

Child care costs exclude women from workforce [IE] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Child care costs here are the highest in Europe and are keeping large numbers of women out of the workforce, according to a major study published yesterday. It says Irish parents spend almost twice the EU average on child care and it indicates the problem is getting worse.

The report, by the Forum on the Workplace of the Future, says there is a "serious under-utilisation" of women's high standards of education and skills, and a "critical" factor in this is the lack of affordable child care.

The forum was set up by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance to draw up a blueprint for the successful Irish workplace in 2010 and beyond. It received nearly 50 written submissions in the preparation of its report, launched yesterday by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. The report calls for a range of measures to improve access to the workplace for groups including lone parents, people with disabilities, older workers and non-nationals.

It points to a recent EU-funded study which evaluated the 15 pre-enlargement states in terms of the supports provided to enable parents to work outside the home.

Ireland was ranked last of the 15, in a table headed by Denmark, Sweden and Finland. "At the same time, the cost to parents of child care is the highest in Europe. Irish parents pay on average 20 per cent of their annual income towards child care, which is almost twice the EU average of 12 per cent."

The report points out that in 1999 an expert working group set up under the partnership process estimated that a shortfall in child care places of 40,000 would arise by 2010.

"In recent times a high proportion of Irish women have deferred childbirth until their early 30s. By 2013, the population cohort aged in their 30s will have increased by 150,000. It seems likely that this will further accentuate the need for adequate child care provision."

The report calls for action on a range of other issues if the transition to a "knowledge society" is to be properly managed.

- reprinted from the Irish Times

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