

Barcelona objectives ^[1]

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

Author:

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Executive summary

The availability, accessibility and affordability of high quality childcare facilities are crucial for enabling women, and men, with caring responsibilities, to participate in the labour market. High quality early childhood education and care is also an important tool to tackle possible social disadvantages of children and is good for the cognitive and social development of children from an early age.

As far back as 2002, the Barcelona European Council recognised this situation and set objectives with regard to the availability of high quality and affordable childcare facilities for pre-school children, through two targets, i.e. 90 % of children from age 3 until mandatory school age and 33 % of children under 3.

The aim of this report is to assess, as part of the implementation of the Commission's Communication supporting work-life balance for working parents and carers, to what extent Member States have progressed towards implementing the Barcelona objectives since the last report in 2013.

All in all, the Barcelona target has been generally reached for children under the age of 3 for the EU28, covering 32.9% of children in the EU, even if important differences persist among Member States.

The target of 33 % has largely been reached in 12 Member States according to the most recent data of 2016, while in 7 EU Member States out of 12 between 33 % and 49 % of children have access to childcare and in 5 EU Member States 50 % or more of children have access to childcare. In remaining 16 Member States, less than 33% of children have access to childcare, with 10 Member States where less than 25 % of children in the smallest age group participate in childcare.

The Barcelona target has not yet been reached for children from 3 to mandatory school-going age. As of 2016, 86.3 % of children from 3 to the mandatory school-going age participate in formal childcare or attend preschool. The Barcelona target has been reached in 12 Member States and all the rest of 16 Member States have not yet reached the target.

Availability and use of childcare is influenced by several factors: namely legal entitlement to childcare, accessibility and quality. Also the adaptability of the services to the needs of parents, including distance to the childcare facilities and opening hours adapted to working patterns and needs, plays an important role.

As caring responsibilities are the main reason for low female labour market participation, counting to 370 billion euro a year of loss for Europe, the Barcelona objectives, adopted by the European Council in 2002, are still of crucial importance in 2018.

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