

# Britain's childcare worst in Europe [GB] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS:

Pre-school children in Britain are among the worst served for childcare, according a report today by the Daycare Trust identifying the inadequacy of support available for overworked parents.

Despite a "frenetic" stream of government initiatives to improve childcare during Labour's first term of office, the charity said ministers had made only minimal progress towards European standards in support for children in their early years.

The charity said that Britain's statutory parental leave lined up with the weakest provisions in Europe, "reflecting deep reluctance to offend employers by regulating a free market economy in the interests of parents and children".

Mothers in Britain have a statutory right to a maximum of 29 weeks' post natal maternity leave, some of it unpaid, compared with 36 months on reduced pay in France, Germany, Spain and Finland.

"Early education is moving belatedly towards two years' part time provision, when most European countries seek three years' full time," said a report for the trust by Peter Moss, professor of early childhood provision at the Institute of Education, London University.

Britain had the highest level of child poverty in Europe, British fathers worked particularly long hours, and there was a high level of part time working by women with children. Other European countries had clear policies for supporting children under three, but it was hard to discern the policy of Britain.

"Support for working parents is now acknowledged, but remains minimal - weak leave entitlements, no entitlement to work reduced hours [as most other European countries offer] and no entitlement to a publicly funded place in an early childhood service," Professor Moss said.

Britain was the only European country to continue splitting its childcare workforce, with trained teachers on higher rates of pay looking after children in nursery schools and kindergartens, while poorly trained workers on low pay cared for others in day care centres.

Stephen Burke, the trust's director, said: "British parents are picking up the tab for most of the childcare bill in this country.

"The national childcare strategy is creating much needed improvements in services. But compared to our European neighbours, where childcare is a key part of the social infrastructure that families take for granted, Britain has a long way to go."

- Reprinted from the Guardian.

**Region:** Europe <sup>[2]</sup>

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