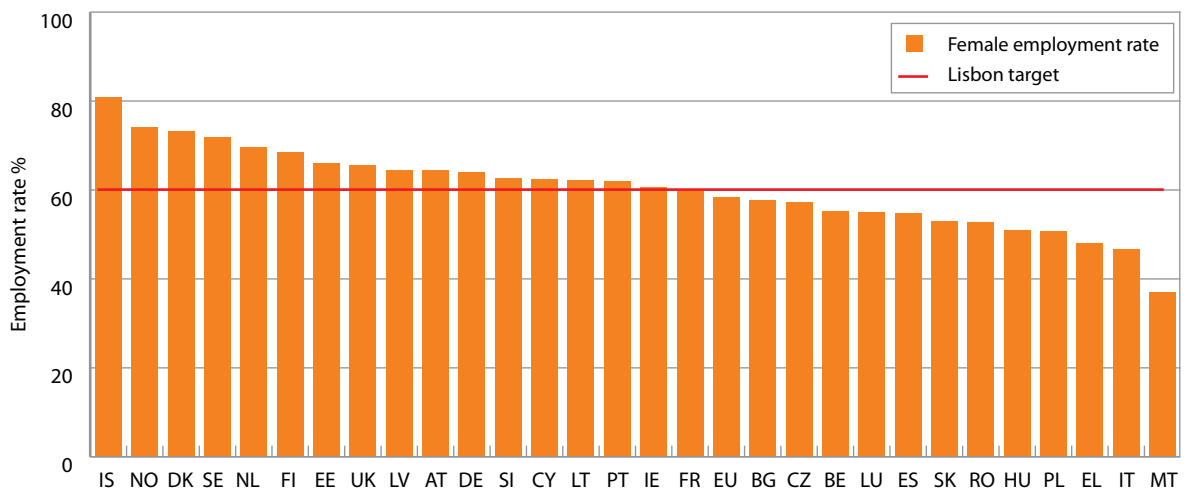
Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey 2007. For IS and NO: Eurostat employment statistics 2006.

of almost 81 %, whereas in Malta the female employment rate is just below 37 % (data for Liechtenstein missing). Graph 2 also indicates that 15 EU Member States (and Iceland and Norway) have met or exceeded the Lisbon target of 60 % female employment: Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, Estonia, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Portugal, Ireland and France. At the other end it appears that Greece, Italy and Malta are still far from the Lisbon target, as the female employment rates are under 50 %.

The difference between total and female employment rates indicates that throughout Europe there is still a large gap between the employment rates of men and women,

with women falling significantly behind. Graph 3 ranks all the countries in this respect. The highest employment gender gaps are found in the southern part of Europe: Malta, Greece, Italy, Spain and Cyprus. Ireland and Luxembourg also score rather unfavourably in this respect. Small gender gaps are found in Sweden and Finland (less than 5 percentage points). Lithuania and Norway also score rather favourably. When interpreting the data, it has to be noted that the Lisbon targets — and related to this the employment data — are based on a headcount. Differences in working hours are not taken into account. As women work part-time more often than men, the employment gender gap, as presented in Graph 3, is in fact underestimated. When measured in full-time equivalents, the gender gap

**Graph 2. Employment rate of women 2007**

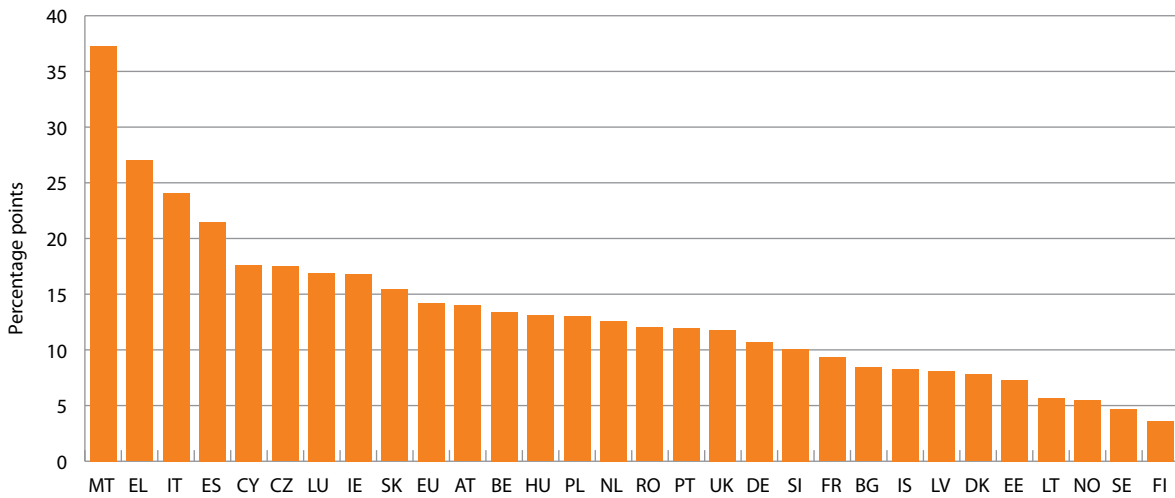


NB: EU = EU-27.

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey 2007. For IS and NO: Eurostat employment statistics 2006.



Graph 3. Employment gender gap 2007



NB: EU = EU-27.

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey 2007. For IS and NO: Eurostat employment statistics 2006.

calculated for the EU-27 increases to 20.6 percentage points compared to 14.2 percentage points when measured in headcount. The Dutch gender gap particularly increases from 12.6 percentage points when calculated in headcounts to 29.1 percentage points when calculated in full-time equivalents (see for more details the appendix).

An important reason for employment differences between men and women is the different impact of parenthood. Whereas men with children tend to work more than men without children, the opposite is true for women: women without children have higher employment rates than women with children. The different impact is illustrated in Graph 4, which compares the absolute difference in employment rates of men and women without the presence of any children and with the presence of a child aged 0–6 within the age group 20–49. Remarkably, the impact of parenthood on men is rather similar in the Member States and hovers around –10 percentage points (data for Sweden, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway missing). For women, however, the impact differs considerably. The highest figures are found in the Czech Republic (40.5 percentage points), Hungary (33.6 percentage points) and Slovakia (32.8 percentage points). In Romania and Belgium, on the other hand, the difference is rather small (2.1 and 0.9 percentage points respectively). Portugal and Slovenia are the only countries where women are more likely to be employed after having children. The employment impact of parenthood on women is –3.9 percentage points in Portugal and –5.5 percentage points in Slovenia.

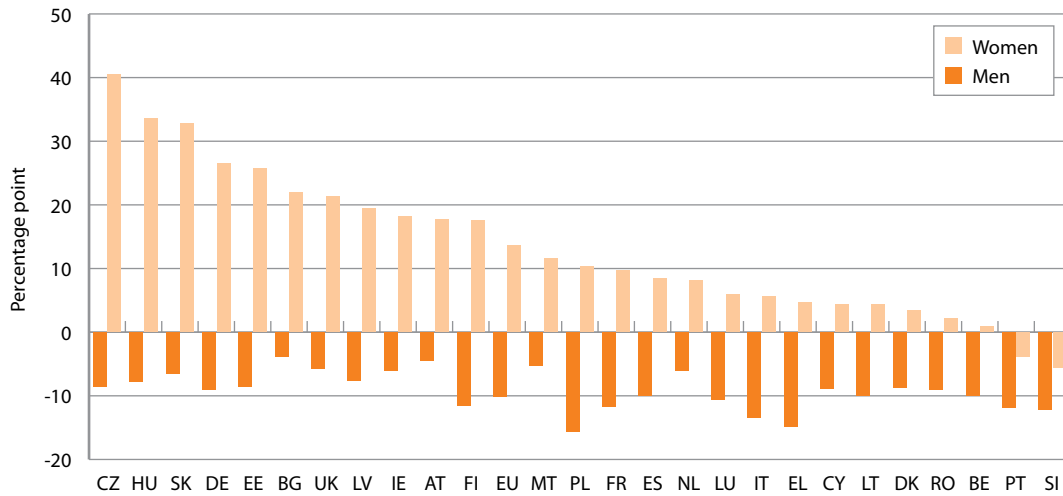
### The impact of childcare subsidies

Theoretically the impact of childcare subsidies on labour force participation is rather straightforward: childcare subsidies reduce the relative price of childcare and

therefore increase the relative return of market work (Jaumotte, 2003; OECD, 2007). Empirical studies of the relationship between childcare costs and labour force participation are consistent with this prediction: when costs go down, labour force participation goes up, especially among mothers. For Germany, Büchel and Spieß (2002a, 2002b), for example, show that extensive childcare possibilities intensify the labour market participation rate of mothers — above all in the former West Germany. In Greece two evaluation studies suggest that the availability of public childcare services contributes to the activation of important numbers of non-employed women (Data RC 2006; EETAA 2006). For the Netherlands, Euwals et al. (2007) show that between 1992 and 2004 participation of women in the labour market has become less reliant on the presence of children. According to the authors this is probably related to the increase in the availability and affordability of childcare since 1990. A recent study in Austria revealed a significant positive correlation between the labour-market participation of mothers and the availability of adequate childcare services and a clearly negative correlation if the childcare facility closes for lunch (Neuwirth and Wernhart, 2007).

Studies may also focus on the impact of the lack of (affordable) childcare. In Hungary, almost 60 % of those on maternity and parental leave experience difficulties in balancing work and family duties and claim this to be the main barrier in returning to employment; 80 % of the respondents mentioned the lack of available childcare services as a major explanatory factor for their inactivity (Frey 2002). In the United Kingdom an estimated half of non-working parents said they would take up employment if they could obtain good-quality, affordable and reliable childcare (Bryson et al., 2006). Related to this issue, a study on Spain shows that increases in the price of paid

**Graph 4. Employment impact of parenthood on men and women 2006**



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey 2006.

care services reduce the likelihood of labour participation of the mother: an EUR 1 increase in the hourly price of day-care centres reduces the probability of employment by 32 % (Borra, 2006). A Polish study shows that among such variables as education, age structure, maternity leave, institutionalised childcare, public transport, level of urbanisation and sociocultural traits, the most important factor that affects the emerging pattern of women's professional activity rates in Poland is the availability of childcare. The lowering of the provision of childcare places in nurseries and pre-schools negatively affected activity rates of women (Mickiewicz and Bell, 2000). At a more general level, figures from the European Union labour force survey 2005 (module on reconciliation between work and family life) seem to suggest that the lack of childcare facilities prevents a considerable group of inactive women from participating in the labour market. In addition, insufficient childcare facilities seem to restrain the average working hours among female employees (see Eurostat employment statistics and LFS Ad hoc module Reconciliation between work and family life).

One could argue that, by increasing the labour force participation rate of women, childcare could also contribute to reducing gender inequality in terms of careers and/or level of payment. Although several studies are available on the impact of children on wages and/or level of jobs, hardly any studies focus explicitly on the relation between childcare and the gender pay gap. In Germany, extended formal day care and gainfully employed mothers on average correlate with higher earnings (Büchel and Spieß, 2002a). In Greece, with respect to career advancement, two evaluation studies show that a great share of women who have recourse to public childcare were able to maintain or improve the jobs they already have, implying that the improvement of public childcare services

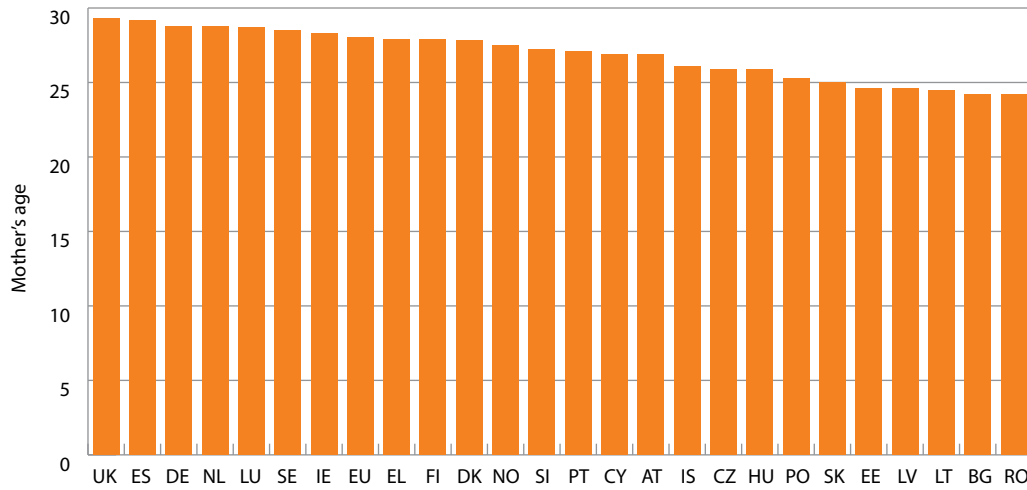
contributes not only to raising female activity rates but also to securing employment and upgrading jobs (Data RC, 2006; EETAA, 2006).

When studying the effectiveness of childcare subsidies on raising female labour supply a few caveats have to be taken into account. The first issue refers to the possibility of substitution effects. A full subsidisation of formal childcare arrangements, for example, might induce working parents to substitute informal arrangements for formal ones. As a result, the increase in childcare subsidies may be (far) larger than the increase in female labour force participation. Another issue refers to the impact of childcare subsidies on the hours of work among those already in the labour force. Whereas the effect in terms of labour market participation may be rather straightforward, the effect on working hours is ambiguous, as the increase in take-home wage would create an income effect and a substitution effect that work in an opposite direction to the desired hours of work. Finally, the issue of causality has to be taken into account. In some countries there is strong evidence of causality from childcare support to female participation. In other countries, however, in particular the Nordic ones, the sequencing seems to be reversed, with an increase in female labour participation preceding the extension of childcare facilities (Jaumotte, 2003).

## 1.2 Improving fertility

An important change regarding fertility is the postponement of childbearing: women have fewer children when young, but more children at later ages. Recuperation at higher ages is, however, only partial. As a result, over the last few decades fertility rates have been declining to a level beneath the replacement rate in every EU Member

**Graph 5. Mother's average age at birth of first child 2003**

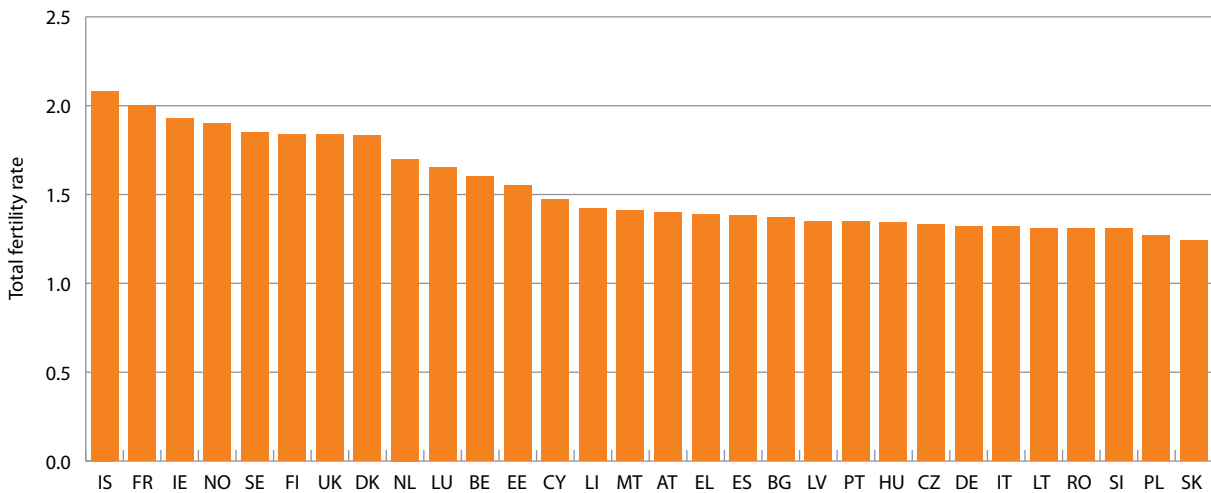


NB: EU = EU-25.  
Source: Eurostat. Data for DK: 2001. EE, EL, ES and UK: 2002. BE, FR, IT, MT and LI: not available.

State. In combination with increased life expectancy this results in an ageing population and, in the longer run, a decline in population size. Graph 5 shows the average age of mothers at birth of the first child. In the majority of the 30 European countries this average has exceeded 25. The highest average age is found in the United Kingdom (29.3 years) and Spain (29.2). In Estonia, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania it is below 25 (data for Belgium, France, Italy, Malta and Liechtenstein missing). Graph 6 shows the fertility rates in European countries in 2006. The highest fertility rates are found in Iceland and France, and the lowest in Poland and Slovakia. Despite national differences, the total fertility rates are now below replacement level for all EU Member States.

Traditionally, the decline in fertility rates has been explained by referring to the increase in female labour force participation. The higher average educational level of women and the concomitant desire to build up a professional career increases the opportunity costs of children. This standard economic argument cannot explain, however, the reversal of the traditionally negative correlation between fertility and participation rates. Countries with a higher rate of female employment (such as Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland) also have relatively high fertility rates, while in countries with a low female participation level (Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) fertility has dropped below 1.5. This suggests that the wide availability of reconciliation facilities in the

**Graph 6. Total fertility rates 2006**



Source: Eurostat population statistics. Data for BE: 1997; IT: 2005.

Nordic countries supports fertility decisions. In contrast, combining childrearing and being in employment seems most incompatible in the Mediterranean countries and some central European countries (OECD, 2007, 34).

### The impact of childcare subsidies

Several studies have underlined the importance of childcare facilities within the context of childbearing behaviour. Ermisch (1989), for example, concludes that the availability of childcare services in some OECD countries has lessened the reduction of fertility rates associated with the higher labour force participation of women. Del Boca et al. (2003) illustrate for Italy that childcare availability has a positive effect on fertility rates, while higher childcare costs have the opposite effect. It proves, however, rather difficult to analyse the specific relationship between the full range of policies and fertility rates. D'Addio and d'Ercole (2005) relate actual childcare costs for households with two children aged 2 and 3 years, cared for on a full-time basis in a public or publicly recognised day-care facility, to the total fertility rate. As expected, in countries where actual childcare costs are lower, fertility rates are higher. The correlation is, however, not significant. According to the authors, this might be related to the fact that only the costs of a public day-care facility is taken into account and not the actual availability. 'Research, however, indicates that it is the combined effect of childcare availability *and* costs that is most important' (D'Addio and d'Ercole, 2005, 55).

In a more sophisticated statistical analysis on fertility rates in 16 OECD countries, the authors find that fertility rates are higher in countries where the direct costs of raising children are lower, where the share of women working part-time is higher, where the length of parental leave is longer and where childcare enrolment rates are higher. In addition, simulations of four policy reforms (taxes and transfers that lower the direct costs of children, greater availability of part-time employment for women, longer periods of parental leave and greater availability of formal childcare for pre-school children) indicate that these policies may be effective in raising fertility levels, though this differs according to country. In Spain and Germany, for example, there seems to be hardly an impact, whereas in Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal, there is a clear increase in fertility. The impact of the different policies may vary. In the Netherlands, where the part-time rate is already high, an increase in formal childcare facilities for pre-school children seems most important. In Portugal a combination of lowering the direct costs of children, increasing formal childcare facilities for pre-school children and, to a lesser extent, increasing the availability of part-time employment seems crucial (D'Addio and d'Ercole, 2005).

The importance of childcare facilities has been confirmed in a recent Norwegian study. This study concludes that the availability of high-quality, affordable childcare

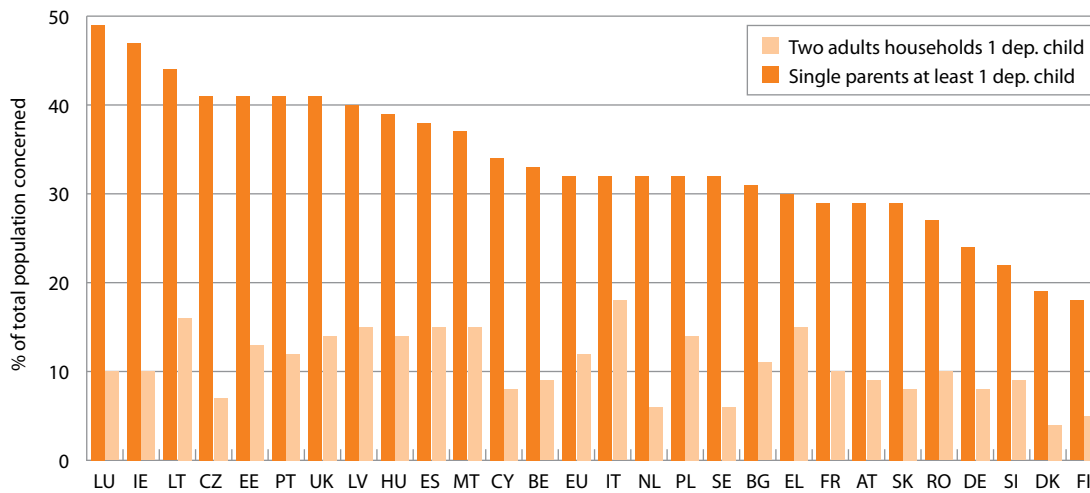
leads to higher rates of women making the transition to motherhood. The effects proved to be substantively large (Rindfuss et al. 2007). With respect to Germany, the birth rates of women in the former East and West in the years 1996–2000 have been studied with reference to the provision of childcare. The central finding of the survey is that a sufficient supply of formal childcare places has had an impact on the decision for a first child in the former East Germany. In contrast, in the former West Germany the availability of informal childcare proved to be important. The study concludes that the results express the existing supply structures in the former East and West Germany (Hank et al., 2003). In Poland, the delaying of the decision to have the first child began in the 1990s (Kotowska et al., 2007), which coincided with the closure of childcare facilities, increased labour market difficulties for women, and higher participation in further education. According to Kotowska et al. (2007), the main factors that would affect the decision to have another child are the ease of accessing and maintaining employment, the cost related to care and education of children and adjusting working hours to childcare.

### 1.3 Improving social inclusion

Next to reconciliation, social inclusion is receiving increasing prominence in the public policies of most countries. In this respect, social inclusion might either refer to parents, more particularly to single mothers and migrant mothers, or to children. Notwithstanding the general increase in the female participation rates, single mothers face particular challenges in trying to cope with work and family commitments. As a result, single parent families (of which approximately 80 % are female headed) are generally more vulnerable to the risk of poverty. The disadvantaged position of single parent households is evident from the statistical indicators developed within the context of the EU social inclusion process. Graph 7 shows that a far larger share of lone parents with at least one dependent child is at risk of poverty compared to two-adult households with one dependent child. Especially in Luxembourg, Ireland, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria and Denmark, the risk of poverty is relatively high for lone parent household compared to other households. In addition children in single parent families are more likely to grow up in poverty, which may hamper child development. According to the EU-SILC data for 2006, 32 % of adults and children living in lone parent households in the EU-27 were at risk of poverty while over 77 % of this category reported deprivation.

A more recent challenge is social exclusion among ethnic minorities and/or immigrant and migrant women. In several Member States there is a general increase in the migrant population, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total population. Immigrant and

Graph 7. At risk of poverty rate by household type 2006



NB: EU = EU-25 estimate.  
Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006. BG and RO national HBS 2006.

migrant workers may face two main forms of potential disadvantage, referring to structural and sociocultural integration. Structural integration refers to access to education, employment, income and economic independence and this depends partly on the resources the migrant arrives with and partly on the institutions of the receiving countries. Sociocultural integration refers to differences in religion and social values, including gender roles within the family and how the receiving country responds to differences. All immigrant and migrant workers face these disadvantages, but women may be a particularly vulnerable group because of limited labour market opportunities and/or limited independent rights for social security (see Fagan et al., 2006: 115).

Reducing child poverty is another important challenge under this heading. At 19 %, the risk of poverty among children is higher than that of the general population. The risk appears to be connected with low work intensity of the household. According to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008, 'about 10 % of all children live in households where nobody works and 60 % of those children are at risk of poverty. The share of children at risk of poverty reaches 25 % when only one parents works, compared to 7 % when both parents work' (JRSPSI, 2008:7). Other factors coupled with low work intensity include living with lone parents or in large families. Graph 8 indicates the risk of poverty among children aged 0–17 years, compared to the risk of poverty among the total population. It appears that Latvia, Poland, Italy, Lithuania and Hungary display particularly high percentages of children at risk of poverty. Relative favourable scores are indicated by Cyprus, Denmark and Finland. Only four countries (Denmark, Germany, Cyprus and Finland) indicate a lower score for children than for the total population, whereas in Belgium and Slovenia

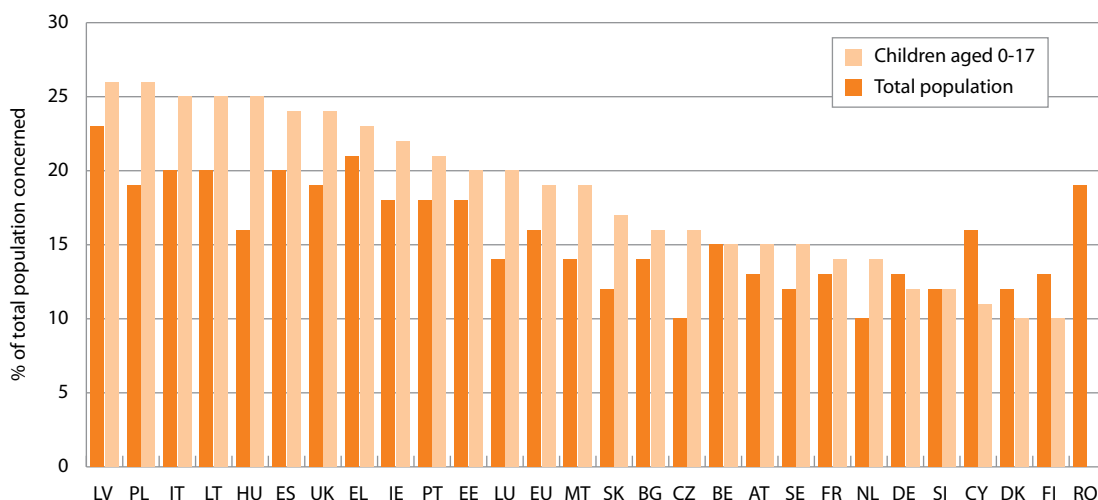
the risks are equal. In general, countries that have low rates of child poverty (under 5 % of households with children) do so because they combine high levels of parental employment with an effective redistribution of resources through the tax benefit system (OECD, 2007).

### Role of childcare subsidies

Increasing maternal employment is an effective way of improving family income. In fact, women's labour market participation is the best and most effective protection against poverty in a family with children (Esping-Andersen, 2002). Improving the reconciliation of work and family by investing in good-quality childcare may therefore prove to be an effective strategy in fostering social inclusion and reducing poverty rates. Available and affordable childcare facilities may promote the autonomy of single mother and/or migrant parents, thereby preventing benefit dependency and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Unfortunately, there is little research on the effect of childcare services on the single mother or migrant employees. There are, however, several studies indicating that migrant women are less likely to use public childcare and/or pre-school facilities due to a combination of financial obstacles and cultural differences. In Norway, for example, high fees for out-of-school care represent a particular obstacle to immigrant families. In Sweden it is also much more common for the child to be in a leisure-time centre when the parents have higher education and both are born in Sweden than if the parents have a lower educational level and are immigrants (Skolverket, 2005).

Formal childcare arrangements may also contribute to the sound and healthy development of a child. Especially in the Nordic countries, there is a growing recognition of

**Graph 8. At risk of poverty rate for children aged 0–17 years and total population 2006**



NB: EU = EU-25 estimate.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006. BG and RO national HBS 2006. IS, LI, NO: not available.

day care as a key institution in shaping life chances. It is presumed that to obtain social equality and to avoid poverty and marginalisation, all children need to be included in good learning collectives. In this perspective, childcare investment no longer serves the labour market possibilities of the parents, but rather the development options of the child. National studies provide some evidence on the benefits of high-quality childcare facilities. A Norwegian study, for example, indicates that children who develop good language skills before school starts have better social development and better reading abilities in the primary grades than children with lagged language skills (Nergård, 2002). In Latvia, pre-school education in kindergartens has an important impact on the social inclusion of children in mainstream education; another study reports positive effects on health (Trapenciere et al., 2003). In Poland, regions with higher levels of children aged 3–5 years in pre-school education score higher on (amongst other things) educational attainment and income of population; they have higher standards of living, higher formal qualification, lower rates of benefits related to poverty, lower levels of unemployment and higher educational scores among youth (Herbst, 2005). Finally, in Germany, the lower percentage, on average, of children with a migrant background attending childcare

centres has negative implications for language development, school success and/or general integration (Büchel and Spieß, 2002a). In more general terms, the impact seems to depend on the quality of the child care, the hours of attendance and the starting age.

## 1.4 Summary and conclusions

Summarising the main results, it appears that there are substantial differences across countries in the (female) employment rate. The presence of a child has a small impact on male employment, but affects female employment rather heavily, especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Total fertility rates are below replacement level in all EU Member States, but prove to be especially low in countries with low female participation levels. Child development and social inclusion receive increasing prominence in the public policies of most countries. The risk of child poverty appears to be connected with low work intensity, living with lone parents or in large families. There is strong evidence that a sufficient supply of childcare services has a positive impact on (female) labour force participation, the fertility level and social inclusion.

## 2. Childcare services

### 2.1 Introduction

Personal services are extremely important in the lives of working parents. This applies in particular to childcare services, as care responsibilities constitute a major obstacle to (full) employment. The importance of affordable and accessible quality childcare provision has long been recognised by the European Council and the European Union. In March 1992 the Council of the European Union passed a recommendation on childcare to the effect that Member States 'should take and/or progressively encourage initiatives to enable women and men to reconcile their occupational, family and upbringing responsibilities arising from the care of children' (92/241/EEC). Ten years later, at the 2002 Barcelona Summit, the aims were formulated more explicitly and targets were set with regard to childcare. Confirming the goal of full employment, the European Council agreed that Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provisions, to provide childcare by 2010 for at least 90 % of children aged between 3 years and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age.

Assessing the availability of childcare services is not an easy task, however. National statistics are not easily converted to a common standard, given the fact that each country has its own unique constellation of childcare arrangements, consisting of services and facilities such as leave arrangements, day-care centres, kindergartens, family-type care arrangements, childminders at home, (pre)school education systems, etc. In particular, the dividing line between formal and informal arrangements may be rather fluid and differ between countries. The care arrangements for young children, in particular, often consist of rather informal arrangements, which nevertheless play an important role in the life of young parents. Due to data problems, it may be necessary to concentrate solely on formal arrangements, but for a correct interpretation of these data the availability of informal arrangements also has to be taken into account.

In addition, it is important to realise that the division between public and private arrangements is not always clear cut. Funding programmes for employers, for example, or tax measures for parents imply public support for a private market. It would therefore be a mistake only to concentrate on public services. Another important issue, which complicates the interpretation of the available data, is the relationship between childcare and the education sector. In some countries, there is a clear division between the care arrangements for the youngest chil-

dren and an education system for older children. In other countries, however, children may be cared for by the education system during school hours and within the childcare system outside these hours. Again it is important to take account of these interrelationships for a correct interpretation of the available data. Finally it is important to take the time dimension into account. Since care may be provided on a full-time or part-time basis, the number of childcare places available or the number of children being cared for outside the family is liable to give only a partial as well as a potentially misleading indication of the effective scale of childcare facilities (for a full assessment of the methodological complexities see Eurostat, 2004; Plantenga and Remery, 2005).

The problems with regard to childcare statistics are to some extent solved by the introduction of the European statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC), which are supposed to become the new reference source for statistics on income and living conditions and common indicators for social inclusion. The SILC project was launched in 2003 in six EU Member States (Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Austria) as well as Norway. In 2004, the 15 EU Member States were covered (with the exception of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom which had derogations until 2005) as well as Estonia, Iceland and Norway. The new Member States (with the exception of Estonia) started in 2005. In principle the EU-SILC will provide two types of annual data:

- cross-sectional data pertaining to a given time or a certain period with variables on income, poverty, social exclusion and other living conditions; and
- longitudinal data pertaining to individual-level changes over time observed periodically over a 4-year period.

The EU-SILC contains rather detailed data on childcare services. Questions are asked about the use of formal childcare arrangements, the use of other arrangements and the number of hours per week. Formal arrangements are defined as pre-school or equivalent, compulsory education, centre-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche or another day-care centre, including family day-care organised/controlled by a public or private structure. Other arrangements are defined as childcare by a professional minder at the child's home or at the childminder's home, and care by grandparents, other household members (outside parents), other relatives, friends and neighbours. Distinction between paid and unpaid 'other arrangements' is possible but is statistically valid only in a limited number of countries due to low number of observations.

Taking the EU-SILC data as a starting point, this chapter comments on these data and extends the information as far as possible. To start with, Section 2.2 provides information about the use of childcare services for the different age categories. As the EU-SILC data do not answer directly the question of whether demand is fully met, Section 2.3 will provide some national information about the link between the share of children covered by childcare, the Barcelona targets and the existence of an uncovered demand. Section 2.4 evaluates the available information on the quality standard for childcare services, whereas Section 2.5 gives information about the overall level of costs and the affordability of childcare services for different income levels. Section 2.6 contains information about the attitudes of parents and/or society at large on the use of childcare services, while Section 2.7 summarises the conclusions.

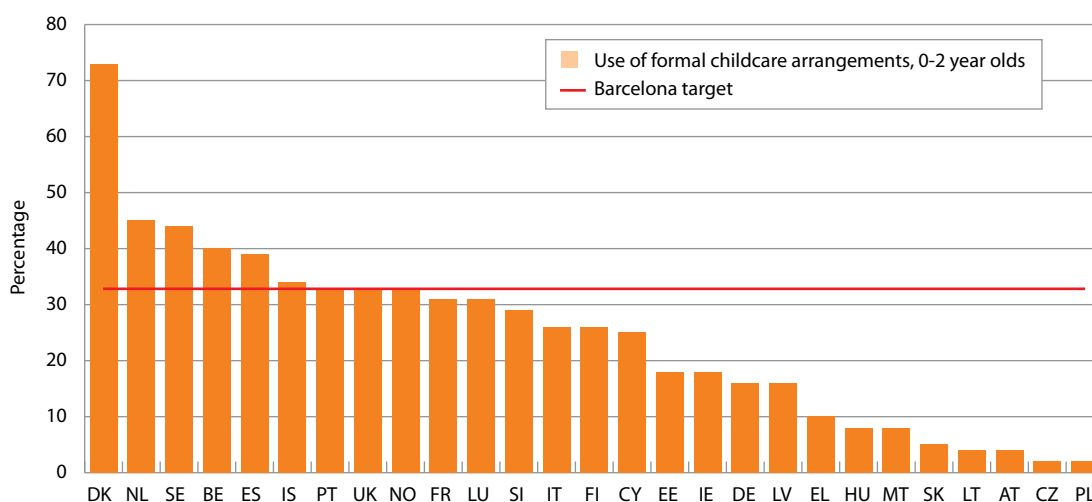
## 2.2 The use of childcare services

Childcare services consist of a wide variety of formal and informal arrangements, with rather fluid — and country-specific — transitions between social support services, the educational system and the actual care system. In this section we will assess the use of childcare services in the EU-27, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, following the structure of the EU-SILC questionnaire. Given that the EU-SILC is a household questionnaire, the data provide information on the receipt of childcare ('formal' or 'other') by children. Given the Barcelona targets, distinctions will be made between the arrangements for children in the age category 0–2 years, those between 3 years and the mandatory school age and school children up to the age of 12 years.

### 2.2.1 Childcare arrangements for children in the age category 0–2 years

Graph 9 summarises the use of childcare services for children in the youngest age category, on the basis of the EU-SILC statistics. It indicates children cared for in formal arrangements, as a proportion of all children of the same age group. Formal arrangements in this respect refer to education at pre-school or equivalent, childcare at centre-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche or another day-care centre including family day-care organised/controlled by a public or private structure. It appears that the difference between the lowest and the highest ranking country is 70 percentage points, with Denmark having a share of children cared for in formal arrangements of 73 %, whereas the Czech Republic and Poland only score 2 %. A more detailed analysis would reveal that within countries there are large differences in the use of childcare facilities by age: in almost all countries, the younger the child, the more likely it is that he/she is cared for at home, especially by the parents, followed by other groups, such as grandparents and/or other relatives. In Denmark, for example, only 10 % of children below the age of 1 year are in public day-care and 5 % in a crèche or age-integrated institution (an institution which combines and includes crèche, kindergarten and youth centre). Newborn children spend on average 11 months with parents, while they are on maternity or parental leave. In the latter part of these months many children start gradually in day-care with a few hours a day. In Sweden, hardly any children below the age of 1 year are in public childcare since they are at home with a parent on parental leave. This is also true for a large proportion of the 1-year-olds since parental leave is longer than 12 months, and can be spread out over a longer period

Graph 9. Use of formal childcare arrangements, 0–2-year-olds



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

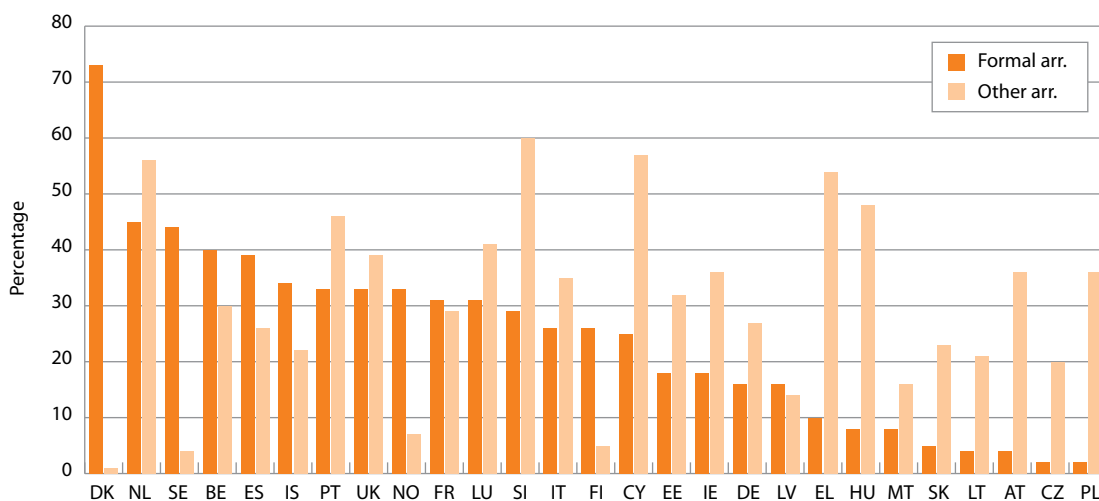


of time. In Estonia, the proportion of children in childcare also depends significantly on the age of a child. Only 11.3 % of children up to 1 year are in a childcare facility, while more than half of 2-year-olds make use of such facilities. In Norway, finally, the coverage rate for children under 1 year is only 3 %, which is explained by the parental leave arrangement. Among 1–2-year-olds, coverage rates reach 51 % and 73 %, respectively.

In order to provide a fuller picture of the use of childcare services, Graph 10 combines the information on formal arrangements of Graph 9 with information on ‘other arrangements’. Other arrangements in this respect are defined as childcare by a professional childminder at the child’s home or at the childminder’s home and childcare by grandparents, other household members (outside parents), other relatives, friends or neighbours. It should be taken into account that the sum of the score on formal and other arrangements may exceed 100 % as parents might combine different arrangements to cover a full working day. From the table it appears that countries such as the Netherlands, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France and Luxembourg score relatively high on formal arrangements but seem to combine these arrangements with an equally well-developed system of other arrangements. Slovenia and Cyprus combine a medium score on formal arrangements with a much higher score on other arrangements, whereas quite a number of countries that score low on formal arrangements have a high score for other arrangements. This is particularly the case for Greece, Hungary, Austria and Poland. Only four countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland) do not seem to combine formal arrangements with home-based family day care and/or childcare provided by friends and family. Countries that score below 25 % for both formal and other arrangements are Latvia, Malta, Slovakia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

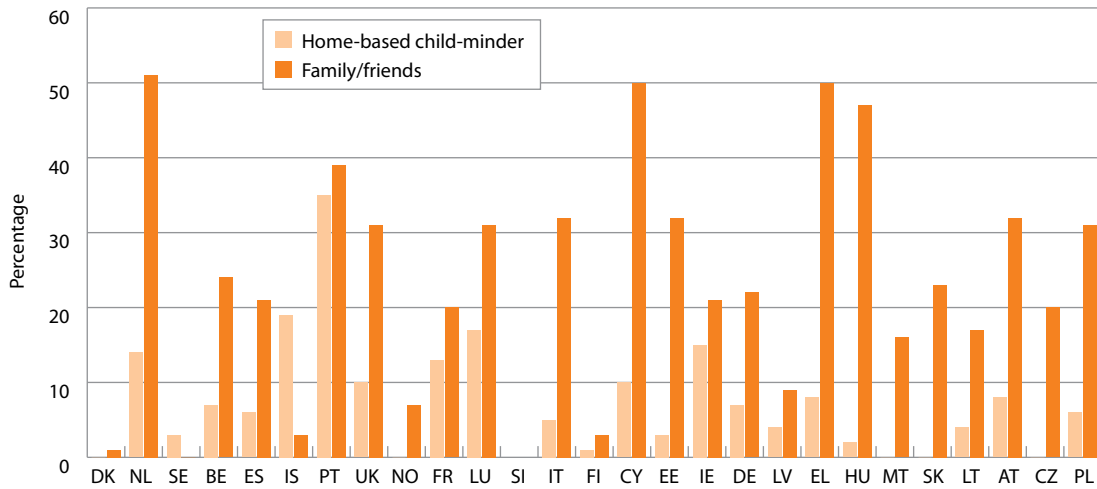
The use of formal childcare facilities is the most important indicator to monitor the provision of childcare facilities in the different Member States. On the basis of this indicator, it appears from Graph 9 that seven Member States (Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and United Kingdom) and Iceland and Norway have already met the Barcelona target, with France, Luxembourg and — at some distance — Slovenia close behind. At the lower end of the ranking, Slovakia, Lithuania, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland have a score of 5 % or less (figures for Bulgaria, Romania and Liechtenstein are missing). For a correct interpretation of these scores, it is important to note, though, that national boundaries between formal and other arrangements may not completely comply with the EU-SILC data. In France, for example, the SILC data on formal arrangements do not include childminders, (*assistantes maternelles*), who are paid directly by parents. However, in France, the great majority of childminders must be registered and are therefore considered as a form of formal care in the national statistics. This is, in fact, the main form of childcare for very young children. Due to reforms improving the occupational status of childminders, as well as benefits helping families to access this form of childcare, their number increased 3.5 times between 1990 and 2001. If these childminders were included under the heading of formal arrangements (which will be the case in the forthcoming years), France would also meet the Barcelona target of 33 % for the youngest age category. In contrast, the SILC figures for the Netherlands and Portugal with regard to formal arrangements seem rather high compared to national statistics. For the Netherlands this may be partly explained by the inclusion of playgroups in the category of formal arrangements. Playgroups are, however, generally not considered as a facility that supports working parents. Playgroups only offer a part-time

**Graph 10. Use of formal and other childcare arrangements, 0–2-year-olds**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

**Graph 11. Use of home-based childminder and/or family/friends, 0–2-year-olds**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. Data for SI not included because of small sample size. BG, RO and LI: not available.

service; the majority of children that attend a playgroup do this for two daily periods (often two mornings of 3 hours) per week.

Graph 11 gives some more detailed information on the use of other arrangements differentiating between home-based childcare on the one hand and the use of family and friends on the other. It appears that in seven countries (Netherlands, Iceland, Portugal, United Kingdom, France, Luxembourg, and Ireland) the use of home-based childcare (not organised/controlled by a public or private structure) amounts to 10 % or more. A real outlier in this respect appears to be Portugal, where the use of this kind of facility amounts to 35 %. Family and friends appear to be important in a number of countries, but especially in the Netherlands, Portugal, Cyprus, Greece and Hungary. This is to a large extent due to the involvement of grandparents in the provision of care at home. In Greece, for example, the most common care arrangement for babies and infants of working parents is still at-home care by family members, usually grandparents. Parents have less confidence in nannies than in their own parents when children are still very young. Nannies are hired mostly by families with children under three where grandparents are not locally available, or not eager or capable of undertaking the care of grandchildren, especially for long hours. The short and rigid operating hours of crèches, nurseries and kindergartens and extended closure during Christmas, Easter and summer holidays oblige parents to combine formal childcare with grandparents' assistance.

### The impact of the education system

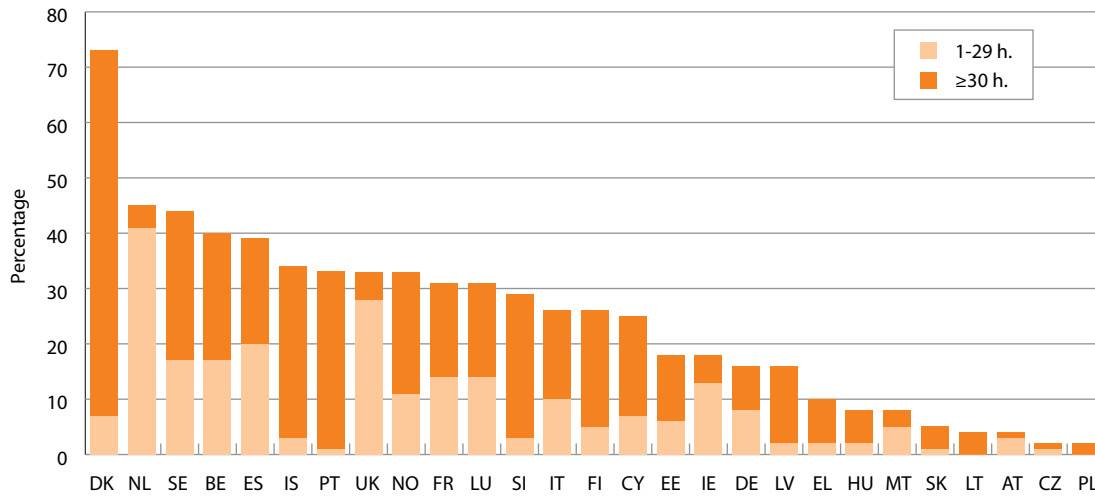
Another issue that has had an impact on the scores with regard to formal arrangements is the inclusion of pre-school arrangements. In Belgium, for example, children

can enter nursery school at the age of 2.5 years. Most parents make use of this possibility, given that pre-school is free of charge as opposed to childcare arrangements for 0–3-year-olds outside the school system (focusing on care and not on education). In the Czech Republic, partly as a result of a declining number of nurseries, more and more children under the age of 3 years attend kindergartens (which in principle are intended for children aged 3–6 years). In 1997 around 11 % of children aged 2–3 years attended a kindergarten, and by 2005 the figure had increased to 25.5 %. The same developments seem to have taken place in Slovakia. In principle the grouping together of educational and childcare services may be justified by the fact that both arrangements help parents to combine their private and professional lives. At the same time, the time dimension of the arrangements becomes even more critical as in most countries pre-school is only part-time. In order to cover a full working day, parents may need additional childcare facilities, which may be much less available.

### Hours

Graphs 12 and 13 provides information about the number of hours during which formal and other arrangements are used. It appears that in countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, Latvia, Greece, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania and Poland, most formal childcare services are used for 30 hours or more. Especially in Denmark and Iceland the social right to childcare seems to translate into a high full-time coverage rate. A typical Danish day-care unit has opening hours ranging from 6.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. from Monday to Thursday and to 4.30 p.m. on Friday. This corresponds to traditional working hours in the trades and industries (from 7.00 a.m.) and offices (until 4.00 p.m.), although shopkeepers and

**Graph 12. Use of formal childcare arrangements by hours, 0–2-year-olds**



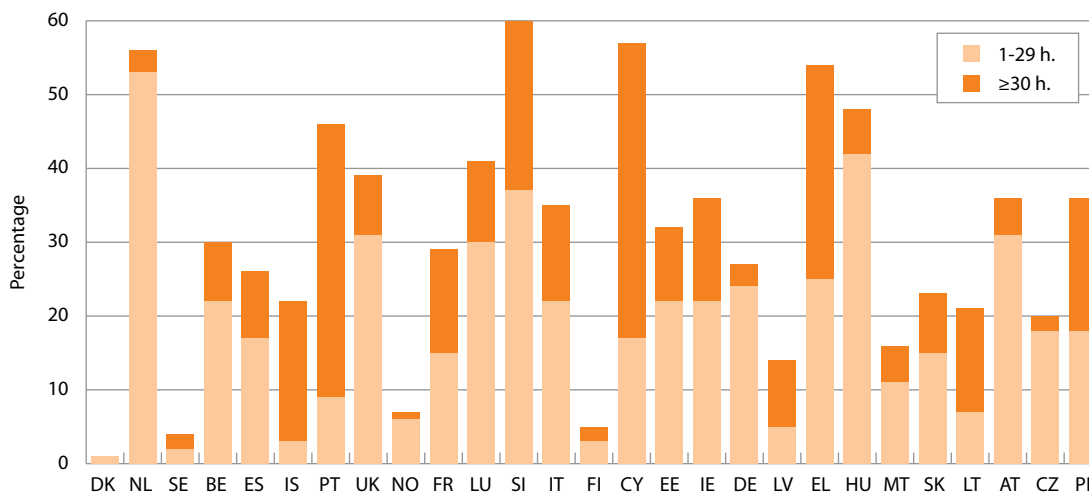
Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

assistants (from 9.00–10.00 a.m. to 6.00–8.00 p.m.) may need longer opening hours. Also in Slovenia, formal arrangements are mostly used for 30 hours or more, while other forms of childcare are used more for between 1 and 29 hours. As the majority of both women and men in Slovenia are in full-time employment, these data could be understood as reflecting choices of parents, who are using formal arrangements as the main childcare solution during working hours, while other arrangements are used in addition to formal arrangements.

In other countries, part-time arrangements are much more common. In Germany, for example, there used to be a heavy emphasis on part-time arrangements, yet

over the last couple of years, the opening hours have extended although considerable differences between the former East and the former West Germany can still be observed. In the Netherlands, childcare services are provided on a full-time basis, but the use of the facility may be limited to a few days per week, reflecting the high level of part-time employment in the Netherlands. As a result, only 4 % of the children are taken care of in formal arrangements for more than 30 hours per week (and another 3 % of the children are in other arrangements for more than 30 hours a week). In the United Kingdom, employed mothers typically work part-time, which corresponds to a high part-time use of childcare services. A finer breakdown of the part-time provision would reveal

**Graph 13. Use of other childcare arrangements by hours, 0–2-year-olds**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional); data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

that many part-time childcare places involve less than 20 hours. Similarly, in Norway the choice of the number of hours of care has been considered an important policy aim, as part of the general aim of free choice and diversity in childcare services. In recent years there has been increasing policy emphasis on providing flexible time contracts for the users.

In more general terms, a comparison between the hours of formal and other arrangements indicates that in all countries, home and/or family based arrangements generally involve fewer hours than the formal arrangements. This applies also to countries such as Greece, Hungary, Austria and Poland that to a large extent depend on the provision of other arrangements. This seems to imply that other arrangements are not fully compatible with formal arrangements; rather they may be used as a complement to formal services or — in case formal service are lacking — they may be combined with other informal services in order to cover a full-time working day. Graph 14 provides some details on the average amount of time used in formal and other childcare arrangements for 13 countries. This average is calculated for children attending at least 1 hour per week (data for other countries are not available due to small sample sizes). It appears that most countries are in the right hand corner, although in some countries (notably the United Kingdom, Ireland, Cyprus and Portugal) the average number of hours of other care exceeds the average number of hours of formal care.

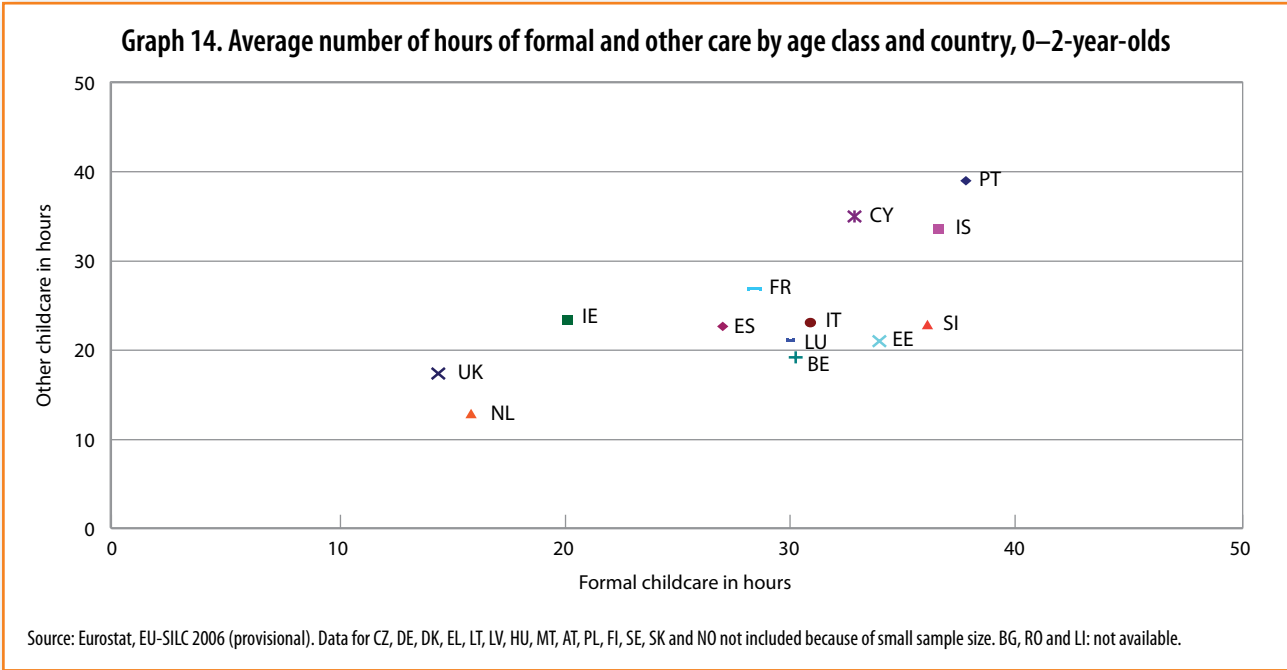
**Flexibility**

A final issue that has to be taken into account for the youngest age group refers to the flexibility of the services. Flexibility in childcare facilities might refer to opening hours (during the day, week and year and during non-standard

hours) and to flexible use of the facility over the week or during the year. Flexible arrangements are particularly important for parents working atypical hours (during evenings, nights, weekends and/or state holidays). Opportunities seem, however, rather limited in this respect. Most countries have hardly any centres that offer care at atypical hours. Some of the larger towns in Denmark have a limited number of nurseries and kindergartens that offer care during evening and night hours. Only one or two institutions in four different municipalities have given priority to a 24-hour service. In France there are a few examples of ‘non-stop’ crèches and crèches that offer extended care (e.g. 10 hours care between 6 a.m. and 9.30 p.m.). More positive examples are provided by Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, more than half of all municipalities offer night-opening childcare arrangements to parents who work nights. In Finland, the Act on Day Care stipulates that municipalities have to provide childcare at times parents need it, including during the night, the weekend, etc. In 62 % of the municipalities the demand for this type of shift care is fully or almost fully met. With respect to opening hours over the year, childcare during summer holidays is problematic in several countries. In Italy, for example, there is no service in August and in July only a reduced time schedule is available. In Belgium, only 10 % of the care services on school premises are open and 40 % of extra-school care services.

**2.2.2 Childcare arrangements for children in the age category 3 years to mandatory school age**

Graph 15 provides data on the use of formal childcare services for the age category 3 years to the mandatory school age. The Barcelona target states that the actual coverage rate should be at least 90 %. It appears that



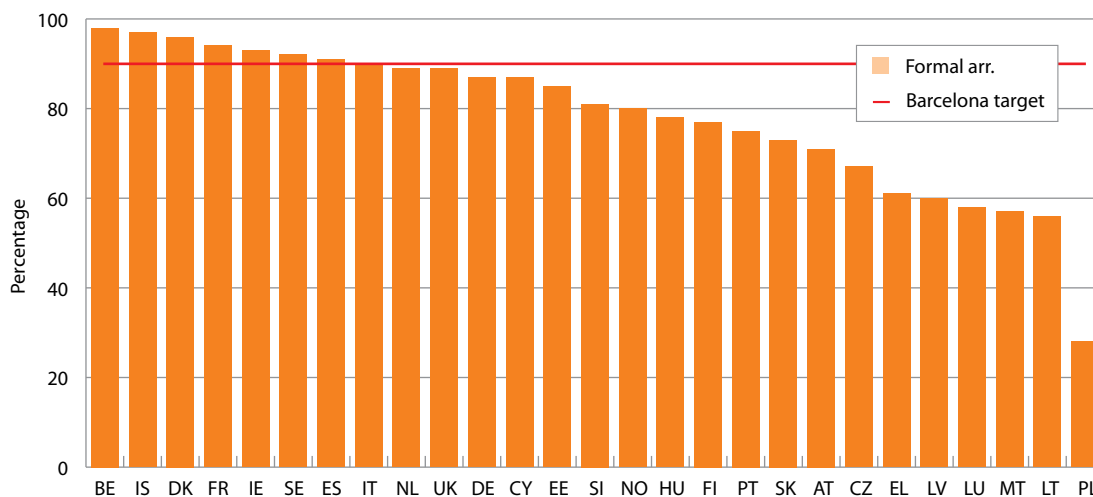
nine EU Member States meet the Barcelona target or score rather highly: Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Other countries score at least 50 %, the only exception being Poland with a score of only 28 %. Compared to the scores for Graph 9 it seems that the use of formal care arrangements increases with the increasing age of children. Of course this is, to a large extent, due to the inclusion of pre-school arrangements under the heading of formal arrangements and the high coverage rate of pre-school arrangements for children in the age category 3 years to the mandatory school age.

In Belgium, for example, children in the age category 2.5–6 years have universal and free access to publicly provided pre-school arrangements, as a result of which the enrolment rate is 90 % at 2.5 years and almost 100 % of the children aged 3 years. In Iceland, there is a strong emphasis on the individual right of a child to a place at pre-primary school and on the educational and pedagogical role of childcare services. Partly as a result of this, the share of children aged 3–5 years old in formal care arrangements reached 97 % in 2006. Germany introduced a legal entitlement for subsidised childcare for children aged 3 years up to the mandatory school age in 1996. In Spain, the proportion of children attending pre-school services has continuously grown during the last 15 years, especially in the case of children aged 3 years, whose schooling rate has increased from 38 % in 1991 to 96 % in 2005. The Portuguese government, taking into account the Barcelona target, promised that 100 % of 5-year-olds would attend pre-school by 2009, and that 90 % of 3–5-year-olds would also be included by 2010. In Hungary it is compulsory that children attend kindergarten for 1 year before they start primary school, whereas in Liechtenstein a space at nursery school is guaranteed

for every child aged 4–6 years. Finally, in the United Kingdom, the national childcare strategy introduced an entitlement for all 3–4-year-olds to a free part-time place in pre-school education, which is currently 12.5 hours per week during school term-time (38 weeks per year). In case the child remains in a fee-paying nursery, parents receive the equivalent as a monetary rebate. The entitlement is due to be extended to 2-year-olds and to 15 hours per week by 2010. Pilot schemes for this have been established.

In other countries the situation seems less favourable, though. In Slovakia, only 68 % of the children aged 3–6 years attended a kindergarten in 2006. Although there was a significant drop in the mid-1990s, this figure is close to the 69 % in 1989, suggesting at least a positive trend over the last couple of years. In the Czech Republic the number of kindergartens declined between 1989 and 2005 by approximately 33 %. Partly as a result of this development, the number of children attending a kindergarten dropped from 96 % in 1989 to 78.3 % in 2005. Since 2005, however, children aged 5 years (the final pre-school year) have free access to pre-school facilities. In Latvia there is a real shortage of kindergartens and kindergarten teachers. Since 2002 municipalities have been obliged to guarantee places in pre-school education for all children of the age category 5–6 years. On average, however, only about 60 % of all children attend kindergartens. There has also been a significant decrease in the number of all pre-school facilities in Poland, including self-contained pre-schools for children in the age category 3–5 years, as well as pre-school sections attached to primary schools for 6-year-olds. Fewer facilities mean that accessibility has decreased for some families because of increased distances they have to travel, especially in rural areas. However, in terms of the proportion of

Graph 15. Use of formal childcare arrangements, 3 years to mandatory school age



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

children in pre-schools, the overall trend has been showing a long-term increase, from 29.5 % of children aged 3–5 in 1990/91 to 44.6 % in 2006/07. For the 6-year-olds, the data indicate an increase from 95.2 % to 97.4 % over the same period. If these scores are correct, the Polish score in Graph 15 seems too low; a score of approximately 55 % would be more in line with the national statistics. Finally in Romania the participation in pre-primary education decreased between 1989 and 1995 from 63.3 % to 55.1 %, since when it has systematically grown each year up to 73.4 % in 2005. The level of participation in education in kindergartens remains relatively low because of socioeconomic factors (a lack of minimal resources to send children to kindergarten), and because of regional factors (a lack of kindergartens in several localities in rural areas and a lack of interest in kindergartens in some communities, such as the Roma minority).

### Formal and other arrangements

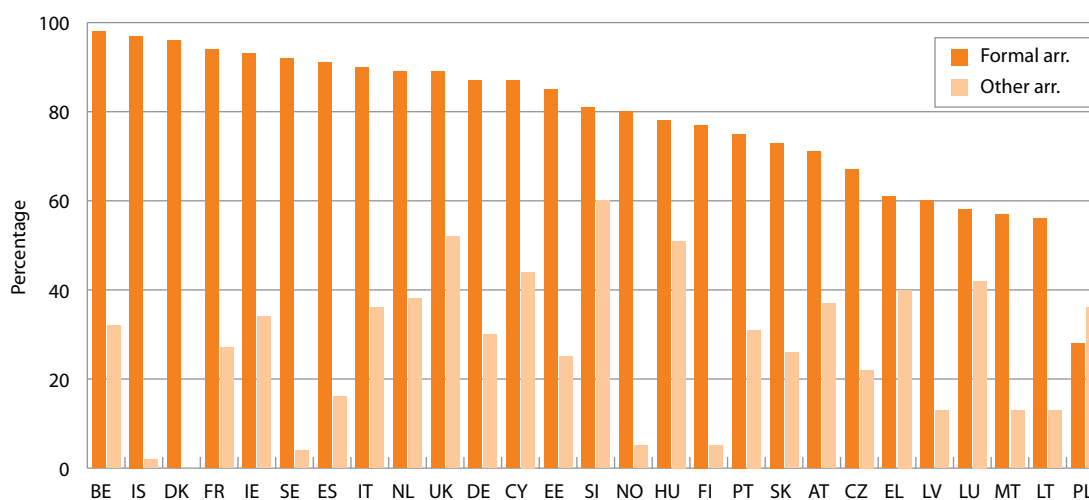
In comparison to the youngest age category, the other arrangements, referring to home-based childminders and family/friends, play a much more limited role in the childcare arrangements for children aged 3 years to the mandatory school age (see Graph 16 for more details). In Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland the use of other arrangements is practically zero, whereas in Spain, Latvia, Malta and Lithuania the use is below 20 %. In only three countries do other arrangements score above or at 50 %: the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Hungary. In the Netherlands, part-time pre-school arrangements are topped up by other arrangements in which family and friends play a major role. In Slovenia, relatives, neighbours and friends also play an important role in matching pre-school arrangements with a full-time working day.

### Hours

Although the coverage rate of the age category 3 years to the mandatory school age is higher than the coverage rate for the youngest age category, it has to be taken into account that in most countries pre-school is only part-time, as a result of which working parents still need additional childcare facilities which may be much less available. Graphs 17 and 18 provide data on the available formal and other arrangements by hours. It appears that in Iceland, Denmark, Estonia, Slovenia, Portugal, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland formal arrangements are to a large extent organised on a full-time basis (or at least for 30 hours or more). Across the 30 countries, Iceland has the highest coverage rate of children of 3 years old to the mandatory school age in formal care arrangement for 30 or more hours a week. In Estonia most of the pre-school childcare institutions have opening hours from 7.00 a.m. till 6.00 or 7.00 p.m. Another example is Slovakia, where most of the kindergartens operate on a full-time basis. The usual opening hours are from 6.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

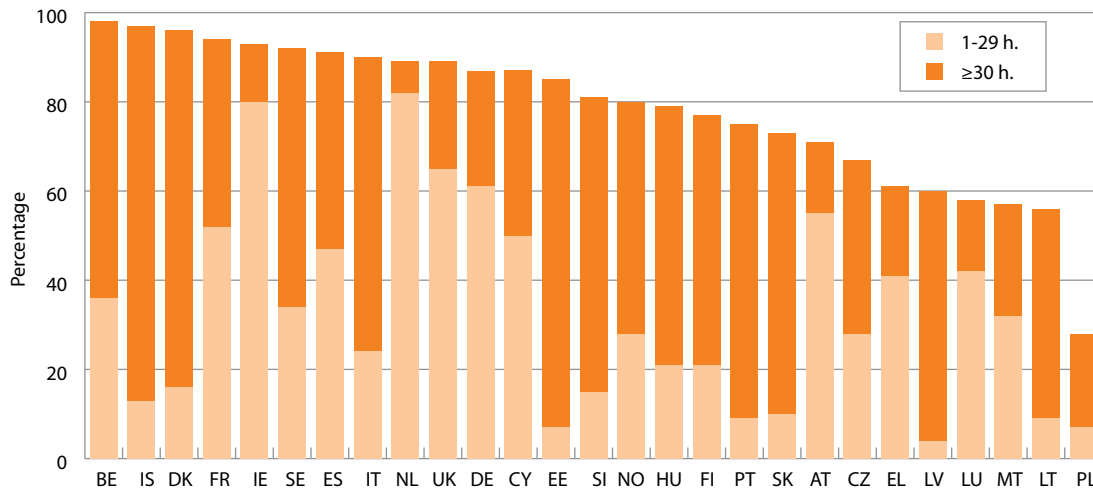
In contrast, other countries have organised the formal arrangements on a part-time basis, the most extreme cases being Ireland and the Netherlands. In Ireland, children enter the primary school system from the age of 4 years, with school hours generally between 9.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m. for the first 2 years. In the Netherlands most 3-year-olds either attend playgroups that only cover two mornings per week, or attend childcare facilities on a part-time basis. After the fourth birthday children start primary school, but openings hours are limited to approximately 25 hours a week. Other countries with a high part-time score are the United Kingdom, Germany and Austria. In the United Kingdom longer hours of attendance in excess of free part-time places

Graph 16. Use of formal and other childcare arrangements, 3 years to mandatory school age



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

**Graph 17. Use of formal childcare arrangements by hours, 3 years to mandatory school age**



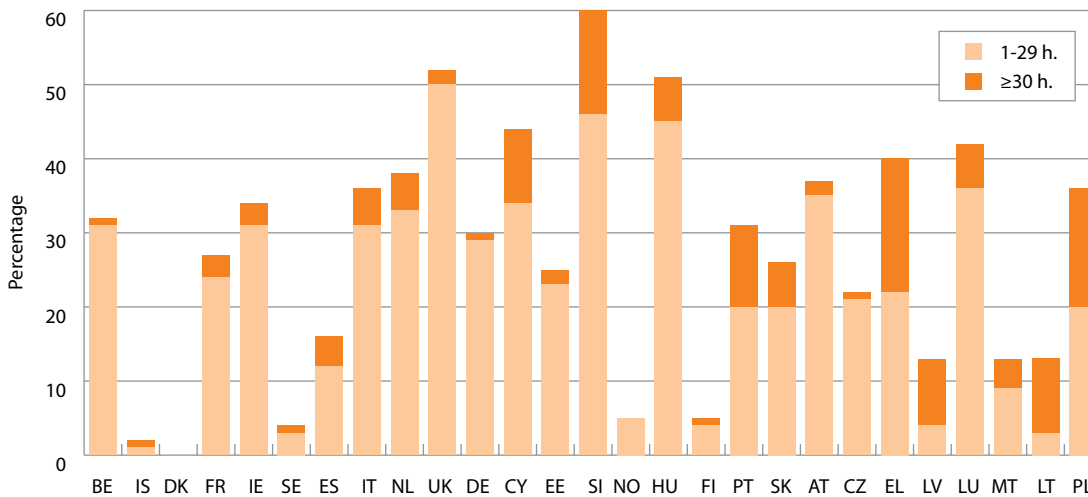
Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

(12.5 hours per week for 3–4-year-olds) are rarely available in school-based nurseries. In Austria and Germany the school system is still dominated by half-day schools, which translate into a large part-time score among the formal arrangements in Graph 17. Finally it can be noted that almost all other arrangements for pre-school children are organised on a part-time basis, indicating the complementary use of these arrangements (see Graph 18 for further details). The only outliers in this respect seem to be Greece and Poland: the heavy involvement of grandparents and childminders in the provision of care at home is translated into a relatively high rate of full-time other arrangements for children aged 3 years to the mandatory school age.

### 2.2.3 Childcare arrangements for school-going children

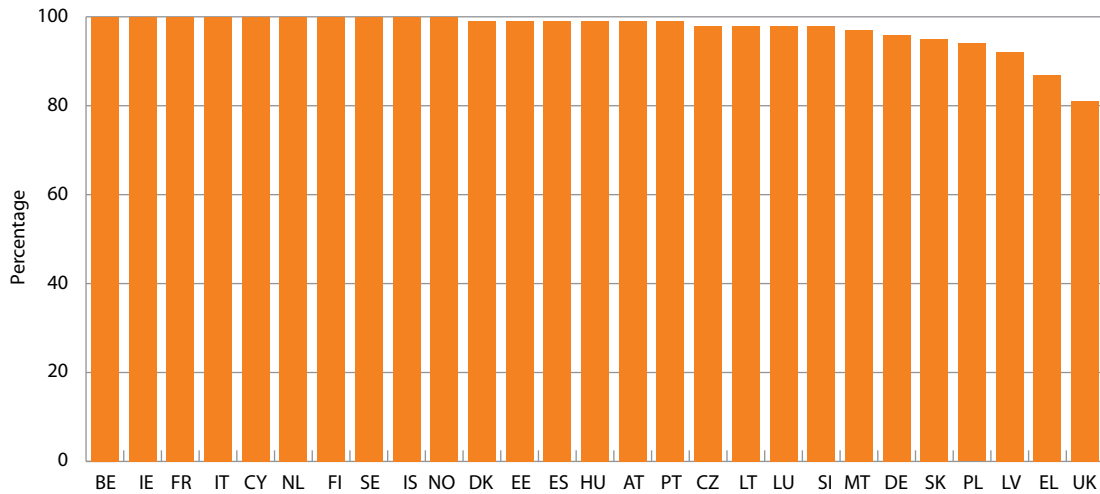
Graph 19 presents the data of childcare arrangements for school-going children. The EU does not specify a target in the provision of care for this age category, although from the point of view of reconciling work and life as well as ensuring the well-being and safety of children such care is still needed. From the graph it appears that the coverage rates are close to 100 %; only Greece and the United Kingdom score below 90 %. These relatively low scores do not seem to be in line with national statistics, though. In Graph 20 the scores on formal arrangements are combined with the scores on other arrangements indicating that other arrangements are

**Graph 18. Use of other childcare arrangements by hours, 3 years to mandatory school age**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

**Graph 19. Use of formal childcare arrangements, mandatory school age to 12-year-olds**



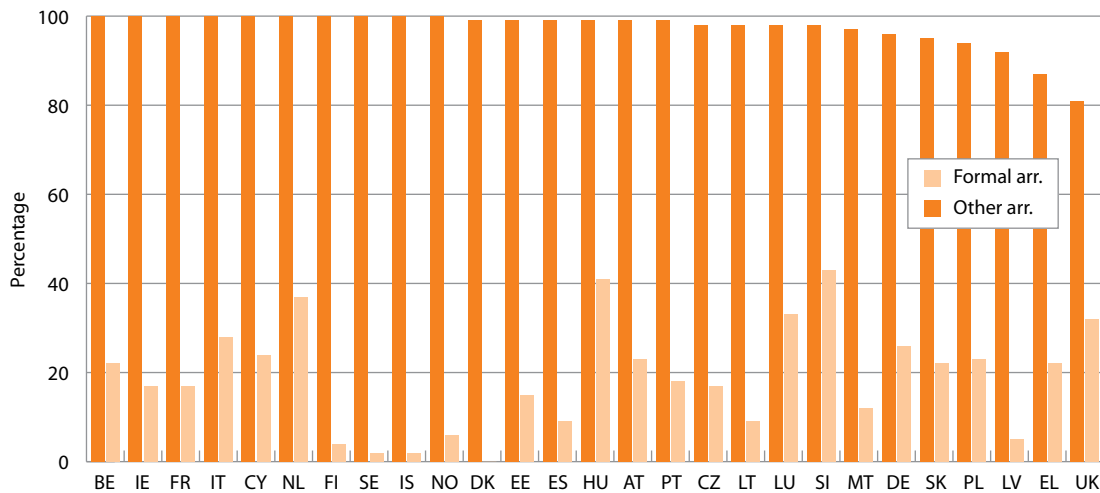
Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

especially important in the Netherlands, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. In the Netherlands, the relatively high score on other arrangements indicates the non full-time school hours in combination with an insufficient supply of formal out-of-school care. Grandparents, neighbours and friends thus complement the formal arrangements in order to cover a full working day. In the United Kingdom informal childcare arrangements remain an important part of family life. In a given week formal and informal childcare are used to roughly the same extent, by around 4 out of 10 families in both cases, with many parents using a combination. The widespread use of informal care reflects a combination of parental preferences and a lack of suitable local and affordable formal services.

### Hours

Finally Graphs 21 and 22 provide data on formal and other arrangements for school-going children, divided by hours. It appears that even for school-going children the typical school day in most countries is less than full time (that is less than 30 hours a week). The only exception is Sweden, which has organised the school system on a full-time basis. Other countries with a relatively high share of full-time care are: Belgium, Italy, Iceland, Hungary, Portugal, Malta, Latvia and the United Kingdom. In Italy, schools are autonomous regarding time schedules, as long as they provide the minimum amount. For primary schools the reduced time schedule is typical from 8.30 a.m. till 1.30 p.m., with

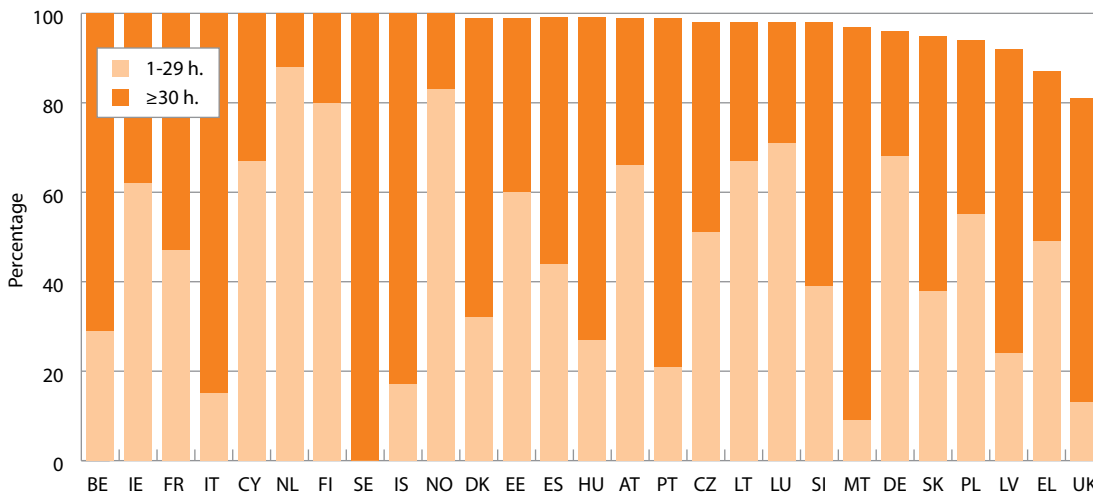
**Graph 20. Use of formal and other childcare arrangements, mandatory school age to 12-year-olds**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.



**Graph 21. Use of formal childcare arrangements by hours, mandatory school age to 12-year-olds**



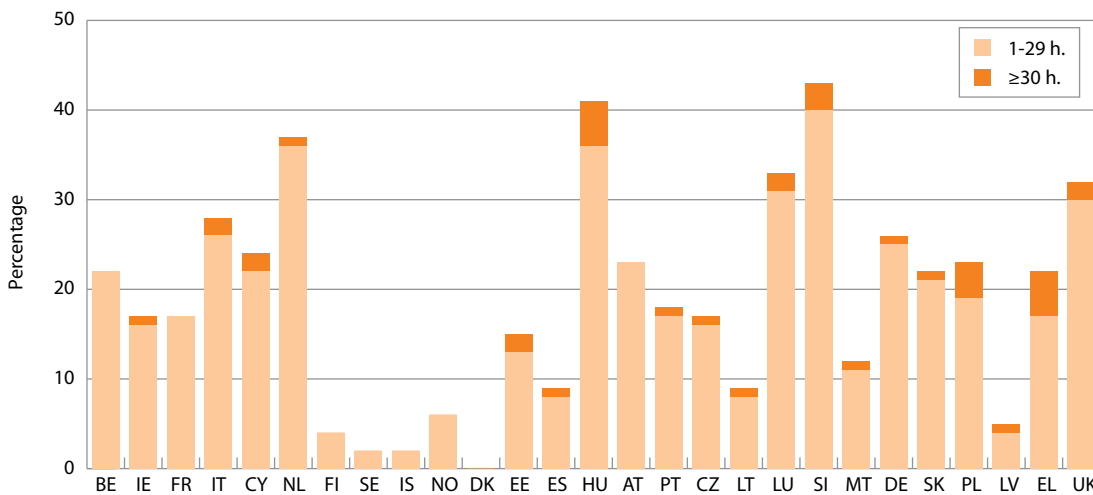
Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

two afternoons when service is provided from 2.20 to 4.30 p.m. Extra school activities may be provided for 1–1.5 hours before or after the usual schedule. Lower secondary schools follow the school schedule from 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. with additional extra-activities for two or three times a week in the afternoon. A full-time service is provided only for primary schools, between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m., with possible extensions for pre- and after-school additional activities from 7.30 and until 6.00 p.m. In Portugal in 2006, the full-time school has been implemented at the first 4 years for children aged 6–10 years, making it compulsory for all primary schools to deliver after-school activities between 3.00 and 5.30 p.m. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in the level of out-of-school care provision.

### 2.3 Supply and demand

When interpreting the figures in Section 2.2, it has to be taken into account that the use of childcare facilities does not answer directly the question of whether demand is fully met. The actual demand for childcare is influenced by the participation rate of parents (mothers), levels of unemployment, the length of parental leave, school opening hours and the availability of alternatives such as grandparents and or other (informal) arrangements. In Finland, for example, the coverage rate of formal arrangements for the youngest age category is, according to Graph 9, 26 %, which is well below the Barcelona target of 33 %. Yet childcare facilities are not in short

**Graph 22. Use of other childcare arrangements by hours, mandatory school age to 12-year-olds**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (provisional). Data for DE and NO: EU-SILC 2005. BG, RO and LI: not available.

supply. In fact, since 1990 Finnish children under 3 years are guaranteed a municipal childcare place, irrespective of the labour market status of the parents. In 1996 this right was expanded to cover all children under school age. This entitlement complements the home care allowance system, which enables the parent to stay at home to care for his/her child with full job-security until the child is 3 years old. Partly due to the popularity of the home care alternative, the supply of public day-care services has met the demand since the turn of the 1990s.

As in Finland, a few other European countries have formulated a social right to (formal) childcare services. In Denmark, for example, all municipalities have to offer a childcare guarantee when the child is 6 months old. In fact in Denmark there is a tendency to see childcare as much as an offer to the children in their development as democratic citizens, as an offer to the parents to have their children cared for while they are working. In Sweden, public childcare constitutes an important

part of the social infrastructure which is to further gender equality in the division of paid and unpaid work; almost all children aged 1–12 years have the right to public childcare. In Norway, unlike the other Scandinavian countries, childcare services are not a social right. Yet, since the late 1980s full coverage has been the common political goal for care services. Especially since 2005, the number of childcare facilities has increased, moving the Norwegian day care coverage into the same league as the other Nordic countries. In other countries, however, the supply of high-quality and affordable childcare facilities may be insufficient. In particular, formal childcare facilities for the youngest children seem to be in short supply. For children aged 3 years up to the mandatory school age, supply is higher but the opening hours of the facilities may not always match working hours. Box 1 provides more details in this respect. The information in all boxes is based on the national reports which were finalised in March 2008.

### Box 1. Supply and demand of childcare facilities

BE	The main problem for parents with children is out-of-school care. The supply of this type of care appears to be heterogeneous and fragmented.
BG	Limited supply of (and demand for) childcare services for the youngest children.
CZ	The demand for childcare facilities far exceeds supply, especially for the youngest age category. There is also a shortage of pre-school facilities for children below 5 years.
DK	Childcare is a legal right; since 2006 all municipalities have had to offer a childcare guarantee when the child is 6 months old.
DE	The demand for childcare for children under 3 years is considerably higher than the existing provision can cover. Especially in the former West Germany the insufficient provision of formal childcare obstructs participation in the labour market.
EE	There is a shortage of childcare places for almost all age categories, but especially for children under 3 years.
IE	Options for childcare services are limited and often extremely costly. What has come to be referred to as Ireland's 'childcare crisis' has been the subject of considerable debate in the media but has not yet been taken up in a significant way centrally within the political system.
EL	There is a limited demand for (and provision of) childcare facilities for the youngest children. Unmet demand for formal childcare services is thus mainly concentrated in the age group 3–6 years when children can go to nurseries and kindergartens.
ES	For the youngest age category, the availability of places is not enough to cover demand; there is fuller coverage for children aged 4–5.
FR	Full coverage for children from 3 years old. As for younger children (0–3 years), the system is less developed and does not cover all needs.
IT	Coverage of nurseries is small and falls far short of meeting the demand of working parents.
CY	Childcare system remains insufficient despite governmental commitment to provide childcare facilities for 90 % of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school age by 2010.
LV	There is a severe shortage of places in public kindergartens. On average, about 60 % of children attend kindergartens.

LT	The availability of childcare services is limited. In addition, there is an insufficient number of places in public kindergartens in most urban and rural areas.
LU	The number of available places is insufficient. In addition, opening hours may not be compatible with working hours.
HU	Coverage of nurseries is small and falls far short of meeting the demand of working parents. Supply of kindergarten facilities is more or less adequate, except for smaller rural settlements.
MT	There is a serious lack of childcare facilities for all age categories.
NL	Despite a large increase, childcare services are still in short supply. There is a particular shortage for school children.
AT	Based on a parents' survey, the most severe lack of childcare services affects children aged 6–14.
PL	Coverage of nurseries and pre-school arrangements is small and falls far short of meeting the demand of working parents.
PT	Especially for the younger children, there is a large unmet demand.
RO	Very low coverage. In addition the quality of the services causes problems.
SI	There is a growing inclusion of young children in childcare services. There are, however, large differences between towns and between urban and rural areas.
SK	Limited provision of (and demand for) childcare facilities for the youngest children. After a period of decline, the coverage rate for pre-school arrangements is increasing and is more or less at the level of 1989.
FI	Since 1990 all children under 3 years are guaranteed a municipal childcare place irrespective of the labour market position of parents. In 1996 this right has expanded to cover all children under school age (7 years).
SE	Public childcare is available all over Sweden. The number of places available for pre-school children aged 2–5 and school children aged 6–9 more or less corresponds with demand.
UK	Despite the expansion in formal childcare services there are still problems with availability. There is a mismatch of supply and demand across the country, with sizeable vacancies in day care, out-of-school and childminder places in some areas and heavy shortages in others. Moreover, the universal right to free pre-school for 3–4-year-olds is for a part-time place only.
IS	Rather extensive coverage for children in all age categories
LI	There is a guarantee for nursery school for all children in the age category 4–6, yet there are waiting lists for childcare centres.
NO	Since 1980 full coverage for care services has been the political goal. Yet the demand for childcare services for the youngest children in particular is not always met.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## Regional disparity

Regional disparities are also an important issue when it comes to the availability of childcare services. In most countries there is a clear difference between the more urbanised and the more rural areas. In addition there may be large differences among regions. Classical examples are provided by Germany and Italy. The attendance rates for children aged 0–3 in day-care centres range from 4.5 % in Lower Saxony and 5.3 % in North Rhine Westphalia in the former West Germany, to 49.9 % in Saxony Anhalt and 36.6 % in the Free State of Thuringia in the former East Germany. In Italy, public childcare services cover over 20 % of children in some areas of the north (Toscana, Valle d'Aosta and Emilia-Romagna) but only 2 % to 3 % in some southern areas (Campania, Calabria and Molise). An atypical case is provided by Bulgaria. Here a massive migration from the rural areas towards to more urban parts has created an imbalance in supply and demand both in the rural and urban areas. Box 2 provides more details.

## Box 2. Regional disparities in availability of childcare

<b>BE</b>	There is a rather large difference between the French and Flemish communities. In addition, both communities contain an important degree of subregional disparity.
<b>BG</b>	There is a clear imbalance in the supply of childcare services, partly as a result of migration from the countryside to the big towns and the capital in particular. As a consequence, kindergartens in small towns and villages have been closed while in big towns there is a shortage of such services.
<b>DE</b>	While in the former West Germany only 8 % of the youngest age group attended a childcare facility, the rate was nearly five times higher in the former East Germany, at 39.8 %. For children aged 3–5 years there is still a difference, but it is less pronounced. All in all, living in the former East Germany or in a bigger city or in a densely populated region increases the chance for a place at a childcare facility.
<b>EE</b>	According to Statistics Estonia, the scarcity of childcare is a more serious problem in the urban areas, where there are longer waiting lists. Also, the childcare institutions in urban areas were working above their capacity; there were 107 children per 100 normative places in urban institutions and 99 in rural institutions.
<b>FR</b>	With regard to childcare services, big cities have a much greater coverage. The national average is 6.3 crèche places per hundred children under 3 years, whereas in Paris it is 23.9 (18.9 in the Paris region — Ile de France) and less than 2 in the Charente-Maritime département. Seven départements offer more than 10 places per hundred children, while 12 offer less than 2.
<b>IT</b>	In 2004 the share of children in day-care centres was below the 33 % target set by the European employment strategy in all the regions. Among the best performers are Emilia-Romagna, Valle d'Aosta and Toscana. In most of the other northern and central regions the share was higher than the national average. Veneto, Sardegna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Lazio reported values close to the average, while the worst performers are to be found in the south.
<b>LT</b>	There is a significant disparity in the provision and coverage of childcare between urban and rural areas. In terms of the proportion of children aged 3–6 years covered by childcare institutions the difference ranges from 92.5 % in urban areas to just 24.6 % in rural areas.
<b>HU</b>	The regional dimension of the problem aggravates the insufficient availability of childcare provision. The financial situation of municipalities in smaller settlements does not allow the operation of nurseries. Only 12–5 % of all settlements provide some form of childcare while 43 % of families with young children live in a settlement where nurseries are unavailable. Since 1 July 2005 it has been mandatory to operate nurseries in settlements of over 10 000 inhabitants. At present, 14 municipalities still fall short of meeting this obligation. Only in the capital and big cities do women have at least the possibility to have access to public nurseries.
<b>AT</b>	Although there has been a clear increase in the provision of childcare services throughout Austria, 20 % more crèche places are still on offer in Vienna than in the rest of the country. Vorarlberg has no crèches at all, with mixed-age childcare facilities frequently taking over the job of care for the under-3s. There are also marked differences across the provinces in respect of the provision of kindergarten places. In Carinthia and Styria enrolment was only 69 % and 77 % respectively, while in Lower Austria and Burgenland it amounted to 89 % and 95 % of all 3–6-year-olds.
<b>PL</b>	There is a significant regional disparity in the provision and coverage of childcare among regions. There is a regional variation in the proportion of children (0–2 years) in nurseries, ranging from the low of 1.04 % in Swietokrzyskie to 3.75 % in Opolskie. Disparity is also evident in pre-school care (3–5 years), where in 2005/06 the difference between urban (58 %) and rural (19 %) areas was substantial. The attendance has been as low as 4 % in rural areas of the Podlaskie region.
<b>PT</b>	The deficit of childcare services particularly affects the poorest families living in disadvantaged areas, in the periphery of the large cities — Lisbon and Porto. In general, in larger cities, the provision of childcare services is extremely scarce. In some cities, the gap is dramatic. This is the case in Bragança, for instance, the centre of a poor region in the northern interior of Portugal.
<b>SI</b>	The share of children who do not receive a kindergarten place is low but there are great variations between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, kindergarten capacities seem to be adequate, while in rural areas many parents are unsatisfied with the number of places available in kindergartens.
<b>SK</b>	There is a significant correlation between kindergarten attendance and the economic situation in a region. The highest figures (almost 97 %) are in the capital city region (Bratislava region) while in some poor eastern and southern regions with a high share of the Roma minority the rate decreases to 72 % to 80 %.
<b>FI</b>	Despite the subjective right to childcare, it remains a fact that local authorities are not always able to provide a day-care place in the form or at the time requested by the parents, although this is an obligation by law. Problems may occur especially in arranging an urgent place and/or shift day care. Furthermore, in some cases long distance may also present a problem.
<b>NO</b>	Currently, there is substantial geographical variation in coverage rates, in particular for 1–2-year-olds, varying between a high of 100 % and a low in the 30 % range in 2006.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## 2.4 Quality of childcare services

In addition to availability, the quality of the service provided is also of significant importance when it comes to parents' decisions to use childcare facilities. Although the Barcelona targets only refer to the quantity of childcare, several European documents emphasise that the need for childcare does not only refer to the availability but also the to affordability and quality of childcare services (see for example JER, 2004:47). Experts define the quality of childcare as those aspects that contribute to the social, emotional and cognitive development of the child. Usually a distinction is made between structural, process and contextual aspects of childcare (see Cleveland and Krashinsky (2004) for an overview). Structural aspects are aspects of the environment that can be regulated by the (local) government. These concern, for example, the group size, the staff-child ratio, the number of square metres that a day-care centre must provide per child, the education of the childminders, and safety regulations. Process aspects concern aspects of the group itself. Examples refer to the diversity of activities that are on offer and to the interaction between the childminder and the child. Contextual aspects, finally, concern the broader environment, such as the day-care centre in comparison to care at home.

Although the debate on quality is evident in many countries, there is a severe lack of harmonised statistics on this matter. The simple fact that many countries have different care facilities with different quality measures and requirements makes it a complicated situation to navigate. In this section we will concentrate on the following issues which

together should more or less cover the structural aspects of childcare quality: group size and staff-child ratio, labour market characteristics and the level of education, and, finally, quality maintenance and parental influence.

### Group size and staff-child ratio

Throughout Europe, group size ranges from 10 to 14 children for the 0-3-year-olds and from 20 to 25 children for the 4-6-year-olds. Childminders usually have a maximum of four to eight children. Regarding the staff-child ratio, this ranges in the youngest age class from 1:3 to 1:6.4 and in the older age class from 1:6 to 1:14. The staff-child ratio has been decreasing over the past years in some countries, such as Spain, Slovakia and Liechtenstein. Contrary effects regarding quality can be seen as well, for example in Sweden, where the average group size has been growing over the past years, or in Poland, where the maximum group size is not regulated yet. When interpreting these figures it has to be taken into account that they concern legal regulations; in practice there may be (slight) departures from these regulations, especially during the first or final hours of the day. There is, however, little information about the actual impact of quality regulations. One of the few examples is provided by Finland: it appeared that in 16 % of the municipalities, the staff-child ratio was not regularly followed. This is due to, for example, parents' irregular working hours, and/or the impossibility of finding short-term substitutes. Problems and temporary 'oversized' groups might also occur when family childminders fall ill and the municipality has to arrange 'substitute' care for the children. Box 3 summarises the details by country.

**Box 3. Information on group size and staff-child ratio in childcare arrangements**

	Group size	Staff-child ratio
BE	The maximum group size is 8 children in the regulated family day care.	In regulated family day care, the staff-child ratio is 1:4.
BG		The average ratio is 1:5.9 (in 2006).
CZ	In kindergarten, the average number of children per class in 2005/06 was 23.1.	The average ratio has been stable between 1989 and the present, at around 1:12-13 children.
DK		The ratio for 2-3-year-olds is 1:3 on average, whereas the ratio for 3-6-year-olds is 1:6 on average.
DE		Groups with children aged 0-2 years had on average a ratio of 1:6.4 in 2006, groups with children aged 3-5 had a ratio of 1:10, and groups with schoolgoing children a ratio of 1:10.5.
EE	Groups are divided into age groups. Crèche groups, aged up to 3 years, contain a maximum of 14 children, and nursery school groups, aged up to 7 years, contain at most 20 children.	There is one teacher and one assistant teacher per permanent group.
IE	Pre-school services in drop-in centres contain groups of at most 24 children.	In 2006, the regulations prescribe the ratio to be 1:3 for the 0-1-year-olds, 1:5 for the 1-2-year-olds, 1:6 for the 2-3-year-olds, and 1:8 for the 3-6-year-olds.

EL	A crèche group can contain 12 children. Nurseries (for children aged 2.5– 6) cannot exceed a maximum of 25 children.	In 2004, the overall child/staff ratio in public crèches and nurseries was 1:18.5.
ES	The average number of children per group of 0–3-year-olds is 14.1, and for 3–6-year-olds 21.	In 2005–06, the ratio was on average 1:10.
FR	Childminders can look after 4 children at most, whereas nursery schools contain groups of 28–30 children.	
IT		The ratio for 0–2-year-olds ranged from 1:5 to 1:6 (3–12 months) and 1:7 to 1:10 (age 1–3).
CY	The maximum group size in a kindergarten classroom is set at 16 children.	The ratio for childminders, crèches or nurseries is 1:6.
LV	The maximum group size for 0–2-year-olds is 12, whereas it is 24 for 3–7-year-olds.	
LT	The average group size is 10.	In 2005–06, the ratio was on average 1:10.
LU		
HU	The maximum number of children in a nursery group is 12, while this number for kindergartens is 25.	The ratio is 2:12 in nurseries and 2:22 in kindergartens.
MT	The 'home-based' provider can only look after a maximum of 6 children, including his/her own children.	The ratio is 1:3 for 0–1-year-olds, 1:5 for 1–2-year-olds, and 1:6 for 2–3-year-olds.
NL	The maximum group size is 12 for 0–1-year-olds, 16 for 0–4-year-olds, and 20 for 4–8-year-olds.	The ratio is 1:4 for 0–1-year-olds, 1:5 for 1–2-year-olds, 1:6 for 2–3-year-olds and 1:8 for 3–4-year-olds.
AT	Group sizes vary between the different provinces. For crèches, this varies between 11 and 14 children, for kindergartens it is about 20, and for childminders it is at most 5.	The ratio in crèches is about 1:5 and in kindergartens this is 1:14.
PL	The maximum number of children in a group is not regulated.	The ratio is on average 1:15.
PT	In crèches, maximum group sizes practised are 10–12 children, whereas 25 children are at most present in kindergartens. For childminders the maximum is 4 children, and in centres for out-of-school activities 20 children.	The ratio is 2:12 in crèches, 1:25 in kindergartens, and 1:15 in out-of-school activities centres.
RO		
SI	Groups contain at most 12 children aged 1–3, and at most 22 children aged 3–6.	The ratio is 1:9.6.
SK	Kindergarten groups contain on average 20.9 children per class. In kindergartens with Hungarian language the average group size is 17.	The ratio is 1:10.6.
FI	The standard of group size is not regulated for the moment, but the item is under discussion.	The ratio is 1:4 for 0–3-year-olds (full-time and part-time) and 1:7 and 1:13 for 3–6-year-olds (respectively full-time and part-time).
SE	Groups contain on average 16.7 children in pre-schools and 31.7 in leisure-time centres.	The ratio for pre-schools is 1:5.1, and for leisure-time centres this is 1:18.9.
UK	There are regulations set for childminders; for group care it is driven by staff ratios, although in practice a group care setting would usually have a maximum of 30–35 per room and often less, because there are space ratios set as well per child.	The ratio is 1:3 for 0–2-year-olds, 1:4 for 2-year-olds, and 1:8 for 3–7-year-olds.
IS		The ratio for childminders is 1:4.
LI	Public nursery schools have groups of at most 20 children, whereas the average is 15. Private day-care centres have an average between 10 and 13.	Nursery schools have a ratio of 1:14, and day-care centres a ratio of 1:5.
NO		Regarding pedagogical personnel, the ratio is 1:7–9 for 0–3-year-olds and 1:14–18 for children of 3 years and older.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## Labour market characteristics and level of education

The childcare labour market is characterised by a feminised workforce. In most countries, the vast majority of employees are female, although in some countries (Slovenia and the Netherlands) the top management positions may be occupied by men. Wages are often low, both in public and private day-care centres. Partly as a result of this, some countries experience a high turnover rate in the childcare sector. In the United Kingdom, for example, because poor conditions are present in the form of low wages, the average length of duration of employees is 3 years and 5 months, with a turnover rate of 18 %. Of course, this has a negative impact on quality, since steady and consistent members of staff are an important feature of high-quality services. In Finland, fixed-term contracts are widely used in the

childcare sector, and it seems that women in their 30s who became employed in the public sector at the end of 1990s, in particular, have problems in obtaining stable employment contracts.

Box 4 provides some information on the level of education of childminders. It appears that required qualifications range from personal skills to pedagogical degrees. In some countries childminders seem to have a rather low level of education; this appears to be the case in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Furthermore almost all countries have a large difference in education between nursery schools, pre-schools and crèches on the one hand and private childminders on the other hand. In the former group, strict requirements are often set and inspected by government. Private childminders, working from home, however, usually have a significantly lower level of education.

### Box 4. Educational level of childminders

<b>BE</b>	The minimum staff qualifications required differ to a large extent, depending on the community (Flemish and French), the form of care arrangement, and the specific professions in the care sector (teachers, nurses, etc.).
<b>BG</b>	In order to improve quality, staff education has been introduced, which is aimed at both working with children and improving management skills.
<b>CZ</b>	Pre-school teachers usually have an education at secondary vocational level, with a specialisation in pre-school pedagogy, or a university education.
<b>DK</b>	Staff qualifications differ and can range from personal qualifications (for childminders) to 1.5 years of basic educational training and 3.5 years of pedagogical education (in nurseries, age-integrated institutions and kindergartens).
<b>DE</b>	Education ranges from 3 years of vocational school-based training, a shorter training as a child nurse, a university-based higher education, and no vocational training at all.
<b>EE</b>	Childminders in childcare institutions are called teachers, and they have to have higher education or secondary vocational education with either a specialisation in pre-school education or additional courses of a pre-school education (160–320 hours)
<b>IE</b>	There is a lack of national minimum standards in education and training, but during the past few years there has been an increase in universities and institutes offering qualifications and degree courses related to childcare
<b>EL</b>	In both the public and private crèches and nurseries, the educators are mainly higher education graduates (from universities or higher technological education institutes) while their assistants have mainly finished post-secondary vocational education.
<b>ES</b>	The minimum required level of education for professionals to work in pre-school education services is a 3-year university degree in (pre-)school education or a professional qualification related to childcare
<b>FR</b>	In crèches, the staff are trained as paediatric nursing assistants (baccalaureate + 2 years of studies). Childminders have experienced many changes regarding their occupational status, but they can obtain a certificate or diploma nowadays. For nursery schools, the staff are also trained by the National Education Ministry.
<b>IT</b>	Pedagogic personnel have to be professionally trained to work with children. In the past they used to have a high school professional diploma and more recently a 3-year university degree in the field of pedagogy or child psychology and similar studies. In addition, a theoretical and practical traineeship is required.
<b>CY</b>	For a licensed crèche, the caregiver must hold the equivalent of an associate diploma, which can be obtained after 2 years at college or private universities. Caregivers that were already offering these services before the change in legislation can still carry out their work, in spite of not having the formal academic requirements. A kindergarten teacher holds the equivalent of a bachelor's degree of 4 years, which can be obtained from universities.
<b>LV</b>	Kindergarten teachers and teachers who provide education for children aged 5–6 years, in preparation for school, ought to have higher pedagogical education and qualifications than pre-school pedagogues/teachers. All these pre-school teachers need to take in-service training, of about 36 hours every 3 years. There are no official education and training programmes for private childminders.

<b>LT</b>	Teachers in pre-school education need to have secondary or higher education, related to pre-school education.
<b>LU</b>	Most of the people working in the care sector are qualified employees, with training that may differ by function (management, education, and cooking and cleaning).
<b>HU</b>	In nurseries, most workers have professional qualifications, mainly secondary vocational level. Most kindergarten employees are qualified as well, having undertaken three years of study in approved colleges. There are differences in quality depending on the size of the settlements, making the ratio of qualified personnel lower in smaller settlements than in larger cities. The Hungarian higher education system is currently in transformation, and this is expected to have an effect on the training of kindergarten teachers as well.
<b>MT</b>	Supervisors need to have training in management and administration, as well as a certificate in paediatric first aid. Other carers and people in home-based facilities need to have a recognised level of training and education in childcare.
<b>NL</b>	The minimum qualification requirement for childcare employees is relevant schooling at secondary vocational level. There is a debate about the necessity of increasing the quality of childcare services and this debate focuses in particular on the need to employ workers with a higher vocational education.
<b>AT</b>	Most childcare workers are educated at 5-year specialist schools at the upper secondary level or 2-year specialist training colleges at postsecondary level. Training for childminders is not mandatory in all provinces, and training standards can differ greatly between different regions.
<b>PL</b>	Pre-school teachers are treated the same as teachers in other educational programmes and thus are obliged to obtain pre-school teaching qualifications at the level of post-secondary education.
<b>PT</b>	Workers in crèches are teachers, who have received a 4-year university or polytechnic education, and nurses and social workers, who have had tertiary-level education. Kindergarten teachers also received a 4-year university or polytechnic degree. Teacher aides are only obliged to have secondary education, but training is now being introduced for them. Childminders are not legally obliged to have a secondary education, but they should be able to read and write, and vocational qualification programmes are being introduced.
<b>SI</b>	Pre-school teachers should possess an advanced or higher education degree, or a university degree. Assistants should hold an upper secondary technical qualification, whereas education counsellors should have a university degree in psychology, pedagogy, social work, social pedagogy or special and rehabilitation pedagogy.
<b>SK</b>	The compulsory education for a kindergarten teacher is tertiary schooling or special secondary education.
<b>FI</b>	Employees in day-care centres have at least a secondary-level degree in the field, and at least one in three has to have a tertiary level degree (Bachelor of Education, Master of Education or Bachelor of Social Sciences). Teachers in pre-school education have to have tertiary-level education. Within family day care the childminders' education is generally not in line with the requirements, but rather with personal qualities and know-how. Since 2005, new family day-care childminders are recommended to have a vocational degree.
<b>SE</b>	About half of the employees in pre-school and leisure-time schooling have higher education teaching qualifications. In family day-care centres, the educational level is much lower, and very few have a university degree.
<b>UK</b>	There are minimum qualification levels for workers in the childcare sector, divided into a level 3 qualification, to which senior managers belong, looking after the care or development of children. All full day-care supervisors should also hold a level 3 qualification. At least half of all the other employees should hold a level 2 qualification, all employees should have induction training and trainees under 17 should be supervised at all times. The qualification level of childcare employees is said to be relatively low, although improvements have started.
<b>IS</b>	Pre-school teachers and staff responsible for the pedagogical care are required to obtain a university degree, which means a 3-year education programme. Demand for pre-school educators has consistently exceeded supply, leading to most pre-primary schools having to rely on unskilled employees.
<b>LI</b>	There are no nursery school teacher and childminder training programmes, but teachers are trained mainly in Switzerland and to a lesser extent in Austria. Nursery school teachers are educated through a 3-year programme with a bachelor's degree. Childminders should complete an intermediate social training course, which is part of the upper secondary level.
<b>NO</b>	Childcare services have a lower share of employees with pedagogical qualifications than the other Nordic countries. Regarding private childminders and out-of-school care institutes (as offered by municipalities), there are no requirements regarding staff qualifications.

Source: National reports (March 2008).



## Quality maintenance and parental influence

A regular system of monitoring is another important aspect of quality childcare (OECD 2001). Most countries have an inspectorate agency, taking care of inspections and audits of quality. Some countries, such as Ireland, do not have a national inspection mechanism. Other countries that do possess such mechanisms sometimes experience informal arrangements as not receiving enough attention. In Cyprus, for example, all care-giving facilities, both private and public, at home and institutional, are subject to inspection by the social welfare office. In reality, however, most informal arrangements may not receive adequate attention. In addition to a government inspection mechanism, parents can influence policies by, for example, taking places on boards. This is done, for example, in Denmark, Estonia, and Ireland. In other countries, such as Iceland, parents cannot participate in the evaluation process. See Box 5 for more details.

### Box 5. Inspection of and parental influence with respect to childcare arrangements

BE	There are professional childcare coordinators who inspect the norms in childcare and support pedagogical practices. Moreover, parents are participating in the new quality system.
CZ	The Czech school inspectorate assessment establishes indicators and inspects the quality of pre-schools according to them.
DK	Parents can influence their children's childcare through the parents' board. On this board, staff members are also represented, and guidelines and frameworks are determined.
EE	Parents can sit on the board of trustees, together with representatives from the municipality or government, to ensure that the schooling and education provided at the childcare institution corresponds with the interests of the children.
EL	Local authorities carry out inspections of structures. Private crèches and nurseries are inspected by prefectures, and private kindergartens are inspected by the local offices of the Ministry of Education.
IE	There is no national inspection mechanism to assess quality outside the state-financed infant classes in primary schools. Parents can participate in the 'equal opportunities childcare programme', by taking place in one of the county childcare committees, together with other stakeholders, such as employers and government departments, to cooperate and coordinate on childcare in different regions, with the help of a 5-year strategic plan.
IT	The national law states that parents' representatives have to be in every day-care administrative committee. These committees decide and control, among other aspects, the internal rules, admissions and the pedagogical approach chosen. The personnel and municipalities are also represented on the committees. In some areas a provincial or regional-level committee monitors the service and is charged with monitoring and evaluating the quality of private accredited day-care every year. The local health authorities are responsible for hygiene and health issues in all day-care institutions.
CY	An inspection mechanism for all care-giving facilities has been introduced by the social welfare office, but in reality most informal arrangements do not receive adequate attention from the office, due to inadequate staff.
LV	The state education inspectorate examines the quality of pre-school education and sanitary and hygiene conditions.
PL	The educational programme for pre-schools is regulated by the Ministry of National Education, while the regional education superintendent offices supervise the educational functions of public and non-public pre-schools.
PT	Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity license, supervise and inspect the performance of crèches, centres for out-of-school activities and day-care centres.
SI	Parents can cooperate regarding the quality of kindergartens, and they have the right to participate in the planning of pre-school institutions.
SK	School inspections examine the quality of education in kindergartens and other institutions. Parents have been questioned about this recently, and have suggested a change in the organisation of the pre-school institutions.
SE	The National Agency for Education, as established by the government, inspects pre-schools and schools.
UK	Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is tasked with the inspection of childcare institutions, the examination of complaints and enforcement when requirements are not obtained. In addition, there are standards and inspections for registered childminders.
IS	The Ministry of Education is responsible for the inspection of pre-primary schools. Parents and children cannot participate in the evaluation process.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## 2.5 Affordability

In most countries childcare services are subsidised by one means or another. There are large differences, however, in the actual financial programme. Subsidies may be paid through direct payments to parents or providers, through tax concessions, reduction in social contributions or issuing a voucher for the purchase of services (Cleveland and Krashinsky, 2004). Partly as a result of these complex financial structures, but also because prices may differ by region or even municipality, assessing the affordability of childcare services proves to be a complicated matter. In trying to come to terms with the complexities of the financial structure, the OECD uses the concept of overall costs. This is 'a broad measure that aims to encompass all relevant cost components irrespective of their label or the way they are administered in a particular country.' It thus includes fees minus cash benefits, rebates and the value of any tax concessions (Immervoll and Barber, 2005: 12). The study shows that net childcare costs are high in many OECD countries: 'typical out-of-pocket expenses for two pre-school children can add up to 20 % and more of total family budgets' (Immervoll and Barber, 2005: 4). In this section, a strict comparison of the costs made by parents for childcare services is not possible given the information provided by the national reports. More qualitative information that is available on the issue of costs will be summarised instead.

### Macrodivision of costs

Thirteen countries provide information on the (macro) division of childcare costs between state, employees (parents) and employers. With respect to the parental contribution there seem to be three clusters. In the first cluster of countries, parents have a relatively low share in the costs (less than 25 %). Countries involved are Sweden, where parents seem to pay the smallest part (8 %), Hungary (10–15 %), Estonia (12 %), Austria (15 %), Finland (15 %), Belgium (Flanders) (17 %), Germany and the Netherlands (both 19 %) and Iceland (about 25 %). In another group, the parental contribution is about 40 %. Examples are Portugal (38 %) and Liechtenstein (40 %). The third cluster consists of two countries where parents pay a relatively high share: the United Kingdom (75 %) and Poland (80 %). It has to be noted that this concerns mainly the costs of childcare services for young children; in several countries, the costs of preschool services are much lower. It should also be taken into account that for several countries public funding is limited to public childcare. In Portugal, for example, in the case of private childcare, parents pay 95 % of the costs.

How the other part of the childcare bill is paid differs from country to country. Rather exceptional is the situation in the Netherlands, where employers pay a quite substantial part of the childcare bill (29 %). In the other countries it is mainly the state and/or local governments that finance the other part of the childcare bill. For example, in Austria out-of-family childcare is generally funded by municipalities, which cover about 60–70 % of the total funds for childcare. Provinces cover about 15–25 %. In Iceland public funding of childcare is in the hands of municipalities.

### Prices and affordability of childcare

The available information on prices and affordability of childcare is summarised in Box 6. In most countries the costs of a childcare facility depend upon family income. The Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) have set a maximum to the childcare fee. In Denmark, for example, parents pay a maximum of 25 % of costs for pre-school children and 33 % for school-going children whereas in Finland the maximum is EUR 200 for a full-time place. In some countries low-income groups may attend childcare for free. For example, this is the case in Italy, Cyprus and Finland. In other countries, however, such as Germany, low-income families pay relatively more than medium and high-income groups. In the United Kingdom those in the lowest-income quintile pay 20 % of their income on childcare on average, compared with 8 % for families in the highest income quintile. In addition, lone parents spend more of their household income on childcare than couples (16 % compared with 10 %).

Childcare is considered to be expensive in Austria, Spain, Ireland and United Kingdom. In Ireland the costs seem a particular issue for disadvantaged (single parent) families and higher income families with more than one child requiring childcare. In the United Kingdom a private nursery place is expensive; public nurseries are a bit cheaper but supply is limited. In some countries public childcare is quite affordable, but private childcare is expensive (e.g. Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia and Slovakia). In addition, the financing system may be disadvantageous for certain groups. In Denmark, for example, childcare payments are problematic for double-income working families that on average have a family income above the income limit for reduced childcare fees. In the UK, it seems that in particular the middle-income families face high costs. There are also positive developments, such as in the Netherlands and Norway, where costs of childcare have decreased, especially for medium and high-income groups.

**Box 6. Childcare costs for parents, by childcare arrangement**

	Price of childcare facility	Affordability
BE (Fr.)	Parents pay an income-related fee, of between EUR 1.99 and EUR 28.04 per day, which can be deducted for tax purposes. On average parents pay EUR 13.07 per day per child. The price of care out-of-school hours is highly variable depending on the type of care structure used.	
BE (Fl.)	Parental fees are income-related. In exceptional cases reduced fees or attendance free of charge is possible. Childcare costs are tax deductible until the child reaches 12 years of age. In 2006 parents on average paid EUR 12.39 for a full day's care in subsidised collective childcare for children aged 0–2. For out-of-school care parental fees vary between EUR 0.90 and EUR 4.47 a day.	
BG	The average monthly price for attending an all-day kindergarten with municipal ownership is BGN 40 (EUR 20). If the family has a second child attending this kindergarten, the price for the second child is BGN 10 less.	
CZ	The costs of childcare vary between pre-school facilities. Generally the costs are higher at nurseries than at kindergartens, and higher at private than at public facilities. Parents pay an income-related fee, which covers part of the institutional (non-investment) costs and the costs of meals and refreshments. At public nurseries, the institutional fee should not exceed 50 % of the real average costs.	The average family spends approximately 3–4 % of its income monthly on kindergarten, but single parent families spend around 6 % of their monthly income on it.
DK	Parents' fees are income-related and are free for parents on low incomes. A maximum is set at 25 % of the costs for pre-school children aged 0–5 years and 33 % for school-going children. The costs vary among municipalities and childcare arrangements.	Even though payment for childcare seems fairly low — especially for low-income groups — it puts extra pressure on a double-income working family, which on average has a family income above the income limit for reduced fees for childcare.
DE	Parents pay an income-related fee, which differs between communities and regions. Low-income households are charged relatively more than middle- and high-income households with reference to public childcare. Compared to the costs of public childcare, informal care arrangements are normally more expensive (with the exception of grandparents, sisters or other relatives).	
EE	The costs of childcare vary between municipalities. Parents pay the catering expenses. In addition, other costs (administration, staff, social taxes and teaching aid costs) are partially covered by parents. The share covered by parents may not exceed 20 % of the minimum wage. Starting from 2007, the local governments are paying benefits to compensate part of the costs of qualified childminders for parents whose children do not attend kindergartens or crèches.	In 2005, the average cost of public childcare facilities was 12 % of the national minimum wage and 4 % of the average wage.
IE	There is very little public funding of childcare, as a result of which costs of formal childcare facilities are high.	Costs are high — research reveals that Irish people are paying almost twice as much as the EU average for childcare. The costs of childcare are a particular issue for disadvantaged (single parent) families and higher income families with more than 1 child requiring childcare.

EL	Parents pay an income-related fee, which differs between communities and regions. Monthly fees in public crèches and nurseries do not exceed EUR 300, while in private ones they range between EUR 300 and EUR 600.	
ES	Private services are expensive.	The average annual expenditure on pre-school education and childcare services for cared children under 6 years old amounted to EUR 606 in 2005, which means nearly 9 % of the minimum salary established in the same year and 3.2 % of the average salary.
FR	Parents pay an income-related fee, with the actual prices depending on the use of a crèche, or own-home child carer or a childminder. If a family has an income above the equivalent of two times the minimum wage, the least onerous childcare solution is a registered childminder. When the household's income is equal to, or less than, two times the minimum wage, collective childcare establishments cost less.	
IT	Public childcare for children below 3 years is only partly subsidised. Parents pay an income-related fee, which differs between municipalities and regions. The maximum fees set by many municipalities are roughly equivalent to what is charged by some private day-care centres. Only poor households pay low or no fees.	
CY	Private childcare is the most costly. Communal childcare has more affordable fees, which are income related. The fees for state childcare, which is the least numerous, are also income-related and some children attend for free.	
LV	Parents pay for meals and managing expenses; the average price is about EUR 3.5 per day. Those families that receive low wages or are unemployed may apply for municipal support to cover the costs. In private (not subsidised) childcare centres the price is higher; around EUR 14 a day.	
LT	The average monthly price for attending all-day kindergarten with state or municipal ownership is LTL 120 (EUR 35).	
LU	Parental fees are income-related: for low and medium wages, state contributions amount to EUR 750 and EUR 10 000 per year. If the children are cared for in a formal structure, parents can take advantage of a reduction of the taxable income that amounts to a total of EUR 3 600 per year.	
HU	Public childcare services are heavily subsidised. In kindergartens only meals have to be paid for. The very few existing private childcare institutions charge prices that can be afforded only by high-income families.	
MT	There is little information on the affordability of childcare. The 2007 budget speech promises parents a deduction of EUR 932 from the taxable amount in the use of licensed childcare services.	

NL	For most income levels childcare services are highly subsidised. For households with an income of 130 % of the legal minimum wage, the price per hour for the first child is EUR 0.33 and for the second child EUR 0.19. In households where the earnings are three times the gross general income, the amounts are EUR 2.20 and EUR 0.46.	In the period 2005–07, the costs of childcare decreased substantially, particular for the medium and high-income groups.
AT	Both the cost of childcare and the financial support available vary in all of Austria's nine provinces. The minimum cost of childcare ranges between EUR 0 (free childcare in the mornings in Lower Austria, independent of household income) and EUR 480 (all-day childcare in private facilities including lunch and other extra costs) per month.	The relatively high cost of childcare in public facilities is one of the major points of criticism raised by parents.
PL	Often it is the local council that sets the level of fees charged by public pre-schools and nurseries. There is a wide variation within and between public and non-public facilities.	The cost of public care is quite high for minimum wage earners (24–35 %) and the cost of non-public care is virtually unaffordable (24–200 %). For individual earners of an average income the situation is rather affordable in the public domain (10–14 %), but less so in the non-public sector (10–79 %).
PT	Childcare services rendered by public or non-profit institutions are partially financed by the state; families pay a share according to their economic situation.	A family with a per capita income of EUR 403, corresponding to the minimum salary, pays EUR 121 for a crèche or pre-school for each child and EUR 81 for out-of-school care (per child), respectively. This means that a young couple that earns about EUR 1 200 will pay approximately 10 % of their income for the care of a single child. Most parents seem to consider the price for childcare as reasonable (74 %). About 20 %, however, consider it expensive or very expensive.
SI	Parents pay an income-related fee, the actual amount of which is defined by the municipality. Parents contribute 10–80 % of the costs. On average the parental contribution amounts to 25–30 % of the costs.	Prices of kindergartens are high compared to other EU countries.
SK	Parents pay an income-related fee, which differs between municipalities. The average monthly costs were about 8 % of the average Slovak net wage in 2007.	Public kindergartens are quite affordable (about SKK 1 250 per month; 97.5 % of children attending kindergarten attend a public kindergarten). Private nurseries are expensive (average monthly fee is about SKK 9 000).
FI	The local authorities charge a monthly fee, which is fixed according to family size and income level, ranging from EUR 18 to EUR 200 for a child in full-time day care. Families with low incomes are not charged at all. A small group uses private childcare arrangements and receives a private care allowance, which is paid directly to the carer but is applied for by the child's parents. The amount of the allowance is EUR 137.33 a month for each child (in 2008), and it may be increased by a separate income-related supplement, at maximum EUR 134.55 per child. In addition, some municipalities pay a municipal supplement.	The public day-care arrangements can be considered affordable for Finnish families, also from a comparative perspective.

SE	Parents pay an income-related fee, which may differ by municipalities. The maximum fee is set at 3 % of income for one child with a maximum of EUR 130 per month, at 2 % of income for the second child with a maximum of EUR 86 per month and at 1 % of income for the third child with a maximum of EUR 43 per month. For leisure-time centres a similar arrangement exists.	
UK	The government provides several forms of subsidy to parents for childcare costs. The most widely used one is via the funding of childcare provision, of which the one with the widest coverage is the free part-time pre-school nursery education place. There is also assistance with childcare costs for low-income employed families via the tax credits system, and for all employees if their employers adopt the tax-efficient childcare voucher system introduced in 2005.	Childcare is still expensive in the UK and parents continue to bear most of the cost despite the increased subsidies. In 2005 families spent 11 % of their income on childcare on average. This rose to 20 % for those in the lowest-income quintile compared with 8 % for families in the highest income quintile. Lone parents spent more of their household income on childcare than couples (16 % compared with 10 %).
IS	Fees for registered care in private homes differ extensively within and across municipalities. The municipalities subsidise the cost of each child in registered private home care.	The average regular monthly earnings are now about ISK 378 000. The amount a married parent with one child needs to pay for registered private home care is 12.5 % of the average regular monthly earnings while this ratio is 7.8 % for a single parent, disabled parent and a student with one child.
LI	Parents pay an income-related fee.	Whereas attending nursery schools is free of charge, full-time, year-round pre-school childcare is expensive.
NO	Maximum payment for a full-time place is approximately NOK 2 330; plans to lower the payment to NOK 1 750 have not yet been implemented. Payments vary according to municipality. A majority uses flat-rate fees, independent of the family's income; 23 % of the municipalities have income-graded fees.	Compared to the other Scandinavian countries, the price for day care has been rather high. The price reform has been most advantageous for high-income families that had expensive places in private institutions, while some low-income families actually have to pay more. Out-of-school care services are relatively expensive.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## 2.6 Acceptability

Quite apart from availability and affordability, cultural norms may also influence the demand for childcare services. It may not be generally accepted that parents make use of childcare facilities if the child is still very young or if the facilities are used for the whole day or the whole five-day working week. As Box 7 makes clear, in most countries attitudes vary according to the age of the child. Belgium and France are the only countries where childcare services seem to be generally accepted. In most other countries childcare facilities are generally regarded as positive for 'older children', but not for the very young. In some countries, such as Estonia, Greece, Slovenia and Portugal, this applies to babies until the age of (about) 1 year. In other countries the attitude is that children should not attend childcare facilities until they are at least 2 or even 3 years old. Germany, Austria, Italy and Cyprus are examples. Instead leave facilities or informal arrangements with a family member are preferred. In addition, the number of hours may be an issue. In the Netherlands and United Kingdom, for example, it is widely accepted that mothers work part-time and make part-time use of childcare facilities; a full-time use even for older children is still not accepted. In Sweden, where the use of childcare facilities for children above 1 year is generally accepted, there seems to be an informal norm that children should not spend too many hours in childcare. The same applies to Norway where the Children's Ombudsman has emphasised publicly that children should not spend too many hours in day care. Apparently, childcare and motherhood are still sensitive issues. Even in countries where childcare (for older children) is accepted and used on a large scale, as in the Nordic countries, occasionally 'good motherhood' and the well-being of children in childcare are topics of public discussion.

### Box 7. Attitudes towards institutionalised childcare

BE	The use of full-time childcare facilities is generally accepted after the end of the maternity leave (15 weeks).
BG	The use of childcare services for children over 3 years of age is generally accepted. Especially given the increasing birth rate, there is a growing demand for both public and private childcare services.
CZ	Public childcare services for children under the age of 3 are generally regarded as not appropriate for young children. For the future generation of 'potential' parents, nurseries are a more acceptable option than they are for the current generation of parents.
DK	Use of childcare is the norm. Childcare is also seen as a right for children to participate in play and education — as well as a right for parents to have proper and well-regulated care for the children. Only babies are supposed to be best cared for at home, which is also due to the tradition of (and pressure for) breastfeeding children.
DE	There are large differences between the former West and the former East Germany, with more positive attitudes in the former East Germany. People in both are becoming less sceptical about mothers' employment. The majority of the parents are interested in public childcare when the children are 2 years old.
EE	Childcare institutions seem to be generally accepted as a majority of families uses them. A study of mothers of young children showed that it is considered natural that a parent takes care of a child who is younger than 12 months. By the age of 3, children are considered to be less dependent on their parents, and kindergartens are viewed as an opportunity to meet other children of the same age
IE	Given the very low level of public provision of childcare and the high cost of private market childcare services, there has been little scope to establish a sense of the preferred or most acceptable system of care. Choice is highly limited and choices are constrained by high costs and a lack of flexibility.
EL	Public opinion disapproves of parents who take their child to the crèche before 1 year. The most common care arrangement for babies and infants of working parents is still at-home care by family members, usually grandparents.
ES	Childcare services are regarded as a useful and effective means for improving the reconciliation of work and private life, but with a rather limited scope, especially in the case of children under 3 years old. Grandparents (in particular, maternal grandmothers) still play a crucial role in covering the needs at the earliest ages.
FR	Using childcare facilities, including for babies aged 3–4 months, is considered as quite normal.
IT	For a long time caring for children was considered primarily a family responsibility, in particular for children below the age of 3 years. A new, more positive attitude towards formal childcare for young children is spreading.
CY	Childcare is generally accepted as an option although there is a hierarchy about what are considered best and worse options. Typically, the 'best' option would be the grandparents and close relatives. The most 'acceptable' age for a child to go to kindergarten is around 3 years.
LV	The attitude towards pre-school childcare is positive.
LT	It is still usual for family members (grandparents, relatives etc.) to take care of young children. Childcare institutions seem to be generally accepted for children aged 2 years and above.
HU	There is a general agreement that until approximately 18 months of age, the infant's physical and emotional needs are best served by parents at home.
MT	The majority of families consider grandparents as the most suitable arrangement for childcare after the mother.
NL	There are indications that childcare facilities are still not completely accepted in the Netherlands especially if the children are very young. In addition, the general attitude seems to disapprove full-time use of care facilities.
AT	Childcare facilities for children below the age of 3 years are still regarded with quite a lot of scepticism.
PL	Parents prefer to look after the youngest children at home. There is a wide acceptance of formal care/education for children who reach the age of 6 years. Recent attention to the education and socialisation benefits of formal care and to the reconciliation of work and family indicates that these attitudes may be shifting towards more acceptance.
PT	There is a rather positive attitude towards working mothers. In the first months of the child's life (at least until 12 months), mothers believe that collective institutions are not a suitable option, and prefer to leave the child with relatives.
SI	The use of childcare services is generally accepted as a support for employment of both parents for children over the age of 1 year, as financially supported parental leave allow parents (in practice mostly mothers) to take care for children up to this age.
SK	The pre-school facility is regarded as the ideal. Mother's care is the second most preferred option. This is in accordance with the standard 'Slovak caring pattern', which expects a mother to stay with her child until the child is 2–3-years-old and can attend kindergarten.
FI	Provision of public childcare is taken almost for granted. As a public service, children's day care has a very positive image. Most parents do not wish to take their baby (under the age of 1) to formal care. With respect to children aged 1–2 years, the debate on 'good motherhood' is occasionally raised in publicity.

SE	Children below the age of 1 are not in childcare, which is related to the fact that parental leave is 16 months. Some 93 % of parents with children aged 1–5 years were satisfied with the childcare situation. However, there is an informal norm that children should not spend too many hours in childcare.
UK	Due to the introduction of part-time pre-school places, it has become widely acceptable and normal practice for mothers of pre-school children to be employed part-time, and for parents to use formal childcare on a part-time basis for 3–4-year-olds, regardless of whether the mother is employed or not. Opinions are more mixed concerning the desirability of full-time formal childcare, and the use of formal childcare for children younger than 3.
IS	Most parents take it for granted that their children will enter pre-primary school at a very young age. Recently, there has been some discussion about the well-being of children who spend on average 8 or more hours a day at pre-primary schools, as well as of the role of parents in bringing up their children.
LI	The acceptability of out-of-family childcare has increased.
NO	In the past decade, the general normative climate has changed; people's attitudes are becoming increasingly favourable toward working mothers and public childcare. Traditional attitudes towards working mothers and negative views on childcare were more or less 'phased out'. Nevertheless, informal norms imply that 'good parents' do not fully use the hours of the contracted services.

Source: National reports (March 2008).

## 2.7 Summary and conclusions

An affordable and accessible quality childcare provision is extremely important for working parents. Throughout Europe, however, the availability, quality and affordability of childcare differs extensively. The EU-SILC data indicate that some countries have extensive formal centre-based arrangements (including education at pre-school), whereas others rely more on other arrangements (such as childminders and/or family, friends or neighbours). In the age category 0–2 years, the use of formal childcare arrangements varies from 73 % in Denmark to only 2 % in the Czech Republic and Poland. It appears that seven EU Member States (Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and United Kingdom) and Iceland and Norway have already met the Barcelona target, which states that Member States should provide childcare by 2010 to at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age. A comparison between the hours of formal and other arrangements indicates that in all countries, home and/or family based arrangements generally involve fewer hours than the formal arrangements.

The use of formal care arrangements increases with the increasing age of children. Within the age category 3 years to the mandatory school age, Belgium ranks highest, with a use of formal childcare arrangements of almost 100 %. At the other end is Poland, with a use of 28 %. The high user rate is to a large extent due to the inclusion of pre-school arrangements under the heading of formal arrangements and the high coverage rate of pre-school arrangements for children in this particular age category. According to the Barcelona target, the actual level of provision should be at least 90 % in 2010. It appears that nine Member States (and Iceland) meet the Barcelona target or score rather high. When interpreting these figures, it has to be taken into account, however, that in most countries pre-school is only part-time, as a result of which working parents still need additional childcare facilities which may be much less available.

A third age group concerns school children. The EU does not specify a target in the provision of care for this age category, although from the point of view of reconciling work and private life as well as ensuring the well-being and safety of children, such care is still needed. From the figure it appears that the coverage rates of formal arrangements are close to 100 %; only Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom score below 90 %. These relatively low scores do not seem to be in line with national statistics, though. In several countries the formal arrangements are supplemented by other arrangements, which again indicate that the formal arrangements do not cover a full-time working day.

When interpreting the EU-SILC figures it should be noted that the use of childcare facilities does not answer directly the question of whether demand is fully met. The actual demand for childcare is influenced by the participation rate of parents (mothers), levels of unemployment, the length of parental leave, the opening hours of school and the availability of alternatives like grandparents and/or other informal arrangements. More specifically, a score above the Barcelona target may be compatible with a large uncovered demand, just as a score below the Barcelona target may be compatible with full coverage. A clear example of the latter case is provided by Finland, where the coverage rate of formal arrangements for the youngest age category is 26 %, which is well below the Barcelona target of 33 %. Yet childcare facilities are not in short supply. In fact, since 1996, Finnish children under the school age are guaranteed a municipal childcare place, irrespective of the labour market status of the parents. In a large number of other European countries, however, high-quality and affordable childcare facilities, in particular for the youngest age category, are still in short supply. For children aged 3 up to the mandatory school age, supply is higher but the opening hours of the facilities may not always match working hours. Moreover, in most countries there are marked regional differences.



In addition to availability, the quality of the service provided is of significant importance when it comes to parents' decisions to use childcare facilities. Quality of childcare refers to aspects that contribute to the social, emotional and cognitive development of the child. The severe lack of harmonised statistics on this matter is problematic. More qualitative data indicate, again, a large variation across Europe. Staff-child ratios, for example, seem to differ widely between the European countries. Another aspect is the educational level of childminders. In some countries childminders appear to be rather poorly educated. Furthermore, in almost all countries there is a large difference in the education of care workers between those in nursery schools, pre-schools and crèches on the one hand, and private childminders on the other hand. For the former group, strict requirements are often set and inspected by government. Private childminders working from home, however, usually have a significantly lower level of education and, if regulated, the requirements are lower than for group care settings. Finally, most countries have an inspectorate agency, taking care of inspections and audits of quality. Some countries, however, do not have a national inspection mechanism.

Another important aspect with respect to the use of childcare is affordability. In most countries childcare services are subsidised by one means or another. There are large differences, however, in the actual financial pro-

gramme. With respect to the macrodivision of costs, the share that parents pay seems to vary from 8 % in Sweden to as high as 80 % in Poland. In most countries costs of childcare depend upon family income. The Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) have set a maximum to the childcare fee, and in other countries low-income groups may attend childcare for free. There are, however, also countries where low-income families pay relatively more than medium and high-income groups. In quite a few countries childcare is considered to be expensive. In addition, public childcare may be affordable, but private childcare is often expensive.

Quite apart from availability and affordability, cultural norms may also influence the demand for childcare services. In most countries attitudes vary according to the age of the child. Belgium and France are the only countries where childcare services seem to be generally accepted for even very young children. In most other countries childcare facilities are generally regarded as positive for 'older children', but not for very young children. In addition, the number of hours may be an issue, resulting in a part-time use of childcare facilities. Apparently, childcare and motherhood are still sensitive issues. Even in countries where childcare (for older children) is accepted and used on a large scale, such as in the Nordic countries, occasionally 'good motherhood' and the wellbeing of children in childcare become topics of public discussion.



## 3. Policy issues

Although the provision of childcare services has a rather high profile in a number of European countries, there is no uniform trend with regard to the level of facilities. Some countries have framed childcare as a social right; others are much more focused on leave provisions and/or childcare allowances. All countries, however, face the challenge of reconciling the interest of the parent and the child in a way that is both efficient and just from a social, demographic and economic perspective. Measures that allow parents to take leave when children are young, for example, will reduce the demands for childcare services at this particular stage of family formation. At the same time, if parents are allowed to remain on leave for a rather extended period of time, the costs to employers will rise and so will the cost of childbearing in terms of career opportunities. The real policy issue, therefore, is to find the optimal mixture of leave facilities, financial allowances and services, taking into account national circumstances. Another important issue refers to parental choice. In several countries, policies have been redesigned to allow parents to choose between the appropriate options, recognising that different parents will have different preferences (see OECD, 2007).

This chapter will contain an overview of the main policy issues with regard to the provision of childcare services (based on the situation in March 2008). The first section starts with the achievements and challenges in the provision of childcare services in the EU-27 and Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Section 2 takes a somewhat broader view and discusses the efforts of several European countries to (re)balance the particular policy mixture of leave facilities, financial allowances and services. Section 3 summarises the policy issues with regard to the quality of childcare services, whereas Section 4 contains a short overview of the recommendations several EU Member States have received within the context of the European employment strategy. Finally, Section 5 contains the summary and conclusions.

### 3.1 Childcare provision: achievements and challenges

#### Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland

In Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland, childcare services form an essential part of social policy. The provision of childcare services is rather extensive and, generally speaking, demand has been met. This does not imply, however, that there is no debate about the actual provision of childcare services. In Denmark, for example, a Family and Working Life Commission was set up in De-

cember 2005 with the aim to map and analyse the demands of a modern family both with regard to the labour market and the provision of public and private services. The commission published its main report in 2007, providing several recommendations on more flexible childcare services. Childcare institutions should for example, limit 'closing days' on ordinary working days, provide more childcare facilities for parents with shift work and/or flexible working times and ensure, where possible, that siblings attend the same day-care facility. As a consequence of the Family and Working Life Commission's report, the government has requested the municipalities to cut down on 'closing days' in the quality reform from summer 2007. The problem is, however, that the local authorities are responsible for the day-care cost, and as there is a commitment to not raise the taxes, the municipalities cannot cover higher expenditures to childcare by raising council taxes.

In Finland, it is also generally considered that day care subsidised with public money is a sustainable investment. Yet the reconciliation of family and work and the particular role of childcare facilities have become a major issue in public debate. The current day-care policy aims at encouraging families to use early education and care services in more 'individual' and 'flexible' ways, and when possible, only on a part-time basis, as an alternative to full-time care. The concern seems to be about parents who use day-care services even while staying at home themselves. In Sweden, on the other hand, the right to childcare has been extended to cover children of unemployed parents and parents on parental leave. As a result, the share of children aged 1–5 years who made use of childcare services with a parent on parental leave rose from 29 % in 1999 to 59 % in 2005, while the percentage of participating children with unemployed parents rose from 58 % to 81 %. Finally in Iceland, places at pre-primary schools run by the municipalities are in some cases only available to children aged 2 years and older. Hence, parents complain about high fees and a lack of places at pre-primary schools for children from 9 months to about 2 years old. In the policy statement of the Icelandic coalition government, it is stated that parental leave will be extended step-wise. However, the government has not yet announced when the extension will be implemented and how long it will be.

#### Norway, Belgium, France and Slovenia

In Norway, Belgium, France and Slovenia the level of provision is also relatively high, with policy focusing on full coverage. In Norway, the two overriding policy concerns in recent years have been accessibility and affordability: to provide enough places in day-care services, and

to make childcare services less expensive. These objectives have to a large extent been successfully achieved. While Norwegian municipalities are obliged to provide day-care services and out-of-school services, presently parents do not have a corresponding right to a place. The current government has stated that when there is 'full coverage' of day-care services, parents' right to day care will be introduced. In the spring of 2008 the government will present a proposition to the Parliament to introduce parents' right to a place in day care for their pre-school children. In Belgium, the creation of extra places in formal childcare has been announced. At the same time there are tight budget constraints, which make large investments less likely. In France during the 2007 Presidential election campaign a legal right to childcare was promised but the implementation of the actual measure has been postponed to 2012. Given that there are 1.44 million children under 3, both of whose parents work, the government has estimated that 350 000–400 000 additional places need to be created in order for such a right to be effective. In Slovenia, the availability of childcare services in recent decades is constantly improving, reaching a share of almost two thirds in the school year 2006/07. At the same time, a large proportion of childcare is performed informally on the grey market without any public control of the quality. The government aims to introduce registration of private childminders in order to formalise their work and thus to improve the quality of this segment of childcare.

#### The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany

The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany are clearly moving towards a fuller coverage of childcare services. In the United Kingdom, the national childcare strategy created an impressive expansion of formal childcare places. Between 1997 and September 2006 an estimated 644 000 new registered childcare places (net) were created in England. The National Audit Office estimated that during the period 1997–2004, private-sector nursery places for pre-school children would increase by 90 % and out-of-school and holiday scheme places for school age children would increase by 134 %. In the Netherlands, the provision of childcare services has also increased rather substantially and it is expected that the demand for childcare will increase further. The growth seems, however, to be under pressure, partly as a result of the budget deficit. As it is very unlikely that the government will be able to bear the costs without any change in policy, part of the costs may be shifted to the parents. In Germany, during recent years there has been some substantial progress with reference to extending the quantity and quality of subsidised childcare facilities, above all for children younger than 3 years. To reach the goal of 750 000 places for children under 3 years old (which would cover 35 % of all children of this age group), a yearly increase of 70 000 new places

is necessary from 2008 until 2013. In addition, employment would rise with 55 000 full-time employed skilled childcare workers and 42 000 full-time employed skilled childminders. This is an ambitious programme that is broadly supported by all societal groups. Nevertheless it is unclear whether these aims will be reached, above all because of the extremely heterogeneous responsibilities and childcare regulations in Germany

#### Luxembourg, Portugal, Italy and Spain

The level of provision is also increasing in Luxembourg, Portugal, Italy and Spain, although at a somewhat more moderate pace. In Luxembourg, the provision of childcare services has increased, mainly because of the development of the '*maison relais*'. *Maisons relais* offer mainly out-of-school-hours care, such as school catering, assistance with homework, temporary care and holiday activities and/or camp. In Portugal there is also an evident effort to increase the availability of childcare services. The announced target is an increase of 50 % of crèches within the next 5 years. The main obstacle to improving the provision of childcare is the tight public budget. The scarcity of formal childcare for young children in Italy is particularly due to cultural factors that still persist in the country, as well as to the structure of the Italian care regime, which relies more on financial transfers than on the supply of services in kind. However, a new, more positive attitude towards formal childcare for young children is spreading. Encouraged by the European employment strategy, policymakers at different levels of government are devising policies to meet the demand for day-care centres, following the example of those regions that have been successful in organising the supply of such services. The supply of day-care centres is thus increasing, albeit at a slow pace. The proposed target is a 15 % coverage for children aged 0–2 years, on average, with a minimum coverage of 6 % to be reached in all regions. In Spain, there is a genuine commitment by public authorities to increase the availability of services as well as to guarantee affordable prices. In this regard the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues has launched a programme of subsidies to help autonomous communities finance new childcare services.

#### Greece, Austria, and Liechtenstein

Greece, Austria and Liechtenstein also experienced some growth in childcare services, although from a relatively low starting point. In Greece, the adoption of the European employment strategy and the availability of funds through the second and third Community support frameworks (funded by the European Structural Funds in Objective 1 regions, to which all Greek regions belonged until the 2004 EU enlargement) have coincided with an intensive effort to extend and improve public childcare services. This effort constitutes the cornerstone of reconciliation policy in Greece in

recent years. In Austria the issue of childcare services has always been seen in the context of family policies. Thus while leaving the labour market is relatively easy and is funded for an extended period of time, childcare services are still in short supply — despite an increase in availability over the last decade. A major obstacle regarding the improvement of childcare services in terms of both quality and quantity is Austria's federal structure. There is little agreement regarding the need and the quality of criteria for childcare services, reflecting historical developments as well as different political opinions. Also in Liechtenstein, a major obstacle regarding the improvement of childcare services is that policy is still oriented towards traditional gender arrangements: increasing the female participation rate has never been one of the government's political objectives and the debate around issues of reconciliation only started a few years ago.

#### Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia and Malta

In other countries developments are extremely limited — perhaps virtually non-existent. This seems to be the case in Cyprus, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia and Malta. In Cyprus the main obstacle to improving childcare services is at the political level, as well as the cultural expectation that grandparents will replace the state's lack of provisions. In Estonia, some actions have been taken to improve the availability of public childcare, mainly by increasing state financing. In addition, some steps have been taken to encourage alternative private childcare, as the private sector has been very insignificant in providing childcare so far. Obstacles to improving the availability of public childcare have included the division of responsibilities between the state and the municipalities and insufficient funding. Although several initiatives have taken place, Ireland's public childcare system remains underdeveloped. In the context of a chronic shortage of provision, little attention has been paid to childcare services from the perspective of the child, the implementation of a system of quality care, and the need for access to early childhood care and education, particularly for low-income households. Despite some discussion on granting a pre-school child place for those aged 3–4 years, as specified under the Barcelona targets, no specific initiatives have yet been put in place to achieve this objective. Also in Latvia there is a lack of policy as regards childcare. The provision of childcare services is low, especially for the youngest age category. Policy seems concerned with the falling fertility rate rather than the reconciliation of work and private life. Malta is still without a legal framework that regulates childcare centres. There have been several statements from governments over the years about what they see as the crucial importance of national childcare for the well-being of children and gender equality, in particular. However, to date there has not been an attempt to discuss or design a national policy for childcare services.

#### Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania

Finally, there is a group of countries that experienced a clear downward tendency with regard to childcare facilities during the 1990s. This concerns Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. In some of these countries the (economic and social) climate for childcare services has improved over the last few years but in others shortages remain, partly because of ideological reasons and partly because of a lack of financial means. A positive change is, for example, visible in Hungary. After a long period of decline, the current Hungarian government has a strong commitment to improve the availability and quality of childcare services. Strategic documents and action plans of the government reflect a significant reordering of priorities, including a weight that is greater than previously attached to early childhood development and childcare provisions. However, in spite of all efforts (including the creation of new types of services such as the integrated childcare facilities), the Barcelona target for the younger age group cannot be met in the medium term. In the Czech Republic an important cause of the critical shortage of childcare services for children under the age of 3 is the prevailing conviction that this care should ideally be provided by the mother. Also in Lithuania the policy with regard to the provision of childcare services is rather hesitant. A considerable decrease in the birth rate, the rise of the price of childcare services, ideological reasons (women 'returning to the family') and the notion that 'the child has to grow at home until he is 8' all contribute to a low demand and supply of childcare services.

In Slovakia, family policy aims to strengthen the role of women as a mother and caregiver. The planned measures in this field are therefore targeted towards supporting childcare within the family. Much less attention is paid towards supporting childcare services and out-of-school-hours care. In contrast, in Poland in recent years there has been a lively political and policy interest directed at the education of young children at the pre-school level. The need to invest in nurseries has been recognised, but there are few concrete plans yet. The main obstacle is therefore not political consensus on the issue, but still limited financial resources. The ESF has proven a valuable source of funding for the development of care facilities or programmes, but the low starting points show that more is needed from domestic budgets. In Bulgaria, before the transition to a market economy, the state and the employers were primarily responsible for social services; today the responsibilities are divided between families, the state, and municipalities (with parents being the main carers). In addition, grandparents play an active role in the care of young children. Finally, the services offered to children have been seriously reduced in Romania as well. In terms of social policy, there is a need to reconsider the priorities in the system of child protection, to change the legislation regarding institutionalisation, and to improve coordination among the support programmes for children.

## 3.2 Rebalancing time, money and services

The provision of childcare services is an important element of modern social policy. When the focus is on (young) families, however, there are also other instruments by which policymakers may try to influence the working, living and caring patterns of their inhabitants, such as leave facilities and financial allowances. In fact current day-care practises and debates seem to concentrate on two different models. The first model can be called the parallel model: after a period of parental leave parents have the choice between childcare provisions or a home care allowance which may be conditional on not using childcare facilities and may typically last for several years. Although this model ranks highly from the perspective of parental choice, one of the drawbacks may be that differences between families and/or men and women in working and caring patterns increase. The other model is a more sequential one: after a period of leave, most parents opt for childcare services. Here the policy issue refers to the optimal length of the leave facility. From a narrow labour market perspective, the optimal level of leave seems to be around 4–6 months in total (Jaumotte, 2003; OECD, 2007). Yet in terms of child development or overall fertility it may be important to extend this period. Finland, France, Sweden, Denmark and Norway illustrate the pros and cons of the parallel model; the debates in Estonia, Portugal, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands concentrate on the optimal design of the sequential model.

### Debating the parallel model: examples of Finland, France, Sweden, Denmark and Norway

Finland, France, Sweden, Denmark and Norway provide five examples of the complex trade-offs within family policy. In the Finnish case, each family is entitled to 44 weeks of paid leave (including maternity leave). After the parental leave period, each family is entitled to a (paid) home-care allowance, enabling the parent to stay at home to care for his/her child with full job security until the child is three years old. The home care allowance is financed out of the municipal day care budget. The basic allowance is EUR 294.98 (2008) and if the family includes more than one child aged less than 3, an additional payment of EUR 94.09 is made. If the siblings taken care of at home are older, but still under school age, an additional payment of EUR 60.46 is made. The child home care allowance can be complemented by a supplement that varies according to the size and monthly income of families (EUR 168.19 a month maximum). Some municipalities, especially the larger ones, also pay a local government supplement as an attempt to reduce the demand for the more costly municipal day care. Parents can also choose private day care instead of public day care. In this case they can apply for a private care allowance, which is paid to the private carer. In 2006, home care or private

care allowances were paid for 32.8 % of all children aged 9 months to 6 years, and 56.7 % of children aged 9 months to 2 years.

The Finnish day care system has been developed with the aim of lowering the demand for expensive childcare services for young children and offering families a number of different options, allowing them to choose what suits their individual needs best. It appears, however, that the system creates certain incentives which may not be in line with the overall policy. The additional supplement which is paid for older siblings under school age, for example, creates a financial incentive for not taking older children to childcare either. Indeed, there may not be much choice in a context in which the labour market is strongly segregated by sex and where parental obligations have remained gendered. As a result, use of public childcare subsidies is dependent on the families' socioeconomic situation. Families with low incomes and less education more commonly use the home care allowance, whereas the private care allowance is most popular among parents with higher incomes, higher education and a good labour market position. For that matter, the OECD has criticised the Finnish system for allowing long leave periods for women, which is seen as weakening their career opportunities and making the goal of gender equality harder to attain. On the other hand, proponents could claim that the system has a positive impact on fertility and that only a minority of women take advantage of the whole home care allowance period.

In France, families are entitled to parental leave of 36 months (including maternity leave). This leave period is paid at a rate of approximately EUR 500 per month for a second or subsequent child (CLCA or ex-APE). More than half of the families, however, make use of childcare facilities when the baby is 3–4 months old — that is to say after the end of maternity leave. In the absence of a sufficient number of childcare facilities, many of these families try to find individual solutions. The consequence of this particular set of policies is, above all, a process of polarisation. Given the specific incentive structure, mothers with (very) low pay 'choose' to withdraw from the labour market until childcare is free of charge (i.e. nursery school at 2 years). As a result only 20 % of the poorest mothers with a young child are active in the labour market, compared to 70 % of well-off mothers. Moreover, there are more larger families (with three or more children) amongst poor families and this makes their situation even more complicated. Poor households, where both parents continue to work, generally have more constraints regarding their work schedules (work at weekends, at the end of the day, in shifts). These families make less use of paid childcare (56 % of poor families, compared with 91 % of well-off families) and have to use informal networks (family and neighbours, etc.). Finally, the choice of part-time work in order, for example, to look after one's children on Wednesday (when nursery schools are closed) occurs more amongst the well-off than the poor, because of the costs involved.

In Sweden a parental allowance is paid out for a total of 480 days (16 months) when a child is born or adopted. Each parent has 60 days' leave which can be allotted as determined by their benefits-based income and which is reserved specifically for them and cannot be transferred to the other parent. The parental leave means that there is no demand for childcare for children below the age of 1 and this is also true for a large proportion of 1-year-olds. The new government intends to open the way for municipalities to introduce child-raising allowances from 1 July 2008 so as to increase opportunities for parents with children aged 1–3 years to be at home longer after the end of their parental leave. The municipalities that want to do so will be able to give a tax-free child-raising allowance. A full child-raising allowance is conditional on the child not using any publicly funded childcare. Also in this case, the introduction of a child raising allowance might mean enhanced differences between different groups. If less-educated and/or foreign-born mothers are among those who choose a child-raising allowance instead of a place in childcare, the differences might increase between such mothers and highly educated and/or Swedish-born mothers and also between their children. In addition some fear that the municipalities will introduce the child-raising allowance to keep demand for childcare down and that the quality of childcare will deteriorate.

Finally, Denmark and Norway provide two interesting examples of a rather unsuccessful introduction of a parallel model. In Denmark in 2002, a subsidy to care for one's own child in the age category 24 weeks to 6 years was introduced. As it was perceived that the subsidy would most likely be used by women and/or could weaken the integration of immigrant and low-income groups in the labour market, the access to the subsidies was restricted to persons not receiving unemployment or any other form of benefit and who had lived in Denmark for 7 out of the last 8 years. Data for 2007 suggest that only 0.2 % of all children in the relevant age group are taken care of by this specific arrangement. The low take-up is partly explained by the rather low level of the home care allowance and partly by the refusal of the largest municipalities (Copenhagen, Århus and Aalborg) to use the system, given the interest and needs of the child. The home care allowance scheme is not very popular in Norway either. Since 1998, Norwegian parents with children aged 1–2 years who do not attend publicly funded day-care services receive a monthly cash benefit, currently NOK 3 303 (about EUR 400). The huge expansion in day-care services for children aged 1–2 years has been followed by a parallel decline in the proportion of parents receiving the cash for care benefit. While 71 % of parents with children aged 1–2 years received the cash for care benefit in 2002, the proportion had declined dramatically to 41 % only 5 years later. Also, the proportion receiving a full benefit shows a declining trend. This development is contrary to expectations of the cash for care reform, which was expected to

lower parents' demand for childcare. Apparently, Norwegian parents value childcare services, which has not been fully acknowledged within the policy process.

### Reshaping the sequential model: examples of Estonia, Portugal, Ireland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and Germany

In several countries changes in the duration and/or payment of leave facilities are planned or have recently been carried out. Sometimes the policies aim to attune leave policies with the supply of childcare services, sometimes to improve the labour market participation of (particularly) women and sometimes to favour family life. Estonia is a clear case of an improved tuning between leave facilities and care services. Since 2004 there has been paid parental leave, which, in combination with maternity leave, covers 365 days. The majority of crèches, however, are only available to children aged 1.5 years and above, implying a gap between leave and care facilities. The parental benefits have been prolonged several times. Since 2008 there has been fully paid maternity and parental leave for 575 days. In Portugal the maternity leave was extended from 120 to 150 days in 2005, thereby diminishing the pressure on childcare services. In spite of receiving the same amount of money in total, whether taking 120 or 150 days leave, mothers increasingly choose the longer period. In addition, the level of child benefits has increased, while a pre-natal family benefit, helping women during pregnancy, was introduced in 2007.

A lengthening of leave facilities is also foreseen in Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In Ireland, the extension of maternity leave increased paid leave from 18 to 26 weeks in 2007 and there is an entitlement to a 16-week period of unpaid leave. In addition, maternity leave payments have been increased from 70 % to 80 % of reckonable earnings. There has also been a rise in parental leave entitlement which, while it continues to be unpaid, can potentially be combined with maternity leave to establish a new leave entitlement of 56 weeks for women following childbirth (or adoption). Of these weeks, 26 are paid at 80 % of pay (for those with a sufficient employment record). Somewhat similar developments seem to have taken place in the Netherlands. Since 2005, parents who take up parental leave and who participate in the so-called life course scheme have access to an extra fiscal facility of 50 % of the minimum wage for the statutory period of parental leave. In addition, the new government has announced plans to increase the period of parental leave from 13 to 26 weeks. In the latest Policy Note Emancipation it is stated that the length of 26 weeks is chosen so that working parents, when taking up parental leave, can take care of their child during his/her first year. Dependent on take-up rates, this might reduce the demand for childcare, in particular in the first year of the child's life.

The United Kingdom also seems to be in a transitional phase with regard to the optimal mixture of time, money and services within family policy. Along with the expansion of childcare, the government has introduced a series of reforms and initiatives concerned with leave facilities. Statutory maternity leave has been lengthened and the level of financial support rose in three stages of reform starting in 2002. It is now possible for mothers to take up to 1 year of maternity leave, of which 39 weeks (9 months) are paid (6 weeks at 90 % of earnings, and the rest a flat-rate statutory maternity pay). Statutory paternity leave was introduced in 2003. It is paid for 2 weeks for most fathers at the same rate as statutory maternity pay. The government has stated that it intends to introduce 12 months of paid maternity leave by 2010 (but the implementation has not been confirmed to date). Additional paternity leave and pay is also due to be introduced. This will enable employed fathers to take up to 26 weeks of additional paternity leave during the second 6 months of the child's life. Some of the leave can be paid if the mother of the child has returned to work (and in effect has transferred some of her leave entitlement to the father). In addition, another important development was the introduction of the right to request reduced or flexible working hours in 2003, which was first introduced for parents of young children and has now been extended to include carers of adult dependents.

In contrast, the Czech Republic and Germany, where the period of leave used to be rather long, have introduced policies to shorten the actual use of leave facilities. In the Czech Republic the explicit aim is to increase female labour market participation and to further their gradual return to the labour market after having children. In 2008 a 'multi-speed parental allowance term' was introduced. Parents can choose from three 'speeds' of parental leave with a correspondent level of parental allowance: 'faster' for 2 years with a monthly payment of CZK 11 400 (about EUR 460), 'normal' for 3 years with a monthly payment of CZK 7 600 (about EUR 300) and 'slower' for 4 years, again with a monthly payment of CZK 7 600 for 3 years and of CZK 3 800 (about EUR 150) for the 4th year. The maximum length of parental leave was unchanged, at 3 years, as was the option of allowing parents to alternate in caring for the child. This measure seems to be progressive in the direction of reducing the duration of the use of parental leave and increasing the financial support for care. However, the condition for the 'faster' option is that the parental allowance cannot be greater than the maternity allowance (in the period of maternity leave — until a child reaches the age of 6 months), which is calculated as 69 % of the previous wage. The 'faster' option for collecting the parental allowance can thus only be adopted by women whose wages before maternity were at least CZK 16 000 a month (EUR 650, about 75 % of average income in the Czech Republic). Low-income women are therefore 'constrained' to collect the parental allowance for 3 or 4 years. As a result, inequalities among women might increase.

Leave facilities have also been changed in Germany with the aim to improve the labour market attachment of women. After a long and controversial political debate a new parental allowance act came into force in January 2007. Parents still have the right to parental leave for a maximum of 3 years, but the parental allowance during leave has changed. The parental allowance now is 67 % of the previous gross earnings (with a minimum and maximum) for the parent on leave and is paid for 12 months; if the other partner takes the leave as well, 2 additional months are conceded. It is assumed that due to the new regulation on parental allowances the demand for formal childcare will increase noticeably after 1 year of parental leave as (above all) mothers are expected to return earlier to gainful employment.

### 3.3 Policies with regard to the quality of childcare services

Policies do not only refer to the availability of childcare services; the quality of the service provided also raises important policy concerns. It is commonly recognised that the tasks of the staff in childcare services have become more complex and demanding from a pedagogical, social and societal point of view. Rapid and continuous structural, cultural and economic changes in society have implications for the lives of children and their families. Moreover, the increasing impact of research on early education also contributes to more challenges. At the same time, tight budget constraints and the aim to increase the flexibility of childcare infrastructure may lead to decisions that are not completely in line with quality considerations. This section presents the information available about the current policy issues with regard to quality. Two issues seem to be at stake: the qualification level of the childcare workforce, and quality control and maintenance.

#### Qualification level of childcare workforce

Key challenges with regard to childcare infrastructure are the low pay and low status of personnel, in combination with rather low training requirements. In several Member States childcare workers are known as the 'lesser educators' in comparison with teachers. Raising the level of training would enhance their status and bring their profession more in line with that of teachers. In effect, several countries are trying to raise the level of qualifications. In Slovakia, for example, it has been suggested that the qualifications of kindergarten teachers be raised to at least the first level of tertiary education by 2020. In Finland, the Advisory Board for the Early Childhood and Education Centres has expressed concern about the educational level of staff, as currently only one in three has to have a bachelor's or master's degree. According to the propositions, in the future one in three of the childcare work force should have a Bachelor or Master of Educa-



tion degree, one in three at least Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Social Sciences and one in three a vocational qualification, e.g. as a practical nurse. In addition, family day-care providers should have at least a vocational degree. Yet another example is provided by the United Kingdom, which announced reforms in its 'children's plan' to improve the qualifications of the childcare work force. One of the objectives is that every day-care setting will be led by a graduate 'early years professional' with a degree-level qualification by 2015, with two graduates per setting in disadvantaged areas. Currently, leaders at children's centres are required to attend the 1-year integrated leadership programme which is being piloted.

In Spain, the main policy development regarding the enhancement of quality has been the inclusion of childcare services within the formal education system, distinguishing two different stages in infant education: the first one is for children under 3 years and the second for children aged 3–6 years (which is free of charge). The previous model made a distinction between pre-school education (for children under 3 years old) and infant education (3–6 years old), in which the former did not have a formal education approach. In the new model, the first stage of infant education acquires a universal character in which full schooling is intensively promoted by public authorities. The implications of this reform in terms of quality are evident, as new and more demanding pedagogical requirements are included in the curriculum for this stage. Nevertheless, the reform is only in its preliminary phase, as the new Framework Law on Education was approved in July 2007. In Liechtenstein the so-called Child Care Ordinance was adopted in 2002 to provide a legal basis for ensuring the quality of care outside the home. In addition the average group size in nursery schools and private day centre-based services has been reduced. With regard to nursery schools, the minimum qualification needed to be employed as a nursery school teacher has been upgraded. Since then childcare facilities and private care arrangements ('*Tagesmütter*') must obtain a licence. A somewhat less positive example is provided by Greece, where quality standards differ between nurseries and kindergartens with respect to the qualifications of the educators of children aged 4–6 years. The law allows nurseries to hire educators who are secondary education graduates if there is a scarcity of educators with higher education degrees. This has led nurseries, especially the private ones, to use less qualified teaching staff than those that are employed by kindergartens for children aged 4–6 years. After pre-school education became mandatory for children aged 5–6 years, the state asked nurseries to hire educators that are higher education graduates for children of this age group. However, legislation has not yet made this request mandatory.

There are also several examples of countries that try to set certain quality levels with regard to childminders. In 2007 in Estonia, for example, the Social Welfare Act was amended

with the definitions of childminder and childminding and requirements for childminding premises. Establishing the childminders' qualification improves the quality of childcare as the professional certificate provides a parent with a certainty that the person is qualified enough to care for the child professionally. The situation of registered childminders has also been improved in France and Portugal, as they now have a proper status, a recognised training, and are monitored by the health services and the social security offices, respectively. Slovenia introduced the concept of childminder in its new Law on Kindergartens. The increased registration of childminders aims at improving the quality of this largely grey market. Critics claim, however, that the formalisation of private childminders (with lower qualifications and/or working in premises of lower quality) could be seen as an alternative and not as a supplement to the public childcare services. Finally in the UK childminders and other home-based child carers will be able to access professional support and continuous professional development through 'Sure Start' children's centres and other childcare providers.

### Quality control and maintenance

Control over the curriculum is one way through which government can exercise some quality control. According to the OECD (2007: 146): 'Unlike the centrally imposed primary school curricula, childcare and pre-primary curricula frequently are relatively short, allow for local interpretation (e.g. in Nordic countries where decentralised responsibility is part and parcel of childcare, education and health service delivery and policy development), provide guidance to professionals, promote parent–staff communication, identify general quality goals and indicate how they may be attained.' Examples of the development of curricula are provided by Germany and Ireland. In Germany, since the mid-1990s there has been a debate on quality standards in the field of day-care centres which in particular has been brought about by the publication 'Quality targets in services for young children: Proposals for a 10 year action programme' (1996) of the European Commission Childcare Network. So far, however, there are no general regulations on instruments and procedures to examine quality. Rather it is a *Länder* affair, with each *Land* having a new *Bildungsprogramm*, which varies in length between 12 pages in Thüringen up to 250 pages in Bavaria. Trying to qualify the programmes, most of them are programmatic-pedagogical, as in Bavaria, Berlin and Brandenburg. In Ireland, in 2006, the Centre for Early Childhood and Education (CECDE) launched *Síolta*, the national quality framework for early childhood education, based upon the idea that early childhood education and childcare are not necessarily separate concepts but are rather inseparable elements in a child's life requiring a common set of quality standards which span a diverse range of settings (Schonfeld, 2006). *Síolta* published in 2007 a set of four different manuals creating for the first time a national quality standard. The

manuals are for full and part-time daycare, infant classes, childminding and sessional services — all fundamentally similar but including various specificities relevant to these four identified areas of the sector. While the *Síolta* guidelines create the closest thing Ireland has seen to a policy on childcare quality, these guidelines have not yet officially become policy and are currently undergoing a consultation process within the sector

Monitoring is another important dimension of quality control. In Portugal the state plays a proactive role: it has promoted the mainstreaming of an evaluation and monitoring organisational culture, namely by publishing a reference manual on quality procedures and a manual of quality procedures. The indicators suggested for monitoring and evaluation are related to working processes (leadership, planning and strategy; staff management; mobilisation of resources and partnerships; working procedures), and outcomes attained (satisfaction of customers and of personnel; impact on community/society; results of performance). The evaluation will be conducted by an external entity, properly certified to perform that task. Once evaluated a facility can obtain three grades: A and B are the highest grades and are voluntary; they help to differentiate different facilities according to the high standards of the services provided; grade C compels the adoption of predefined quality procedures, and will be considered the minimum level to guarantee state funding. Formally this system seems to have the potential to regulate the quality of childcare services, but it is still too soon to evaluate its effectiveness. In the United Kingdom, a new single framework for promoting quality through regulation, registration, inspection and enforcement has emerged, with the national Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) replacing local authorities as the lead agency responsible for childcare standards. Local authorities retained the support functions of providing information, advice and training, and acquired new legal responsibilities to raise the quality and availability of childcare under the 2006 Childcare Act.

### 3.4 The response to the recommendations given at the EU level

The final section of this policy chapter covers the country-specific recommendations and points to watch, issued by the Council of the European Union as part of the Lisbon package. Box 8 provides an overview of the country-specific recommendations (CRS) and the point to watch (PTW) over the period 2000–08. It appears that Germany and the United Kingdom received a CRS or PTW rather frequently, but have been removed for the year 2007–08, because their progress with respect to childcare was considered sufficient. Currently, 7 Member States have received a point to watch on childcare: Ireland, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Austria, and Poland.

#### Box 8. Country-specific recommendations or 'points to watch' with respect to childcare

Year	Country-specific recommendation	Point to watch
2007–08		IE, ES, IT, LT, LV, AT, PL
2006–07	IT	DE, IE, ES, LT, LV, AT, UK
2005	No recommendations adopted	
2004	DE, IE, MT, NL, AU, UK,	
2003	DE, IE, AU	
2002	DE, EL, IE, AU, PT, UK	
2001	PT, UK	
2000	UK	

Source: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/employment\\_strategy/recomm\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/recomm_en.htm)

In several Member States the European employment strategy proves to be of importance regarding the provision of childcare services. In Germany, for example, the Barcelona targets play an important role in (the discussion on) the expansion of childcare. Although the so-called point to watch on childcare has been removed because of the progress made, the Barcelona targets are still referred to in current discussions. In Italy the European employment strategy has encouraged policymakers at different levels of government to implement policies to meet the demand for day-care centres. In the 2007 recommendations adopted by the Council, the country-specific recommendation for Italy has been downgraded to a point to watch but became more explicit.

In Spain, several policy and legal documents refer explicitly to the Commission's call for further efforts in the field of childcare services. The national reform plan and the subsequent progress reports, submitted within the framework of the Lisbon strategy, have stressed as one of the main measures of the pillar dedicated to human capital the progressive increase of school enrolment rates of children under 3 years old. The latest national action plan for social inclusion (2006–08) has also paid attention to this issue, establishing the objective of increasing the school enrolment rate for that age group up to 50 % in the next 5 years. However, most reference to the European recommendations is found in the strategic plan for childhood and adolescence. The plan gathers several objectives and general measures to tackle this problem, such as the creation of a permanent information system to monitor availability and quality of childcare services; the increase and improvement of childcare services for

children under 3 years old; the promotion of exchange of good practices in the field and the promotion of the fulfilment of certain minimum quality requirements in childcare services.

The response of Latvia to the EU point to watch to increase the availability of childcare has been the application of ESF funds to improve the infrastructure of kindergartens, to establish alternative centres for short-term childcare and to initiate childminder services. In Poland, the national reform programme (NRP) for 2008 (adopted at the end of 2007) notes the importance of developing care facilities proposing to develop alternative forms of pre-school education. The goal is to make pre-school education for children aged 3–5 more accessible, especially in rural areas. The response to the EU point to watch in the NRP repeats policy proposals from earlier NRPs, but does not propose additional developments, nor does it include information on progress or targets. However, recent policy debates on lowering the mandatory school age and changing regulations to ease the setting-up of care facilities have not yet been included in the most recent document for the EU.

The impact of EU recommendations is less clear in the United Kingdom and Austria. The UK government has received recommendations concerning the need to provide affordable childcare in most of the years since the recommendations commenced: in 2001–04 and most recently in 2006 to ‘further improve access to and affordability of childcare’. However, the national ‘childcare strategy’ was initiated before the first recommendation and subsequent recommendations have occurred in the context of the strategy being implemented and extended. Apparently, developments are now satisfactory as in the current proposal the point to watch has been removed because of progress made. In Austria several additional federal funds have been earmarked for an increase of childcare services especially for children under the age of 3. However, the reason given for these additional funds seem mainly to be found at federal level, i.e. ‘additional childcare needs due to the flexibilisation of the childcare benefit’. So far, no mention has been made at the federal level of EU recommendations or the aim to meet the Barcelona childcare targets.

### 3.5 Summary and conclusions

From a policy perspective, the provision of childcare services raises several issues. An important question refers to the underlying motives of investing in childcare services,

which may differ from ensuring future labour supply to promoting child development. A predominance of labour market concerns, for example, may lead to a rather strict policy with regard to availability, compared to a policy that emphasises the important role of childcare arrangements in terms of social inclusion. Another important issue refers to the actual policy mix between financial allowances, time facilities and services, given the particular policy ambitions. The actual decision on that issue may depend on fundamental debates about the most desirable organisation of society or on rather practical considerations about what is feasible from a financial point of view. In addition, the actual policy might be inspired by the conviction that parents should be allowed to choose between different options, given the fact that different parents will have different preferences.

In effect, quite a number of countries seem to extend the provision of childcare services, although the actual growth rate is sometimes disappointing, partly because of budgetary constraints. At the same time quite a number of countries are rebalancing the actual policy mixture between the provision of services, time and money, with the aim to increase parental choice, to improve the labour market position of women or to promote family life. The result may not always be a coherent model that provides a continuum of support to families (the parents as well as the children). The period of leave, for example, is not in all cases attuned to the provision of childcare services. In addition, the emphasis on facilitating parental choice may translate into adverse effects in the sense that socioeconomic differences between families and/or men and women increase.

Another important policy issue refers to the quality of childcare services, and in particular the quality of staff. Raising the level of training would enhance their status and bring their profession more in line with that of teachers. Several countries are trying to raise the level of qualifications. Again, however, there may be important budgetary constraints, which decelerate the actual introduction of these policy measures. It is also important to decide on a coherent picture of quality requirements — that is for centre-based and home-based childcare, and for private and public — in order to prevent negative interactions. Finally it is important to note that the high profile of childcare services within the European employment strategy does have its impact at the level of the Member States. Although the Barcelona targets may not have a large impact on all national policy debates, the monitoring of progress within the Lisbon strategy does help to highlight the issue of childcare as an important policy priority.



## 4. Summary and conclusions

Traditionally, an important reason for countries to invest in the provision of childcare is to increase the (female) labour force participation. A higher participation rate may increase gender equality, foster economic growth and help improve the sustainability of the present-day welfare state, especially in the light of an ageing population. In fact, an increasing participation rate was a decisive factor in formulating the Barcelona childcare targets as part of the European employment strategy. Another argument points to the fact that childcare services might increase fertility rates by making a child less costly in terms of income and career opportunities. Recently, there seems to be a growing attention to childcare as a means to reduce poverty and increase social inclusion. Higher labour force participation reduces the risk of poverty over the life course and especially in old age. The improved well-being of parents may also reduce child poverty and thus improve future outcomes for children. The effect on children may even be more direct: good-quality childcare services may serve a child-development purpose, providing the child with a rich, safe and stimulating environment. As such childcare services may offer an important contribution to child development and socioeconomic integration.

### Childcare services

This report illustrates that throughout Europe the availability, the quality and affordability of childcare differ extensively. The EU-SILC data indicate that some countries have extensive formal arrangements (including education at pre-school and centre-based arrangements), whereas others rely more on other arrangements (such as childminders at home and/or family, friends or neighbours). In the category 0–2 years, the use of formal childcare arrangements varies from 73 % in Denmark to only 3 % in Poland. On the basis of the SILC-data, it appears that seven EU Member States (Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and United Kingdom) and Iceland and Norway have already met the Barcelona target, which states that Member States should provide childcare by 2010 to at least 33 % of children below 3 years of age. The use of formal care arrangements increases with the age of the child. Belgium ranks highest, with a use of formal childcare arrangements in the age category 3 years to the mandatory school age of almost 100 %. At the other end is Poland, with a use of 28 %. According to the Barcelona target, the actual coverage rate should be at least 90 % in 2010. It appears that nine Member States (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Sweden, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) and Iceland meet the Barcelona target or score rather high. The rather high use is, to a large extent, due to the inclusion of pre-school arrangements under the heading of formal arrangements

and the high coverage rate of pre-school arrangements for children aged 3 years up to the mandatory school age. In most countries, however, pre-school is only part-time, as a result of which working parents still need additional childcare facilities which may be much less available.

Information on the use of childcare facilities, though informative, does not directly answer the question of whether demand is fully met. The actual demand for childcare is influenced by the participation rate of parents (mothers), levels of unemployment, the length of parental leave, the school opening hours and the availability of alternatives like grandparents and or other (informal) arrangements. Indeed a score above the Barcelona target may be compatible with a large uncovered demand, just as a score below the Barcelona target may be compatible with full coverage. On the basis of a more qualitative assessment it appears that in the Nordic countries as well as in Belgium, France and Slovenia the level of provision is fairly high, with policy focusing on full coverage. In a large number of other European countries, however, high-quality and affordable childcare facilities, in particular for the youngest age category, are still in short supply.

The quality of childcare refers to aspects that contribute to the social, emotional and cognitive development of the child. Comparison is, however, seriously hampered by the severe lack of harmonised statistics. More qualitative data indicate, again, a large variation across Europe, for example, with regard to the staff–child ratio. Another aspect is the educational level of childcare workers. In some countries childcare workers appear to have a rather low level of education, whereas in others a higher or even university level is required. In almost all countries, however, there appears to be a large difference in education between nursery schools, pre-schools and crèches, on the one hand, and private childminders, on the other. In general terms, the organisation of childcare services and the specific position of these services within overall family policy, may be related to cultural norms about the most desirable organisation of society. In effect, in most countries childcare facilities are generally regarded as positive for ‘older’ children, but not for very young children. Even in the Nordic countries where childcare (for older children) is accepted and used on a large scale, occasionally ‘good motherhood’ and the well being of children in childcare are topics of public discussion.

Another important aspect with respect to the use of childcare is affordability. In most countries childcare services are subsidised by one means or another. There are large differences, however, in the actual financial programme. In most countries costs of childcare depend upon fam-

ily income. The Nordic countries (with the exception of Iceland) have set a maximum to the childcare fee; in other countries low-income groups may attend childcare for free. There are, however, also countries where low-income families pay relatively more than medium and high-income groups. In a few countries childcare is considered to be expensive. In addition, public childcare may be affordable (but hardly available), whereas private childcare is available, but expensive. A final issue refers to openings hours, school holidays and the overall flexibility that is offered. Opening hours are often part-time and hardly compatible with a full-time working week. Also the coverage of school holidays is problematic in quite a number of EU Member States.

### Policy issues

Each country has its own unique constellation of childcare arrangements, consisting of services and facilities such as leave arrangements, day-care centres, kindergartens, family-type care arrangements, childminders at home and (pre)school education systems etc. Some countries, with the Nordic countries as well-known examples, have a well-developed system of leave arrangements and affordable, high-quality childcare facilities. In other countries, the level of services may be rather low, with parents relying on informal solutions. Policies with regard to childcare services may be motivated by different factors, varying from ensuring the future labour supply to promoting child development. The specific mixture of policy objectives has an important impact on the decisions to be taken with regard to the availability of childcare services. In effect, quite a number of countries seem to extend the provision of childcare services, although the actual growth rate is sometimes disappointing, partly because of budgetary constraints.

At the same time quite a number of countries are rebalancing the actual policy mixture between the provision of services, time and money, with the aim to increase parental choice, to improve the labour market position of women or to promote family life. The result may not always be a coherent model that provides a continuum of support to families (the parents as well as the children). The period of leave, for example, is not in all cases attuned to the provision of childcare services. In addition, the emphasis on facilitating parental choice may translate into adverse effects in the sense that socioeconomic differences between families and/or between men and women increase. A common element for all countries is the challenge to reconcile the interest of the parent and the child in a way that is both efficient and just from a social, demographic and economic perspective. A coherent point of view, providing a continuum in the provision of money, time and services is essential in this respect.

The results provided in this report, the actual score of the European Union Member States on the Barcelona targets and the ongoing debates suggest that the childcare issue will remain an important policy priority also in the near future. Despite all the effort and improvements, high-quality and affordable childcare facilities are still in short supply in quite a number of Member States. The availability of the EU-SILC data enables an assessment of the current states of affair and allows for a careful monitoring of the measures taken by the different Member States. This information, in combination with the emphasis on the provision of childcare services within the context of the European employment strategy, should provide the necessary basis for a policy which is targeted towards a coherent socioeconomic infrastructure, keeping in mind the policy goals with regard to participation, gender equality, fertility and social integration.

# Appendix

**Table A.1. Employment rates by gender in headcount and full-time equivalents in 30 European countries 2007**

Country	Headcount				Full-time equivalents			
	Total	Men	Women	Gap	Total	Men	Women	Gap
Belgium	62	68.7	55.3	13.4	57.7	68.9	46.8	22.1
Bulgaria	61.7	66	57.6	8.4	61.2	65.3	57.2	8.1
Czech Republic	66.1	74.8	57.3	17.5	65	74.2	55.6	18.6
Denmark	77.1	81	73.2	7.8	69.3	76.2	62.8	13.4
Germany	69.4	74.7	64	10.7	59.6	71.2	48.2	22.9
Estonia	69.4	73.2	65.9	7.3	68	72.4	64.1	8.3
Ireland	69.1	77.4	60.6	16.8	63.9	77	50.8	26.1
Greece	61.4	74.9	47.9	27	60.4	75	45.8	29.1
Spain	65.6	76.2	54.7	21.5	61.9	75.1	48.5	26.6
France	64.6	69.3	60	9.3	59.4	67	52.4	14.6
Italy	58.7	70.7	46.6	24.1	55.4	69.8	41.5	28.3
Cyprus	71	80	62.4	17.6	69.7	80	59.9	20.1
Latvia	68.3	72.5	64.4	8.1	67.6	72.1	63.3	8.9
Lithuania	64.9	67.9	62.2	5.7	65	68.7	61.5	7.2
Luxembourg	63.6	71.9	55	16.9	59.4	73.6	44.8	28.8
Hungary	57.3	64	50.9	13.1	57.4	64.9	50.1	14.9
Malta	55.7	74.2	36.9	37.3	52.6	72.8	32.5	40.3
Netherlands	76	82.2	69.6	12.6	58.6	73.5	44.4	29.1
Austria	71.4	78.4	64.4	14	62.9	75.3	51.1	24.2
Poland	57	63.6	50.6	13	55.8	63.4	48.6	14.8
Portugal	67.8	73.8	61.9	11.9	65.7	73.3	58.3	15
Romania	58.8	64.8	52.8	12	58.9	65.4	52.3	13.1
Slovenia	67.8	72.7	62.6	10.1	66.4	72.2	60.4	11.8
Slovakia	60.7	68.4	53	15.4	59.6	67.7	51.5	16.2
Finland	70.3	72.1	68.5	3.6	67.6	71.3	63.9	7.4
Sweden	74.2	76.5	71.8	4.7	67.7	73.6	61.9	11.7
United Kingdom	71.3	77.3	65.5	11.8	61.7	73.2	51.3	21.8
EU-27	65.4	72.5	58.3	14.2	59.9	70.4	49.8	20.6
Iceland <sup>(1)</sup>	85.1	89.1	80.8	8.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	78.6	79.5	74	5.5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

(1) = Provisional figures

NB: n.a. = not available

Source: Indicators for monitoring the Employment guidelines 2008 compendium (13.5.2008); for Iceland and Norway: Eurostat employment statistics 2007.

**Table A.2. Employment impact of parenthood in 30 European countries 2006**  
(difference in percentage points in employment rates (age group 20–49)  
without the presence of any children and with presence of a child aged 0–6, by sex)

Country	Men	Women
Belgium	-9.9	0.9
Bulgaria	-3.8	21.9
Czech Republic	-8.6	40.5
Denmark	-8.7	3.4
Germany	-9	26.5
Estonia	-8.5	25.7
Ireland	-6.1	18.2
Greece	-14.8	4.7
Spain	-10	8.4
France	-11.7	9.7
Italy	-13.4	5.6
Cyprus	-8.8	4.3
Latvia	-7.6	19.4
Lithuania	-10	4.3
Luxembourg	-10.6	5.9
Hungary	-7.8	33.6
Malta	-5.3	11.6
Netherlands	-6.1	8.1
Austria	-4.4	17.7
Poland	-15.6	10.3
Portugal	-11.8	-3.9
Romania	-9.1	2.1
Slovenia	-12.2	-5.5
Slovakia	-6.5	32.8
Finland	-11.6	17.5
Sweden	n.a.	n.a.
United Kingdom	-5.7	21.3
EU-27	-10.1	13.6
Iceland	n.a.	n.a.
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	n.a.	n.a.

NB: n.a. = not available

Source: Indicators for monitoring the Employment guidelines 2008 compendium (14.3.2008).



**Table A.3. Total fertility rates and mother's age at birth of first child in 30 European countries**

Country	Total Fertility Rate (2006)	Mother's age at birth of first child (2003)
Belgium	1.6	n.a.
Bulgaria	1.37	24.2
Czech Republic	1.33	25.9
Denmark	1.83	27.8
Germany	1.32	28.8
Estonia	1.55	24.6
Ireland	1.90	28.3
Greece	1.39	27.9
Spain	1.38	29.2
France	2	n.a.
Italy	1.32	n.a.
Cyprus	1.47	26.9
Latvia	1.35	24.6
Lithuania	1.31	24.5
Luxembourg	1.65	28.7
Hungary	1.34	25.9
Malta	1.41	n.a.
Netherlands	1.7	28.8
Austria	1.4	26.9
Poland	1.27	25.3
Portugal	1.35	27.1
Romania	1.31	24.2
Slovenia	1.31	27.2
Slovakia	1.24	25
Finland	1.84	27.9
Sweden	1.85	28.5
United Kingdom	1.84	29.3
EU-25	n.a.	28
Iceland	2.08	26.1
Liechtenstein	1.42	n.a.
Norway	1.9	27.5

NB: n.a. = not available.

Sources: First column: Total fertility rate in Belgium for 1997, in Italy for 2005; source: Eurostat population statistics.

Second column: DK, FR: 2003 = 2001; EE, EL, ES, UK: 2003 = 2002; FR: metropolitan France.

EU-25: Estimate ; source: Eurostat (2008).

**Table A.4. At risk of poverty rate by household type in 30 European countries 2006**

Country	Single parents	Two-adult households
Belgium	33	9
Bulgaria	31	11
Czech Republic	41	7
Denmark	19	4
Germany	24	8
Estonia	41	13
Ireland	47	10
Greece	30	15
Spain	38	15
France	29	10
Italy	32	18
Cyprus	34	8
Latvia	40	15
Lithuania	44	16
Luxembourg	49	10
Hungary	39	14
Malta	37	15
Netherlands	32	6
Austria	29	9
Poland	32	14
Portugal	41p	12p
Romania	27	10
Slovenia	22	9
Slovakia	29	8
Finland	18	5
Sweden	32	6
United Kingdom	41	14
EU-25	32s	12s
Iceland	n.a.	n.a.
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	n.a.	n.a.

NB: p = provisional value; s = Eurostat estimate.

Sources: EU-SILC 2006, income data 2005; except for UK, income year 2006 and for IE moving income reference period (2005–06); BG and RO National HBS 2006, income data 2006.

**Table A.5. At risk of poverty rate by age and gender in 30 European countries 2006**

Country	Total population	Children aged 0–17 years
Belgium	15	15
Bulgaria	14	16
Czech Republic	10	16
Denmark	12	10
Germany	13	12
Estonia	18	20
Ireland	18	22
Greece	21	23
Spain	20	24
France	13	14
Italy	20	25
Cyprus	16	11
Latvia	23	26
Lithuania	20	25
Luxembourg	14	20
Hungary	16	25
Malta	14	19
Netherlands	10	14
Austria	13	15
Poland	19	26
Portugal	18p	21p
Romania	19	n.a.
Slovenia	12	12
Slovakia	12	17
Finland	13	10
Sweden	12	15
United Kingdom	19	24
EU-25	16s	19s
Iceland	n.a.	n.a.
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	n.a.	n.a.

NB: p = provisional value; s = Eurostat estimate; n.a. = not available.

Source: EU-SILC 2006, income data 2005; except for UK, income year 2006 and for IE moving income reference period (2005–06); BG and RO National HBS 2006, income data 2006.

**Table A.6. Admission age to mandatory education in 30 European countries**

Belgium	6
Bulgaria	7
Czech Republic	6
Denmark	7
Germany	6
Estonia	7
Ireland	6
Greece	6
Spain	6
France	6
Italy	6
Cyprus	6
Latvia	5
Lithuania	6
Luxembourg	4
Hungary	5
Malta	5
Netherlands	5
Austria	6
Poland	6
Portugal	6
Romania	7
Slovenia	6
Slovakia	6
Finland	7
Sweden	7
United Kingdom	5
Iceland	6
Liechtenstein	n.a.
Norway	6

NB: n.a. = not available.  
Source: Eurostat.

**Table A.7. Children cared for, by type of care, as a proportion of all children in 30 European countries, 0–2-year-olds, 2006**

	Formal arrangements (reply categories 1–4)			Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)			Only cared for by the parents (all reply categories = 0)
	0 hours	1–29 hours	≥30 hours	0 hours	1–29 hours	≥30 hours	
Belgium	60	17	23	70	22	8	43
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	98	1	1	80	18	2	79
Denmark	27	7	66	99	1	0	26
Germany	84	8	8	73	24	3	62
Estonia	81	6	12	67	22	10	57
Ireland	82	13	5	64	22	14	52
Greece	90	2	8	46	25	29	41
Spain	61	20	19	73	17	9	42
France	69	14	17	72	15	14	50
Italy	75	10	16	65	22	13	50
Cyprus	75	7	18	43	17	40	28
Latvia	84	2	14	86	5	9	70
Lithuania	95	0	4	79	7	14	75
Luxembourg	69	14	17	59	30	11	38
Hungary	92	2	6	52	42	6	48
Malta	92	5	3	84	11	5	77
Netherlands	55	41	4	44	53	3	25
Austria	96	3	1	64	31	5	61
Poland	97	0	2	64	18	18	62
Portugal	67	1	32	54	9	37	23
Romania	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Slovenia	72	3	26	40	37	23	28
Slovakia	95	1	4	77	15	8	74
Finland	74	5	21	95	3	2	70
Sweden	56	17	27	96	2	2	52
United Kingdom	67	28	5	62	31	8	45
Iceland	66	3	31	78	3	19	44
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	66	11	22	93	6	1	61

NB: n.a. = not available.

Reply category 1: Education at pre-school.

Reply category 2: Education at mandatory school.

Reply category 3: Childcare at centre-based services outside school hours (before/after).

Reply category 4: Childcare at day-care centre.

Reply category 5: Childcare by a professional childminder at child's home or at childminder's home.

Reply category 6: Childcare by grand-parents, others household members (outside parents), other relatives, friends or neighbours.

Remark: reply category 2 is not relevant for age classes 0–2 years and 3 to the mandatory school age.

Data for Germany and Norway are from 2005.

Source: EU-SILC 2006 (provisional).

**Table A.8. Children cared for by a home-based childminder and/or family/friends, as a proportion of all children in 30 European countries, 0–2-year-olds, 2006**

	Home-based childminder (reply category 5)	Family/friends (reply category 6)
Belgium	7	24
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	0	20
Denmark	0	1
Germany	7	22
Estonia	3	32
Ireland	15	21
Greece	8	50
Spain	6	21
France	13	20
Italy	5	32
Cyprus	10	50
Latvia	4	9
Lithuania	4	17
Luxembourg	17	31
Hungary	2	47
Malta	0	16
Netherlands	14	51
Austria	8	32
Poland	6	31
Portugal	35	39
Romania	n.a.	n.a.
Slovenia	n.r.	n.r.
Slovakia	0	23
Finland	1	3
Sweden	3	0
United Kingdom	10	31
Iceland	19	3
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	0	7

NB: n.a. = not available; n.r. = not reliable.  
 Data for Germany and Norway are from 2005.  
 Source: EU-SILC 2006 (provisional).

**Table A.9. Average number of hours of formal and other care in 30 European countries, 0–2-year-olds, 2006**

	Formal arrangements	Other arrangements
Belgium	30.3	19.1
Bulgaria	n.a.	n.a.
Czech Republic	n.r.	n.r.
Denmark	n.r.	n.r.
Germany	n.r.	n.r.
Estonia	34.0	20.9
Ireland	20.1	23.4
Greece	n.r.	n.r.
Spain	27.0	22.7
France	28.4	26.9
Italy	30.9	23.1
Cyprus	32.9	34.9
Latvia	n.r.	n.r.
Lithuania	n.r.	n.r.
Luxembourg	29.9	21.1
Hungary	n.r.	n.r.
Malta	n.r.	n.r.
Netherlands	15.8	12.9
Austria	n.r.	n.r.
Poland	n.r.	n.r.
Portugal	37.8	39
Romania	n.a.	n.a.
Slovenia	36.1	22.9
Slovakia	n.r.	n.r.
Finland	n.r.	n.r.
Sweden	n.r.	n.r.
United Kingdom	14.4	17.3
Iceland	36.6	33.6
Liechtenstein	n.a.	n.a.
Norway	n.r.	n.r.

NB: n.a. = not available; n.r. = not reliable due to small sample size.

Data for Germany and Norway are from 2005.

Source: EU-SILC 2006 (provisional).

**Table A.10. Children cared for, by type of care, as a proportion of all children in 30 European countries, 3 years to the mandatory school age, 2006**

	Formal arrangements (reply categories 1–4)			Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)			Only cared for by the parents (all reply categories = 0)
	0 hours	1-29 h.	≥30 h.	0 hours	1-29 h.	≥30 h.	
<b>Belgium</b>	1	36	62	68	31	1	1
<b>Bulgaria</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Czech Republic</b>	33	28	39	77	21	1	26
<b>Denmark</b>	4	16	80	100	0	0	4
<b>Germany</b>	13	61	26	70	29	1	10
<b>Estonia</b>	15	7	78	75	23	2	11
<b>Ireland</b>	7	80	13	66	31	3	5
<b>Greece</b>	39	41	20	60	22	18	18
<b>Spain</b>	9	47	44	84	12	4	7
<b>France</b>	6	52	42	72	24	3	5
<b>Italy</b>	10	24	66	65	31	5	8
<b>Cyprus</b>	14	50	37	55	34	10	4
<b>Latvia</b>	40	4	56	86	4	9	30
<b>Lithuania</b>	44	9	47	87	3	10	33
<b>Luxembourg</b>	43	42	16	58	36	6	20
<b>Hungary</b>	21	21	58	49	45	6	15
<b>Malta</b>	43	32	25	87	9	4	39
<b>Netherlands</b>	11	82	7	48	50	2	6
<b>Austria</b>	29	55	16	63	35	2	16
<b>Poland</b>	72	7	21	64	20	16	46
<b>Portugal</b>	25	9	66	70	20	11	12
<b>Romania</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Slovenia</b>	19	15	66	40	46	14	5
<b>Slovakia</b>	27	10	63	74	20	6	20
<b>Finland</b>	23	21	56	96	4	1	21
<b>Sweden</b>	8	34	58	96	3	1	5
<b>United Kingdom</b>	11	65	24	62	33	5	8
<b>Iceland</b>							
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Norway</b>	20	28	52	95	5	0	18

NB: Reply category 1: Education at pre-school.

Reply category 2: Education at mandatory school.

Reply category 3: Childcare at centre-based services outside school hours (before/after).

Reply category 4: Childcare at day-care centre.

Reply category 5: Childcare by a professional childminder at child's home or at childminder's home.

Reply category 6: Childcare by grand-parents, others household members (outside parents), other relatives, friends or neighbours.

Remark: reply category 2 is not relevant for age classes 0–2 year and 3 to the mandatory school age.

Data for Germany and Norway are from 2005.

Source: EU-SILC 2006 (provisional).



**Table A.11. Children cared for, by type of care, as a proportion of all children in 30 European countries, mandatory school age to 12 years, 2006**

	Formal arrangements (reply categories 1–4)			Other arrangements (reply categories 5 and 6)			Only cared for by the parents (all reply categories = 0)
	0 hours	1–29 h.	≥30 h.	0 hours	1–29 h.	≥30 h.	
<b>Belgium</b>	0	29	71	77	22	0	0
<b>Bulgaria</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Czech Republic</b>	3	51	47	83	16	1	2
<b>Denmark</b>	1	32	67	100	0	0	1
<b>Germany</b>	4	68	28	74	25	1	2
<b>Estonia</b>	1	60	39	85	13	2	1
<b>Ireland</b>	0	62	38	83	16	1	0
<b>Greece</b>	13	49	38	78	17	5	7
<b>Spain</b>	1	44	55	90	8	1	0
<b>France</b>	0	47	53	83	17	0	0
<b>Italy</b>	0	15	85	72	26	2	0
<b>Cyprus</b>	0	67	33	75	22	2	0
<b>Latvia</b>	8	24	68	95	4	1	6
<b>Lithuania</b>	1	67	31	92	8	1	1
<b>Luxembourg</b>	2	71	27	67	31	2	1
<b>Hungary</b>	1	27	72	58	36	5	0
<b>Malta</b>	3	9	88	89	11	1	2
<b>Netherlands</b>	0	88	12	63	36	1	0
<b>Austria</b>	1	66	33	77	23	0	0
<b>Poland</b>	6	55	39	77	19	4	4
<b>Portugal</b>	1	21	78	82	17	1	1
<b>Romania</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Slovenia</b>	1	39	59	57	40	3	1
<b>Slovakia</b>	6	38	57	78	21	1	5
<b>Finland</b>	0	80	20	96	4	0	0
<b>Sweden</b>	0	0	100	98	2	0	0
<b>United Kingdom</b>	20	13	68	68	30	2	14
<b>Iceland</b>	0	17	83	92	2	0	0
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<b>Norway</b>	1	83	17	94	6	0	1

NB: Reply category 1: Education at pre-school.

Reply category 2: Education at mandatory school.

Reply category 3: Childcare at centre-based services outside school hours (before/after).

Reply category 4: Childcare at day-care centre.

Reply category 5: Childcare by a professional childminder at child's home or at childminder's home.

Reply category 6: Childcare by grand-parents, others household members (outside parents), other relatives, friends or neighbours

Data for Germany and Norway are from 2005.

Source: EU-SILC 2006 (provisional).



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The availability of adequate childcare services is a growing concern for citizens across Europe. A better availability of childcare services can boost labour market participation and support gender equality and social inclusion while also working to reverse declining fertility rates by reducing the cost of childbearing in terms of career opportunities. This report examines the situation of childcare across 30 European countries including the extent to which demand is met, quality and affordability of services and the national childcare policies.

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