

(English version)

Question for written answer E-004659/18
to the Commission
Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D)
(14 September 2018)

Subject: The realisation of the Barcelona objectives on the provision of childcare services

The availability of quality, accessible, and affordable infrastructure for the care of children and other dependants has proven to be a crucial factor for work-life balance policies that facilitate the rapid return of mothers to, and an increasing participation of women on, the labour market.

The objectives on the provision of childcare services were set in 2002. Unfortunately, a majority of EU Member States did not reach them by 2018. The realisation of these objectives is essential in ensuring women's full participation in the labour market.

Does the Commission support the idea that a multi-annual financial framework should give priority to investments in community-based quality, accessible and affordable childcare services, because they are necessary for realising the Barcelona objectives on the provision of childcare services?

Answer given by Ms Thyssen on behalf of the European Commission
(26 November 2018)

The Barcelona target of 33% on the provision of childcare to children aged under 3 was reached in 2016 with the EU28 figure standing at 32.9%. However, four countries provide formal childcare to less than 10% of their youngest children (Greece, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia). The target of 90% for children aged 3 to mandatory school age has not yet been reached, even if the average rate has progressed to 86.3% in 2016 ⁽¹⁾.

According to Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, children have a right to affordable childcare of good quality. In its communication on an 'Initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers' ⁽²⁾ improving the quality, affordability and access to childcare is put as one of the priority areas to be explored in the preparation of the post-2020 EU funding programmes.

On 22 May 2018, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on High quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems ⁽³⁾, which includes 'supporting the development of high quality inclusive ECEC services by making available EU funding'.

Within the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework, by proposing to increase the share of social inclusion in the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +) budget from the current 20% to 25%, and by including specific objectives for the ESF + on access to ECEC ⁽⁴⁾, the Commission has shown that this remains a high priority. In addition, the Commission proposal for the InvestEU Programme ⁽⁵⁾ includes a 'Social Investments and Skills Window' involving a EUR 4 billion guarantee for investments in the social services sector. The Commission has proposed to double the budget of the Erasmus+ programme, which can be used to train the staff involved in ECEC.

⁽¹⁾ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8785-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

⁽²⁾ COM(2017) 252 final of 26.4.2017. Available at:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A252%3AFIN>

⁽³⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/european-education-area/early-childhood-education/it-and-care_en

⁽⁴⁾ Article 4.1.(iii) and (v) of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) (COM(2018) 382 final)
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-european-social-fund-plus-regulation_en.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/investeu-programme_en