



# Changes in child and family policies in the EU28 in 2017

European Platform for Investing in Children: Annual thematic report



Employment,  
Social Affairs  
and Inclusion

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The year 2017 marked a number of important developments in the area of child and family policy in Europe. The presentation of the European Pillar of Social Rights has set the framework for new legislative and policy actions to combat some of the key challenges facing European children and their families. In addition, the preparatory action for the Child Guarantee scheme for vulnerable children outlined the need for an integrated approach to tackle multidimensional aspects of child poverty.

The aim of this annual thematic report, drafted as part of the European Platform for Investing in Children (EPIC) project, is to outline changes and new developments during the past year in the area of child and family policies across the EU Member States (MS). The report is aligned with the 2013 Recommendation *'Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'*<sup>i</sup> and its key indicators to measure progress across the policy areas relevant for each of the three pillars of the Recommendation. The report is also guided by recent developments related to the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>ii</sup> As such, this report provides an overview of the direction of policy developments in this area.

### ***Methodology and data used***

The report draws on the data and information collected during the process of updating the national profiles featured on the EPIC website.<sup>iii</sup> National profiles are an important tool to report on family policy trends and changes at national level, and to monitor progress made towards the implementation of the Recommendation, as well as to map how common certain practices are in a particular country. EPIC national profiles are refreshed on an annual basis. Information used for this report builds on the recent round of national profile updates conducted during the winter months of 2017 and 2018.

The EPIC project team at RAND Europe worked in close collaboration with national experts across MS to collect relevant information and data. All national profiles are structured in accordance with a common reporting template, requiring experts to provide information on current policy objectives, legislation, programmes, initiatives and other measures covering the past 12 months in relation to the three pillars of the Recommendation. Nevertheless, national experts have flexibility in reporting information, thus there is variation in the content, length and breadth of information available for each MS country profile. This variability is also reflected in our report when we outline the policy changes across European countries. As such, information on some topics is sometimes covered in more depth for some Member States than in others. And on a few occasions, information is not available for some countries at all. The report should be read with this caveat in mind.

### ***Thematic coverage***

This report covers common, relevant and reoccurring themes, trends and changes relevant in a number of MS countries. In particular, we selected themes related to the situations of vulnerable children (e.g. migrant children, children residing in institutions, etc.) and the key aspects related to socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. provision of and access to the early childhood education and care services, leave provisions available to parents, etc.). These trends outline current policy objectives, legislation, programmes, initiatives and other measures covering the past 12 months (May 2017 – May 2018) in relation to the three pillars of the Recommendation and relevant aspect of the Pillar of Social Rights. As such, they provide an overview of the

countries' current policies for children and their families, highlighting significant challenges and how these are being addressed at the MS level.

### ***Structure of each thematic trend***

For each trend, we first provide background information about relevant policy areas and a short description of drivers for new developments. This is followed by a short description of key policy developments at the EU level. Next, we report on key changes and progress in each of the MS for which the information is available in the EPIC national profiles. A final conclusion summarises key findings, and outlines remaining challenges and potential next steps.

### ***Report structure***

Chapter 2 reports on key trends as reported in the EPIC national profiles. Chapter 3 provides a reflection on policy developments and key challenges remaining. It also signposts current policy discussions and how they could potentially shape child and family policy at the EU and national levels in coming years. Developments in the area of child migrant and refugee policy are presented in Chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 introduce changes in parental, paternity and maternity leave policies in the EU. The progress of deinstitutionalisation of the child care system is presented in Chapter 7.



## **CHAPTER 2: EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS –THE DIRECTION OF FUTURE CHANGES IN CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY IN THE EU**

Full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is recognised and protected in several international and regional human rights instruments, and it is one of the key principles of the European Union. In relation to child and family policy, these rights include gender equality, provision of equal opportunities to women and men, the right to access the labour market and to be economically active, the right to fair treatment in employment, and the right to social protection and inclusion.

Following a public consultation,<sup>iv</sup> in April 2017 the European Commission (EC) presented a formal Recommendation for the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).<sup>v</sup> The Pillar was later proclaimed by the European Council, European Parliament and by the MS at the Gothenburg summit in Sweden in November 2017. The objective of the Pillar is to contribute to social progress by supporting fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems, and providing a framework for a set of related legislative and non-legislative initiatives in the Pillar's areas of focus.

The Pillar is based on three main principles:<sup>vi</sup>

- Equal opportunities and access to the labour market;
- Fair working conditions; and
- Social protection and inclusion.

Several of the 20 key principles of the Pillar are directly relevant for the child and family policies as they build on the principle of the work-life balance (Principle 9 of the Pillar) and the right to childcare and support to children (Principle 11 of the Pillar). This includes a promotion of rights to 'all people in employment with caring responsibilities'<sup>vii</sup> to encourage a more equal share of caring responsibilities between women and men, in order to balance professional and family responsibilities. In more detail, this includes the ability to have flexible work arrangements and equal conditions related to leave policies. We provide more detail on aspects related to the equal share of leave arrangement in Chapter 5. Aspects related to childcare and support to children include the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality, and the right to protection from poverty and the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities. More detail on aspects related to the ECEC provision is provided in Chapter 3.

The EC working document *Monitoring the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights*<sup>viii</sup> has assessed, monitored, compared, and reported on, the progress of EPSR implementation and new developments across the MS in the areas related to work, private and family life, childcare and support to children.

### **2017- 2018 country-specific recommendations in the area of child and family policies**

The European Semester for policy coordination provides a framework for future policy developments in the Member States, including policy recommendations stemming from the EPSR. As part of the European Semester, every year the European Commission issues country-specific recommendations (CSRs) setting up policy objectives for the next year. While the CSRs are tailored to a specific Member State, they are part of a wider set of EU priorities identified as part of the Annual Growth Survey. The recitals of the CSRs introduce the country-specific context in which the recommendations are made. They provide an overview of the country's situation in areas covered by the European Semester, including child poverty and well-being. The 2017 recitals provide important policy pointers to strengthen efforts in the particular policy areas in each of the MS. The overview of the 2017 and 2018 CSRs is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Overview of the 2017 and 2018 European Semester themes for country-specific recommendations and 2017 recitals related to families and children.**

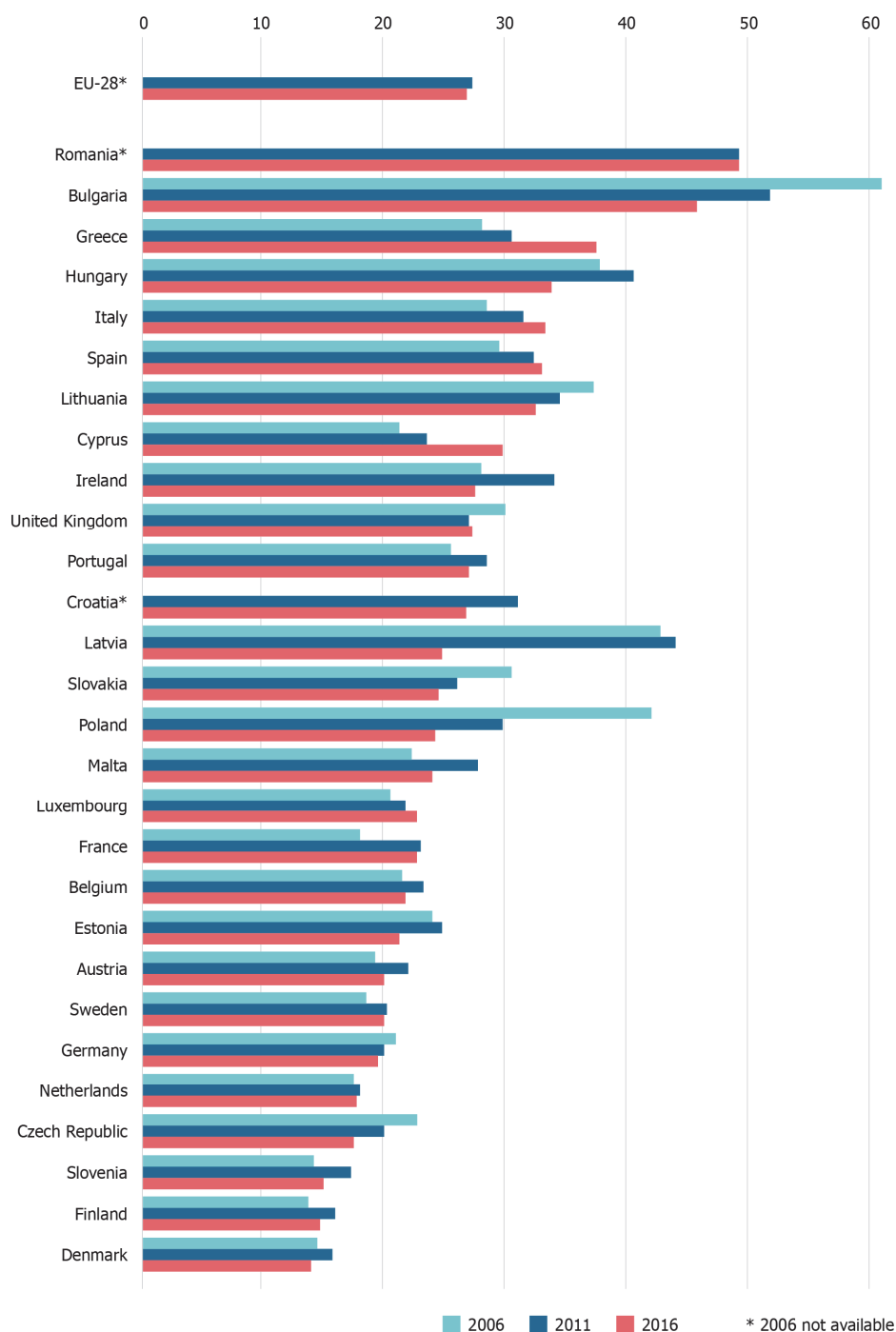
Policy Topic	Countries receiving a family/child recital in 2017	Countries receiving a family/child CSR in 2017 <sup>1</sup>	Countries receiving a family/child CSR in 2018
Child poverty	BG, IT, RO		
Income support	BG, DE, EE, ES, HU, HR, LV, LT, PT, RO, UK	BG, ES, HU, LV,	BG, ES, LV, LT, HU
Efficiency/effectiveness of social protection support	IE, FI, HU, HR, IT, LV, LT	EE, HU, IT, LV, LT, RO (min. wage)	EE, HR, IT, LV, LT, HU, RO (min. wage)
ECEC/childcare (access, affordability, quality)	CZ, AT, IE, ES, HR, IT, PL, SK, UK	IE, ES, SK, AT	IE, IT, PL, SK
Inclusive education/ Early school leaving	AT, BE, BG, DK, ES, FR, HR, LT, MT, PT, RO, SE, SK	BE, CY, AT, ES, FR, LT, LV, BG, HR, HU, RO, SK	BG, CZ, ES, HR, CY, LV, LT, HU, RO, SK
Affordable housing	IE, LU, NL, SE, UK	IE	IE, NL, UK
Financial disincentives to the labour market	DE, FI, FR(migrants), HU, HR, PL	DE, FR, IT, PL, RO	DE, FR, IT, NL, PL, RO
Reconciliation	EE, IT, SK	EE, PL, SK, AT	
Access to health	BG, CY, HU, HR, LV, LT, RO	BG, LV, LT, RO, SI (LTC)	BG, CY, LV, LT, RO
Roma-related	BG, CZ, HU, RO, SK	BG, HU, RO, SK	BG, HU, RO, SK

Source: 2018 European Semester: Country-Specific Recommendations / Commission Recommendations<sup>x</sup>

### **Social inclusion in the child and family policies in the Member States**

The European Semester thematic factsheet on social inclusion<sup>x</sup> indicates that in 2016, 26.4% of children in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion<sup>xi</sup>, only 0.9% lower than in 2011. As such, social exclusion and child poverty remain key challenges and priorities of child and family policy across Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Greece did not receive any CSRs in 2016-2018 as it was still following macroeconomic adjustment programmes.

**Figure 1 Percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU, 2006, 2011 and 2016**

Source: Eurostat (2017)<sup>xii</sup>

To address this challenge, EU Member States have introduced various measures over recent years. For instance, some countries, such as Ireland and Denmark, have introduced **comprehensive national policy frameworks**. In 2014 Ireland adopted 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2016–2020' (BOBF), recognising the life-long consequences of child poverty.<sup>xiii</sup> Later, Ireland introduced a new set of strategic priorities for 2015–2017 which has focused on creating a socially inclusive and fair society with safe environments for families and children. These strategic priorities have set a child-specific poverty target

which is believed to be achieved by an increased investment in evidence-based and effective services. Similarly, a comprehensive preventive measures package, 'Early support – Lifelong effects', was adopted by the Danish Parliament in 2014.<sup>xiv</sup> The aim of this measure was to ensure early and preventive support for disadvantaged children and young people during the 2014-2017 period.<sup>xv</sup> The provisions included strengthened public-private partnerships, supported parental competences, and an increased budget for preventive initiatives to tackle psychiatric issues in children and adolescents.

Other countries, such as Italy, Greece and Poland, introduced **focused financial policy measures to tackle specific challenges**. For example, a new cash benefit called 'Family 500 Plus' was introduced in Poland in April 2016.<sup>xvi</sup> This benefit is a universal monthly cash transfer of PLN 500 (equivalent to around €117) paid to families for the second and any consecutive children until they reach the age of 18. Low income families receive benefits for their first child. Families with disabled children are entitled to increased monthly benefits. A financial support measure was also introduced in Italy. In 2017, the Italian Government approved a decree to introduce an Inclusion Income (REI) benefit to tackle poverty, which should increase the total number of beneficiaries to around 400,000 families per year (around 1.7 million people, including 800,000 minors).<sup>xvii</sup> Finally, in Latvia specific financial assistance was introduced to support socially disadvantaged children. This support includes increased benefits to children whose parents' parental rights have been removed and who have consequently been placed under guardianship; transport subsidies to families with two or more children; and family loans for the purchase or construction of family housing.<sup>xviii</sup>

A **broad range of financial support initiatives** was launched in Greece. The aim of these measures was to address the inequalities and gaps in the social protection system. Initiatives included the Social Solidarity Income programme, which targets households living in extreme poverty, and The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), which supports the distribution of food and commodities.<sup>xix</sup> In addition, the National Network of Immediate Social Intervention, which offers social, psychological and material support to people in a state of need, was also introduced in Greece.<sup>xx</sup>

### ***In sum***

A number of policy frameworks and new initiatives related to children and families have been introduced over recent years across Europe to strengthen support to families. These initiatives may help to bring positive changes to the lives of children and families, though their specific impacts still need to be ascertained. Further, looking at the number of CSRs and recitals as outlined above, there are still numerous challenges across several relevant policy areas that require additional action. Given that many of these aspects are priorities of the European Pillar of Social Rights, we can expect to see more child and family policy developments aimed at combating the remaining challenges.

### **CHAPTER 3: CHANGES IN FORMAL CHILDCARE PROVISION**

Research shows that high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services can have important and enduring impacts on children's development, their educational outcomes and labour market prospects.<sup>xxi</sup> The provision of affordable, accessible and high-quality ECEC services is also important for parents' participation in the labour market.<sup>xxii</sup>

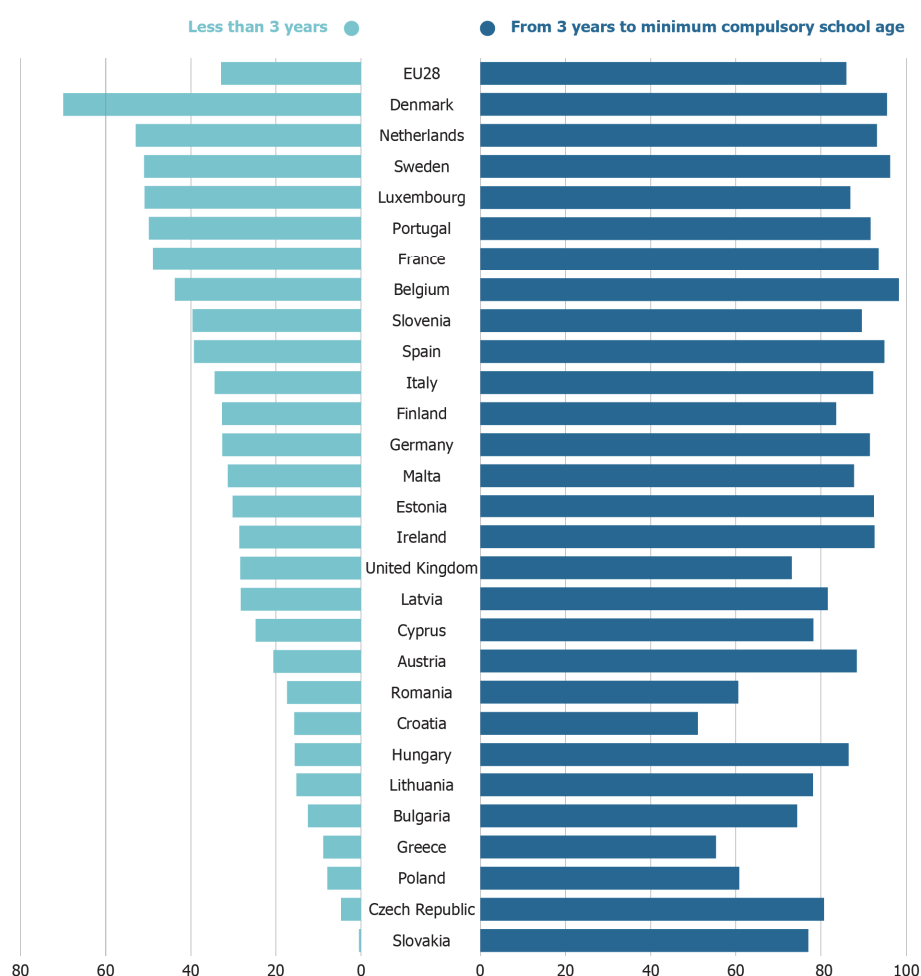
The importance of the provision of formal ECEC services has been recognised at the EU level since the beginning of this century. At the Barcelona Summit in 2002, the European Council set childcare provision targets. EU Member States agreed to increase the formal childcare provision to ensure that by 2010 at least 33% of children under 3 years of age, and at least 90% of children between 3 and the mandatory school starting age, have access to formal childcare services.<sup>2</sup>

On average, 32.9% of under 3 year-olds were enrolled in childcare in the EU in 2016.<sup>xxiii</sup> However, there are considerable differences in enrolment among MS, varying between 50% of children having access to childcare in Denmark, the Netherlands and Portugal, to only 10% in Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This suggests that more efforts to invest in ECEC provision are still needed in some MS to reach the Barcelona targets. As for children aged 3 years or above, 83.6%<sup>xxiv</sup> have access to childcare services. Overall, 12 MS had reached the Barcelona targets in 2016. However, access to childcare for this age group is still less than 65% in Croatia, Greece, Romania and Poland. Figure 2 shows the percentage of formal childcare in all EU Member States (EU-SILC 2016 data).

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<sup>2</sup> The Barcelona targets focus solely on the issue of access. However, it has to be noted that there is a difference between having access to childcare and taking up the offer. Despite the availability of childcare provision, some families may decide not to enrol children. As such, the EU statistics are in fact not about access but about childcare enrolment.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children up to 3 years of age, and 3+ years of age to mandatory school starting age, cared for in formal childcare arrangements**



Source: EU-SILC (2016) in European Commission (2018)<sup>xxv</sup>

The EC Recommendation *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage*<sup>xxvi</sup> created a more targeted framework, with the second pillar of the Recommendation focusing on supporting parents with affordable quality services. Adopted in May 2018 by the European Commission, a Council Recommendation on a quality framework for ECEC is also a step in the direction of improved ECEC services.<sup>xxvii,xxviii</sup> The planned Recommendation would offer action statements and good practices on providing quality ECEC, and also call for a European benchmark of ECEC places for at least 95% of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school starting age. A Roadmap<sup>xxix</sup> towards the Recommendation has been shared with stakeholders for feedback.

The OECD is also in the process of developing the OECD 'Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey',<sup>xxx</sup> a survey of childcare provision that will support a comparison of the structural and process quality features of ECEC services in nine countries,<sup>3</sup> including professional development practices available to staff. Data are being collected this year and the first results will be available in 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The nine countries participating in the OECD survey are: Chile, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway, and Turkey.

## ***EPIC country profiles highlight developments in ECEC provision across Europe***

There have been several initiatives related to ECEC provision across EU member states. First, several countries have **increased the available budget to create more childcare places**. For example, in 2017 Germany increased its budget by €1.126 billion, aiming to have 100,000 more childcare places available by 2020. The overall objective of this investment programme is to reduce inequalities among children at an early age and allow single mothers to return to work.<sup>xxxii</sup> Similarly, the government in the Netherlands has invested substantially in improving the quality of childcare to stimulate the use of child care facilities by children from vulnerable groups, such as migrants. The newly elected Dutch government announced in 2017 that it will invest €170 million to strengthen early childhood education and provide 16 hours of teaching per week for disadvantaged pupils.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Extra public funding was also allocated in the Czech Republic in 2017 with the aim of creating children's groups and micro-nurseries.

Another policy measure focusing on **providing guaranteed childcare places** has also been implemented across several member states, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Portugal and the UK. For example, Hungary introduced compulsory kindergarten for children aged 3 and above in 2015.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The overall objective of this measure was to reduce inequalities and improve equal opportunities among children. The change was made to promote formal childcare arrangements for vulnerable children and stimulate their social development. Similarly, in Portugal, preschool is free for children aged 3–6 for up to 25 hours per week. Fees for attendance above this threshold are directly proportional to parental income and are heavily subsidised. Due to the increased investment in preschool education, access to childcare has also increased for children under 3 years of age.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Free childcare is also available to parents in England and Wales. In September 2017, as part of a wider package of childcare support, the working parents of children aged 3 and 4 were offered an additional 15 hours of childcare. In total, it provided families with parents in employment an entitlement to 30 hours of free childcare, saving families around £5,000 (around €5,700) per year in total. Free childcare (up to 15 hours per week) is also available for 2-year-olds who live in disadvantaged households.<sup>xxxv</sup> Finally, since 2018 the Czech Republic has provided guaranteed childcare places to all children aged 3 and above, which will be extended to children aged 2 by 2020.

Several Member States have implemented **initiatives to promote greater inclusion of children requiring additional support**. For example, Denmark made additional investments in the education system in 2017. The Danish ECEC sector focuses on the quality of learning and care facilities with extra attention paid to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The linguistic evaluation of all children at the age of 3 has been expanded to include the language assessment of 2-year-olds. When their linguistic capacity is considered insufficient, the municipalities are obliged to provide the necessary language stimulation activities. Similarly, in Bulgaria, new legislation from 2016 promotes an integrated approach in childcare services and aims to promote the social inclusion of children with special needs.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The improved regulatory framework emphasises a cross-sectoral approach among education, social and health systems.

Finally, some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Portugal, introduced recommendations guiding the quality of childcare provision. In September 2017 the Czech government approved a new Family Policy Strategy which includes a number of concrete measures for childcare.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The suggestions were made in the areas of: free pre-primary education, implementation of quality standards, and unification and simplification of hygiene requirements; these were designed to prevent barriers to the establishment of new childcare services. Similarly, in 2016, new curriculum guidelines for preschool education (OCEPE) were adopted in Portugal to set guidelines for nurseries and childcare centres.<sup>xxxix</sup>

***In sum***

Overall, various Member States have taken measures to increase the availability and use of childcare provision. Most of these initiatives are based on the principle of inclusiveness and involve integrated approaches focusing on reducing vulnerabilities and inequalities from an early age. Many EU countries have extended ECEC provisions, for example, by offering more free childcare places or number of hours per day or week. In addition, some MS have introduced a guaranteed provision to ensure that all children from a certain age are entitled to access ECEC services.

However, there are still discrepancies in the level, affordability and quality of ECEC provision across Europe.<sup>x1</sup> This calls for more action to allow all children and families to benefit from high-quality ECEC services. The increased effort in the improvement of ECEC provision and quality can also contribute to other EU priority areas and policies, such as work-life balance and increased participation by women in the labour market.

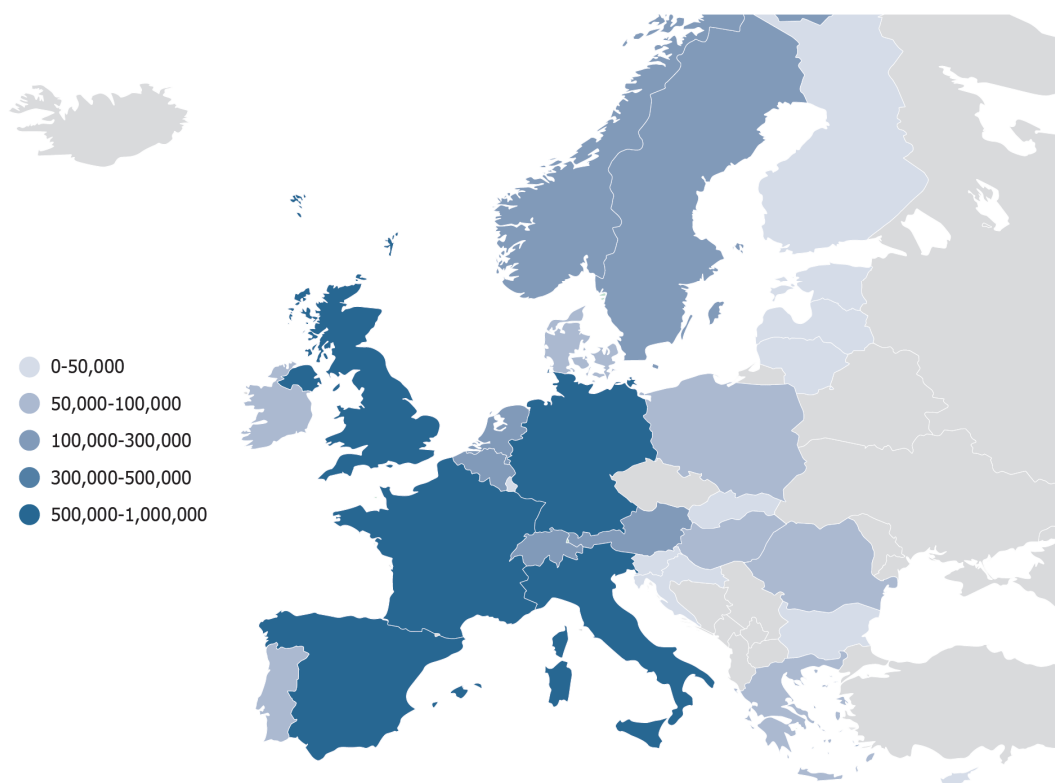


## CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPMENTS IN EU MEMBER STATES IN THE AREA OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN POLICIES

Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children are often identified as vulnerable groups in the academic and policy literature, at risk of social exclusion and in need of support and protection. As a result of the recent migration crisis and the arrival of unprecedented numbers of migrant children into Europe, many MS were faced with the need to design and implement policy frameworks and practices responding to the multiple and complex needs of these children.

One of the most important causes of exclusion relates to the linguistics capabilities of migrant children. In 2017, Eurydice,<sup>xli</sup> a network monitoring the organisation of education systems across Europe, released a report showing that almost all MS provide some formal teaching and learning assistance to migrant and refugee children, for instance in the form of additional group or individual language classes in or outside the school timetable. However, the systematic evaluation of the language capability of newly arrived migrant and refugee children varies among MS, because the different educational systems implement their own processes regarding the reception and inclusion of these children.

**Figure 3: Migrant and refugee children in the EU Member States in 2017**



Source: Eurostat (2018)<sup>xlii</sup>

### **Member State support to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children**

There have been a number of recent initiatives across EU MS to support migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children. EPIC country profiles provide concrete examples of such activities, programmes, policies and legislative frameworks aimed at integrating these vulnerable groups of children.<sup>xliii</sup>

First of all, several countries, such as Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Germany, have introduced **initiatives related to facilitating access to education**. Greece is one of the countries most affected by the migrant and refugees crisis. As part of the measures taken in response, at the beginning of 2016 the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs established the 'Refugee Education Programme'.<sup>xliiv</sup> The aim of this programme is to provide reception facilities for refugee children in public schools across the country, and to provide afternoon courses. The ultimate objective of this policy framework is the integration of all refugee children into schools in the morning timetable for the academic year 2017-2018. In Italy, migrant children's right to access education has been codified into legal act. Based on article 12 of the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Italian government introduced Law no. 47/2017 which focuses on the support and protection of unaccompanied refugee children and their entitlement to access education and participate in the decision-making process regarding their education.<sup>xliv</sup> Similarly, the Dutch Ministry of Education launched the Equal Opportunities Alliance Framework in 2016 outlining the need for provision of equal opportunities for migrant children in education.<sup>xlvi</sup> In Germany, the programme 'Culture empowers – Alliances for education' also focuses on the provision of education opportunities. The programme will continue from 2018 to 2022 with new financial resources of €250 million.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The **provision of adequate housing standards** for migrant and refugee children and their families has been also one of the priority areas for some EU MS. The provision of accommodation for refugee children and families, especially unaccompanied migrant minors with uncertain residency status, is one of the key focus areas in Germany. The biggest achievement of the 'National initiative for the protection of refugees and migrants living in refugee centres in Germany', launched in 2016, has been the establishment and implementation of the Minimum Standards for the protection of refugees and migrants living in refugee shelters, which were developed in collaboration with over 30 partners.<sup>xlviii</sup> In addition, Germany has also introduced other programmes, such as:

- 'Improving the accommodation, supply and care of foreign children and adolescents' (2015);
- 'Look forward! What your child does with Media', a national initiative for the protection of refugees and migrants living in refugee centres in Germany; and
- 'Accompanied and unaccompanied migrant minors – living conditions and integration processes from the perspective of young refugees', taking place in 2017 and 2018.<sup>xlix</sup>

This last programme focuses on the identification of changes, challenges and developments in refugees' lives based on their personal views and lived experiences in the host community.

An **integrated approach towards the needs of migrant and refugee children** was implemented in Bulgaria in 2016. Due to the rapidly increasing numbers of unaccompanied minors and victims of trafficking among asylum seekers, the Bulgarian state identified the imperative need to design and implement coordinated healthcare and educational interventions focusing on the provision of humanitarian protection and rehabilitation. The objective of two projects, 'Support for Preschool Education of Disadvantaged Children' and 'Educational Integration of Students from Ethnic Minorities and/or Asylum or International Protection', is the integration and access to education for children of ethnic minorities.<sup>i</sup> Finally, there have been specific healthcare policy actions. The policy framework stipulates that asylum-seeking families with children, and families in which one or both parents have separated, are eligible for a Child Allowance providing access to medical and dental health.<sup>ii</sup>

Apart from third-country migrants and refugee children, MS have also put in place **provisions and programmes for intra-EU migrant children and other disadvantaged children**, for example Roma. For example, the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy for 2014–2021 sets the policy strategy towards the inclusion of

national minorities in the educational system. More specifically, the policy supports the creation of an inclusive national curriculum and the development of teacher education and educational counselling concerning national minorities.<sup>lii</sup> Since 2013 the Portuguese local authorities, in collaboration with universities and local NGO's, have implemented several programmes in 21 inter-municipal communities focusing on the promotion of equality and social justice. The ultimate goal of these programmes is the prevention of early school drop-outs, especially among populations facing social exclusion, such as the Roma community.<sup>liii</sup> The Romanian National Strategy for 2014-2020 also focuses on the imperative for the provision of community-based healthcare programmes to Roma communities.<sup>liv</sup> In addition, there is special support available to children of parents who reside outside Romania. According to Decision no. 691/2015, children of parents who have migrated to work in other countries are entitled to a school counsellor providing support regarding the children's academic achievements and any mental health needs they have. Additionally, in cases where both parents have migrated to work abroad, children are eligible for social assistance services visits every two months for the first six months, and then systematically each trimester, assessing school performance, social adaptation and mental health.<sup>lv</sup>

### ***In sum***

EU countries are putting in place legal and policy frameworks, and concrete actions and programmes, to promote the social inclusion of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children and their families. These initiatives often aim to take an inclusive and coordinated approach encompassing education, healthcare, social care and housing services. It is worth noting that some of these initiatives apply holistic approaches that focus not only on academic and learning development, but also respond to children's social, emotional and mental health needs.<sup>lvi</sup>

## **CHAPTER 5: CHANGES IN PARENTAL AND PATERNITY LEAVE POLICIES AND PROVISIONS**

Studies suggest that paternity and parental leave policies can have a positive impact on child development, the reconciliation of work and family life and the reduction of gender inequality in the labour market.<sup>lvii</sup>

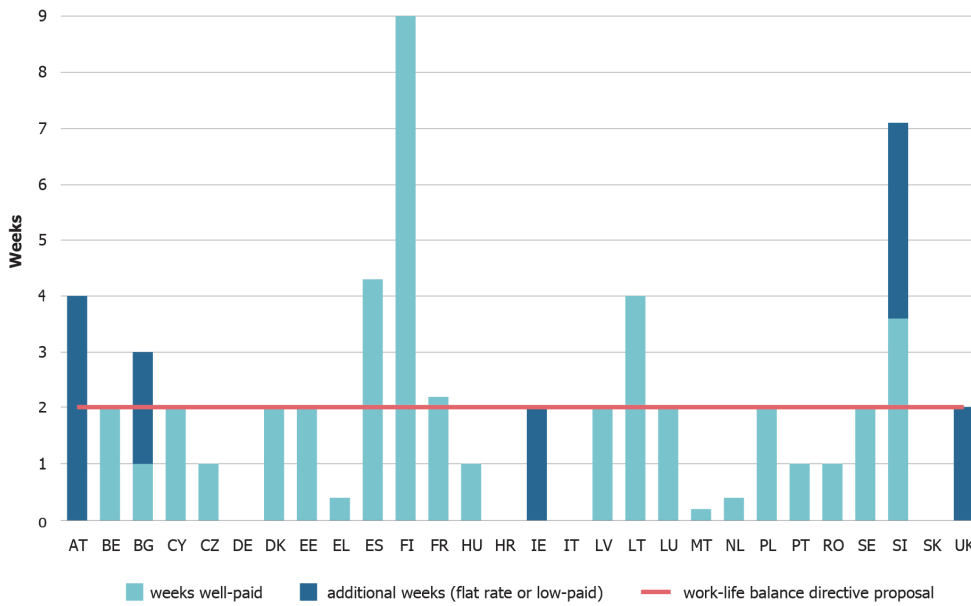
Paternity leave tends to involve a short-term interval from work for employed fathers after the birth of a child. Parental leave is an individual or a family right and it is defined as a period of leave for employed parents which is additional to paternity and maternity leave.<sup>lviii</sup> All European countries provide some type of parental or paternity leave scheme. However, the type, duration and compensation of parental and paternity leave provisions vary between European countries.

Despite some legislative and policy actions at the EU level and the efforts of the MS to promote parental and paternity leave, there are still some significant barriers to the uptake of parental and paternity leave by fathers across European countries. These obstacles relate to perceptions of the social and cultural norms about gender roles in supporting a child's development, and the lack of employment support and flexibility for fathers wishing to receive leave.<sup>lix</sup>

### ***New developments: 'Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers'***

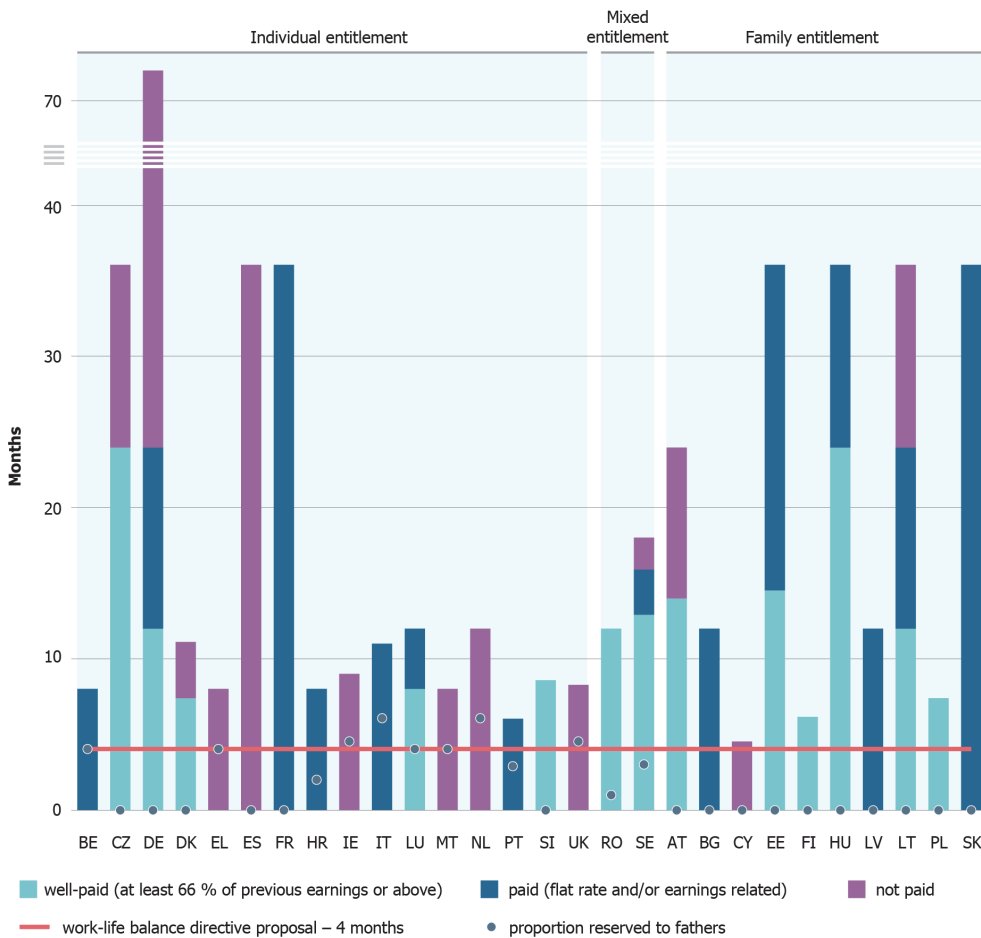
In April 2017, the European Commission outlined the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>lx</sup> As part of this initiative, the 'Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers'<sup>lxi</sup> was proposed, setting out a list of policy measures which aim to support working parents and carers in achieving a balance between their work and family life. These measures aim to ensure that all families have access to affordable childcare services and entitlement to adequate parental leave arrangements, e.g. by reserving part of the leave entitlement to fathers so it cannot be transferred to mothers. The ultimate objective of the directive is the prevention of discrimination against parents and carers in the workplace, and the enhancement of women's participation in the labour market. After a review by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs in February 2018,<sup>lxii</sup> a set of amendments was proposed to further facilitate combining work with family-related responsibilities.<sup>lxiii</sup>

**Figure 4: Paternity leave offered in nearly all EU28 Member States**



Source: Based on Blum et al. (2017)<sup>lxiv</sup> and European Platform for Investing in Children, (2018)<sup>lxv</sup>

**Figure 5: Just over a third of EU28 Member States reserve a proportion of parental leave to fathers. In addition, parental leave is often not well paid**



Source: Based on Blum et al. (2017)<sup>lxvi</sup> and European Platform for Investing in Children (2018)<sup>lxvii</sup>

***There have been several developments in parental and paternity leave provision across Member States<sup>lxxviii</sup>***

First, several MS, such as Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain have **introduced new leave entitlements for fathers**. For example, in line with the Act 120/2015<sup>lxxix</sup> implemented from 1 September 2015, both parents in Portugal have the right to receive parental leave of 120 or 150 consecutive days. Additionally, employed fathers have to take mandatory paternity leave of 15 working days.<sup>lxxx</sup> Similar legislative changes have been introduced in Spain. According to new laws introduced in 2017, employed fathers are entitled to four weeks of paternity leave during or after maternity leave on a full- or part-time basis.<sup>lxxxi</sup> Between 2016 and 2017 a 0.4% increase in the use of parental leave by fathers was observed in Spain. And recent data provided by the Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security<sup>lxxxii</sup> highlighted that the number of fathers receiving paternity leave (196,873) almost reached the numbers of mothers taking maternity leave (200,618). The plan to extend paternity leave from two to four weeks was approved in 2009 and was intended to be implemented in 2011, but eventually it was put into effect on 1 January 2017. A further extension in the length of paternity leave up to five weeks is planned to be implemented in 2018. More recently, since the summer of 2017, fathers in Cyprus have been eligible for two weeks' paternity leave and social security benefits paid at 72% of their mean salary.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Similarly, according to recent policy changes, from 2018, fathers in Slovenia are entitled to 30 days of paid paternity leave, and each parent to 130 days of parental leave.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Finally, since February 2018, in line with the new paternity leave policy, fathers have an entitlement of seven days' leave within six weeks of the birth, adoption or fostering of a child, and to claim up to 70% of their salary. The leave can be taken at any time within the six weeks and aims to enhance fathers' engagement in supporting the development of young children.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

An **extension of leave entitlements for parents** was also one of the policy measures introduced in MS. For example, according to Law 232/2016<sup>lxxxvi</sup>, the duration of parental leave for employed fathers in Italy has been extended to two weeks, aiming to promote work-family balance for both parents. Mothers and fathers are each eligible for parental leave up to six months, with a maximum of 11 months per child.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> In Slovakia, the right to receive maternity leave benefits was extended to fathers. As a result, the number of fathers receiving maternity leave benefits has increased from 837 in 2016 to 1,767 in 2017. This represents 7% of all recipients.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> The state of Luxembourg implemented a new law regarding flexible parental leave, aimed at the reconciliation of work and family life. According to the new law, introduced in December 2016, parents are entitled to receive parental leave until the child turns 6 years of age. Additionally, parents have the right to take parental leave during the same period. Another reform, introduced on 1 January 2018, extended paternity leave from two to ten working days.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Some **measures promoting sharing of leave entitlements** were also introduced across Europe. In 2017, the Estonian government introduced the Family Benefits Act,<sup>lxxx</sup> covering aspects related to parental leave. These changes, planned to be implemented gradually from 2018 to 2020, aim to encourage more fathers to take up leave entitlements and improve the work and family life balance. More specifically, parents will have 515 days of leave per child to be used over a period of 3 years. Additionally, from July 2020, fathers will receive an additional 30 days of parental benefits. The Family Benefits Act allows parents to work during parental leave without losing the parental leave benefit.<sup>lxxxii</sup> Some policy modifications have also been introduced in France regarding parental leave for children born since 2015. These amendments aim to achieve equal sharing of parental responsibilities and reduce the gender pay gap.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Finally, in March 2017, policy reforms in Austria introduced the option of a so-called 'partner bonus' of €500 for each parent, in case both parents equally share the leave provision and allowance. Furthermore, another new measure entitled 'family time bonus' gives additional financial support to working fathers who intensively and exclusively take care of their families and interrupt their job, directly after the birth of their child, for at least

28 days. Such fathers are entitled to a bonus of €22.60 daily (approx. €700 per month).<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Finally, **specific measures focused on the provision of financial support** were introduced in some MS. For instance, the policy reforms introduced in Latvia in 2014 aimed to enhance financial support with childcare for children aged up to 18 months. Parents are entitled to choose either to receive leave until the child is 12 months old or to take leave up until the child is 18 months old. Parents have the right to receive parental benefits and work at the same time.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The financial support measures were also strengthened in Sweden. In January 2016, the Swedish State extended the basic level of paid leave to 250 SEK (€25) per day. Additionally, the number of non-transferrable months between parents was increased in 2016 from two to three.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Despite the fact that mothers are still the primary users of parental leave (in 2017, 72.4% of all days were taken by mothers and 27.6% by fathers), there was an increase of 2.7% in the proportion of parental leave days taken by fathers in 2016 and 2017. Overall, the number of parental leave days taken by Swedish fathers is still considerably more than that by fathers in other EU Member States.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

### ***In sum***

Overall, recent changes in parental and paternity leave provisions introduced across European MS have a common aim of greater gender equality and equal sharing of work and family responsibilities between parents. The most recent changes have focused on greater flexibility in the use of leave provision, the extension of the duration of leave, provision of greater financial support during leave, and more encouragement to fathers to take up allocated leave entitlements. However, despite progress made in recent years, there are still opportunities across Europe to design and implement further policies that promote the well-being of both parents and support them in achieving greater reconciliation between work and family life.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

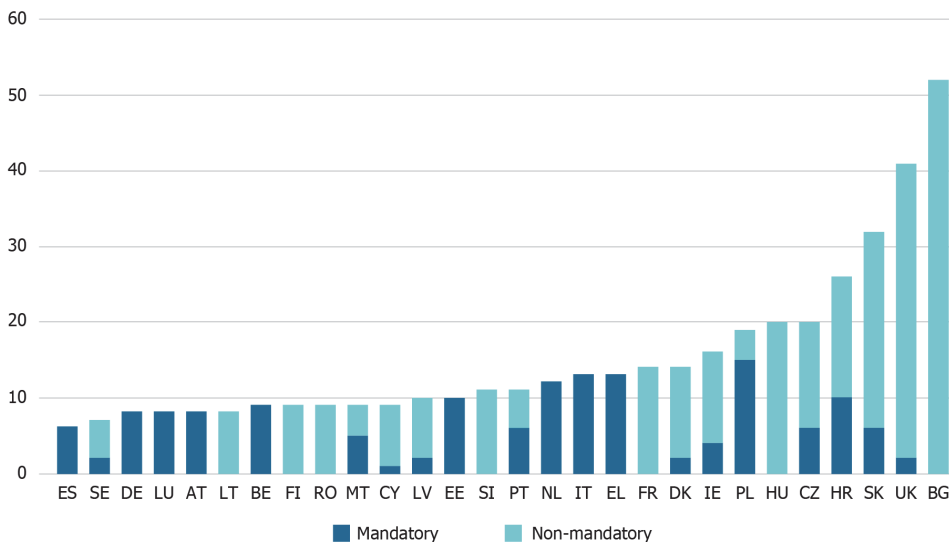
## CHAPTER 6: CHANGES IN MATERNITY LEAVE POLICIES AND PROVISIONS IN EUROPE

Maternity leave is an important health measure allowing women to recover from pregnancy and childbirth, as well as to bond with a newborn baby. However, some research studies indicate that long periods of leave can have negative effects on women’s labour market attachment and career advancement. In order to reflect calls for greater gender equality and a more equal share of childcare responsibilities, over recent years many EU countries have made changes to the design of their maternity leave provisions.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

According to the EU Maternity Leave Directive (92/85/EEC)<sup>lxxxix</sup>, mothers are entitled to receive at least 14 weeks of maternity leave from which two are mandatory, to be taken prior to or after childbirth. This directive provides MS only with general guidelines on maternity leave policies. In practice, most of the maternity leave policies in European MS are targeted at women after childbirth and concern the first period of motherhood, accompanied by a type of public income support. However, there are significant differences in the implementation of maternity leave policies across European MS with regards to whether maternity leave is compulsory or not, the eligibility criteria, the duration, the type, and the amount of financial benefit.

A number of MS have made changes regarding maternity leave policies as a result of the revised Parental Leave Directive (Council Directive 2010/18/EU).<sup>xc</sup> This Directive gives male and female workers an individual right to parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child. In addition, mothers were granted the right to transfer part of their leave allocation period to the other parent. The policy modifications aim at the promotion of gender equality through shared parenthood responsibilities.

**Figure 6 Number of post-natal maternity leave weeks in EU28 countries**



Source: European Parliament (2014)<sup>xcj</sup>

In response to the changes to the Parental Leave Directive and wider societal changes, EU MS made amendments to their maternity leave provisions. These initiatives were predominantly aimed at protecting women’s rights concerning motherhood as well as promoting gender equality and female participation in the labour market.<sup>xcii</sup> Nevertheless, despite similar aims, significant variations in maternity leave policies exist across European countries.



### **Recent developments on maternity leave policies across Member States**

Similarly to policy changes related to parental and paternity leave provisions, recent initiatives and actions regarding maternity leave were also focused on offering greater flexibility in leave use, offering more financial security to mothers on maternity leave, and the promotion of sharing of leave between parents by converting parts of maternity leave into parental leave.

The **opportunities for greater flexibility in leave use** were created in Croatia and the Czech Republic. According to the Croatian legislative framework, maternity leave lasts until the child is 6 months old, and it can be transferred to the father following the obligatory period of 28 days before and 70 days after the birth. Additionally, maternity leave and payment can be transferred to fathers. In 2015, 0.3% of fathers exercised their right to transfer leave.<sup>xciii</sup> Similarly, maternity leave entitlements can be transferred from a child's mother to a father in the Czech Republic. According to Czech legislation, maternity leave equates to 28 weeks which include 6–8 weeks during pregnancy and 20–22 weeks after the birth of a child. The provision can be shared with the other parent after the completion of the sixth week.<sup>xciv</sup>

The flexibility of maternity leave provisions can also relate to more **flexibility in combining leave and paid employment**. For example, the family policy reforms introduced in Hungary in 2014 aimed to promote the employment of mothers with children under 3 years of age by offering part-time employment and other financial bonuses to start working prior to the child's second birthday.<sup>xcv</sup> The focus of these policy changes from providing the right for mothers to stay home for several years on paid maternal leave looking after the child, to encouraging mothers to return to the labour market after a relatively short period of parental leave, and allowing the father to stay home. In addition, both parents are entitled to financial support for the provision of childcare services at home until the child reaches the age of 3.<sup>xcvi</sup>

Finally, policy measures that aimed at the **provision of greater financial security during maternity leave** were introduced across a number of MS. For example, between 2013 and 2015, the Government of Malta introduced measures which aim to achieve greater balance between family and professional life through an increase in the maternity leave benefit, which includes self-employed women and adoptive parents.<sup>xcvii</sup> Additionally, there were measures implemented giving a special maternity benefit to women working in the private sector.<sup>xcviii</sup> In addition, the minimum level of maternity leave benefit was increased in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Since 2016, maternity benefit in the Czech Republic has been related to income, and for women earning up to 901 CZK (€35) per day, the allowance amounts to 70% of their income. The maximum amount of maternity benefit in 2017 was 33,120 CZK (€1,295) per month or 1,104 CZK (€43) per day.<sup>xcix</sup> From 1 May 2016, the benefit provided to mothers during maternity leave in Slovakia has been increased to 75% (from a prior level of 65%) of the base salary (with a monthly ceiling of one and a half times the national average monthly wage).<sup>c</sup> Finally, in Spain, mothers who are eligible to receive maternity benefit can enjoy 100% of their earnings during maternity leave, which in 2017 was up to a maximum of €3,751.20.<sup>ci</sup> Additionally, mothers who do not meet the eligibility criteria for maternity benefits, in 2017 received a flat-rate benefit of €537.84 per month or €17.93 per day, for 42 calendar days. In addition, the non-contributory benefit is extended to a total of 56 calendar days for lone mothers, large families, multiple births and disabled children.<sup>cii</sup>

### **In sum**

Current maternity leave provisions are guided by the EU Maternity Leave Directive. However, over the years a number of countries have extended the minimum standards required by the Directive, such as extending the length of leave provision or level of leave benefit payments. Some of these changes resulted from the more recent revised

Parental Leave Directive. Overall, the aim of the changes is to achieve greater gender equality and facilitate career progression of both mothers and fathers.<sup>ciii</sup> This is achieved by formally allowing fathers to take time off to look after children, by transferring some of the maternity leave provisions to fathers, by sharing parental leave provisions with mothers, or by allocating a dedicated leave provision to fathers. Despite progress, there is still a need for more action to fully allow mothers and fathers to enjoy and combine their professional and family roles.

## **CHAPTER 7: DEINSTITUTIONALISATION OF CHILD CARE SERVICES IN EUROPE**

Growing up in institutional care has a harmful effect on children's physical, cognitive and emotional development. Children brought up in institutions often have reduced intellectual and social skills, suffer from low confidence and have difficulty building relationships with others.<sup>civ</sup>

The process of deinstitutionalisation of the child care system aims to eradicate social exclusion and refers to a transition from the provision of institutional to community-based services focusing on the integration of children and families into the wider community.<sup>cv</sup> The **United Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**<sup>cvi</sup> established a global right to quality education for all children by highlighting that they should receive and enjoy a standard of living which facilitated the development of their physical, mental, social and emotional health, in a family environment of happiness, love and understanding. Institutional care services are often not able to provide this supportive family environment. As such, the efforts towards deinstitutionalisation involve a shift towards community-based services, including foster care services, aiming to support families towards the engagement of children, parents and carers, and improvement of the quality of life through extended support opportunities. One of the major challenges in the near future is to ensure that the successful and radical shift from institutional care to family-based services encompasses all children. This requires an interdisciplinary approach, involving areas of social care, health and education, focusing on the holistic development of the child.<sup>cvi</sup>

### ***Policy documents guide the transition from institutional to community-based care***

In 2012, the **European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based care**<sup>cvi</sup> designed and developed **Common European Guidelines**<sup>cix</sup> to assist MS in the transition to community-based services. Additionally, in 2014, the European Expert Group developed a **Toolkit on the Use of European Union Funds**<sup>cx</sup> to support all countries for the Transition from Institutional to Community Based Care. According to the **Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)**,<sup>cx</sup> by 2017, 60% of Member States had implemented deinstitutionalisation policy plans.

### ***European initiatives towards deinstitutionalisation***

Since the beginning of 2013, Eurochild, an advocacy group for children's rights, has organised the campaign **Opening Doors for Europe's Children**,<sup>cxii</sup> focusing on support for national initiatives to develop child protection networks. The aim of the campaign has been to reinforce families' engagement in the efforts towards the provision of alternative care for children and the improvement of the quality of life. The first stage of the campaign, which took place from 2013 to 2015 in 12 European countries, aimed at raising awareness about deinstitutionalisation by developing policies and action plans supporting this transition. The ongoing second phase, running from 2016 to 2018, involves a wider range of new and existing national and international partner organisations, and has also expanded geographically into four new countries in Western Europe.

### ***There are many initiatives supporting deinstitutionalisation across the EU***

Across Europe some countries have introduced **new legislative frameworks and policies to provide support measures towards deinstitutionalisation of childcare services**. Lithuania has developed a programme conforming to the Child Welfare Action Plan for 2016-2018 promoting the provision of community-based social, educational and health care, and preventive and inclusive care services to children who have lost parental care.<sup>cxiii</sup> The programme aims to facilitate the development of children in a healthy family environment offering proper care, support or adoption in order to respond to their

needs.<sup>cxiv</sup> Similarly, Bulgaria implemented the programme 'Vision for Deinstitutionalisation of Children in the Republic of Bulgaria' in 2016 focusing on the development of support services to prevent separation of children from their families. In 2016, the programme facilitated 4,838 participants, including 2,826 children and young people, involving 147 providers of social care services. The services of the programme included foster care and special foster care to disabled children and unaccompanied refugee minors.<sup>cxv</sup> In Latvia, the government's policy plans for the years 2014 to 2020 aim towards the progressive induction of programmes facilitating the transition from institutional to community and family-based care. The policies and action plans implemented by local governments have the initial target of combating child poverty and social exclusion.<sup>cxvi</sup>

Finally, in 2014 the Ministry of Social Affairs in Estonia produced a 'Green Paper on Alternative Care'<sup>cxvii</sup> for the design and restructure of alternative care services, promoting the inclusion of all children and families in community-based settings. The ultimate objective of the programme was to reinforce the improvement of family-based care. In Estonia, deinstitutionalisation modifications focus on creating residential care settings entitled 'Small Group Homes'.<sup>cxviii</sup>

### ***In sum***

MS are making systematic progress towards the development of alternative child care services by introducing new legislative actions, implementing policies and action plans, and initiating practical programmes in order to transform the lives of many children in Europe. There is still need for further action considering not only the implementation, but also the evaluation, of the current modifications aimed at the transition from institutional to community-based child care services. However, the first steps towards the promotion of deinstitutionalisation and the improvement of the quality of life for young children and families have already been initiated.

## CONCLUSION

This EPIC annual thematic report provides a snapshot of recent changes in European- and national-level child and family policies. It is based on the information provided in the EPIC national profiles summarising recent developments in the 28 EU member states.<sup>cxix</sup>

The major change in child and family policy in the EU in 2017 was the presentation and proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Together with the 2013 Recommendation '*Investing in Children*', over the next few years the Pillar will shape the policy landscape for children and families. As such, it will have an impact on the legislative actions, policy frameworks, and other programmes and initiatives at the EU and MS levels. Within this framework, we can expect some further developments relating to the key remaining challenges, such as the distribution and persistence of child poverty, access to affordable childcare provision of a high standard, social inclusion and support for migrant children, equal sharing of work and family responsibilities between parents, and the transition from institutional to community-based child care services.

Looking forward, it is possible that the European Parliament initiative for a 'Child Guarantee Scheme for Vulnerable Children' will become an important driver for change in the area of child and family policy in Europe over the next few years. The Child Guarantee, formulated as a new political priority by the European Parliament, and currently in the phase of the preparatory action, will aim to lay down an implementing framework for EU policies, legislation and programmes for the provision of essential services to children. As currently planned, the Child Guarantee will offer an integrated approach to tackling the multidimensional aspects of child poverty, ensuring that all children in Europe have access to free health care, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition.<sup>cxx</sup>

Overall, the direction of current developments in the area of child and family policy in the EU is based on the principle of inclusiveness and integrated approaches. The Child Guarantee Scheme could provide further movement in this direction, with the aim of overcoming the remaining but persistent challenges relating to child poverty and inequality.

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**ENDNOTES**


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