



AN EU DEAL FOR CHILDCARE



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I. COFACE BACKGROUND

Families rely on care services every day, for a number of different purposes. They are crucial for their chances to reconcile the different aspects of their lives such as family, work, care, leisure, education.

COFACE has been promoting a reconciliation vision and a work-life balance policy mix for years, as guidelines for policy makers, at all levels, to support families. **Services** are the central pillar of this vision.

In COFACE's vision, a reconciliation economy and society can be achieved by developing policies around three axes: resources, services, time; relying on these fundamental principles:

- Reconciliation measures must be considered as a safety net for all families, regardless of the ethnicity, migrant background, disability, sexual orientation or socio-economic status of its members;

- Involvement of men and fathers: reconciliation aims at gender equality but it is not a women's issue only;
- Life course perspective: reconciliation legislation and policy has to respond to the needs of all generations.

For a more detailed presentation of the COFACE vision, please refer to the publication "Families on the edge: building a Comprehensive European Work-Life Balance reality" (2017).¹ Below is a table, extracted from this publication, summarising the policy measures needed to achieve a reconciliation society.

In "Families on the edge", COFACE introduced the framework for the achievement of its vision but also analysed more in detail Pillar n. 3 "**Time**". The three Pillars are equally important and only by implementing all three would families fully benefit from a shift towards a reconciliation society. However, it has to

Reconciliation Pillar	Measure
RESOURCES ensuring decent living standards	■ Labour related income: access to decent wages and tackling the gender pay gap
	■ Fairer and more equitable tax systems
	■ Removing implicit bias also from indirect taxation (e.g. VAT)
SERVICES adequate provision of care services	■ Income Support: benefits and allowances
	■ Affordable, accessible and quality childcare services for children below 3 years, and between 3 and mandatory school age
TIME support for organising working time	■ Affordable, accessible and quality community-based long-term care services based on person-centered support packages
	■ Adequate family leave schemes (maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves)
	■ Flexible work arrangements (job sharing, telework, smart work)

be kept in mind that different institutions (local, regional, national and European) each have different competences in the design and implementation of the policies covered in those three pillars. It would be interesting to discuss whether the current division of competences is the most beneficial for families or whether some should be moved from/to local, national or European, to better cater for the needs of all families across the EU. Considering the current status and respective competences, COFACE decided to start from the pillar “Time” where the EU has more direct competence, including to propose legislation, contrary to other areas where the EU has more limited direct powers. That paper was also, in fact, a final reminder to the European Commission about the expectations of COFACE Families Europe prior to the release of the EU Work-Life Balance package in April 2017.²

The European Commission’s package contained both legislative and non-legislative instruments, covering the three pillars “Resources - Services - Time”, in ways that reflected the competence of the EU in each of these areas. In particular, the EU Commission proposed a “Work-Life Balance Directive” that covered the two main aspects of the “Time” pillar: leave schemes and flexible working arrangements, incorporating the three COFACE principles for a reconciliation society: reconciliation for all families, supporting the involvement of men in gender equality and the life-course

perspective. It also included proposals for reconciliation services such as Early Childhood Education and Care. COFACE released a general assessment of the Work-Life Balance package in June 2017.³ This paper is a more in-depth assessment of the parts of the Work-life balance package relating to childcare. While parents (and grandparents) are often the key providers of care for children in the very early years thanks to maternity, paternity, parental and carers leaves (with varying degrees of duration and pay), such family care must be complemented with professional childcare to ensure quality education and care from the earliest age for children, also to ensure that parents are not in a vulnerable position on the labour market due to their care duties. **Coordination between family leaves and childcare is therefore essential.** With reform of policies of the “Time” pillar in progress (at EU level through the minimum standards on leaves and flexible work arrangements proposed by the EU Worklife Balance directive, and at national level through various reforms⁴), COFACE decided to publish this new paper on a part of the “Service” pillar: **Early Childhood Education and Care** (ECEC, and referred to as “childcare» from now on in this paper). It will build on existing COFACE positions and present a blueprint for what COFACE calls on the EU to propose as a next set of measures, complementary to the Work-Life Balance Directive and other instruments included in the Work-Life Balance package, to fulfil the promises of the package itself.

COFACE Families Europe position on Early Childhood Education and Care in a nutshell:

It is very important to provide all children with access to a variety of accessible, affordable and high-quality childcare services in the communities, including early childhood care and education, emergency childcare, drop-in part-time babysitting services, care services for sick children, multi-purpose childcare facilities, out-of-hours and out-of-school childcare, and employer supported childcare etc. Such services along with a higher level of social protection and strong family leaves can reduce the risk of poverty of children and their families.⁵

II. EU CONTEXT

Childcare has been present in the EU debates for decades, already in 1990 the European Commission published a report on “Childcare in the European Communities 1985-1990”⁶ and stated that “What is needed, and what remains lacking in all Member States, is a comprehensive and coherent programme for reconciling childcare, employment and equality of opportunity. [...] It needs to cover the full range of childcare services; the organisation of employment; and more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women”. The network of experts who wrote that report also spelled out the necessary steps to achieve these goals:

- Clear targets for childcare coverage;
- Quality of services;
- Training of workforce;
- Individual right of the working parent to flexible and remunerated leave schemes.

The network also set some goals to be achieved by 1995:

- For children under 3 - full-time places (excluding pre-primary schooling) for 6-10% of children; for children from 3 to compulsory school age - places for the full school or kindergarten day in pre-primary schooling or kindergarten for 65-70% of children, including 50% of 3 year olds
- Maternity Leave, lasting between 12-16 weeks after birth; Paternity Leave, of at least 2 weeks; Parental Leave, of at least 3 months per parent

initially, with an eventual objective of 6-9 months per parent. Leave for Family Reasons (to enable parents to undertake essential parental duties including the care of sick children) of at least 5 days each year per parent per child.

“These rights should also be very flexible and provide compensation for all, or a high proportion, of lost earnings. The long-term objective should be complete compensation for lost earnings; but in the meantime, the objective should be compensation at the same level as the earnings-related component of Maternity Leave; be available to all workers, including self-employed workers and workers in family businesses, with eligibility conditions kept minimal and excluding length of service; be provided as individual rights to each parent, rather than as a family right.”

This (and the one published five years later to monitor the situation) gave inputs to those that, still today, are the main EU initiatives in this area: the Barcelona objectives and the maternity leave and parental leave directives. Sadly, some of these demands have not yet been met and, twenty-eight years later, they are currently under discussion in the EU Work-Life Balance directive.

A. Barcelona objectives

One major step forward in the area of childcare has been the Conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona in 2002⁷, where Member States agreed on childcare targets, to be achieved by 2010. However, due to their non-binding nature, the achievement of these targets, that became known as “Barcelona objectives”, was left to the political will of each single Member State.

These objectives aimed 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.

Children cared for in formal childcare structures, 0 to 3 years, %

GEO/TIME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU	29	27	27	28.4	30.3	32.9
Denmark	74	67	65	69.6	77.3	70.0
Netherlands	52	46	46	44.6	46.4	53.0
Sweden	51	52	55	56.8	64.0	51.0
Luxembourg	44	48	47	49.0	51.8	50.9
Portugal	35	34	38	45.0	47.2	49.9
France	44	40	39	39.5	41.7	48.9
Belgium	39	48	46	48.8	50.1	43.8
Slovenia	37	38	39	37.4	37.4	39.6
Spain	39	36	35	36.9	39.7	39.3
Italy	25	21	22	22.9	27.3	34.4
Finland	26	29	28	33.2	32.5	32.7
Germany	24	24	28	27.5	25.9	32.6
Malta	11	17	20	18.2	17.9	31.3
Estonia	19	18	21	19.4	21.4	30.2
Ireland	21	31	29	27.4	30.6	28.6
UK	34	27	30	28.9	30.4	28.4
Latvia	16	23	23	21.6	22.9	28.3
Cyprus	25	26	25	25.5	20.8	24.8
Austria	14	14	17	16.0	22.3	20.6
Romania	2	15	6	2.6	9.4	17.4
Croatia	13	11	11	17.1	11.8	15.7
Hungary	8	8	10	14.4	15.4	15.6
Lithuania	9	8	10	22.9	9.7	15.2
Bulgaria	7	8	11	11.2	8.9	12.5
Greece	19	20	14	12.8	11.4	8.9
Poland	3	6	5	5.5	5.3	7.9
Czech Rep.	5	3	2	4.4	2.9	4.7
Slovakia	4	5	4	6.5	1.1	0.5

In a recent report on the Barcelona Objectives⁸, the European Commission assessed the achievement of these targets and found that, eight years after the expected deadline, the targets have been only partially achieved.

In particular:

- For the target of 33% of children under 3 years of age: although the EU-average target has been reached at 33% of children under 3, only 12 Member States have reached this target individually, whereas 16 Member States have not.
- For the target of 90% of children between 3 years old and compulsory school age: 12 Member States have reached the target amount of providing 90% of children from age 3 to school age high quality and affordable childcare.

Children cared for in formal childcare structures, from 3 to the mandatory schoolgoing age, % over time

GEO/TIME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EU	83	83	82	83.1	83.3	86.3
Belgium	98	100	98	97.8	98.8	98.6
Sweden	95	96	96	94.8	96.2	96.6
Denmark	98	94	99	95.2	97.2	95.9
Spain	85	92	90	93.2	92.0	95.2
France	95	95	92	95.8	93.6	93.9
Netherlands	89	89	86	87.2	90.7	93.5
Ireland	82	89	89	89.3	92.0	92.9
Estonia	92	93	91	94.0	92.9	92.8
Italy	95	91	90	90.6	85.9	92.6
Portugal	81	86	85	88.7	89.9	92.0
Germany	90	91	89	88.7	89.6	91.8
Slovenia	92	92	91	90.3	90.9	89.9
Austria	84	80	79	85.7	85.3	88.7
Malta	73	91	92	99.4	88.4	88.1
Luxembourg	73	80	73	73.9	81.9	87.2
Hungary	75	75	85	86.3	89.1	86.8
Finland	77	77	79	80.6	82.8	83.9
Latvia	72	79	79	79.2	82.3	81.9
Czech Rep.	74	75	76	75.7	77.5	81.0
Cyprus	73	74	80	79.6	81.4	78.5
Lithuania	70	74	74	80.1	73.8	78.4
Slovakia	75	71	74	74.7	67.6	77.3
Bulgaria	62	89	78	71.6	71.5	74.7
UK	93	72	71	70.0	72.8	73.4
Poland	43	36	38	42.5	43.0	61.0
Romania	41	59	51	55.8	58.2	60.8
Greece	75	76	69	56.5	67.1	55.6
Croatia	51	40	47	40.2	52.9	51.3

A European Parliament resolution on “care services in the EU for improved gender equality”⁹ was adopted in November 2018, and invites the European Commission “to revise upwards, in consultation with the relevant actors including the Member States, the Barcelona targets and targets on early childhood education.”

B. Education and Training 2020 targets

In 2009 the European Commission also set four common EU objectives to address challenges in education and training systems by 2020, called “Education and training 2020”.¹⁰ One of these four objectives is linked to childcare where at least 95% of children (from 4 to compulsory school age) should participate in early childhood education. In its Education and Training Monitor 2017,¹¹ the European Commission measured the achievement of the four education and training targets and found that 94.8 % of children from 4 years old to compulsory school age were participating in early childhood education and care on average in the European Union. The ET 2020 target has been, therefore, considered to be generally reached.

C. EU worklife balance package

In 2017, the European Commission published a package of measures aimed at supporting workers in reconciling work, family and care responsibilities. In this package, the EU Commission proposed a Directive for the introduction of paternity leave of 10 days, introduction of 5 days/year carers' leave and a revision of the current parental leave, increasing non-transferability between parents. All these leaves schemes, in the proposal of the EU Commission, would be paid at sick leave level. The Directive is now in the final stages of negotiation between Council and European Parliament, following the adoption of a General Approach of the EPSCO Council in June 2018 and a vote in the European Parliament plenary in September 2018. The package also contained a number of non-legislative measures, covering care services and economic disincentives for second earners.

Concerning childcare, the EU Commission committed to work on three main areas:

1. Guidance and monitoring:

- Continue guidance to Member States on employment friendly and accessible care services and monitor their provision in the European Semester and the annual report on gender equality.
- Further support Member States in providing high quality early childhood education and care and step up efforts to help them learn from each other and identify what works best.

2. Targets and data collection:

- Revise the existing Education and Training 2020 target on early childhood education and care.
- Improve the EU level data collection on availability, affordability and quality of care services, particularly on formal long-term and out-of-school care services, with a view to explore possibilities of developing benchmarks at EU level.

3. Provide funding:

- Develop a tailored approach with Member States to encourage the use of the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) to finance social infrastructure, notably of child and long-term care services; including through Public-Private Partnerships.
- Continue to develop the provision of accessible, affordable and quality childcare, out-of-school and long-term care services, including by using support from the ESF and the ERDF. In light of country-specific recommendations and in case of insufficient funding earmarked to address the relevant challenges identified in the European semester, request Member States to review the programming of European Structural and Investment funds (ESIF).
- Explore the potential of addressing these concerns in the preparation of the post-2020 EU funding programmes, in particular drawing lessons from preparatory actions in this field.

With regard to guidance and monitoring, the EU Semester process considers childcare and has included it among the indicators of the social scoreboard. In 2018, four Member States received a country specific recommendation (CSR) for childcare: Ireland, Italy, Poland and Slovakia.

Concerning the revision of the childcare targets, as COFACE expressed already in June 2017, it is unclear why the EU Commission has decided to revise the Education and Training Targets (95% of children from 4 years to school age in formal childcare) instead of the more comprehensive Barcelona Objectives that cover also the most critical period, below 4 years old. It is important to remember that the biggest drop in worked hours for mothers happens in the first years after the birth of a child and, therefore, increasing only targets that are already almost achieved and do not take into account the most critical years, would be a cosmetic measure, with a very limited effect.

Finally, concerning the third part on funding, the Commission's proposal for the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) does include childcare among the priorities for the European Social Fund (ESF+)¹², in line with principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, on quality childcare and support to children. COFACE welcomed the prioritisation of childcare, and together with the Alliance for Investing in Children urges the co-legislators to maintain this priority in the final budget.¹³ Moreover, the recent European Parliament resolution on care services for improved gender equality encourages EU Member States to prioritise funding for childcare and long-term care using the financial instruments available within the next multiannual financial framework, not least the existing EFSI, ESI Funds, such as the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

D. Council Recommendation on high quality of ECEC

In 2018, the European Commission published a Proposal for a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems¹⁴ that is now under discussion and should be adopted in May 2019. COFACE welcomes this initiative¹⁵, quality of childcare is key for child development but it is also a crucial element in the parents' decision to use that service. The recommendation also refers to the need for inclusive childcare: services must be accessible to all children, to avoid potential segregation, for example, of children with disabilities. On this point, it is important to be very clear: inclusive childcare does not mean creating different and separated services accommodating children with different needs or background, it means that all services must be created with the capacity to accommodate all children. Another important point that is raised by the Recommendation is the need to revise upwards the Barcelona objectives and the Council Recommendation would give the mandate to start this process.

It has, however, to be recalled that, despite the importance of this recommendation as guideline and roadmap, the EU has no exclusive or shared competence over education and the implementation of this initiative will be driven by Member States at national level.

E. European Pillar of Social Rights: its principles and the intersections with the EU semester process and the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework

In November 2017, the EU Institutions and the Member States proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights, a list of 20 principles that should guide Europe towards the development of a Social Europe in the Euro Area. This Pillar is not just a wishlist. It is a social agenda for Europe, which must be implemented through a mix of EU and national actions. COFACE believes that the Pillar is a powerful tool and an opportunity that should not be wasted: it should be the base for developing future legislative (where possible) initiatives and the backbone for a Multiannual Financial Framework that is forward looking and aims at a prosperous Europe. It is important that the upcoming negotiations pay attention not to try to fit the Pillar into the EU budget but, on the contrary that the future EU budget is built around the principles of the Pillar, becoming the instrument to achieve the principles detailed in the Pillar.

Among the 20 principles, there are two that are particularly relevant to childcare:

Principle 11: "Childcare and support to children"

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

Principle 9: "Work-Life Balance"

Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Women and men shall have equal access to special leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and be encouraged to use them in a balanced way.

Performances and trends in EU Member States under the Pillar of Social Rights are monitored via the Social Scoreboard, within the EU semester process. Based on this assessment, the European Commission can propose Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs).

In addition, it is important to recall that the EU Semester and the CSRs have an important political component which could limit their effectiveness in targeting the gaps in childcare in Europe: other political and economic priorities may be chosen as CSRs for a given country, even in cases where the Member State lags behind in childcare provision and would benefit from a CSR on childcare. See more on this specific point and on the need to move towards more precise indicators for revised targets in the sections below.

III. DUALITY OF CHILDCARE: AN EDUCATION MEASURE, A TOOL TO SUPPORT PARENTS' EMPLOYMENT OR BOTH?

Childcare services can have an important and long-term positive impact on child cognitive development but also on social inclusion, contributing to breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, it also enable carers, often women, to participate in the labour market.

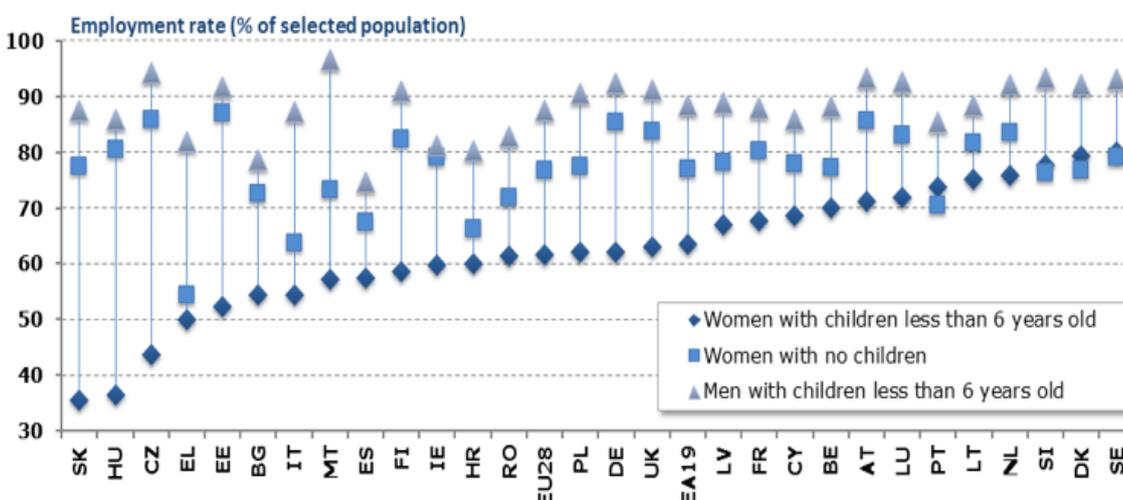
Women's participation in the labour market is lower than men's and the employment gap widens even more after the birth of a child: while men tend to work longer hours, women reduce their time at work or drop out of paid employment altogether. Reasons behind this decision may vary but there are three main drivers that must be taken into account:

- **Lack of quality affordable accessible childcare, including beyond standard opening hours.** For parents commuting or working non-standard hours (e.g. shift, weekends or with other atypical contracts) a childcare service that

opens only at standards office hours may not be helpful. Service provision must be diverse, accommodating the different needs of the families.

- **The persistence of the stereotype that women are natural carers and men are the breadwinners.** This is often masked as a "cultural" norm but it creates a discrimination between men and women, against mothers who would like to work and fathers who would like to spend more time with their children.
- **Gender pay gap:** if no services are available (or too expensive) and the only solution left is for one parent to stay at home, the one to drop employment will be the one earning less, to minimise the reduction of the family income. Women in Europe still earn, in average 16% less than men and therefore, they end up being the one parent leaving paid employment and staying at home.

Mothers' employment rate compared to other women and fathers (people aged 25-49 years), 2013



Source: "Working moms – 'having it all' not yet a standard in Europe»¹⁶

Childcare is not only a possibility for parents to go to work, but also crucial for child development and has an important educational component. According to a study of the European Commission on “the structure of the European Education Systems 2017/2018”,¹⁷ all 28 EU Member States apply the ISCED 0¹⁸ to publicly subsidised and accredited centre based settings for Early Childhood Education and Care provided for children from 3 years of age. Out of the 28 Member States, 13 include in the ISCED 0 childcare programmes for children below 1. Other 3 Member States apply the ISCED 0 to childcare programmes from 1,5 years (Latvia) and from 2 years (France and Hungary). However, Ministries of Education are often but not always responsible for Early Childhood Education and Care, even if the ISCED 0 standards apply. In 15 of the 28 Member States, Ministries of Education are responsible for childcare for children up to 3 years of age.

Early education is fundamental also to reduce social exclusion and the risk of child poverty but the use of childcare is, in many countries, very much linked with the socio-economic background of parents and the level of education of the mothers, with children from disadvantaged groups missing out the most, as highlighted by the OECD.¹⁹

OECD Family database data²⁰ shows that children from families with a medium-high socio-economic background, especially in the age from 0 to 2 years old, are more likely to be in formal childcare than their peers from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Another trend that has been noticed is a direct link between the use of formal childcare and the level of education of mothers: children whose mothers have attained a tertiary/degree level are more likely to be enrolled in formal childcare. Considering the positive impact of childcare on the child development and social inclusion, it seems that those who would benefit the most are less likely to be

using formal childcare services.

With this overview, it seems clear that childcare has different components, all equally important:

- 1.** It is an education measure that positively impacts children’s development;
- 2.** It is a social inclusion measure that reduces the risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- 3.** It is an employment support measures for parents, that enables them to reconcile work and family life.

COFACE explored this specific point, of childcare being at the crossroads of family, social, education and employment policies in a recent conference in Austria (October 2018) and released a policy brief that illustrates the discussion.²¹

Among the key areas for further discussion, one emerged clearly: considering the important educational aspect of childcare, should it not be considered as a right of children and therefore be universal? In Germany, a legal entitlement to childcare has been introduced by law and, together with the debate on whether childcare should be shifted under education policies, a debate has started to emerge: if it falls under education as a legal right of the child, should childcare not be free like other levels of education? In a growing number of EU Member States, Ministries of Education are getting more and more involved in childcare and the notion of childcare as positive for child development and part of children’s rights is more and more accepted. Therefore, this debate for universal and free childcare should be seriously taken into consideration by policy-makers across the EU.

IV. THE CHILDCARE FAMILIES WANT: TIME TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY OF ACCESSIBLE QUALITY AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

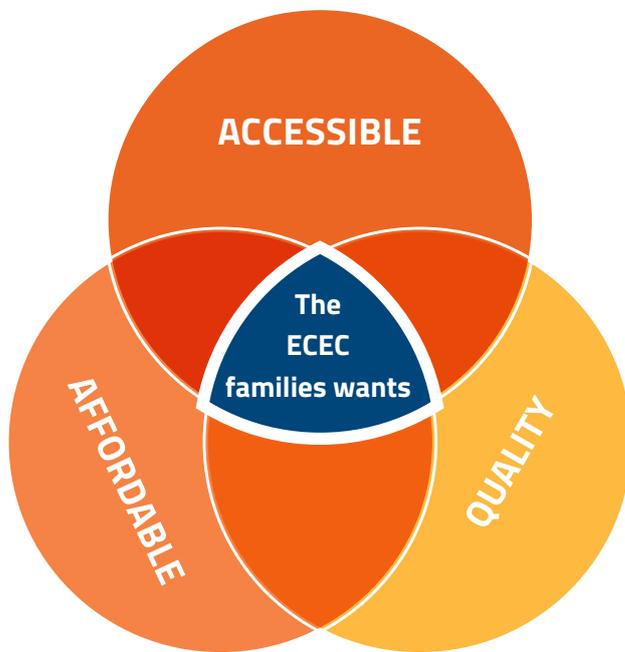
When looking for a childcare place for their children, the first challenge that parents face is that places are too limited and often there is not one available for their child. It becomes clear then, that the first way to respond to parents' needs is to **increase the supply of childcare services**.

However, supply alone is not enough for parents to decide (or be able) to use a service. There are characteristics of the service that convince or enable parents to enroll their child into childcare.

First, the service should be **ACCESSIBLE**. Accessibility can be read in two ways: geographic accessibility and under a disability lens. Parents living in urban and rural areas have very different needs and, for example, public transport availability or commuting needs. Therefore, if a childcare service is too far, opens too late/closes too early for parents having to commute long distances, even if it is supplied, may not be used, because it would make life harder instead of easier. There are good practices across Europe of including childcare infrastructures in city planning and in new built environment, and this should be further explored. Under the disability lens, it is important to underline that services must be accessible to all children, to avoid potential segregation, for example, of children with disabilities. On this point, it is important to be very clear: inclusive childcare does not mean creating different and separated services accommodating children with different needs or background, it means that all services must be created with the capacity to accommodate all children.

Second, the service must be **AFFORDABLE**. If the price parents have to pay is too high, there will be no incentive in using the service, especially if the out-of-pocket component has to be paid upfront and part of it will only be reimbursed via tax benefits. High costs are a widespread reason for not using childcare and have an adverse effect on the labour supply of second earners, impacting both the decision to enter the labour market for non-working parents and the decision to increase the number of hours worked.²²

Third, the **QUALITY** of the service. No parent will enroll a child into a poor quality service. Quality has many aspects and measuring it is not always straightforward. However, among the key areas to consider are the educational value of the service and its alignment with national /international educational standards, the ratio of teaching staff/assistants and children, and the working conditions of the workforce. Highly trained staff to better support the development of each child. Low staff/child ratio to ensure that every child receives all the attention he/she needs and that the staff is not overworked. Quality standards should be applicable to all formal and semi-formal (e.g. childminders) services. COFACE supports the Proposal for key principles of the Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care annexed to the proposed Council Recommendation on ECEC (under discussion).²³



With these key features in mind and making sure to include them systematically in any childcare development project, the focus is to increase the supply of childcare places across the EU. This would have an impact on both children, parents and the economy. Enlarging the view and to understand women's employment patterns after the birth of a child one could start from looking at parental leave trends: women tend to take larger shares of parental leave than men. There are different reasons for this: the possibility to transfer parental leave rights to the other parent (it is the only social right that is transferable), the low level (if any) of pay for parental leave and the persistence of the patriarchal culture that considers women more apt to care for their children than men. Women tend to earn less than their male partners and the family loses less income if the woman stays at home for longer periods. Moreover, parental leave schemes do not necessarily apply to self-employed or atypical workers who have even more difficulties in getting back into the labour market. Therefore, once the parental leave periods are over, women may have already accumulated a certain amount of time out of paid employment. As a consequence, it may seem logical, where childcare facilities are not available, that women keep staying at home or re-enter the labour market in part-time, temporary or low quality jobs, while their male partners may have kept

their original job, or even progressed with their career in the meantime.

This is why, if there is a political will to increase women's (quality) employment, it is of the utmost importance to reform parental leave schemes and **focus the attention on increasing the supply of childcare services for the early years.**

The recent report²⁴ from the European Commission takes stock of the current achievement of the Barcelona Objectives and provides us with the following picture:

Objective 1: 33% of children from 0 to 3 years old in formal childcare.

- The overall rate reached on average in the EU is 32,9%
- 12 Member States reached the level of 33%
- 16 Member States are below 33%, with 4 Member States below 10%.

Objective 2: 90% of children between 3 and school age in formal childcare.

- The overall rate reached on average in the EU is 86,3%
- 12 Member States have achieved the target
- 16 Member States have not achieved the target
- The ET2020 target of 95% of children from 4 years old to school age is, even if reached, showing a gap in the age group of 3 to 4 years old.

These data show certain trends but also lead to a number of reflections that it would be appropriate to take into account of in the near future when designing the future vision for childcare in Europe.

The first and most important data is that in more than half of the EU, more than 2 children out of 3 below three years of age are not in formal childcare. This shocking data is the confirmation of the lack of

childcare provision, but it can also hide a number of biases that somewhat skew the results without revealing the correct picture on the ground:

- Diversity of services: childminders, tagesmutter, semi-formal structures and other forms of childcare that are in between formal childcare services and informal baby-sitting are not always taken into account, despite being regulated and widely used by families.
- Inflexible opening hours can be a factor (other than pure availability or cost) for parents to choose these semi-formal services: a service that is open less (or equal) to office hours may not fulfill the needs of parents, who would then need to look elsewhere. This is especially true considering that younger generations tend to work more on temporary, atypical jobs with non-fixed hours, compared to previous generations.
- Age groups: while it may seem a small age cohort, the 0 to 3 years age group gathers children with very different needs. In addition, it includes the period where no child would be in childcare: statutory maternity leave. A number of parents also take a share of their parental leave right after the end of maternity leave, especially in those countries where maternity leave is very short and where they can afford not to work. This leads to a bias in the data and reduces, de facto, the percentage of childcare use. Because of the different needs that the children in this age group

have, including the child-adult ratio, collecting data for the age group as a whole does not provide a full and accurate picture of the situation on the ground. And percentages may greatly differ for the group “end of well-paid leave to 1 year”, 1 to 2 years old, and 2 to 3 years old.

One way of ensuring a clearer picture of childcare availability in Europe might be to using different indicators, shifting away from enrolment in childcare as an indicator to measuring the number of hours that children spend in childcare. The latter would allow for a better understanding of trends and use of childcare: does availability of childcare mean 5 days/week for instance? Some children might be enrolled but only have access to childcare a couple of hours a week. More precise indicators would also provide more precise information about barriers to women’s employment. This would contribute to consolidating the existing indicator on childcare in the EU social scoreboard.²⁵

V. THE WAY FORWARD: AN EU DEAL FOR CHILDCARE

A. A roadmap to boost the European project

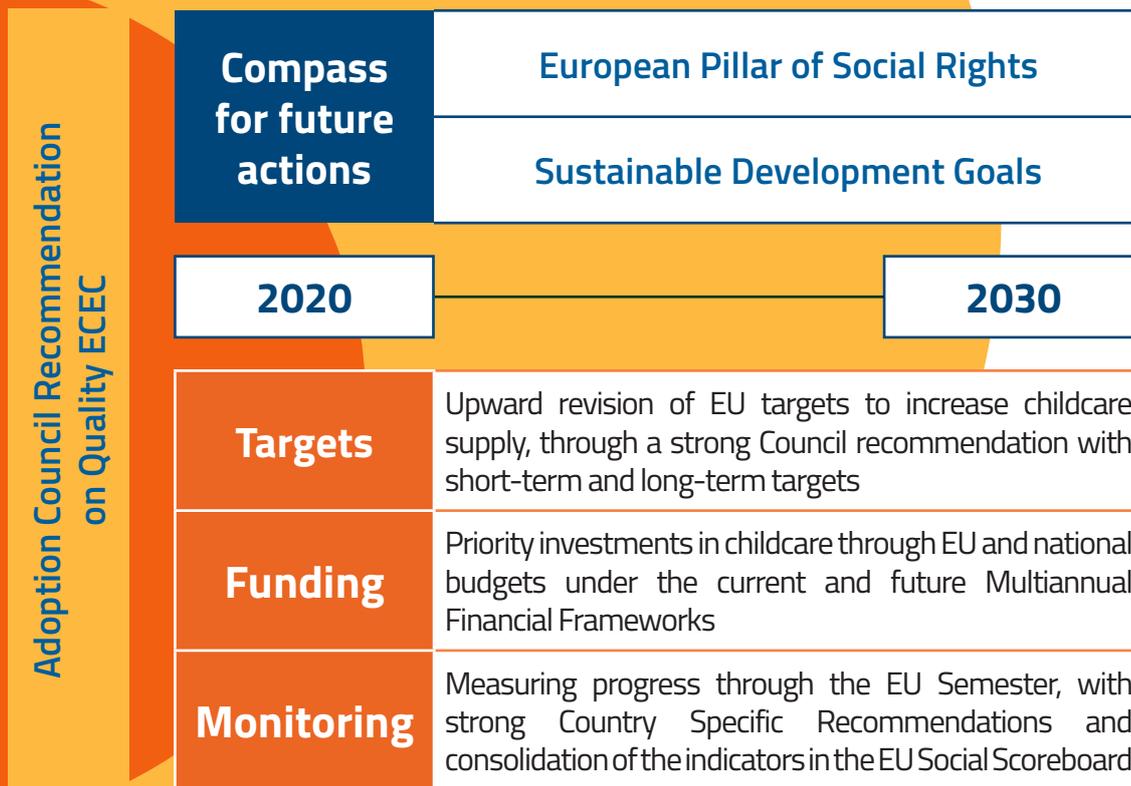
Eurofound estimates that every year Europe loses €370 billion because women are not given the chance to fully express their potential on the labour market.²⁶ The economy and the labour market are changing and Europe needs to stop looking at these changes as something that is approaching but as a reality in which we live. The “future of work” is more and more the “present of work”, precarisation and low quality jobs are a reality that the young generations have trouble to leave behind them. Demographics are also changing and unless we address the causes at their roots and we invest in people, it will be harder and harder to prevent disengagement from the European project, with a risk that they channel their frustrations towards extremists who advocate for borders and walls across Europe.

It is now time for a serious and massive investment into care services, starting from the early age and across the life cycle. It is time for **a new EU deal on care** and with this paper we illustrate our view for a EU deal for childcare, a vision for the next decade, an agenda 2030 for childcare.

Finally, COFACE Families Europe believes that a Roadmap that paves the way for an EU deal for childcare by 2030 is needed based on the following:

- The European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals, as a compass for future actions;
- Adoption of the Council recommendation on high quality ECEC to promote inclusive and quality childcare, and professionalisation of childcare;
- Upward revision of EU targets to increase childcare supply, through a strong Council recommendation with short-term and long-term targets;
- Priority investments in childcare through EU and national budgets under the current and future Multiannual Financial Frameworks;
- Measuring progress through the EU Semester, with strong Country Specific Recommendations and consolidation of the indicators in the EU Social Scoreboard.

ROADMAP #ECEC2030



B. Setting European benchmarks for reaching 2030 targets

To trigger this new EU deal for childcare, we do not have to start from zero, the current and future **Multi-annual Financial Frameworks** (MFF) allow for part of this investment and **childcare needs to be a financing priority** for Member States.

The EU Semester is also a powerful instrument to monitor and measure Member States progress in a number of areas. In 2018, four countries (Ireland, Italy, Poland and Slovakia) received a CSR on childcare. The EU Social Scoreboard includes 14 headline indicators (14 indicators for 20 Pillar

principles) developed together with the Member States and its analysis is presented in the Joint Employment Report.²⁷ Some of the indicators are composite, the one on childcare is not and only measures the percentage of children below 3 years of age in formal childcare. This specific indicator is also used to monitor the progress of one of the Barcelona objectives (i.e. 33% of children below 3 years of age in formal childcare by 2010).

The use of existing indicators is positive as it allows to analyse the progress over a longer period of time. There are, however, a number of recommendations that are worth considering to consolidate these indicators, in order to maximise their effectiveness and increase the internal coherence with other EU instruments to

measure childcare provision.

- Adopt a Recommendation for upward revision of the Barcelona targets for children below 3 years of age, to gradually move towards a right to have **availability of childcare for all families**, regardless of their ability to pay, to close the gap between the end of well-paid leave and legal entitlement to childcare.
- Consider childcare as an **individual right of the child** and develop new targets considering **quality as a pre-requisite** for every service.
- Consider the **necessity of different types of services** and define minimum standards required in order to include “semi-formal” services into the data collection for the revised targets.
- **Create sub-indicators to have more precise measurement and consider the feasibility and opportunity of using the end of well-paid leave (maternity/parental) as a starting age instead of childbirth.** Needs of children from 0 to 3 years old are catered for by different types of services - not always covered by the definition of formal childcare - and the first months after childbirth are covered by maternity leave and in some cases parental leave, creating a bias that lowers the percentage of service use if it is all considered together.
- **Consider the possibility to measure the use of service (number of hours) instead of simple enrolment**, to avoid a biased data collection.
- **Link the Social Scoreboard indicators with the upward revision of the Barcelona objectives for children below 3 years old.** The current objective is 33% of children in childcare and the most recent data showed that 12 Member States

have achieved it. If we do not link the scoreboard indicator with the revision of the targets, those 12 countries will not have reasons to receive a CSR on childcare, despite their scores being just above one out of three children.

- **Pay attention to the 3 to 4 year age range.** Despite the de facto achievement of the Education and Training target for childcare (95% children from 4 years to compulsory school age), the Barcelona objective of 90% of the 3 years-old to compulsory school age in childcare has not been achieved, showing clearly that there is a need to closely monitor and invest in the group of 3 to 4 year olds. This group is, however, not monitored in the social scoreboard and risks falling through the cracks.
- **Align the Barcelona target and education and training target towards a common 95% of all children between 3 years of age and compulsory education** in all EU member States.

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About COFACE Families Europe

COFACE Families Europe has been involved for 60 years in building a strong social, family friendly Europe. It brings forward the voice of millions of families, gathering 60 organisations from all over Europe. COFACE Families Europe advocates for strong social policies that take into consideration family needs and guarantee equal opportunities for all families.



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