



Families and childcare services

Conference report

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Background

This report presents the conclusions from a **seminar on families and childcare services** held in Ankara, Turkey, on 5 June 2008. The seminar was organised by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (hereafter referred to as Eurofound), in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security (*Çalışma Sosyal Güvenlik Bakanlığı*, **CSGB**).

The event brought together about 100 participants, including practitioners, researchers and government policymakers, as well as representatives of social partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Eurofound has a long-standing programme of research on work and families and recently also on childcare in Europe. Eurofound's research is distinctive in its attention to children of all ages; that is, it covers not only children from birth up to the age of three years and those aged three to six years but also focuses attention on out-of-school childcare services for children aged six to 12 years. Childcare is a vital issue in today's society, important not only for the reconciliation of work and family life but also for maintaining the quality of life of children and families. Moreover, childcare is also important as a new area of employment, as well as an area that contributes to the creation of jobs and the smooth functioning of the labour market. The issue is closely linked to other important areas requiring attention such as child protection and child poverty, the debate on equal opportunities and the roles of women and men both in the home and in employment. In contemporary society, it is necessary to increase the capacity of men to care for children both in the family situation and in employment. Against this background, the seminar explored issues associated with 'families and childcare services' in Turkey by drawing a comparison with other countries, particularly the new EU Member States and the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**).

Aims of conference

The conference aimed to identify and debate similarities and differences in the situation of families and childcare systems in Europe and the OECD countries in comparison with Turkey.

The event encompassed two main sessions:

- the morning session included presentations of Eurofound's research findings, the OECD family database and the work of the United Nations' Children's Fund (**UNICEF**) on the childcare transition;
- the afternoon session included keynote speeches about the situation in Turkey from the Directorate General (DG) for Social Services and Child Protection (**SHCEK**) and CSGB.

Importance of children

In his opening address, the Head of research into Living Conditions and Quality of Life at Eurofound, Robert Anderson, noted that today public policymakers all over Europe have a more direct interest in children and their quality of life. This interest is driven in part by demographic concerns, notably the ageing of the European population and the dramatic decline in fertility rates. Policymakers are looking for measures to enable families to have the number of children they wish to have while policy also seeks to promote intergenerational solidarity. A strong focus has been placed on promoting life chances and quality of life for children, which is strongly determined by their families and the services available to care for them. Ultimately, EU policy aims to strengthen the capacity of families to contribute to society as workers and citizens.

The General Director of SHCEK, İsmail Barış, underlined the importance of the theme of the seminar. He presented the work of SHCEK, which focuses on three core areas.

- Care of children outside the home – traditionally, when mothers worked, grandmothers used to care for the children. In recent decades, however, this pattern has begun to change with the rise of the nuclear family and greater population mobility. A growing need for childcare and day-care services outside the home has emerged. Under the new Social Security Law, amendments have been introduced in terms of the social assistance for children provided to families.
- Out-of-school childcare services when women with school-age children are working – it is hoped to increase the responsibility and activities of schools in this area.
- Children in difficult circumstances, such as street children, working children or children in conflict with the law – child protection services aim to provide these children with the care they need and to ensure minimum standards in the specialised institutions established to support children. In recent times, several projects and activities have been launched in cooperation with UNICEF. In addition, Turkey has been successful in applying International Labour Organization (ILO) standards in relation to child labour and has greatly reduced the extent of child labour throughout the country.

To date, challenges to family stability in Turkey are not as acute in much of Europe, but as society changes, Turkey can expect to confront similar problems. Already, Turkish families living and working in Europe share the same problems as families in their host countries.

Numerous challenges are associated with childcare and female employment throughout Europe. However, Turkey can benefit from the experiences of the European countries in this area and the exchange of information should be ensured between the EU and Turkey.

Research findings of Eurofound, OECD and UNICEF

Eurofound research on families and childcare services in the new EU Member States

In the new EU Member States, the labour market participation of women is increasing, and policies to reconcile work with family commitments are becoming more important, including those that aim to provide affordable childcare and to ensure the care of older people. Such policies need to address access to and quality of services with sensitivity to local needs. Employment policies are increasingly focusing more attention on the interdependence between family organisation and labour market arrangements. Different national and local family cultures may provide various frameworks and starting points. The most profound change in the new Member States has been the transition from communism to market economies. Formerly, childcare for children from birth to school age and out-of-school childcare for school-age children was highly subsidised in eastern European countries. With the change to market economies in these countries, many of these services – most often associated with large enterprises and farm cooperatives – were closed down. Today, a lack of childcare places has emerged and those that exist are often expensive for parents.

The development of childcare services will depend not only on facilities but on renewed investment in the childcare workforce. In most of the new Member States, remuneration for childcare workers is low. Staff in the childcare sector are almost exclusively women, and today, have lower educational qualifications than was previously the case. The image of the childcare workforce is often poor, reinforced by low pay levels and a lack of training. Childcare systems are growing at different rates, with provision stagnating or in decline in several of the new Member States. Many EU countries do not have initiatives in place to increase and support employment in the sector or to promote flexibility, high quality of services and protection of employee rights. At the same time, hidden employment in the sector may exist in some countries. As a result, restructuring of the childcare labour market is necessary in order to develop an efficient workforce.

Some of the social attitudes and child philosophies of the past are no longer suited to the profound changes in society and economic organisation that have taken place over the last number of years. A more diverse supply structure and service provision is needed, based on a mixture of public and private funding, as well as new funding mechanisms. More attention needs to be focused on the personal preference and choice of parents with regard to childcare. Moreover, comprehensive information, advice and guidance are essential for parents and children, and for attracting workers into the area of childcare. Diversity too needs to be promoted in the recruitment of childcare workers. Moreover, the necessary qualifications for childcare workers, training, employee characteristics and regulations will need to be reformed on a regular basis.

For more information on childcare provision, see Eurofound’s web pages on the issue:

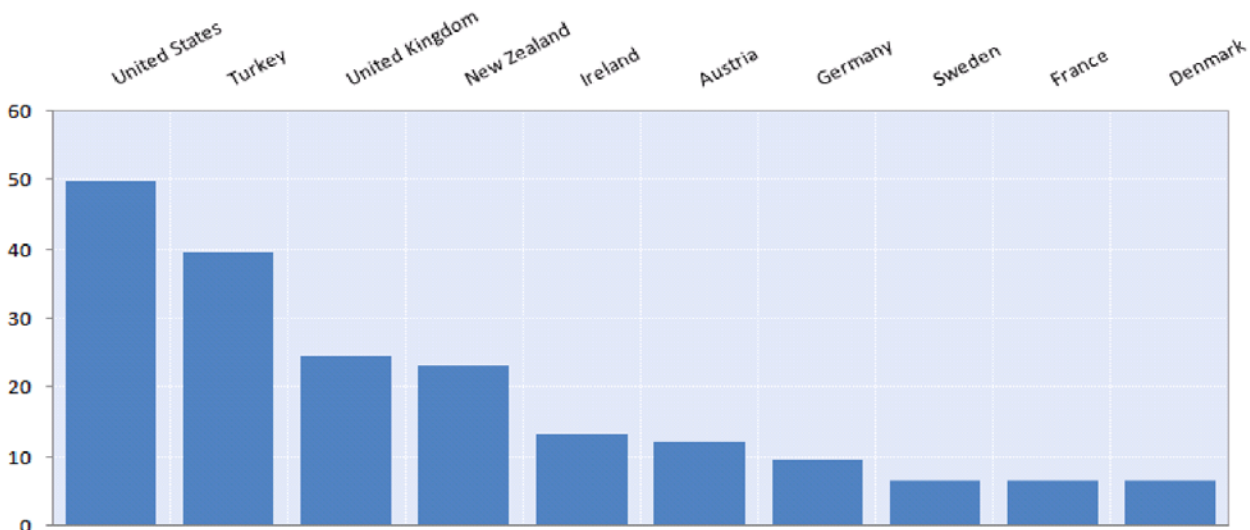
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/labourmarket/childcare.htm>

OECD Family database

The OECD Family database has been developed since the end of 2006, and is a follow-up to the **Babies and bosses** reviews and publications. The database brings together indicators from a number of OECD sources: the social expenditure database, data on benefits and wages, the education database and the health database. The rationale for initiating this work was the growing demand for cross-national family indicators in light of profound changes in family structures in OECD countries, notably the increasing incidence of dual-earner families, single parents and demand for childcare services. At the same time, the ‘Babies and bosses’ reviews highlighted the relative ‘data poverty’ in this area.

Across the OECD countries, fertility rates are falling – quite dramatically in Turkey from the 1970 levels. However, teenage pregnancy is more common in Turkey than most other OECD countries, but less so than in the United States (US).

Figure 1: *Levels of teenage pregnancy in OECD countries, 2005*



Note: The adolescent fertility rate measures the number of births per 1,000 young women aged 15–19 years.

Source: *World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2008*

On average, Turkish men and women work longer hours than in other countries. Female employment in Turkey is low but stable across the life cycle. Against a trend in other OECD countries, the proportion of temporary work undertaken by women in Turkey is declining. Among people with a low standard of education – that is, those with less than upper secondary-level education – Turkish women are much less likely to be employed than men. However, for women with university qualifications, the gap reduces significantly.

Although educational spending has greatly increased in Turkey over the last decade, the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) devoted to education remains below the OECD average, particularly for secondary education. In terms of maternity leave, the length of such leave in Turkey is similar to other OECD countries: women on maternity leave receive about eight weeks of replacement wages for an average 12-week leave period. Participation of children in pre-school care in Turkey is lower than in other OECD countries. This may reflect, in part, the high proportion of single-earner households – that is, a high proportion of families with mothers at home.

However, some limitations emerge with regard to Turkish comparisons. Not all of the indicators in the OECD family database include Turkish data – for example, figures on social expenditure are lacking. In addition, Turkey has certain unique conditions that differentiate it from other OECD countries: a recent high rate of population growth, internal migration as well as rural and urban differences, a large youth population and an intergenerational skills divide. Differences also emerge, specific to work–life comparisons, which limit comparison with other countries. For instance, Turkey has a high proportion of single-earner households (62%). In addition, rates of casual employment are high while rates of contracted employment are low. However, overall, data collection in Turkey is weak and the OECD would welcome advice on how to improve this situation.

At present, Turkey is building for the future. Among other positive signs of development, education spending in Turkey has almost doubled in the past 10 years. Enrolments in education are increasing and achievement standards are rising. Reform measures to improve health and social security systems are underway and, in parallel, infant mortality is falling; in fact, the rate of infant mortality has fallen more in Turkey in the past 20 years than in any other OECD country.

For further information, please consult the OECD Family database, available online at: <http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family>

Childcare transition in OECD countries – UNICEF

UNICEF was represented at the conference by the Innocenti Research Centre (**IRC**) in Florence; the IRC's latest Report Card No. 8 on 'The childcare transition: A league table on early childhood education and care' examines four dimensions of early education and care: access, quality, resources and inclusive context. It ranks 24 OECD countries and Slovenia according to their performance across 10 indicators. Past experience of this exercise shows that comparisons can stimulate national dialogue and a desire to improve performance in the area of education and childcare. The transition from the care of children in the home by parents to care facilities outside the home is a profound change in a fundamental and sensitive societal function.

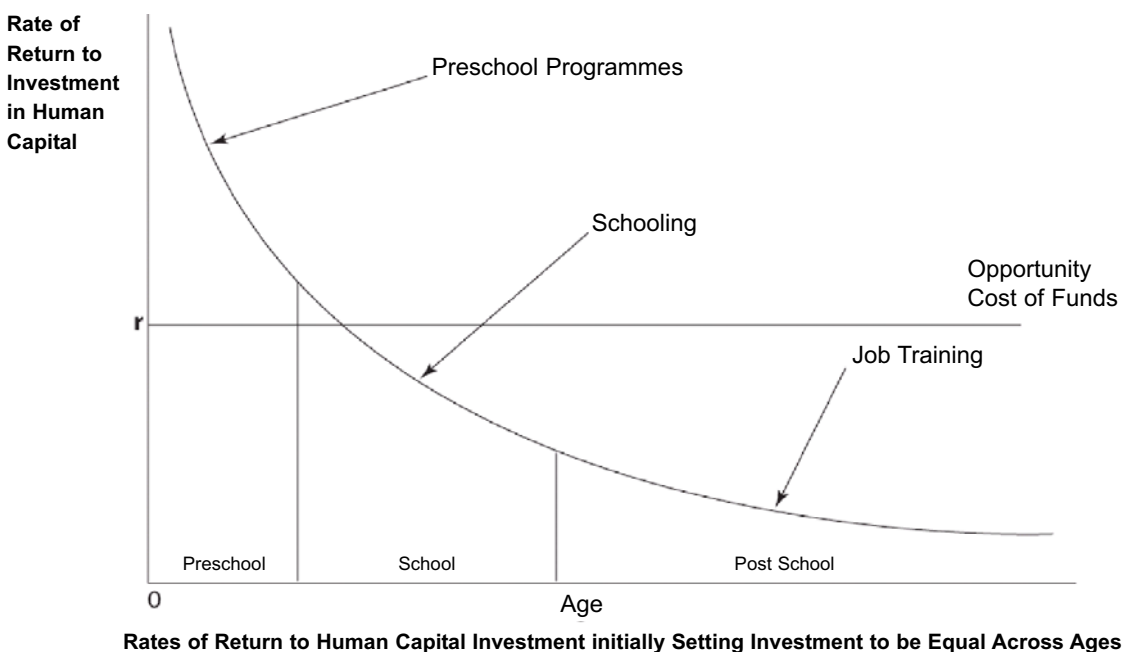
Today, the labour force participation rate of women in OECD countries is about 60.8%. Some women are under-employed or even unemployed but interested in remaining in work; some are in part-time employment, enabling them to work while spending time every day with their children. Furthermore, 80% of children aged three to six years are in some form of early education, ranging from a few hours a day or week to full-day centre-based services, or are simply in the care of a relative, au pair or neighbour on a more informal basis. Overall, an increasing proportion of infants and toddlers and pre-school children are in the care of 'others'.

Investing in early childhood services and in the quality of care is important. Since the quality of care and education programmes matters greatly in early childhood services, governments need to invest significantly in these services. In

fact, poor quality care programmes can have adverse effects on a child’s development and impede their successful integration into school. This means investing in well-trained staff and keeping to small groups of children in childcare facilities, particularly in the case of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poor quality services for these children will simply contribute to growing disparities.

The value of investing sufficiently in young children is shown clearly by the Heckman curve, which is the graphic designed by the Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman illustrating the returns on investment that can be expected at different stages of the education cycle. Overall, investment in early childhood education is more important than at any other stage of the education cycle. OECD figures show, however, that current national investment in child education is far too low. In fact, to provide high quality services, some countries will need to double their investment.

Figure 2: Investing in children: rates of return at different selected ages and cycles



Source: Carneiro, P. and Heckman, J., 2003

Another key element in developing successful early childhood services is to reduce child poverty. More than any other social determinant, persistent child poverty undermines the life chances and educational achievement of children. Even the best funded and designed childcare services can only overcome disadvantage among children to a certain degree. More multi-faceted child poverty reduction strategies are required to make investment in early childhood development and education pay off. UNICEF Report Card No. 6 recommended that all OECD countries should aim for a child poverty rate of ‘below 10%’.

In a growing number of OECD countries, communal early childhood services are recognised as an important tool for integrating vulnerable and second-language children. These services provide important opportunities for children of minority groups to learn the official language(s) of the country and they are equally important for exposing mainstream children, teachers and parents to diversity.

Keynote speeches on the situation in Turkey

Children in need of protection

SHCEK addressed the topic of ‘children in need of protection’. Law 2828 offers a definition of children in need of protection, which refers to children whose physical or psychological development or personal security is in danger, and, who do not have parents or are abandoned by their parents, whose parents are not known, or who are neglected by their parents and thus are open to all kinds of social risks – such as prostitution, begging, alcohol or drug abuse. A shift in understanding about the care of these children has occurred in recent years. Rather than providing residential care in large institutions, it is now believed that children fare better with their families and among their own relatives. A family with well-established social relationships generally provides a positive environment for the social and emotional development of children. For this reason, SHCEK’s project ‘Back to the family’ seeks to return children to their families of origin when doing so is safely possible, facilitates their adoption by host families, places them in foster families or, as a last resort, takes them into residential care. Under this project, to date, some 15,000 children in need of social protection are supported near their families. As regards children who are under protection and cared for in SHCEK institutions, about 5,000 children have been returned to their families, while 10,000 children have been adopted and 1,023 children have been placed with foster families. Moreover, SHCEK’s large institutions have been divided into smaller units, namely ‘child houses’, located close to schools and hospitals. Larger housing units, called ‘care homes’ – literally, affection homes – have also been set up with about 12 children in each unit who are cared for by two professionally trained caregivers. In addition, childcare centres and orphanages are available for children in need of protection. For children perpetrating crime or who are victims of crime, rehabilitation services also exist in childcare and rehabilitation centres. Apart from education, employment, guidance and social services are provided to children living and working on the streets and also to their families in childcare and youth centres. All of these services benefit from central and provincial supervision. Cooperation with other ministries is actively pursued in this new care services model.

Reconciliation of work and family responsibilities: relationship with women’s employment

CSGB introduced the topic of reconciling work and family responsibilities, emphasising the strong link between women’s employment and childcare. In Turkey, 35% of children are cared for by their mothers, 35% by their grandmothers or other relatives, 20% by other informal carers and 10% in crèches or childcare institutions. Participation rates in registered childcare services are even lower. The minimal use of childcare reflects, on the one hand, the strong family networking of Turkish society and, on the other, a lack of subsidised childcare as well as traditional societal attitudes to mothers working outside the home.

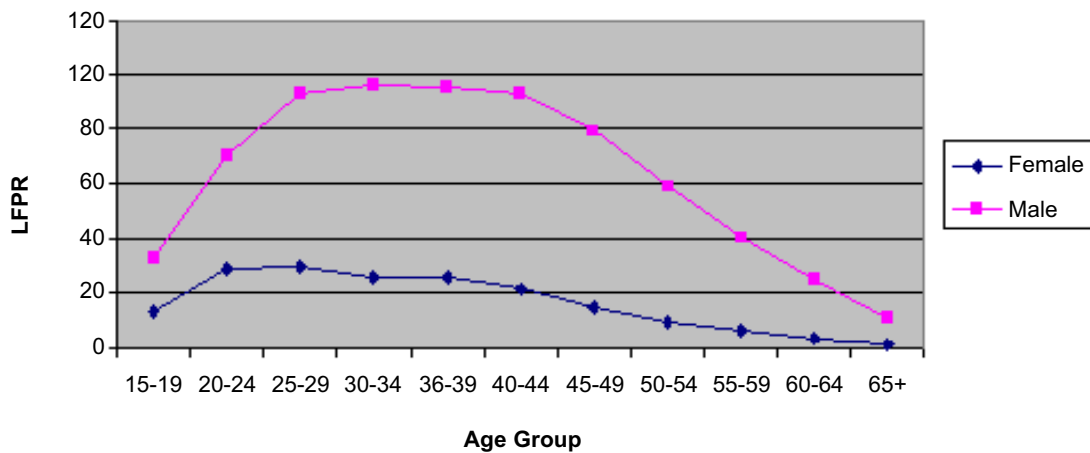
Compared with EU countries, Turkish employment rates are low, involving less than half of the working age population in the third quarter of 2007 – this figure includes unregistered employment. Low employment and participation rates are primarily caused by extremely low participation rates of women at almost 25%, compared with 75% for men.

With regard to urban and rural employment, rural employment is decreasing as a result of agricultural dissolution and urban employment is increasing slightly. Youth employment is a particular challenge, remaining at about 20% for both sexes.

Women’s labour force participation

Increasing the labour force participation of women is the most crucial challenge for the Turkish labour market, as indicated by Figure 3 below; female labour force participation is quite low even among the primary working age population – those aged 25–45 years.

Figure 3: Labour force participation, by age and gender



Source: TurkStat Labour Force Surveys

The labour force participation rate of women, already at a low level of 27%–28% in the early 2000s, has declined to 25% in recent years, notably in urban areas where the female labour market participation rate of 20% is now significantly below the rural employment rate of 33%. The higher rural rate of employment may be accounted for, to some extent at least, by people declaring self-employment. In other words, many women who work as unpaid family workers or in unregistered and unprotected jobs (in terms of social security, duration of work, right to holidays and pensions) in the countryside declare themselves to be employed (as unpaid family workers).

The characteristics of female employment in Turkey can be summarised as follows:

- a quarter of all women of working age participate in the labour market, about half of whom are in unregistered jobs. This employment rate compares with about a third of all men;
- the unemployment rate of women is relatively low, remaining at about 10% in recent years, due primarily to the overall low labour force participation rate of women;
- the unemployment rate of women in urban areas is a cause of concern as it remains at about 16%–18%. This may reflect the difficulties of women living in urban areas in finding caregivers or childcare for young children as family networks are weaker than in the countryside;
- the female employment rate of about 25% is relatively stable, but is decreasing slightly, particularly in urban areas;
- the employment rate of women is positively correlated with education, showing a more visible correlation than in the case of men;
- the employment rate of women is negatively correlated to marriage and having children. From the age of 25 years, the female employment rate in Turkey begins to decline. Like other countries, a link between marriage and women's entry to or exit from the labour market is evident. Initially, married women are expected to devote themselves to rearing their children.

The seminar looked at why high numbers of married women leave the labour market. Overall, two thirds of women state that they do not work because they are housewives. According to a 2007 survey by the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation (**Türkonfed**), the following are the reasons most cited by women to explain their drop-out from the labour market:

- 16% of women drop out because of societal or family pressure;
- 11% leave due to care responsibilities and housework;
- 10% drop out due to lack of skills;
- 10% leave because of unfavourable working conditions.

Social organisation and attitudes in Turkey tend to confirm the personal reasons given by women for leaving the labour market. Patriarchal family structures and traditional perceptions of the role of women place the responsibility for the care of children and dependent family members on women. Reflecting the cultural context are basic practical difficulties with regard to the care of children. Few subsidised childcare facilities are available in Turkey, except for women working in public administrations or in large companies. Market mechanisms that depend on the law of supply and demand make private crèches and babysitters too expensive for most households. Moreover, parents often have doubts about the quality of the services provided.

Such challenges for women cannot be resolved without the intervention and support of the state. Responsibility for female employment and childcare services falls ultimately on the state, even if there is scope for partnership between the government, employers, trade unions and other civil society stakeholders. The benefits of high quality childcare and pre-school education are accepted universally – including by many people in Turkey.

Debate on gender equality and social security

Important barriers to women's work persist due to gender discrimination, unregistered employment, low pay and a lack of institutionalised day-care services. Strong social and psychological pressures exist in Turkey to confine mothers to remaining at home. Home-making, childcare and care for older people are seen as the 'natural' responsibilities of women. Gender discrimination is not just an issue affecting women, but has strong economic implications. In one region, evidence shows that as many as 65% of textile workers stopped working when they had children. Such a large fall-off of workers is extremely expensive for companies as they must continually train new workers to replace those leaving the workforce. Furthermore, the dropping-out of better educated women from the workforce when they have children is of particular concern to employers.

Achieving women's rights depends greatly on the adequate provision of childcare. However, the new Social Security Law is not clear on this issue. It is perhaps more favourable than previous legislation in that it does not encourage employers to limit the employment of women. However, under the new law, there is no obligation on larger employers to provide crèche facilities for their female workers. Whether the new situation is more favourable to employees is open to discussion. The seminar participants recognised that many interesting projects currently exist in relation to childcare provision, but they claimed that the present situation calls for effective countrywide policies. It was argued that a wider approach to childcare policy should be adopted in Turkey, involving the cooperation of the government ministries, the social partners, NGOs and women's organisations, in order to develop a national childcare strategy. Much of the childcare debate is linked to issues of unemployment, lack of education, isolation and poverty. In this regard, it is necessary to develop and support parental leave and parenting education, in addition to childcare services. For instance, it was emphasised that breast-feeding and parental presence is important for the health and well-being of babies during

the first year of life. In general, the situation of families and children can be improved with social, education and employment policies that support women.

Conclusions

During the seminar, it became evident that notable progress has been made in Turkey in the past decade with regard to education (through significant new investment), the protection of children (with new approaches to children in difficult circumstances, including child labour) and the initiation of a more dynamic social dialogue.

Status of women and employment

No European country has yet achieved full equality of opportunities for women in terms of employment or pay. With few exceptions, women are less represented in political and other high-level positions and earn on average, over a lifetime, about 20% less than men. Both gender equality (equal access to work and equal opportunities in work) and gender equity (a more equal distribution of child-rearing and domestic responsibilities between men and women) remain high on the European policy agenda. Achieving such objectives requires more proactive labour and social policies in favour of women, particularly in the area of childcare. In this regard, the 'active inclusion' approach may be helpful, as it aims to provide an environment of quality social services, including good quality childcare, housing and health services. The benefits associated with encouraging more women into the labour force are evident: women's work contributes significantly to national economies, both in terms of production and taxation, and accounts for as much as 40% of gross domestic product (GDP) in some European countries. The overall EU Lisbon Strategy goal of having 70% of the active population at work by 2010 presupposes an overall female employment rate of at least 60%.

Reconciliation of work and family life

Given the traditional attitude that childcare and domestic tasks are female duties, the reconciliation of work with family responsibilities poses particular challenges for women. As recent social research emphasises, the compatibility of motherhood and having a career is contingent on the nature of institutional support, in particular, on public support for parental leave, the provision of early childhood services and the availability of family-friendly jobs. EU countries differ in their approaches to meeting this challenge, but, in general, all Member States now provide both maternity and parental leave, subsidised access to early childhood services (see below) and, in the Nordic countries in particular, better access to family-friendly jobs. In Turkey, paid maternity leave is available and working conditions for women in the public services are more favourable with some possibility for maternal leave and in many instances the availability of childcare facilities.

Childcare policy

The move towards better childcare provision in Europe was highlighted as an important issue by the EU Council meeting in Barcelona on 16–17 March 2002. At this meeting, EU countries agreed to remove disincentives to female labour force participation by providing subsidised childcare places for a third of all children from birth to three years of age, as well as early education for over 90% of all children aged three to six years. Despite certain shortcomings, the Barcelona targets provide a measure of the rate of access expected and indicate concern for the situation of working women in the EU. In several countries within the OECD, over 75% of women between the ages of 25–54 years are currently active in the labour market. Such a high employment of women has had a major impact on modes of child rearing. It is widely recognised that when a certain level of female participation in the formal labour market is reached (generally from 50% upwards), private solutions to meeting childcare needs become insufficient. This is usually the case when parents or other family members are themselves working, and informal childminding solutions are unsatisfactory because of concerns about the quality of services, shortages of facilities and instability.

Although the topic of the seminar was ‘Families and childcare services’, the dominant theme to emerge from the meeting was the overall situation and employment status of women.

Further information on the seminar and all conference presentations are available at:

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/events/2008/semankara/>

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