

**Question for written answer E-003047/2022
to the Commission**
Rule 138
Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos (NI)

Subject: Thousands of children denied access to childcare centres

283 765 applications were submitted for vouchers giving access to pre-school education in local EETAA childcare centres under NSRF programmes, this being a fundamental need to ensure the psychosocial development of children. Only 169 256 families eventually received them, leaving 40.35 % of children denied this possibility, despite their families meeting the income criteria. Furthermore, thousands of families did not even bother to apply since they did not meet the criteria from the outset.

This is the result of EU policy making, to which the present and previous governments have adhered. Only if families are willing to pay can they obtain a place in one of the few remaining public childcare centres, paying higher fees, or in private establishments, against a backdrop of rising living costs.

In the light of this:

What view does the Commission take of the chronic EU and government underfunding of early childhood education under the NSRF and voucher schemes in a bid to commercialise and privatise the sector, resulting in substandard EU 'local governess' schemes or workplace crèches that simply facilitate the further exploitation of company staff?

Does it agree that more funding is needed to ensure that the State takes full responsibility for providing free of charge every child of pre-school age with a place in a suitable public facility permanently staffed by specialists in every appropriate field and meeting all their needs in terms of materials, infrastructure, meals and heating?