

*COFACE Working Group  
on Work-Life Balance*

*How to close the childcare gap?*

## **An overview of the childcare gap in Europe**

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European Observatory on Family Policy

Brussels, January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026

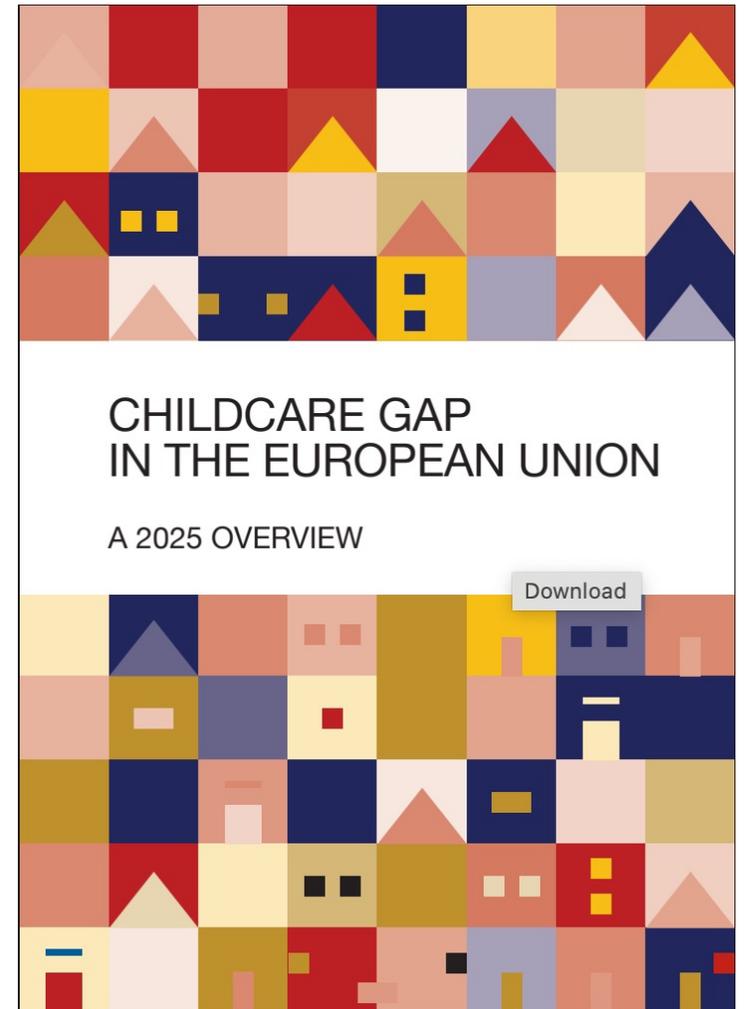


EUROPEAN  
OBSERVATORY

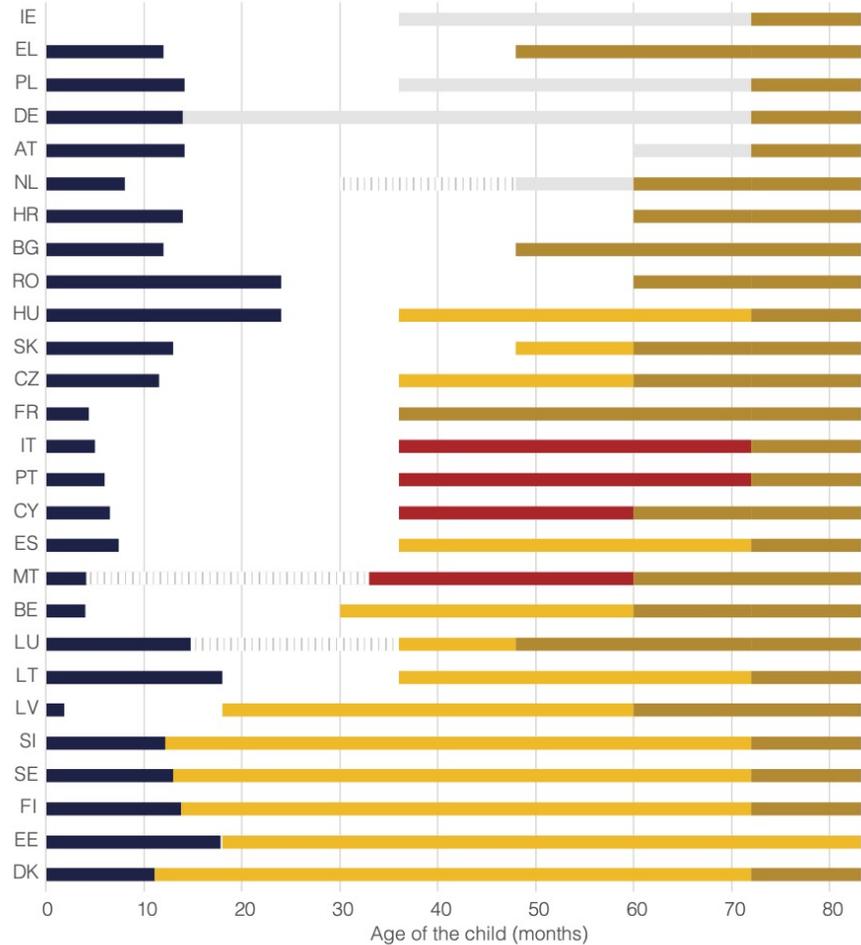
2025 OVERVIEW

## CHILDCARE GAP IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Own elaboration based on SEEPRO-3  
study 2024, and 20th International  
Review on Leave Policies and Related  
Research 2024



# THE CHILDCARE GAP in EUROPE



## Childcare gap problem:

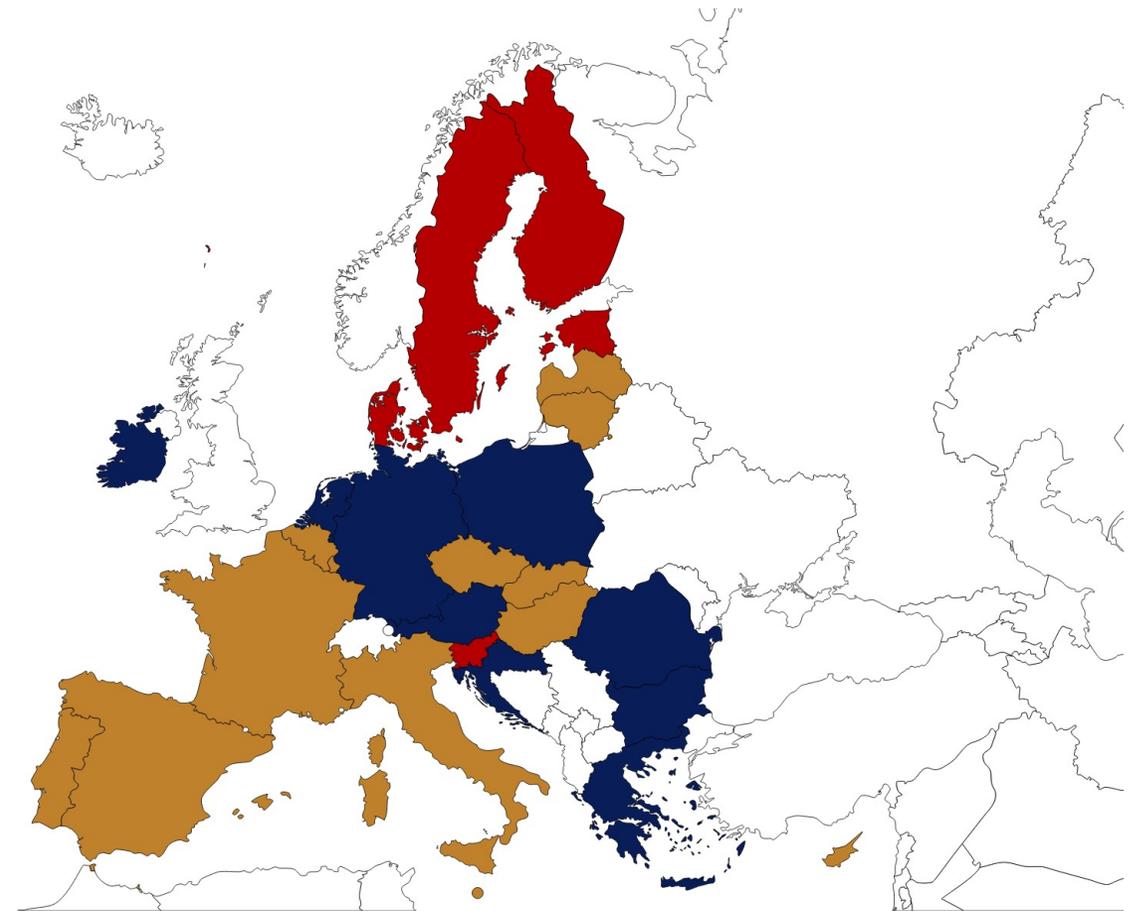
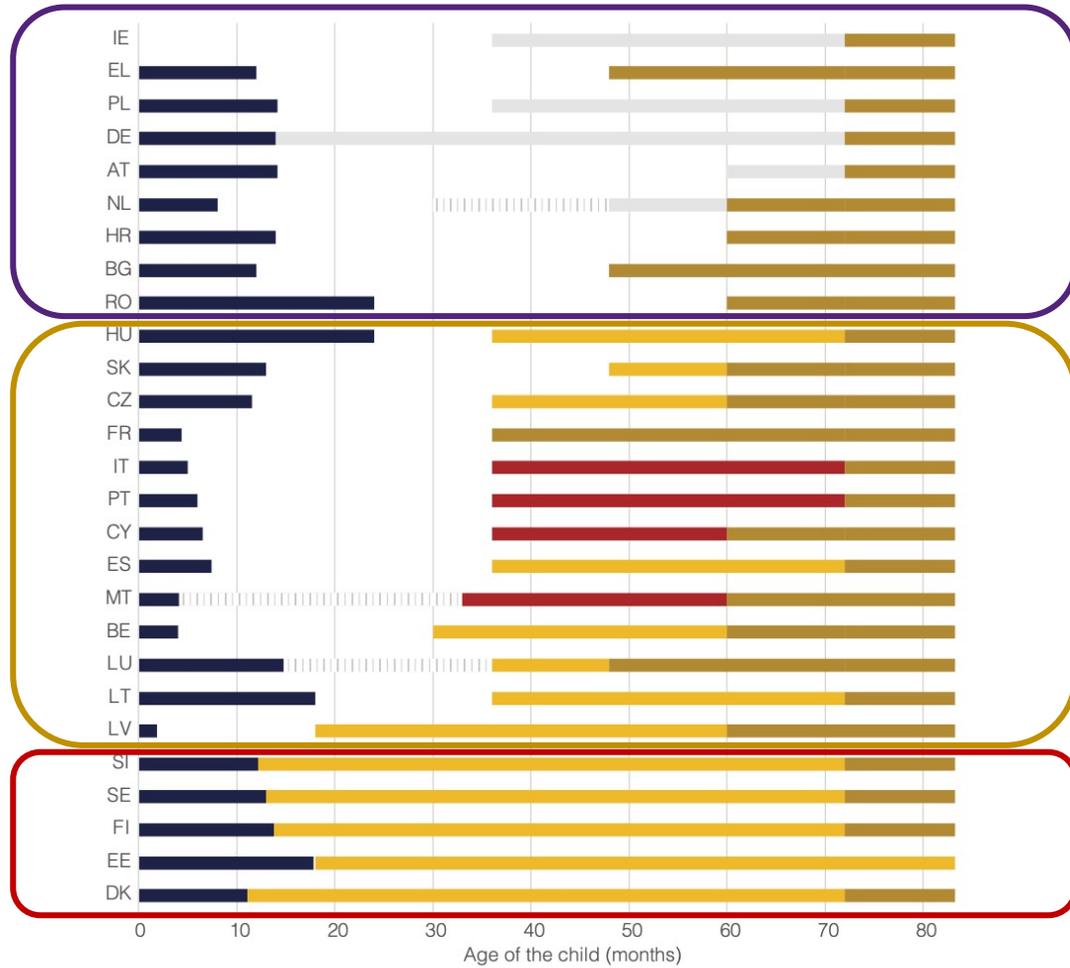
*The period, normally seen in the first years after the birth of a child, during which families are unable to avail themselves of well-compensated parental leave or secure a state-supported full-time place in early childhood education and care*

## Policy solutions:

- Extension paternity/parental leave duration
- Increase in ECEC coverage
- Development and reorganisation of existing ECEC systems

*Source: Own elaboration based on 20th International Review on Leave Policies and Related Research (2024); Eurydice Country Profile Reports.*

# 3 COUNTRY GROUPS



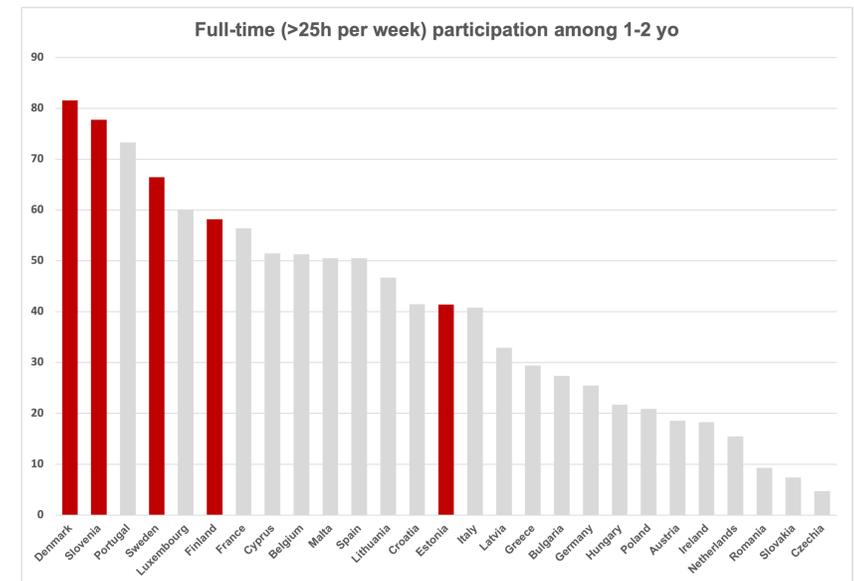
- Well-paid leave
- Statutory entitlement to part-time ECEC
- Entitlement to Full-time ECEC
- Targeted entitlement to ECEC
- No entitlement to all-day ECEC, but full-time uptake > 85%
- Compulsory ECEC or primary education

# GROUP 1: “NO- GAP” COUNTRIES

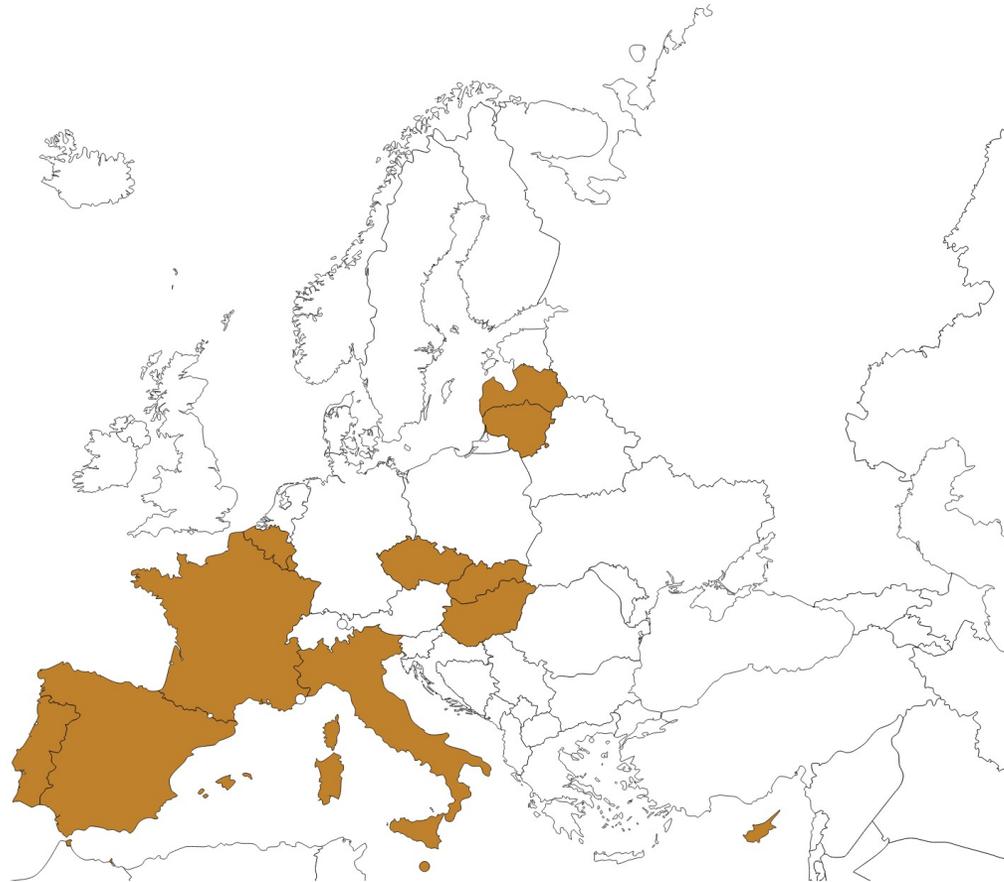


Source: EU SILC database (ilc\_cainform25).

- Scandinavian countries + Estonia + Slovenia
- Early implementation of ECEC entitlements
- Well-paid parental leave is long, but not the defining feature of these systems
- Single-cycle integrated ECEC systems (0-6)
- Similar funding models (fee-paying, income based), with the exception of Estonia

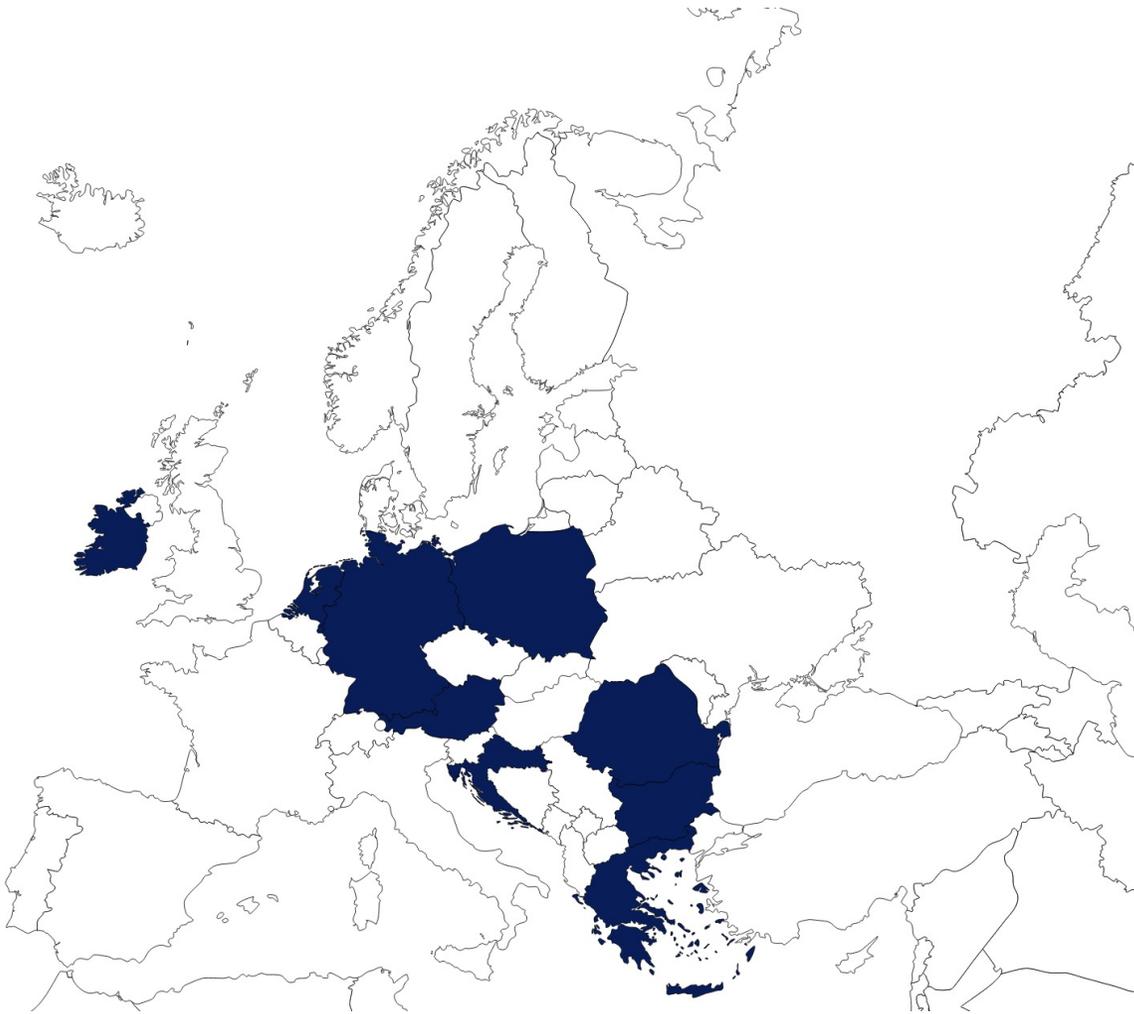


## GROUP 2: GAP WITH FULL-TIME ENTITLEMENT



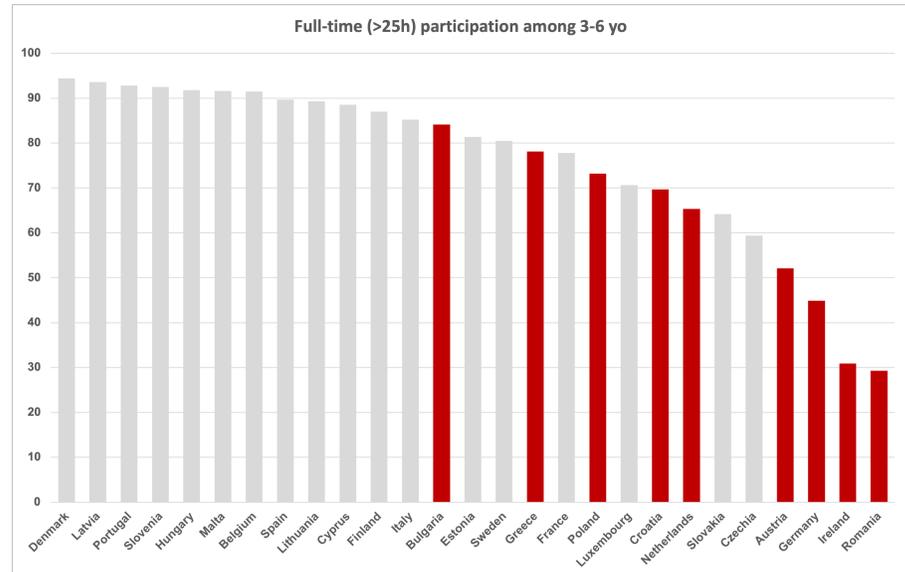
- Heterogeneous group: Mediterranean countries (without Greece) + France, Latvia, Lithuania, Belgium, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary
- Key shared feature: individual right (or obligation) to full-time access to ECEC (similar to no-gap countries)
- Entitlement starts between 2,5 and 3 (with exception of Latvia)
- Italy and Malta do not have a de jure entitlement, however historical development of preschool create a de facto statutory right to the service
- Split ECEC systems
- Comparatively short well-paid parental leave period (with some exceptions: Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Czechia)

# GROUP 3: GAP WITHOUT FULL-TIME ENTITLEMENT

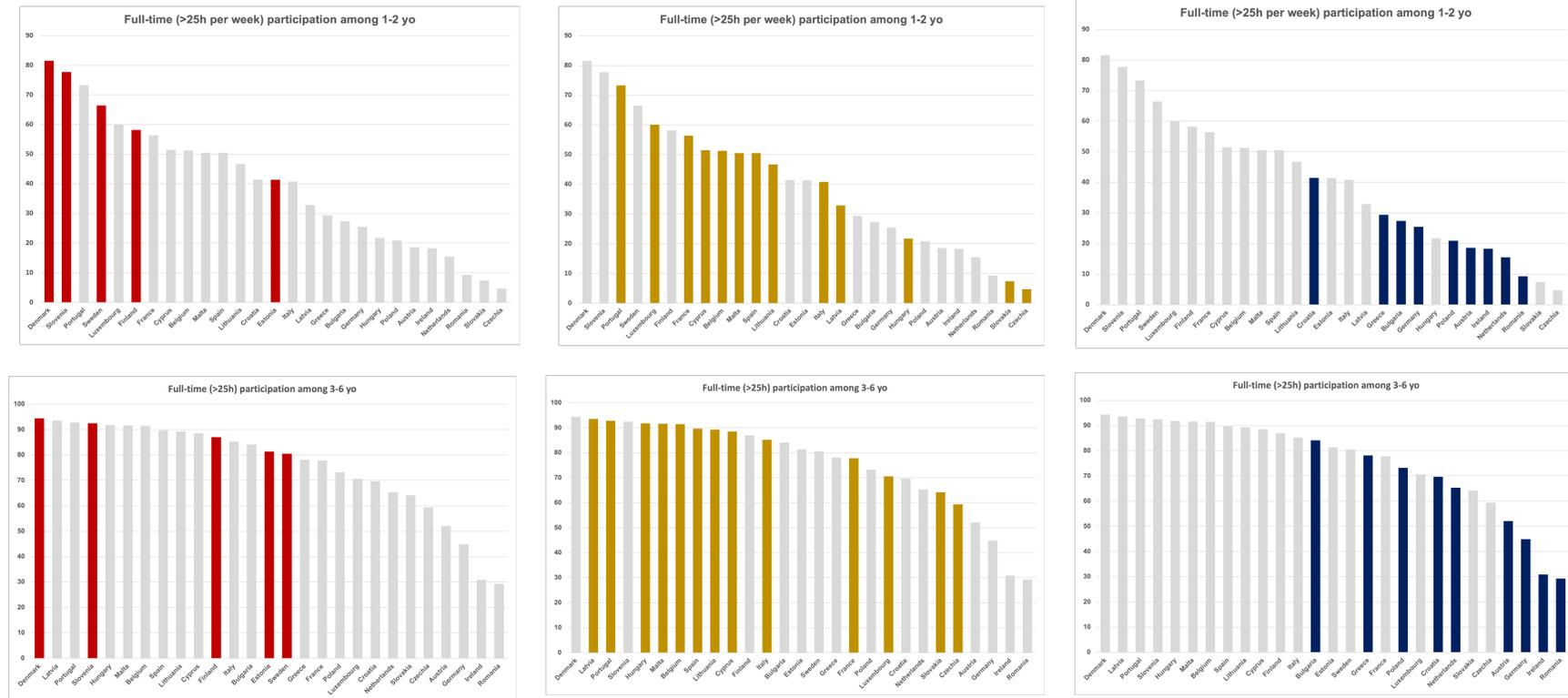


Source: EU SILC database (ilc\_caindform25).

- Extremely heterogeneous group
- Absence of a de jure **country-wide** entitlement to FT ECEC
- Split ECEC systems
- Comparatively long well-paid leave
- Comparatively low FT participation rate, even among 3-6



# CONCLUSIONS



## Key conditions to close the gap

- Early onset of entitlement to ECEC is a key factor
- Length of leave period important but perhaps not decisive
- Integrated 0-6 ECEC cycle seems conducive to a closing of the gap
- Income-based fee-paying model until start of compulsory education is the funding model of reference in most "no-gap" countries

Thank you for the attention.

