

Brussels, 3 October 2008

## Childcare services in the EU

### What are the so-called 'Barcelona targets'?

Ensuring suitable childcare provision is an essential step towards equal opportunities in employment between women and men. In 2002, at the Barcelona Summit, the European Council set the targets of providing 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.

### How do we measure progress towards the Barcelona targets?

Provision is measured as children cared for (by formal arrangements other than by the family) as a proportion of all children in the same age group (children under three or between three years and the mandatory school age).

This indicator is broken down by the number of hours per week during which the children are cared for (up to 30 hours a week /30 hours or more a week). Data are collected through an EU harmonised survey, the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

Formal arrangements are defined as the following services: pre-school or equivalent, compulsory education, centre-based services outside school hours, a collective crèche or another day-care centre, including family day-care, professional certified childminders. The care provided by family members, neighbours or non-certified childminders are therefore not included under this definition of "formal arrangements".

### How are the Member States performing?

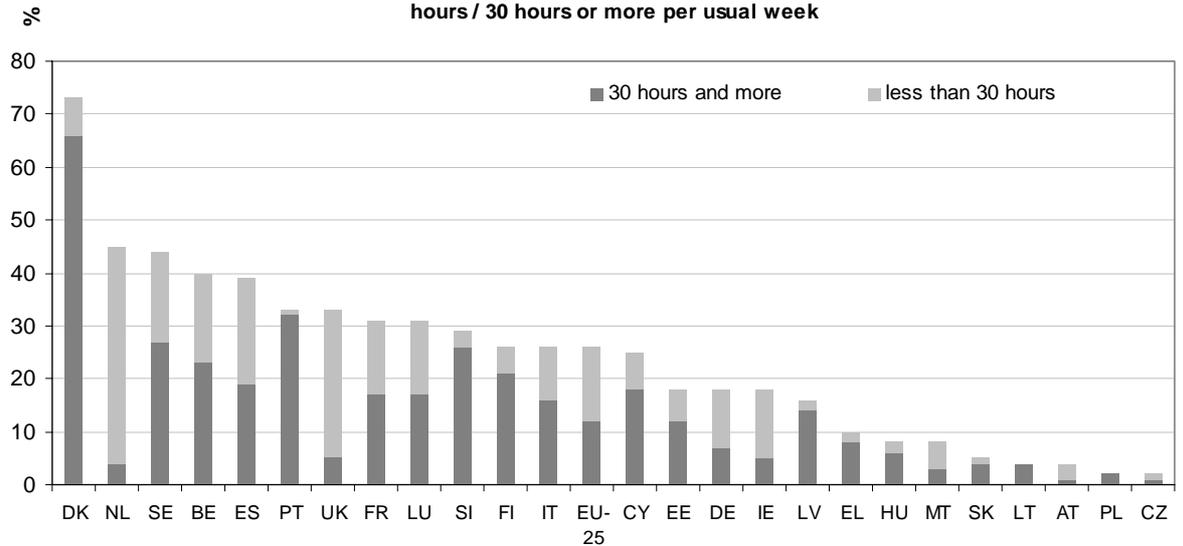
Regarding the **lower age-group (0 to 3 years)**, only five Member States (DK, NL, SE, BE, ES) have surpassed the 33% coverage rate, while five others (PT, UK, FR, LU, SI) are approaching this target. In most of the other countries, much still needs to be done to meet the demand for childcare facilities. While seven Member States (FI, IT, CY, EE, DE, IE, LV) have reached an intermediate level of coverage (between 16 and 26%), eight Member States (EL, HU, MT, SK, LT, AT, CZ, PL) show a coverage rate of 10% or less.

Nevertheless, these coverage rates relate to all children, irrespective of how many hours per week they attend a childcare facility. Attendance hours vary widely from one country to another, and in numerous countries a particularly high proportion of childcare facilities operate on a part-time basis only<sup>1</sup>. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are prime examples, with under-3s attending childcare centres almost exclusively on a part-time basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Less than 30 hours a week.

**Graph 1 : Proportion of children up to 3 years cared for by formal arrangements, up to 30 hours / 30 hours or more per usual week**

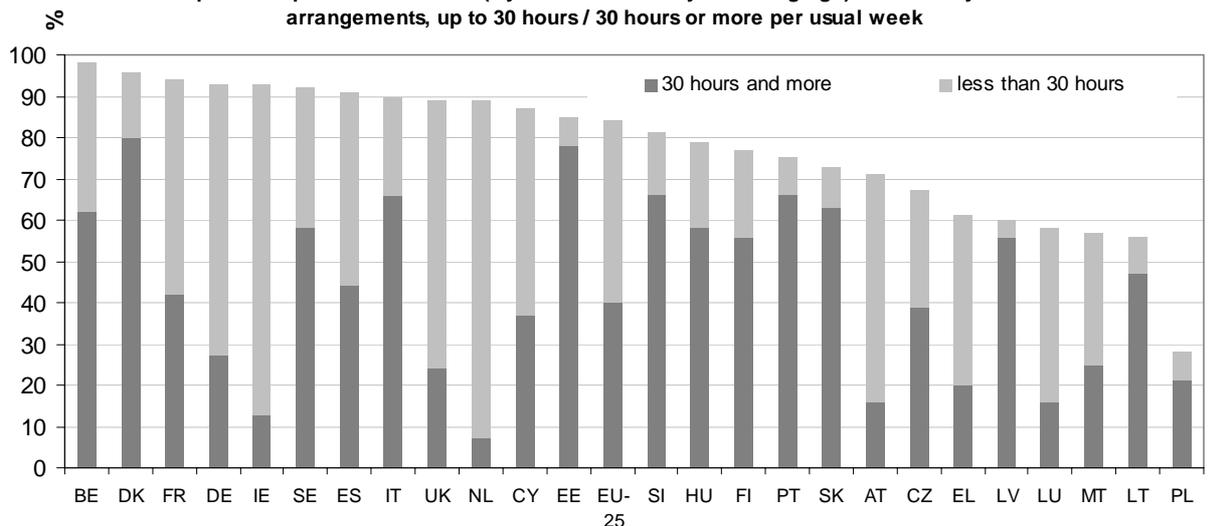


Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006, Provisional data

Regarding **children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age**, eight Member States (BE, DK, FR, DE, IE, SE, ES, IT) have surpassed the 90% coverage rate<sup>2</sup>, while three others (UK, NL, CY) are approaching this target. Seven Member States (EE, SI, HU, FI, PT, SK, AT) have a coverage rate that is substantial but nevertheless still some way short of the target, between 70% and 85%. Moreover, in many countries a high proportion of childcare facilities for children in this age-group operate on a part-time basis only. For example, the coverage rate for full-time attendance is below 50% in more than half of the Member States and not even 30% in a third of Member States.

Any interpretation of these figures must take into account, however, different countries' particular ways of organising nursery-school education and the availability or not of after-school childcare services.

**Graph 2 : Proportion of children (3 years to mandatory schooling age) cared for by formal arrangements, up to 30 hours / 30 hours or more per usual week**



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006, Provisional data

<sup>2</sup> When all children attending for at least one hour per week are considered.

## **What is the link between childcare and the employment and social situation of parents?**

There is still a huge imbalance between men and women in the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities, leaving women – much more so than men – to opt for flexible working arrangements or even give up work altogether. Although these working arrangements may in part reflect personal preferences, they have an impact on women's career development, on the continuing wage gap between men and women and on the accumulation of pension rights. For example, approximately one-third of women work part-time, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 men, and the employment rate falls by 12.4 points for women when they have children under 12 to care for, while it rises by 7.3 points for men.

There is a direct link between availability of childcare facilities and the scope for parents to engage in paid employment. Childcare facilities allow parents to take a job and keep it, thereby improving their quality of life and removing a major obstacle to their freedom to organise their time. In the EU, more than 6 million women in the 25 to 49 age-range say they are forced into not working, or can only work part-time, because of their family responsibilities<sup>3</sup>. For more than a quarter of them, the lack of availability of childcare facilities, or the cost of such facilities, is the problem. If this demand were met, the overall rate of female employment could be increased by at least one percentage point.

Full participation by a parent or parents in work with decent pay can also help to avoid in-work poverty and helps to combat the risk of poverty in lone-parent households, who suffer a much higher poverty rate (32%) than that applicable to all households with child (17%)<sup>4</sup>.

## **How is the Commission helping EU countries reach the Barcelona targets?**

In its Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010), the European Commission made balancing work, private and family life a key priority and undertook to "support the achievement of the Barcelona targets on childcare facilities".

The Commission has no direct powers in the field of childcare, but it will:

- continue to monitor the Barcelona objectives regularly as part of the Strategy for Growth and Employment, providing support through the timely provision of good-quality comparable statistics, and making specific recommendations to certain Member States where necessary.
- promote the exchange of national experiences relating to childcare facilities, through its programme for the exchange of good practice on equal opportunities between women and men launched in 2008, through the exchange platform connected with the European Alliance for Families and through the High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming in the Structural Funds;
- encourage research into working conditions in the pre-school childcare sector and into ensuring that jobs in this field are more highly valued;
- encourage Member States to make full use of the co-financing opportunities offered by the Cohesion Fund, in particular the European Social Fund, to promote measures to facilitate the work-life balance, and in particular to create better childcare facilities. For the period 2007-2013, half a billion euros of EU funding is available to develop childcare facilities.

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<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, Labour Force Survey 2006

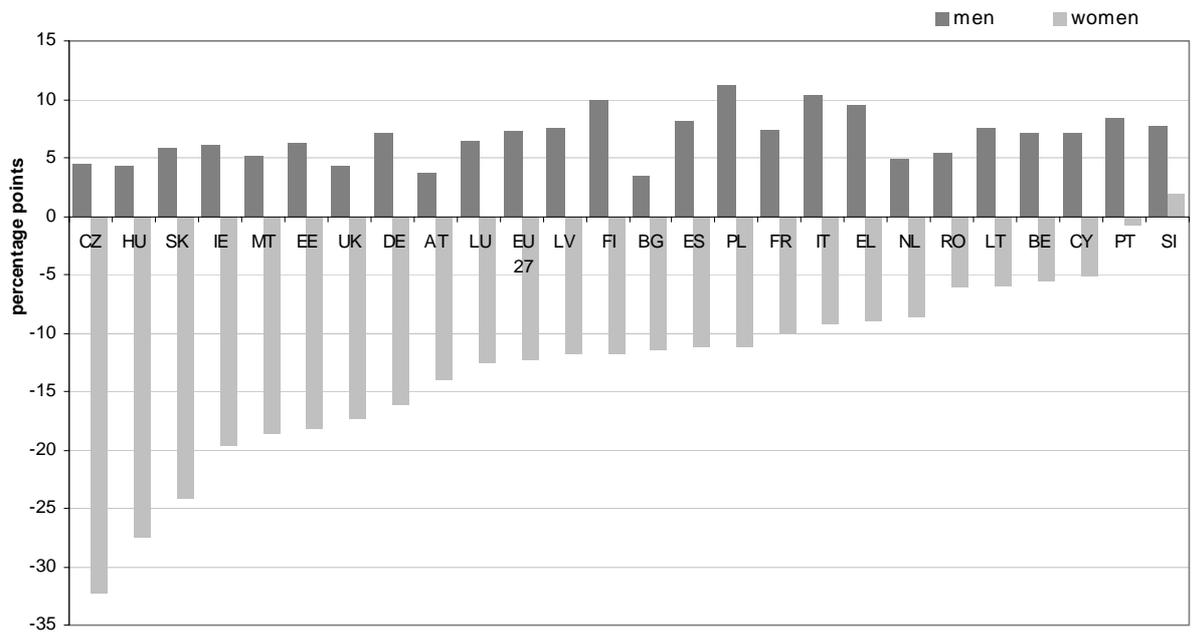
<sup>4</sup> Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006

## What is the impact of parenthood on employment rates?

Graph 3 shows the impact of parenthood on the employment rate of women and men, that is to say the difference (in percentage points) between the average employment rate of persons aged 25 to 49 with at least one child under 12 minus the average employment rate of persons without any children under 12.

The impact of parenthood on employment is negative for women, both as an EU average (-12.4 points) and in almost every country, whereas it is positive for men (+7.3 points on average). There are big differences between EU Member States and there is a link between the availability of childcare services and the impact of parenthood on the employment rates.

**Graph 3 : Employment impact of parenthood for women and men (aged 25-49) in 2007**  
difference in percentage points in employment rates with presence of a child under 12 and without the presence of any children



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS 2007, Provisional data. SE, DK: no data available.

The indicator is calculated as the average employment rate for persons with at least one child under 12 minus the average employment rate of persons without any children under 12.