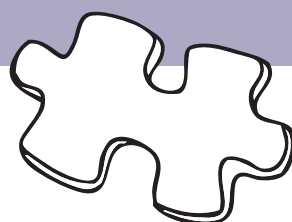


4. CHILDCARE,
EDUCATION
AND PARENTING

CHILDCARE, EDUCATION & PARENTING



The areas of childcare, education – pre-school, school and to a lesser extent after school – as well as parenting support are competences of Member States. They are, however, an important area to explore when discussing reconciliation policies as many of the policy measures or employer-led initiatives to improve reconciliation are often aimed at supporting young parents with childcare solutions. It has been clearly expressed throughout this document that reconciliation policies are to be considered as a review and improvement of the working environment in order to improve the working conditions and well-being of all employees and workers, not only parents of young children, as well as it contributes to the productivity and success of the company. However, it is undeniable that childcare arrangements, their availability, affordability, accessibility and quality are a pivotal factor for women's employment and for gender equality, and thus reconciliation of work and family life for working parents.

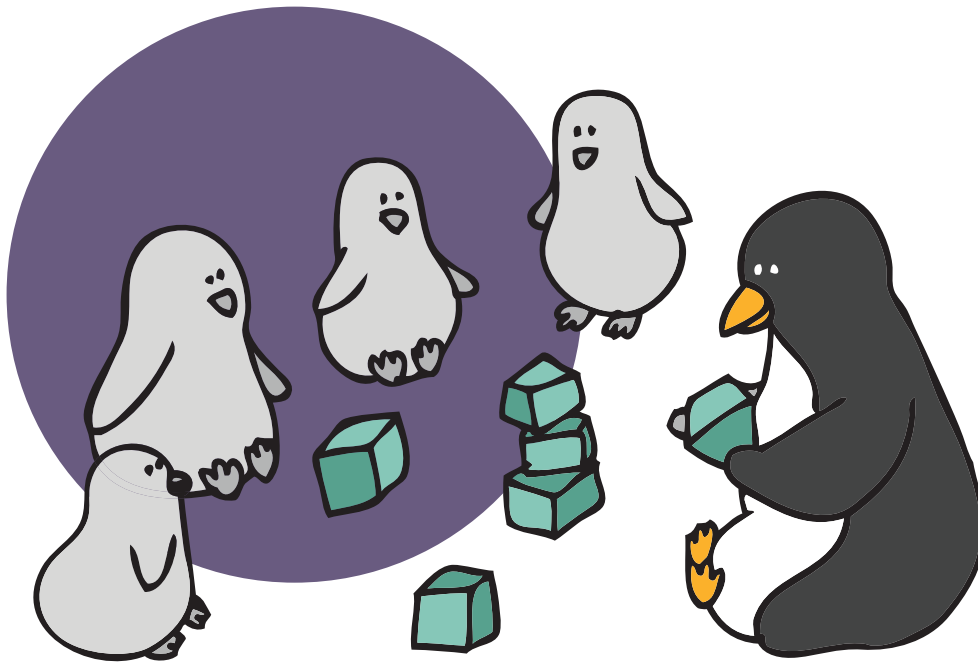
Having children is a transition point in the lives of fathers and mothers, and a crucial point in the employment path of women, in terms of wages, career advancement and getting hired in the first place. Young women still face discrimination in the workplace because of their potential motherhood and because of the role of primary carer they take later on.

Adequate provision of childcare solutions, together with other elements such as more gender equal leaves policies, could support women reach their full potential and reduce discrimination.

In addition we have to make a point to mention that having children with special needs poses additional financial and organisational challenges for families, in terms of healthcare and complementary therapies, accessible, inclusive childcare and schools, specialised support staff, public transport, commuting...

When discussing childcare solutions (or other out of school educational arrangements), it is also important not to misinterpret them as simple "child placements" to allow parents to work, but to fully recognise their educational role in the healthy development of children.

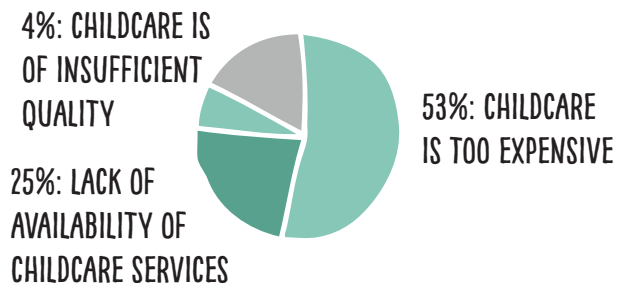
Working parents rely on a patchwork of solutions, comprising of formal childcare institutions, babysitters and nannies, the help of grandparents, after-school activities, summer day-camps and others. None of these offer 100% coverage, and therefore there needs to be, and always will be a combination of them used by parents simultaneously.



A lot of focus seems to be on helping working parents of very young children balance their work and family life through different support measures (nurseries, early childhood centres, Kindergartens, baby-sitters or through employer supported childcare, like childcare-vouchers...). However, during the 15-25 years that children and young people go through the education system, there are a number of challenges for parents. Firstly the annual school timetable is not exactly compatible with a parent's full-time job, and as dual-earner couples and families are on the rise, the challenge is even bigger. There is of course a great variation among the different systems across Europe in terms of daily school-schedules, with some flexibility at the beginning of the day and towards the end of the day, typically with child-minding on the school premises. In some countries schools offer extra-curricular activities (sport, language, music, art) on the school premises, which makes working parents' lives easier, and fills the after-school hours with meaningful activities for children. Yet they are not available everywhere, and their costs also varies greatly. Another key issue are the school-holidays, typically between 12-15 weeks per year, with parents only having 4-6 weeks paid vacation, which is not compatible, especially the long summer holiday has its roots in the agricultural calendar, and is now perhaps ripe for a review.

In addition, teens and young adults may also need the attention and time of their parents for crucial life transitions, for which there is generally no "leave" foreseen, apart from the regular paid vacation. Many mental health problems may also manifest themselves in teenagers (eating disorders, anxiety, depression...) and require parents' attention.

Across the EU, women reported that they do not work or work part-time because...



Even though, as mentioned above, childcare and education are competences of the Member States or regions in some cases, there are still a number of initiatives at EU level, that aim to foster exchange of best practice, linkages to other relevant EU policies, and a more holistic approach to reconciliation measures and policies.



Another important point is the sometimes conflicting interests of working parents and children in terms of commuting, childcare location, hours and regularity, and through testimonies we see, that there is still a lot to be done in many of the Member States to improve access, quality and affordability. Policies and solutions need to take into consideration the best interest of the child, as it is laid down in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, and find compromises, where also the best interest of working parents and those of the employers are taken into consideration.

offering childcare solutions, in the form of childcare centres, play-groups or babysitters. They also provide practical, pragmatic suggestions and discussion-groups for working parents to finding different solutions for managing their work-load and time, to be more present in the lives of their children (e.g. food and shopping delivery, new ways of cooking, household help...).

In this chapter therefore we aimed at exploring the legal framework and showcase some examples from across the EU, where solutions for children and parents go hand-in-hand and are not mutually exclusive.

Almost **60%** of parents identifies availability (waiting lists, lack of services) as a difficulty concerning the usage of childcare in the EU27.

Parenting support classes, groups offered by public authorities, civil society organisations, typically family organisations are not there to offer solutions in terms of the working times of parents, or the compatibility with school schedules, however, they are a very valuable resource in

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Communication 2011/664 final: *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow.*

The conclusions of the European Council of 15-16 March 2002 which led to the so-called Barcelona targets of providing childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 and 6 years old and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2011 on Early Years Learning in the European Union (2010/2159(INI)).

A fundamental legal text in this field is the UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, in particular:

Article 5:

Children have the right to appropriate direction and guidance to exercise their rights

Article 12:

Children have the right to be heard and participate

Article 18:

Governments should develop appropriate services to support families, including assistance with childcare for working parents

Article 23:

Children with disabilities have the right to appropriate care

Article 28:

Children have the right to good quality education

Article 31:

Children have the right to culture, leisure, rest and play.

POLICY POINTERS

AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND QUALITY CARE SERVICES AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

According to the EU Council's Conclusions (2011) on early childhood education and care (ECEC) and the Barcelona Targets, ECEC services and policies are perceived as beneficial to the development of the children and society on multiple levels.

In most European countries, parents' needs for available childcare places are not being met. There are two dimensions to this aspect, on the one hand each child should have an affordable place if the family needs one (universalism), and on the other the opening hours must also serve the interest of the working parents, keeping in mind the child's biorhythm and well-being.

While crèches/nurseries tend to be the most sought-after form of childcare for the 0-3 age group, parents' needs are as varied as their work, family, cultural, social, geographical, etc. situations. Single parents, low income families, parents working non-standard hours (weekends, weekdays after 6 pm), jobseeker parents, parents still in education - all these situations require different types of childcare. Promoting the development of a single type of childcare provision like nurseries/crèches that are often only open during "standard" office hours is nowhere near enough since they don't offer care schemes for non-predictable working hours and are therefore not meeting the needs of a substantial part of the parents.

In addition to the coverage in terms of available places, there is the need of a childcare policy that supports the diversity of types of provision and is flexible enough to be able to reflect the real lives of the families who rely on these facilities locally and to address their needs, without forgetting the employees of these childcare facilities who also have a right to a family life. Examples can be given of many types of childcare provision that address different needs:

- **Emergency childcare:** for children under the age of 3 whose parents are unemployed and on work training schemes, are going for a job interview and/or have found a job.
- **Drop-in, part-time babysitting services,** that cater for jobseekers, or parents with occasional work, or self-employed, or those who are not in employment but still need childcare
- **Care services for sick children:** parents who cannot care for their sick child can have a sitter to look after him/her at home.
- **Multi-purpose childcare facilities:** offer regular or occasional childcare according to what families need
- **Out-of-hours childcare:** for children up to the age of 12 before 7 am and/or after 6 pm, or even night-nurseries
- **Employer supported childcare:** run by one or more companies in partnership, providing childcare at or near the parent's workplace, or in a purpose built company childcare facility

It must be emphasised that formal childcare cannot be just a sort of formalized child minding or babysitting service that merely enables parents to work. Childcare absolutely must form part of a long term educational plan that is in harmony with the educational programme for the 3-to-compulsory school age group, and addresses the five domains of childhood development: physical, social, emotional, language development and cognitive skills. Parents, families and children themselves must be informed and involved in all processes.

- **Funding of ECEC** varies greatly across the different European Member States in terms of where the funding is coming from, and the mix between public and private funding. ECEC may be subsidised via payments to families (through tax relief, allowances or vouchers), via payments to ECEC providers, or through a combination of both. There are two issues linked to funding: one is the lack of available places due to lack of funding, which really hampers employment options of young mothers, and secondly costs of childcare, which in the most extreme cases can be 2000-3000 EUR per month for a full-time crèche, which again results in the trade-off between the mother's salary versus the childcare costs, and can result in the labour market drop-out. There should be a public contribution to ECEC, yet there is no universal agreement on the level of financing.

SKILLS FOR CHILDCARE PROFESSIONALS

High-quality learning and childcare benefits children, families and their communities. It is possible to improve outcomes and attainment for children, by giving parents new opportunities to return to work, boost family incomes, and support sustainable, economic growth. However, in order to achieve this, we need to set out a longer-term ambition to transform childcare skills learning and development provision as this can help boost economic activity and support additional early years jobs – for the current workforce. Therefore, we need to ensure that the development of the workforce matches the scale of need. By boosting skills, ensuring high quality and recognising the value of those we entrust to give children the best start in life, it is important to attract the best to deliver the transformation in childcare. And by pursuing a European shared vision we can secure access, quality, professionalism and recognition of childcare and early years as a career of choice.

COORDINATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS FOR AN EASIER MOBILITY WITHIN THE EU LABOUR MARKET

Due to the high prevalence of labour market mobility, working parents may encounter obstacles to transfer their very young and school-aged children between the different countries' school systems. This is particularly challenging for posted workers, seasonal workers, migrant care-workers, where in addition, the left-behind parent may have to shoulder additional child-care responsibilities and encounter additional difficulties to reconcile work and family life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy and legislative

- Guarantee a legal right to a childcare place for all children after the end of the Leave period.
- View ECEC as an important investment, and thus improve public finances to 0-3 childhood care and education places, which should lead to the improvement of accessibility and capacity, as well as lower the costs for parents.
- Support the mobility of families within the EU by an enhanced promotion of the harmonisation of basic competence levels of school-aged children throughout the EU.
- Monitor, evaluate, communicate and promote early years and childcare competence frameworks ensuring European-wide compliance.

Employment and parenting support

- to support working parents to be physically and emotionally available for their children – by family-friendly measures, incentives for employers to offer flexible working hours in to support of parenting, etc.

Services (coverage and standards)

- Promote flexibility and diversity in childcare provision.
- Ensure provision of quality services, in the best interest of both the children and their parents, attached to a European wide quality assurance system.
- Improve the standing, recognition and qualifications of childcare professionals including skills and qualifications, career progression, recruitment and retention, and workforce planning – to ensure that all those working in early years settings have the right skills and experience to deliver high-quality early learning and childcare across Europe.
- Promote early years and childcare as a career of choice.
- Improve inclusiveness of early childhood education and care for children with special needs, through physical adaptation, additional staff resource, specialised training for staff.
- Guarantee a healthy balance of childcare availability and access in urban and rural (remote) areas to ensure that all parents have access to childcare within a reasonable distance from their work or their home.

EXAMPLES

NORTHERN IRELAND “TOY BOX”, EARLY YEARS, THE ORGANISATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN, BELFAST

Rights-based outreach service; Traveller parents and children engage in the HighScope model of play; Children freely construct their understanding of the world from the active involvement of people, materials and ideas; Project staff observe, interpret, evaluate and nurture the growth of children and parents within their roles; Toybox shaped interventions with young Traveller children and they also compliment practice in schools.



SCOTLAND SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT- GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD

No matter where they live or whatever their needs, children, young people and their families should always know where they can find help, what support might be available and whether that help is right for them. The Getting it right for every child approach ensures that anyone providing that support puts the child or young person – and their family – at the centre.

Getting it right for every child is important for everyone who works with children and young people – as well as many people who work with adults who look after children. Practitioners need to work together to support families, and where appropriate, take early action at the first signs of any difficulty – rather than only getting involved when a situation has already reached a critical point.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA “MOBILE KINDERGARTEN”, SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGES

Various activities with children (provided by pre-school teachers) in accordance with SOS Kindergarten curriculum, results in parent-teacher meetings, preparation for elementary school education (perception, coordination, socialisation, civic education, intellectual development, working skills, language and math skills, science/nature ...); Activities for parents of children attending “Mobile Kindergarten” – several times during a school year (topics: Child Protection Policy, Health, nutrition and care, Psychophysical development of pre-school age children, Learning by playing...); Knowledge and information exchange among teachers.



GERMANY THE COORDINATION CENTRE FOR MEN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The coordination centre works together with policy makers and key players in the field of early childhood education and care to significantly increase the number of male educators working in ECEC facilities. It has been working closely with different partners since early 2010, with the support of their educators, ECEC provider programme directors, administrators, policy makers, academics and parents. The findings of its qualitative and quantitative surveys on “Male Educators in KITAS” provide ample evidence of this support. The Coordination Centre is affiliated with the Catholic University of Applied Social Sciences Berlin (KHSB) and is funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The activities of the center focus on public relations work, information provision, advice, networking and support for those working in the field of ECEC.



ROMANIA “A GOOD START IN LIFE“, CENTER “STEP BY STEP” FOR EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, LOCATED IN BUCHAREST, (CEDP)

Organizing an adequate learning space (explore and experiment); Training courses for professionals involved (ECD philosophy); Training of personnel for “child centred” education; Meetings and trainings with parents and professional staff; Monitoring of all kindergarten’s groups included in project; Technical support for all kindergartens in the project.



IRELAND PARENTS’ TRAINING PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL PARENTS’ COUNCIL PRIMARY IN IRELAND

The scope of trainings range from giving special support for migrant parents to understand child care and education systems (in a printed form in 16 languages, accompanied by personal advisory services) to specialised trainings such as for example supporting your child to build healthy friendships and relationships, parental involvement and board of management trainings, policy development training and anti-bullying training. They also provide an ALCUIN Award winner training course for teachers to cooperate with parents and family.



DENMARK “PARENTS PROMOTE COMMUNITY - INCLUSION IN THE SCHOOL” SKOLE OG FORÆLDRE AND DET CENTRALE HANDICAPRÅD (DENMARK)

As 95% of children with disabilities in Denmark will attend mainstream inclusive schools by 2015, the project was aiming to promote the importance and the benefits of an all-inclusive approach to education.



UNITED-KINGDOM THE CHILDCARE VOUCHER

The Childcare voucher is a system by which employers can help their employees to afford high quality childcare for their children up to 15 years old. It is offered through a salary sacrifice arrangement by which employees agree to forego part of their salary and receive a corresponding value (between £55 and £25 per week) in childcare voucher which is exempted from tax and National Insurance Contribution. This sum is directly allocated to the payment of the facility that parents are free to choose. Employers also benefit from national insurance exemptions of up to 12.8% of the voucher’s value. A survey conducted in 2013 among 1 600 employers currently offering childcare vouchers (70% are SMEs) reveals that :

- 97% of employers offer childcare vouchers because they consider it important to support parents with childcare costs;
- 94% of employers want to create family-friendly environment;
- 65% said that offering childcare vouchers was important for their employee retention strategies.

ITALY THE TATA-CARD IN THE AOSTA VALLEY REGION (POLICY, REGIONAL LEVEL)

The Tata Card is a childcare solution implemented to ease local access to childcare facilities which is restricted in this region due to the geographical situation. The card is accessible to all families and can also be provided by the regional authorities to families with low income (grant covering from 30% to 90% of the service loaded on the card). The card gives access to family-nannies facilities (so-called Tata) who are registered after having followed a specific training. Each Tata takes care of maximum four children enabling the provision of dedicated services (beyond traditional day-care facilities) for instance teaching children about nature of the region and foreign languages basics. 134 families with children from 0 to 3 years old have benefited from the system in 2012.



FRANCE THE CAF SYSTEM

The CAF system directly subsidizes facilities that provide care for children under 6 years (multi-option centres, full-time child care centres, drop-off centres, and more) in order to support the development of childcare options (by funding grants for childcare facility managers) and to make the childcare less expensive for parents. There are three types of subsidies: investment subsidies, operative subsidies (Single service provision – Prestation de service unique) and support for the development of additional child-care options through the “childhood and youth” (“enfance et jeunesse”) contract.

The CAF system also finances Child minder meeting points (Relais assistantes maternelles/RAM) which are places for registered child-minders, parents and early-childhood professionals to come together and exchange information and experiences. Parents can also come to a RAM to receive free information on all available childcare options. Regarding parents opting for a individual childcare service (child-minder or home-based childcare provider) and depending on their means, CAF covers a part of the person’s salary and all or part of his/her welfare contributions). Parents using an individual care solution (child-minder or employee at home) are reimbursed of their social contributions and receive financial support depending on their income.

To improve the quality of the information available to families and facilitate their search for childcare facilities, the Family Branch launched www.mon-enfant.fr in 2009. The website lists nearly all of the childcare facilities in France, child-minder information points, child-parent drop-in centres and childcare day centres funded by CAF offices as well as the contact details of child-minders who wish to appear on the website.

