

Review of the Implementation of the Beijing  
Platform for Action: Women and the Economy

Reconciliation of Work and Family Life as a Condition  
of Equal Participation in the Labour Market

# Main findings



The Main Findings are based on a study financed by and prepared for the use of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The background study was prepared by a team led by Mr. Alberto Merolla (Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini). Neither the European Institute for Gender Equality nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use pertaining to the information contained in this publication.

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# Foreword

Despite various policies and measures for the advancement of gender equality promoted and implemented in the European Union Member States, women still remain the main carers of children and the elderly. Today, in Europe, women between the ages of 25 to 44 spend three times longer than men in childcare per day. Likewise, care responsibilities account for the main reason women work far longer hours than men. As a result this limits women's prospects to a balanced working and family life.

In December 1995, the European Council acknowledged the European Union's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) which was adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women. Since 1999, the Presidency of the Council presents a review which reports on the implementation of one of the twelve areas of concern of the BPfA in the Member States. One of the European Institute for Gender Equality's primary functions is to provide technical support to the Presidencies of the Council in its follow-up of the BPfA.

The following publication summarises the main findings of the first EIGE Report and specifically focuses on the topic of the reconciliation of work and family life as a condition of equal participation in the labour market (one of the objectives expressed in the BPfA, area F: Women and the Economy).

In this summary we bring together the key findings from our report, which include the main legislative developments at EU level concerning maternity, paternity and parental leave. It further

presents the latest available sex disaggregated data for parental leave, for the time spent in different activities, and for the accessibility and availability of care facilities for elderly persons. Also, the use of available childcare services in the EU Member States is presented and discussed.

The findings demonstrate progress in legislative frameworks given that a number of EU Member States have already made changes to allow for the increased involvement of fathers in childcare. Improvements have also been made in the availability and access of childcare services to parents from across the Member States. Nevertheless, women still remain the main carers for children: they are comparatively more involved in part time work to be able to care for children, and therefore work longer paid and unpaid hours than men.

I introduce you this publication with great pleasure, one of EIGE's first significant products of 2011. It initiates the series of EIGE reports, prepared in support to the Presidencies of the EU Council, in the follow-up of the BPfA.

We are grateful to everybody who contributed to this publication which brings additional substantiated evidence to the debates on gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union.

Virginija Langbakk  
Director  
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for Gender Equality (EIGE)

European Institute for Gender Equality is an autonomous body of the European Union, established to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all Community policies and the resulting national policies, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, and to raise EU citizens' awareness of gender equality. Further information can be found at <http://eige.europa.eu>

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# Introduction

The 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, officially adopted the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace* (BPfA). The BPfA outlines the strategic objectives and actions to be taken by the international community, national governments and civil society for the promotion and protection of human rights for women and the girl child as inalienable, integral and indivisible elements of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their lives. Its objectives and actions are arranged throughout twelve areas of concern, each highlighting the significance of the advancement of women. These are:

- Women and Poverty (A)
- Education and Training of Women (B)
- Women and Health (C)
- Violence against Women (D)
- Women and Armed Conflict (E)
- Women and the Economy (F)
- Women in Power and Decision-making (G)
- Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (H)
- Human Rights for Women (I)
- Women and the Media (J)
- Women and the Environment (K)
- The Girl Child (L)

By signing-up to the document, the 27 Member States of the European Union officially acknowledged their responsibility in taking action to implement the BPfA.

Despite the primary responsibility for the advancement of women lying with the national governments, the European Union has been involved in the formulation of the Beijing Declaration and sup-

ports its Member States insofar as taking action is concerned. In December 1995, the European Council acknowledged the European Union's commitment towards the BPfA and expressed its intent to review its implementation across the Member States on a yearly basis. Since 1999, quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed by successive Presidencies of the Council of the European Union for the purposes of monitoring progress towards achieving the BPfA goals. By 2010, the Council of the European Union had adopted indicators in nine out of twelve critical areas. The current situation demonstrates that indicators for three areas are yet to be developed. These are: Human Rights of Women; Women and the Media; Women and the Environment<sup>1</sup>.

In 2010, the European Commission assigned the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) the task of supporting the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in its follow-up of the BPfA. The Member States have agreed on the need to strengthen EIGE's role and its collaboration with successive Presidencies in the follow-up and development of the Beijing indicators. EIGE's role includes the composition of a report to the Presidency including a review of the BPfA area and indicators selected by the Presidency, advice on updating and improving the existing indicators as well as proposals for new indicators, where necessary. The Polish Government as holders of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union between July and December 2011 has opted to review area F: Women and the Economy, with a particular emphasis on the reconciliation of work, family and private life<sup>2</sup>. This summary presents the main findings of the report.<sup>3</sup>

# Gender dimension of reconciliation of work, family and private life

The reconciliation of work, family and private life is recognised at EU level as a priority for achieving gender equality, increasing women's participation in the labour market, and promoting the sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men. Reconciliation is a key element for achieving an EU headline target of the Europe 2020 strategy of raising the employment rate for women and men aged between 20 and 64 to 75 percent. This therefore signifies the necessity to address the barriers to women's participation in the labour market and to increase men's involvement in caring duties in the implementation of the strategy. The Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015<sup>4</sup> underlines economic independence as a prerequisite for enabling both women and men to exercise control over their lives. The strategy also identifies reconciliation measures among the key actions for gender equality. The European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020)<sup>5</sup> also stresses the importance of promoting a better work-life balance for women and men throughout their life-course for the purpose of enhancing equality between women and men.

In recent years, relevant progress can be observed towards gender equality in the EU Member States. Nevertheless, certain degrees of variation among

the Member States remain, in particular, gender gaps in the labour market and the distribution of care responsibilities. The data analysis in the *Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: Women and the Economy. Reconciliation of Work and Family Life as a Condition of Equal Participation in the Labour Market* demonstrates that women are still the main carers both for children and for the dependant elderly, and compared to men, are therefore more likely to be involved in paid and unpaid work in all EU27 Member States. The status of women's working life is more likely to be affected by the care needs of others, whether they are children, parents, family members or any other dependents - which can be explained by a higher take-up of parental leave or by the position of women in the labour market - for instance a higher frequency of part-time work as well as a higher rate of inactivity for women. Patterns of inequality are reflected in various EU27 Member State policies for the improvement of women's access to, and position in, the labour market in promoting more equal sharing of caring duties and in achieving a better work-life balance. Nevertheless, the Annual Reports on Equality between Women and Men of the European Commission demonstrate that progress is slow and that de facto gender equality is yet to come to fruition.



# The Beijing indicators on reconciliation

The labour market landscapes in the Member States provide information and statistics for the review of the indicators, measuring the implementation of the BPfA in the area of Women and the Economy - with a geared focus on the indicators for reconciliation of work, family and private life. The analysis presents a high degree of gender inequality in the labour market despite wide variations among the Member States. The number of women aged 20 to 64 in employment rose from 57.3 percent in 2000 to 62.1 percent in 2010. The rate of men in employment underwent a slight decrease during the same period (from 75.8 to 75.1 percent between 2000 and 2010). Only around one-third (11 countries) of EU27 Member States reached women's employment rates in 2010 above 60 percent (out of women aged from 15 to 64), initially outlined as the Lisbon target, and only Sweden achieved the new target for the employment rate of 75 percent for women and men (age group 20 to 64) outlined in the Europe 2020 strategy. The average employment rate in 2010 in the EU27 area stood at 68.6 percent whereas Hungary, Italy and Malta are still far below the European average. Though an increase in the rate for women's employment has been observed over the last decade, the average gender gap in the employment rate<sup>6</sup> in 2010 in the EU27 countries is 13 percentage points, ranging from -1.5 percentage points in Lithuania to 36.3 percentage points in Malta - with ten EU Member States above the EU27 average<sup>7</sup>. The equivalent gender gap for full-time employment is higher (18 percentage points)<sup>8</sup>. This demonstrates that women are employed in part time work at a

higher frequency than men. In 2008, the share of women employees in part time labour stood at 31.1 percent in the EU27 while the corresponding figure for men was 7.9 percent<sup>9</sup>. This difference applies throughout the entire EU27.

There is a clear linkage between childcare and women's and men's employment rates. On average, in 2009 the employment rate of women with children under the ages of 12 dropped by 12 percentage points. For men the rate increased by 9.1<sup>10</sup>. What is more, the employment rate for women decreases as the number of children increases in a majority of the Member States<sup>11</sup>. According to the latest European Commission Report on the Progress on Gender Equality, on average at EU27 level, almost one third of women with care responsibilities are either in part-time work or inactive because of the lack of care services available for children and for other dependents. As a result of the economic crisis, those hit hardest in terms of labour market participation (or job losses), are mainly the most vulnerable groups of women and particularly those with lower levels of education.

Decreased gender gap in unemployment can be interpreted as a consequence of an increase in men's unemployment rates during a year of economic crisis rather than the result of progress in women's participation in the labour market. In twelve EU Member States, the unemployment rate for women still exceeds that of men<sup>12</sup>.

Women are more than often finding themselves in the difficult predicament of trying to juggle the demands of work, children and other dependents.

The consequences of these predicaments are inactivity and a reduction in their working hours, consequently creating difficulties in reconciling work, family and private life. The way time is used according to gender reveals a higher unpaid working load for women. Women aged 25-44 spend practically three times longer than men do on childcare per day<sup>13</sup>. Cuts in public spending for public care services can aggravate observed inequalities by increasing the workload of unpaid care activities for women who are more likely to be engaged in providing care.

The observed gender inequalities in the labour market and the share of paid and unpaid work are reflected in the degree of reconciliation between work, family and private life across Member States.

## Allocation of parental leave between women and men

### Indicator 1:

Employed men and women on parental leave (paid and unpaid) within the meaning of Directive 96/34/EC on the framework agreement between the social partners on parental leave, as a proportion of all employed parents.

### Indicator 2:

Allocation of parental leave between employed men and women as proportion of all parental leave.

An analysis into the allocation and take-up of parental leave are covered in indicators 1 and 2, and take into account the new Council Directive 2010/18/EU legal provisions on parental leave.

In recent years, the European Commission has introduced a package of measures designed to improve the reconciliation of work, family and private life. A latest initiative concerns a new directive on parental leave, which implements the revised framework agreement of EU social partners, concluded in June 2009. This move reflects the changes that occurred in society and in the labour market since the original Parental Leave agreement signed in 1996, and aims to contribute to a better work-life balance as one of the conditions for gender equality. The right to parental leave is extended from three to four months per child for each parent, where at least one of the months is not transferable to the other parent, thereby offering incentives for fathers to take leave. The new regulation increases protection against any less-favourable treatment (not only against dismissal) for all workers in connection with parental leave. When returning from parental leave, employees have the possibility to request temporary changes in their working hours. Governments and employers/unions are required to address the specific needs of foster parents and guardians of children with disabilities or long-term illnesses. The new rights will apply to all workers irrespective of their type of contract (i.e. fixed-term, part-time, agency workers); however, Member States have the option to maintain a qualification period of a maximum of one year before an employee can apply for leave. All matters regarding income during parental leave are for the prerogative of the Member States and/or national social partners. One of the biggest advantages offered by the new legal provisions is



that parents will be entitled to a single month of non-transferable rights to parental leave, thereby providing incentives to fathers' to embark on caring duties.

Nevertheless, the provision of parental leave arrangements as a major reconciliation strategy in the majority of Member States still encounters several shortcomings related to gender equality. The fact that leave regulations, by definition, imply being distant from actively participating in the labour market and also imply giving better access to care time, puts these regulations at risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes and traditional roles. Data demonstrates that men's take-up of leave represents a mere fraction compared to that of women. The stereotypical role of men can often be re-enforced by business culture. Employers in many cases are still unwilling to promote parental leave among male employees. Both genders often suffer from unsupportive and even discriminatory business culture in the cases of the take-up of parental leave.

Secondly, the duration of the leave taken-up by men is in most cases shorter, thus less pronounced on the impact on the labour market. Women are under much higher risk to experiencing negative effects on their career paths and to the loss of earnings.

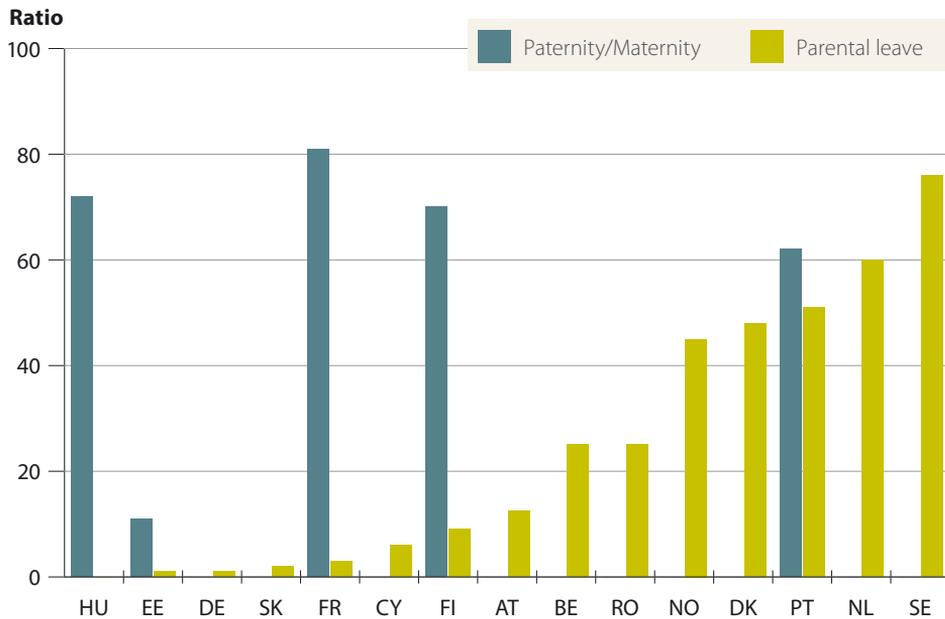
Thirdly, women encounter many more problems at the re-employment stage. A part of women continue on a part time basis upon returning, another part is left outside the labour market. The length of leave and take-up are also determined by job guarantees for employees taking up parental leave. The length also varies according to differences in qualifications and the sectors of employment (private to public). Evidence indicates that highly qualified women leave their jobs for shorter periods than women with lower qualifications. The former also encounter more problems when attempting to re-enter the labour market after being on leave or out

of job for care reasons. The public sector seems to provide women and men with more security during parental leave than the private labour market sector. Usually the time and costs associated with finding replacements, especially in smaller companies, are considered to be a costly affair for private sector employers<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, the lack of flexibility in the take-up of parental leave may impede women's career prospects and discourage the development of a more family-friendly workplace practices. Flexibility would significantly facilitate possibilities for the parents to care for a child and participate in the labour market simultaneously, resulting in a more balanced gender roles and more engaged fatherhood. Many countries in Europe (Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, etc.) offer parents the opportunity to take up leave in periods, usually in the form of individual and non-transferable right, instead of taking up the leave by one person all at once.

## Women are still the main users of parental leave

Notwithstanding the fact that there has been significant progress in the extension of parental leave in EU Member States, women make up the majority of parental leave recipients. The proportion of all parental leave allocated to employed men compared to the leave allocated to employed women is a key indicator which links reconciliation between work, private and family life to gender equality. Figure 1 illustrates gender differences in the use of leave entitlements measured by the ratio between the total number of fathers using their paternity leave and the number of mothers using their maternity entitlement, or the ratio between fathers taking at least one day of parental leave and the corresponding number of mothers (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 – Ratio of fathers to mothers using their entitlement to leave, 2007**

Source: OECD, Social Policy Division, Directorate of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Family Database, Chart PF2.2.C

Note: The ratio is the relationship between the numbers of fathers taking parental leave in each country per 100 women. Data was collected using Family Database questionnaire on parental leave and cover 15 countries.

The data shows a notable variation among countries in fathers' take-up of parental leave. For example, in 2007 in Sweden, there were 77 fathers to every 100 mothers taking parental leave, while in Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany and Slovakia there are fewer than 10 fathers to every 100 mothers in parental leave. Fathers' use of parental leave is particularly low if parental leave is organised along family lines (not as individual and non-transferable right) and not well-paid. Wherever data is available for both the use of paternity and parental leave, they show that the ratio of fathers taking paternity leave is higher than those taking parental leave.

### Forms to encourage fathers to take parental leave

Income support during parental leave is usually related to the earnings prior to childbirth. This proportion varies across the EU Member States, depending on the forms of compensation, which range between unpaid leave and a high level of compensation. As a result, most fathers, who in many cases are still the main earners in a family, do not exercise their right to parental leave and often transfer their part of the leave to the partner.

Tackling the negative effects of such behavioural patterns on gender equality encouraging leave take-up by fathers and achieving gender equality in the allocation of parental leave is crucial. Possible policy recommendations include allocating specific periods of leave only to fathers, establishing a premium for fathers' take-up, and providing



compensation through an adequate paid leave system. Attitudinal change is also an important factor to be addressed. As noted, by the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men<sup>15</sup>, family related leave, taken by women or men, should not be seen to adversely affect career progression (especially by men). Women should not be seen as an unstable and expensive employee pool on an incorrect assumption that they might need to take more leave than men. Higher share of parental leave allocated to fathers is likely to ensure stronger effect on a more gender-equal distribution of care work within the couple.

## Types of childcare services

### Indicator 3:

Children cared for (other than by the family) as a proportion of all children of the same age group: before entry into the non-compulsory pre-school system (during the day); in the non-compulsory or equivalent pre-school system (outside pre-school hours); in compulsory primary education (outside school hours).

The importance of providing affordable and good quality childcare has been recognised at the EU level as an important measure to improve the reconciliation of work, family and private life, foster labour market participation and gender equality. At the 2002 Barcelona Summit, the European Council agreed that the Member States should remove

disincentives to female participation in the labour market and strive to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 percent of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 percent of children below the ages of three. The importance of the Barcelona targets was reaffirmed as recently as 2010 in the Employment Guidelines adopted by the Council of the European Union and in the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020. With a view of achieving the Barcelona targets, the Council of the European Union, in its recent Conclusions (June 2011) invites the Member States and the Commission to continue 'to carry out co-financed initiatives at European, national, regional and local levels in order to promote cohesion and employment opportunities for workers (including promoting the role of men in the family, equality between women and men and the reconciliation of work and family life) by improving the supply of adequate, affordable, high-quality childcare services for children under the mandatory school age'<sup>16</sup>. The importance of improving the supply of childcare services is also recognised in the Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015.

Based on the providers for childcare, there are two main types of services: formal childcare and other types of childcare services. Four types of childcare and education are considered as formal arrangements: a) education at pre-school centres, b) education at compulsory school, c) childcare at centre-based services outside school hours, and d) childcare at day-care centres. Other types of childcare services, also referred to as "informal" childcare, are provided by relatives, friends, neighbours, and babysitters either in the child's home, or else-

where. Whilst formal childcare services have rigid time schedules and partially cover the parents' working day, informal childcare is more flexible and can be used to supplement formal childcare services so as to cover the parents' entire working day. Furthermore, informal childcare is used as a medium of child surveillance during the remainder of the day.

In measuring the extent to which childcare services are used, the analysis presented in the next subsection refers to statistical information provided by the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

### Approaching the Barcelona targets

Indicator 3 provides an overview of the use of childcare services in the EU Member States for three different age groups: a) under 3 years old; b) between 3 years old and the minimum mandatory school age; c) between the minimum mandatory school age and 12 years old. The focus is on the proportion of children cared for by professional child-minders, at home or in formal institutions.

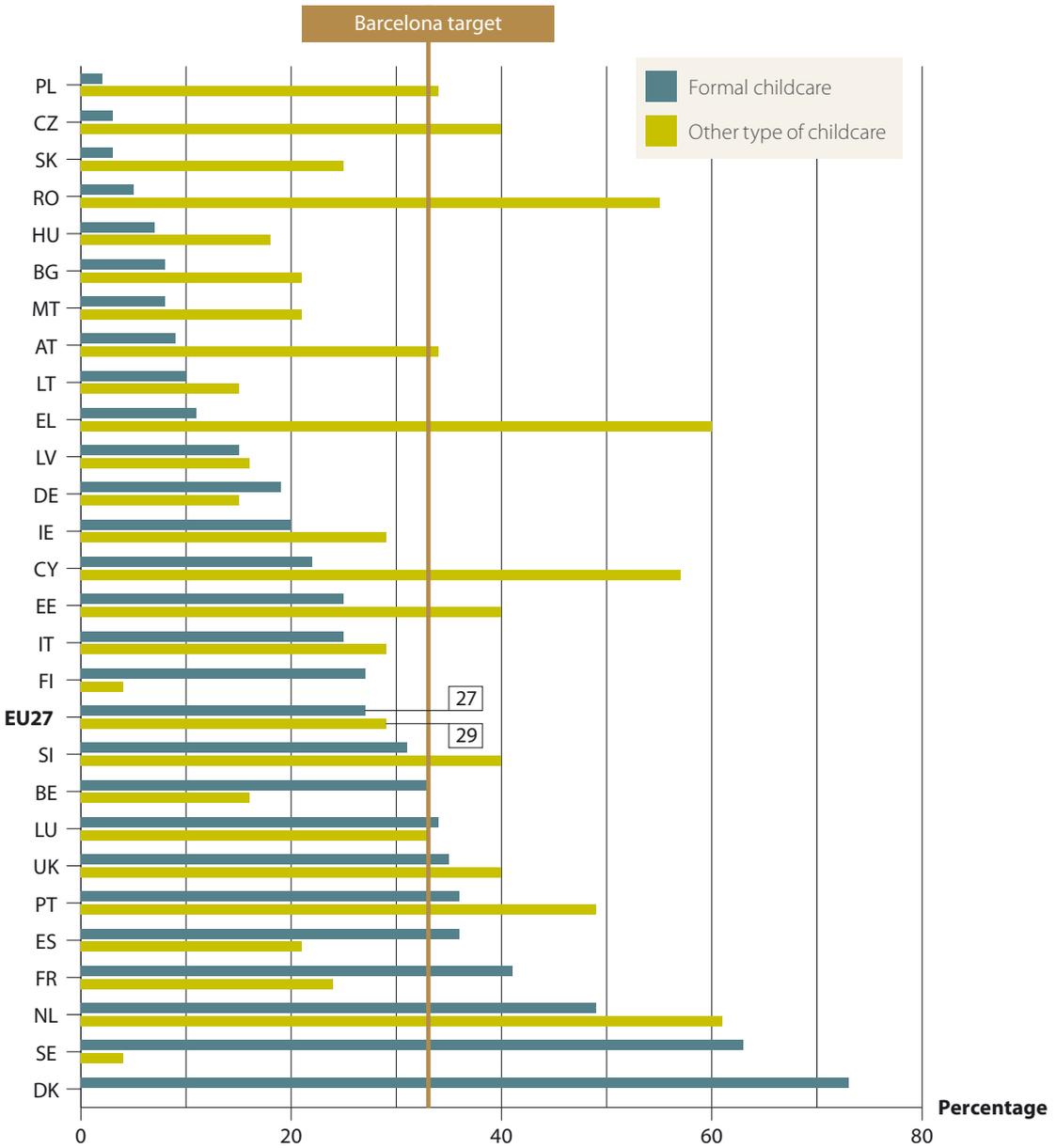
As presented in Figure 2, by 2009, nine Member States (Belgium, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands) had met the Barcelona target of 33 percent provision of formal childcare for children under 3 years old. Nine other EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) had provided places in formal childcare for less than 10 percent of children below the age of 3. Lack of availability of formal childcare for this age group is detrimental to the reconciliation of work,

private and family life, and particularly for the most vulnerable groups of women, who are exposed to higher risks at the re-employment stage after childbearing.

By 2009, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden had achieved the best results in providing formal childcare for children below the age of 3 (respectively 73, 49 and 63 percent).



Figure 2 - Proportion of children under 3 years old in formal and other types of childcare, 2009



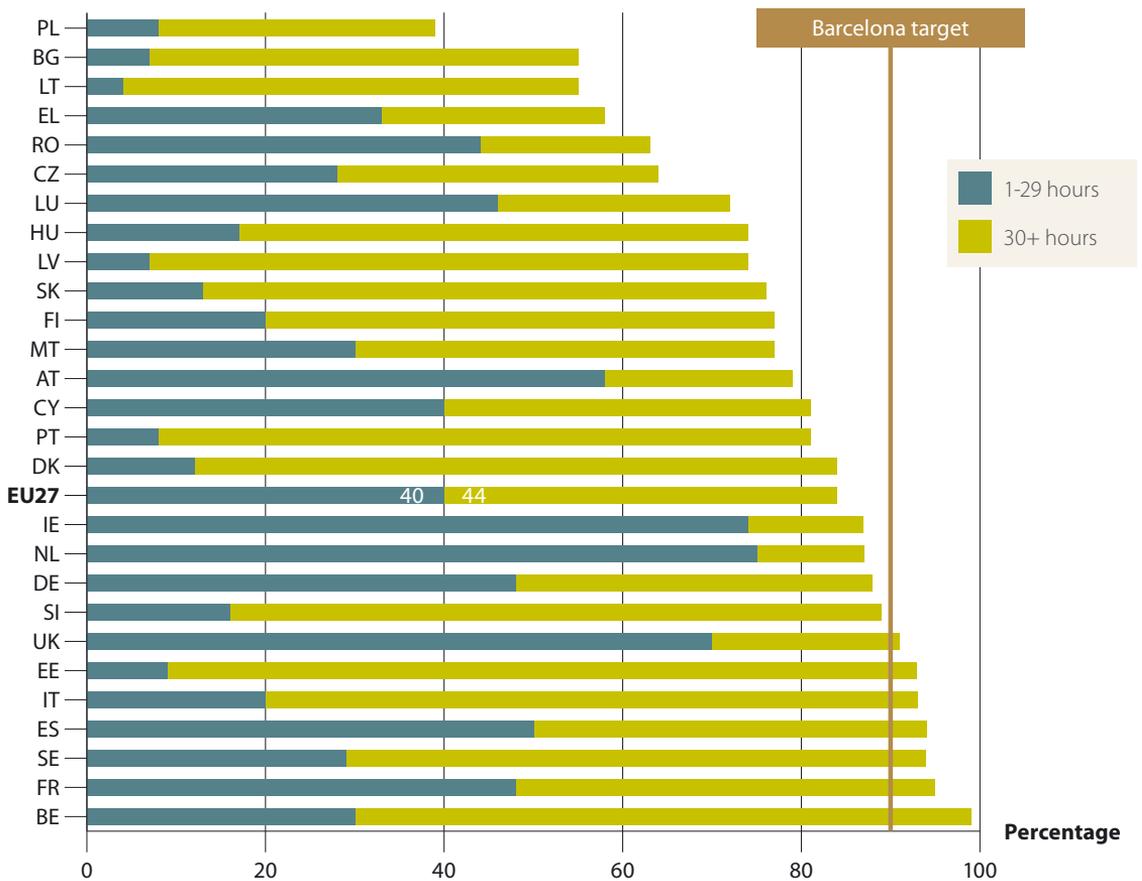
Source: Eurostat, SILC

Note: Percentage of children in formal and other types of childcare out of the total number of children in the same age group. Data on "other types of childcare" for Denmark is not available

Concerning the formal childcare provisions for children between 3 and mandatory school age, a clear improvement in the EU Member States can be noticed. By 2009, seven EU Member States like Belgium, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, met the Barcelona target set up at 90 percent for 2010 (Figure 3). Other seven EU Member States like Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Slovenia

reached a coverage rate of at least 80 percent in 2009. Nevertheless, there still are EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Lithuania, Poland and Romania) where the use of childcare services falls short of the target by more than 20 percentage points. The insufficient coverage of formal childcare provisions poses major obstacles to women's participation in the labour market, fertility rates and social inclusion.

**Figure 3 - Proportion of children between 3 and the minimum mandatory school age in formal childcare 1 to 29 hours and 30+ hours, 2009**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

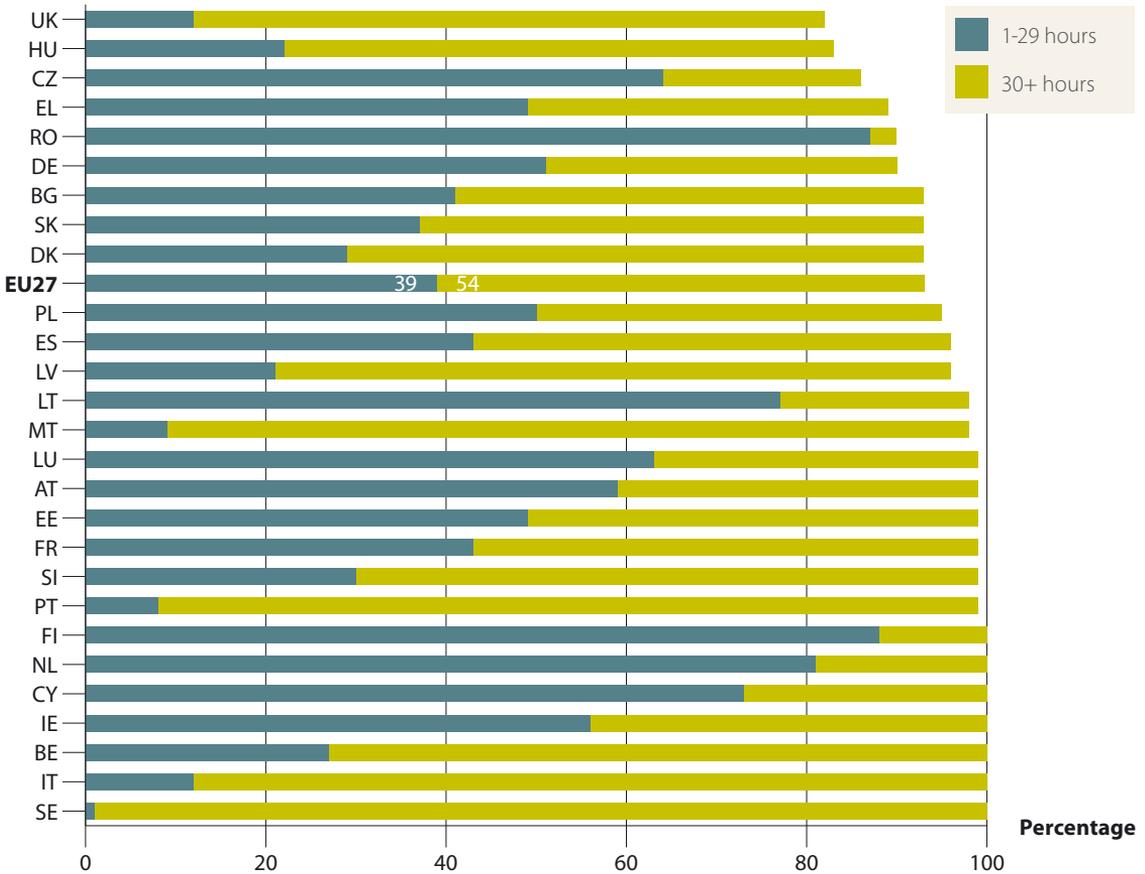
Note: Percentage of children in formal childcare out of the total number of children in the same age group.



Figure 4 reports data on children of mandatory school age, with a coverage rate close to 100 percent in almost all countries. However, in twelve EU

Member States, more children are in formal childcare for less than 30 hours per week.

**Figure 4 - Proportion of children between minimum mandatory school age and 12 in formal childcare, 2009**



Source: Eurostat, SILC

Note: Percentage of children in formal childcare out of the total number of children in the same age group.

Given the current situation in terms of the gender-segregated allocation of childcare within families, progress measured by this indicator would have important implications in terms of gender equality and the economy. The data indicates that between 2005 and 2009 the use of formal childcare of 30 plus hours per week has increased in twenty of the 27 EU Member States. A somewhat lower increase was observed in the use of formal childcare for 1 to 29 hours per week.

Still, on EU27 average, 50 percent of children below

the age of 3 are cared for by parents alone, while the proportion decreases to 10 percent for children in the age group of 3 to mandatory school age. In 21 out of 27 EU Member States, over 40 percent of children below the age of 3 are cared for by the parents alone. The highest percentage of children below the age of 3 cared for only by the parents is to be found in Hungary, followed closely by several other EU Member States such as Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Latvia, where the percentage is over 70 percent.

## There is a need to better adapt childcare services to parental working arrangements

Indicator 3 demonstrates a low use of childcare services for children below the age of 3. In addition, the high share of children receiving fewer than 30 hours of formal childcare per week may reflect the difficulties encountered by parents in adjusting their regular full-time working hours to pre-school and school opening hours. Consequently, this situation may lead to a deterioration of the work-life balance and therefore potentially jeopardise the career prospects of the main child carer, whom in most occasions are women.

The lack of flexibility in childcare services is another crucial issue which merits attention. Flexibility in childcare facilities can refer to opening hours (during the day, week or year, non-standard hours, and/or summer holidays) and to the flexible use of facilities during the week or year<sup>17</sup>. Inconsistencies between formal child care services and normal working hours incite major difficulties in matters of reconciliation of work, private and family life. This mismatch seems to occur both when children reach the age of compulsory education and when they are in the non-compulsory or equivalent pre-school system. Flexibility is particularly important for parents who work atypical hours. Opportunities appear to be even more limited in this respect.

Likewise, reconciliation could also be enhanced by expanding the opportunities for flexibility in working arrangements (e.g. by phasing-out working hours for elderly workers, the facilitation of part-time work, and time credit systems). However, in order to minimise career losses and costs in earnings for part-time workers in terms of prospects in their career and earnings, possibilities should be offered to revert to full-time work following a spell of part-time work. Practices encouraging part-time labour demand in top positions and among men should be gathered and promoted.

## Policies to promote reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU Member States

### Indicator 4:

Comprehensive and integrated policies, particularly employment policies, aimed at promoting a balance between working and family life for both men and women.

The promotion of the reconciliation of work, family and private life throughout the European Union falls within a broader action to ensure equal opportunities between women and men. Policies aimed at promoting reconciliation can be grouped into those affecting working time arrangements, and those requiring more specific public intervention, such as the provision of childcare services, leave facilities, and child benefits allowing women and men participate more actively in all areas of social life. Indicator 4 concerns key policy measures, particularly family and employment policies, enacted or announced in the 27 EU Member States to promote a better working and family life balance. The latest Presidency report on the reconciliation of work, family and private life<sup>18</sup> dates back to 2008. Concerning the period 2008-2010, indicator 4 enables a discussion into the new policy measures implemented in the aftermath of the economic crisis to counter its potential negative effects on the work-life balance.

### Policy measures by countries

Since 2008, the new policies adopted across the EU27 primarily concern childcare services and parental and paternity leave. Significant efforts have been made in several countries, especially in Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Spain, to increase the availability of childcare services. In several cases,



the increased availability of childcare services has been associated with reform of childcare benefits (Austria), where new schemes for childcare benefits have been introduced, or with new schemes for childcare benefits (Germany), where childcare subsidised for one-year-olds is set to be introduced in 2013.

A number of countries enacted or proposed amendments to legal regulations related to paternity<sup>19</sup> and parental leave. Concerning paternity leave, Bulgaria introduced a new entitlement and the Czech Republic also announced its intention to introduce such a policy. A large part of EU countries extended leave coverage (Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom) with the specific aim of encouraging father's take-up (Portugal and the United Kingdom). Regarding parental leave, Cyprus and Latvia introduced entitlements, while Finland, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain altered their legal systems to allow for the extension of leave coverage. Particularly in Spain and Finland, efforts were made to encourage fathers to take parental leave, while Germany introduced leave schemes for grandparents.

## The aftermath of the crisis

A number of EU Member States have developed special financial transfers for households in response to the economic crisis and for the sake of mitigating overall economic impact. These include family allowances and child benefits (Belgium, Bulgaria, the

Czech Republic, and the Netherlands), bonuses for low income households (Italy) and subsidised childcare (Belgium and France). By contrast, other EU Member States have cut or frozen similar financial transfers – including child benefits (Hungary and Ireland), and leave benefits (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania) – for public budget deficit reduction purposes. As a consequence of budgetary cuts, the level and duration of both paternity and parental leave payments have been scaled back in a handful of EU countries (e.g. Latvia, Romania, and Slovakia) while in Denmark the payment of compensation for paternity leave was abolished in January 2009.

Increases in childcare services and fathers' take-up of parental leave have a positive bearing on the labour supply for main carers, who usually are women. Furthermore, both measures promote better gender-equal sharing of unpaid care work. However, the expected reductions in public expenditure due to the economic crisis are likely to transfer care work back to households, and particularly back to women. As a consequence, a number of EU Member States risk perpetuating an uneven distribution of care responsibilities between women and men, and undermining the to-date progress in improving the work-life balance.

## Use of care services for dependent elderly

### Indicator 5:

Dependent elderly men and women (unable to look after themselves on a daily basis) over 75: living in specialised institutions; who have help (other than the family) at home; looked after by the family, as a proportion of men and women over 75.

In recent decades, the European Union has faced significant population ageing and low fertility. As a result, the working age population has been increasing even slower than the elderly population, leaving a greater burden of welfare state costs on the former. Moreover, the share of dependant elderly population demanding care services is forecasted to increase.

The prevalence of the dependant elderly assisted by informal carers is expected to impact on the reconciliation of work, family and private life, and thus further affect women's employment. Present disparities between the numbers of women informal carers and the numbers of men in the same category is likely to strengthen this negative effect. At the same time, in terms of formal care, the predominance of women in elderly care work opens up employment opportunities for women in this rapidly expanding sector. The combination of

these two aspects must then be considered when calculating the net effect of dependant elderly care on women's participation in the labour market and also when analysing forms of reconciling of work and family responsibilities.

### Informal care remains the main source of care for the dependant elderly

Indicator 5 oversees the distribution of the dependant elderly using different types of care. Specifically, it measures the percentage of the dependant elderly who live in specialised facilities (or institutions), receive help at home (other than from the family), and are cared for by their families.

As Figure 5 shows, the take-up of formal care in specialised facilities (or institutions) for the dependant elderly is not particularly common in the 27 EU Member States. Available data for 2007 demonstrates that for nine Member States (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) less than 10 percent of the dependant elderly received care in institutions. The highest level was 35 percent in Denmark and in Sweden. Denmark, Malta, Sweden, and the Netherlands were the countries with the highest percentages – from 65 to 80 percent – of dependant elderly as the recipients of formal home care. More than 50 percent of the dependant elderly receive informal or no care in nineteen out of the 27 EU Member States<sup>20</sup>.



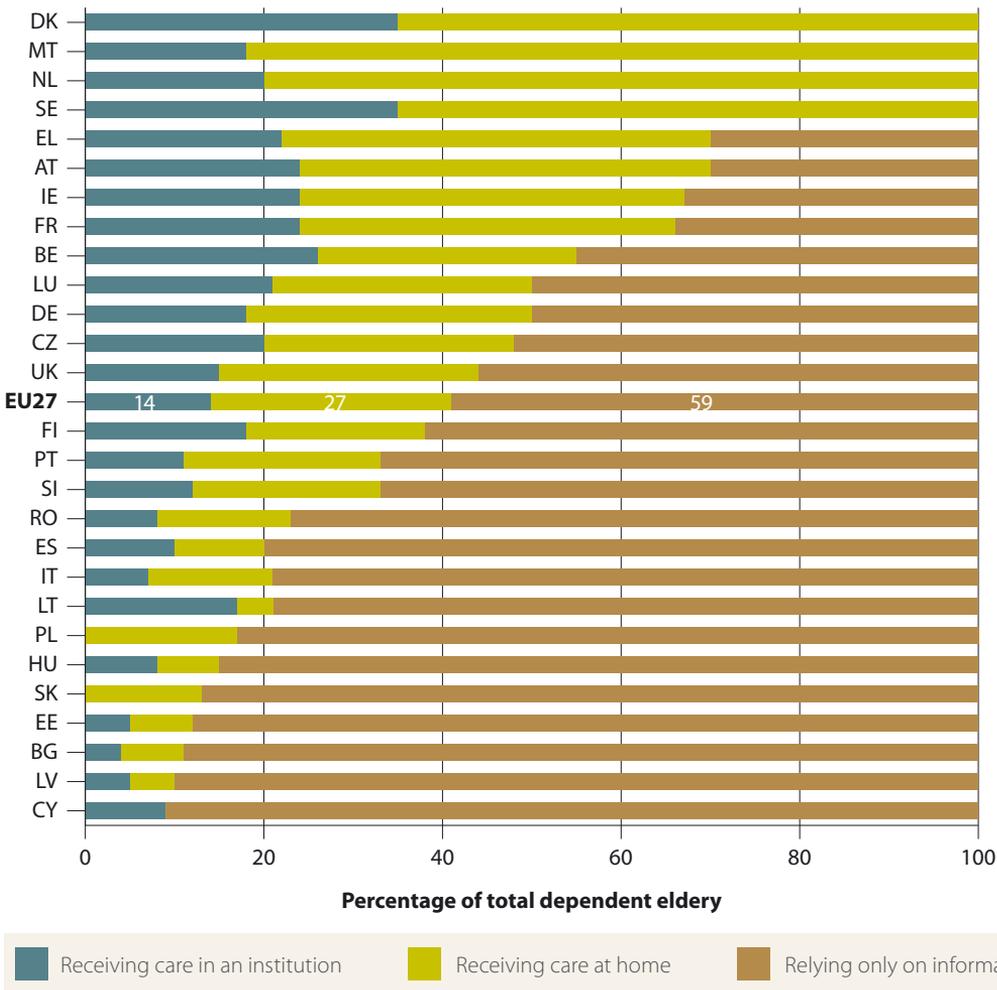
## A pronounced female predominance in elderly care services

Women are more likely to be involved in paid and unpaid elderly care work. Whilst female predominance in elderly care work creates employment opportunities, it nevertheless raises important concerns about gender-segregated labour market and equality within households.

In regard to the effects of employment, the fol-

lowing two features merit particular attention. Firstly, carers of the elderly tend to be relatively older themselves and therefore less likely to still be in alternative, active work. Secondly, even though the negative impact of informal elderly care on women’s participation in the labour force is less visible/obvious than that of childcare, ‘carers of the elderly’ still constitute an important part of the labour force. Therefore the negative impact on employment cannot be overlooked<sup>21</sup>.

**Figure 5 - Dependent elderly receiving formal care, informal care or no care, 2007**



Source: Authors’ calculation based on European Commission, 2009 *Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU27 Member States (2008-2060)*

Note: Expressed as percentage of the total dependant elderly population

A “dependant elderly person” is someone with limitations in the performance of everyday activities.

Informal care is a residual category which includes elderly persons not receiving institutional or formal home care.

## Gender dimension of time distribution

### Indicator 6:

Total “tied” time per day of each employed parent living with a partner, having one or more children under 12 years old or a dependant: paid working time; travelling time; basic time spent on domestic work; other time devoted to the family (upbringing and care of children and care of dependent adults).

### Indicator 7:

Total “tied” time per day for each employed single parent, having one or more children under 12 years old or a dependent (as 6).

“Tied” time refers to the sum of paid working time (or time spent on producing goods and services as part of the aggregate domestic product), commuting time (time spent travelling to and from work), and unpaid working time (basic time spent on domestic work and other time devoted to the family: upbringing and care of children and care of dependant adults).

Gender inequality in the distribution of tied time reflects different forms of reconciling work, family and private life. Women are most likely to access the labour market at the same time as they bear the main responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work. This places them in a structurally disadvantaged position which gives rise to segregation in female-dominated occupations with low wages. Furthermore, unpaid work at the household level often curtails women’s career prospects.

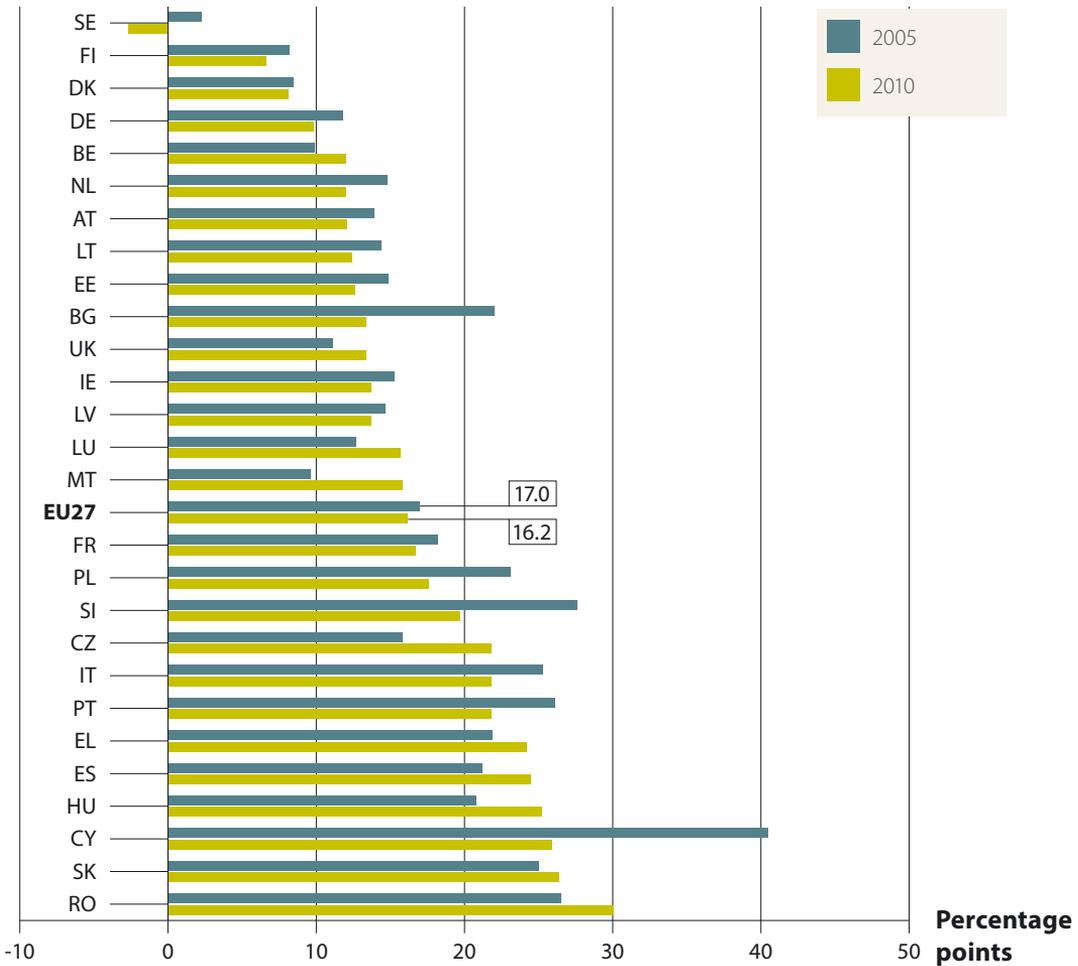
## Women work longer hours than men when paid and unpaid work are combined

The Beijing indicators suggest looking at the total “tied” time for parents in couples with children under 12 years old - or with dependants (indicator 6), and for single parents with children under 12 years old or with dependants (indicator 7). The data available does not contain information as to the marital status or family composition of the interviewees. However, data on how individuals spend their time in paid and unpaid work is available for all countries, and it enables the construction of a joint indicator that gathers information on the gender distribution of time use.

Data demonstrates that time allocation by gender is characterised by a higher total working load for women when both paid and unpaid work are taken into account. Figure 6 shows that in 16 EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia), the gender gap decreased between 2005 and 2010, whereas in 10 EU Member States (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom) the 2010 percentages exceeded those of 2005. Only in Sweden, where the gender gap in time use was already very low in 2005, it became negative 5 years later meaning that in 2010, more Swedish men than women declared that they were engaged in paid and unpaid work for 70 hours or more per week.



**Figure 6 – Gender gap in time use in paid and unpaid work, 2005 and 2010**

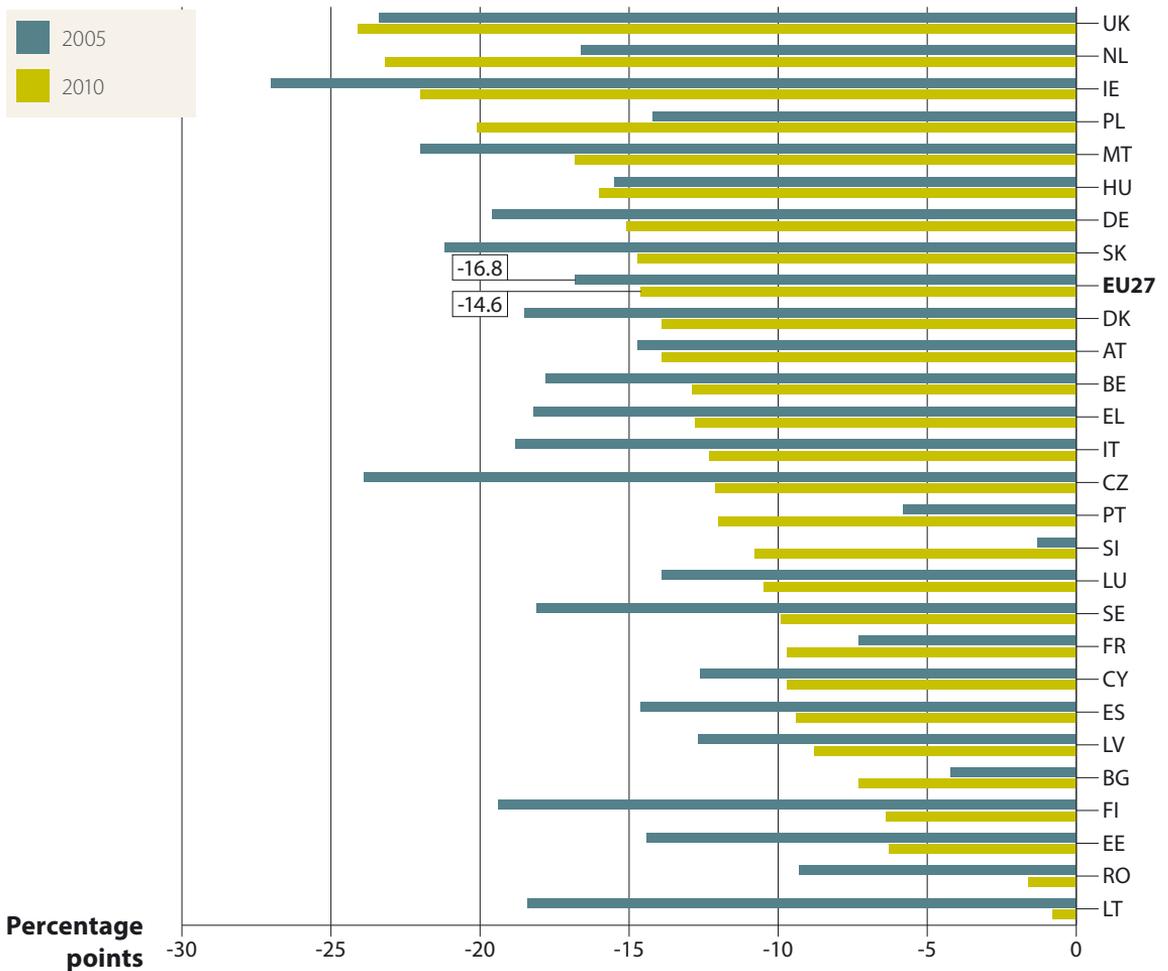


Source: Eurofound, EWCS

Note: Difference in percentage points between women and men spending more than 70 hours per week on paid and unpaid work. Positive values indicate that more women than men declare that they are engaged in paid and unpaid work for 70 hours or more per week, whilst negative values indicate the opposite.

In contrast to the above, when the data presents only the time spent in paid work, the percentage of men spending more than 40 hours per week on such work is higher than the equivalent figure for women (Figure 7).

**Figure 7 - Gender gap in time use in paid work, 2005 and 2010**



Source: Eurofound, EWCS

Note: Difference in percentage points between women and men spending more than 40 hours per week in paid work.

Positive values indicate that more women than men stated that they were engaged in paid work for 40 hours or more per week, whilst negative values indicate the opposite.

### The unbalanced distribution of unpaid work between women and men is still a major issue

The analysis of the data on time use shows that, despite some progress towards a more gender-balanced use of time, men are still more likely to work longer hours in paid employment, while women do more unpaid work than men<sup>22</sup>.

Government policies, such as working-time regu-

lations, family policies and gender equality initiatives, could take a stronger stand to encourage a more balanced division of housework between men and women, promoting a constant shift of mothers from unpaid to paid work. Improving the availability of care services for children and other dependant persons and encouraging fathers to assume a larger share of care responsibilities within the family would contribute significantly to gender equality in the labour market and in general.



# Conclusions

## **Women are still the main users of leave entitlements.**

To encourage fathers to take-up leave in order to care for their children, improvements are needed in the parental leave system. The higher the share of parental leaves allocated to fathers, the stronger the positive effect on the equal distribution of care work and participation in the labour market between women and men.

The allocation of specific periods of leave only to fathers, establishing a premium for fathers' take-up and implementing compensation via a dedicated paid leave system is suggested to be considered in the national policies.

## **A high percentage of children in formal care below the age of 3 still fall short of this target**

despite the fact that several EU Member States had already reached the Barcelona targets on the provision of childcare services by 2009.

Improvements are needed to tackle the deficit of the current availability of formal childcare for children below the age of 3. Besides this, possibilities for formal care for children in age groups between 3 years old and mandatory school age and between mandatory school age and 12 years old need to be improved (a substantial lack of formal care services in out-of-school hours is ever-present).

Increasing the availability and the extension in the coverage of hours in childcare services thereby positively affecting the participation of women in the labour market, as well as their return to work after childbirth is recommended at policy and implementation levels.

Measures such as these would have a similar positive effect on male lone parents, who are unable to share the burden of parenthood with the mothers.

## **Formal care for dependent elderly persons – residential, semi-residential and supplied at home – reaches low percentages,**

as demonstrated by a current assessment at EU Member State level. The main burden of dependant elderly care is left to households, particularly to women.

To tackle the deficit of the current availability of formal care for elderly, especially dependent elderly over 75 years old, measures to break occupational segregation within care sector are encouraged. This approach would improve the balance of men and women in care activities making the reconciliation of work and family life, time allocation and remuneration for work performed more just and fair.

EU Member States give consideration to seeking an increase in the provision of affordable and accessible care services to families, and to promoting the shift from informal to formal care.

### **Reconciliation policies should aim at fostering female participation in social and economic life by various means.**

Altering the traditional stereotype landscape where parenting and care work are considered a primary duty of women would create a solid base for gender-balanced sharing of family responsibilities and advancement of women.

Encouragement and promotion of a greater participation by men in parenting and care work are recommended.

Functioning approaches and practices of behavioural change among men in relation to greater engagement in the unpaid family care work and parenting should be promoted and shared.

Lastly, the labour market policies should integrate specific measures such as flexible working time arrangements to facilitate the reconciliation of work, family and private life needs.

The availability of harmonised and comparable statistical information provides the EU and the Member States with a reliable tool for assessing and monitoring the development in relation to gender equality. It can be effectively used to raise awareness on the importance of reconciliation of work, family and private life to the achievement of gender equality goals in the European Union and beyond.

Stronger gender mainstreaming is recommended in national and international statistical systems, in particular, by developing gender data necessary for policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Given the difficulties and the cost of collecting new data, a stronger cooperation among the key players in data collection is suggested.

### **There is still a need to collect more comparable and harmonised data in relation to the indicators adopted in the area F: Women and Economy of the Beijing Platform for Action.**

For the purposes of this review, data was available for each of the indicators, but in most cases was not adequately accurate, harmonised or comparable as was necessary for the purpose of monitoring the progress.



# Endnotes

1. EIGE will review the area “Women and the Environment” with particular focus on gender and climate change, which was selected by the upcoming Danish Presidency starting from January 1, 2012. The report will include the proposal of indicators in this area.
2. Henceforth also “reconciliation” for brevity.
3. Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: Women and the Economy - Reconciliation of Work and Family Life as a Condition of Equal Participation in the Labour Market - available for download at <http://www.eige.europa.eu/>
4. The strategy shall contribute to improving the place of women in the labour market, in society and in decision-making positions both in the European Union and the world: [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/employment\\_and\\_social\\_policy/equality\\_between\\_men\\_and\\_women/em0037\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/equality_between_men_and_women/em0037_en.htm)
5. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/119628.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/119628.pdf)
6. The gender gap is calculated as the difference between men’s and women’s employment rates. As such, a positive gap indicates higher employment rates for men in comparison with women, while the opposite is true for a negative gap.
7. Eurostat, Labour Force Survey
8. EC (2010), *Employment in Europe 2010*
9. Eurostat, Labour Force Survey
10. EC (2007), *Report on equality between women and men – 2007*; EC (2011), *Report on Progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2010: The gender balance in business leadership*
11. Eurostat, Labour Force Survey.
12. Eurostat, Labour Force Survey
13. Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*
14. Plantenga J. and Remery C., (2005), *Reconciliation of work and private life: A comparative review of thirty European countries*, EU Expert Group on Gender, Social Inclusion and Employment (EGGSIE)
15. European Commission’s Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2010), *Opinion on flexible and part-time working arrangements and the gender dimension of the labour market*
16. Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions Reconciliation of work and family life in the context of demographic change*
17. Plantenga J. and Remery C. (2009), *The Provision of Childcare Services. A comparative review of 30 European countries*
18. Report by the French Presidency (2008), *Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action on the indicators concerning reconciliation of work and family life*
19. The paternity leave is important in laying the basis of paternal care. Still, its impact on work life balance should not be overestimated as, in many EU Member States, fathers are allowed to take up only few days (up to two weeks) of paternity leave, sometimes within few months following the child birth, overlapping with the period of maternity leave.
20. European Commission, European Commission (2009) *Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060)*
21. European Commission, *2009 Ageing Report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU-27 Member States (2008-2060)*
22. The data available allows the analysis to conclude on employed individuals, and not on employed parents. The effects of parenthood on the amount of tied time allocated to mothers may be thus underestimated.

European Institute for Gender Equality

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