

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE 2013 CSRs FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

In the context of reaching EU2020 objectives, Country Specific Recommendations (CSR) were formally adopted by the EU Council in June 2013¹.

Achieving gender equality is not a specific objective of the EU2020 Strategy. In its 2013 position on the EU Semester, the ETUC underlines the need to include a gender equality perspective in the CSRs and to ensure that recommendations aimed at improving gender equality and women's situation in the labour market are not undermined by other recommendations².

This year some of the recommendations addressed to Member States by the European Commission are once again closely related to gender equality. This document aims at giving an overview of them.

13 countries received one or more CSRs with a gender equality dimension in the 2013 CSRs: AT, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, SK and UK.

In 2012, one more country (Slovakia) also received a gender-related recommendation.

In 2011 only 11 Member States were targeted in recommendations incorporating a gender equality dimension: AT, CY, CZ, DE, EE, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, SL, SK and UK.

10 Member States have been addressed in the same kind of recommendation in the last three years: AT, CZ, DE, EE, ES, HU, IT, NL, PL, SK and UK.

The measures endorsed aim in general to increase women's participation in the labour market, with the goal of achieving a 75% employment rate by 2020. Recommendations mostly cover the need for increasing the quantity of care facilities (11 countries), followed by removing fiscal disincentives for second earners (3 countries), harmonizing pension ages for both women and men (2 countries), tackling the gender pay gap (1 country) and, finally, promoting flexible working arrangements for women (1 country).

The "chapeau" communication accompanying the CSRs entitled "Moving Europe beyond the crisis" also contains a short reference to most of these measures: *"In the EU's demographic situation, reforms also need to focus on increasing the labour participation of women and older workers by making sure the tax and benefit systems provide the right incentives to return to and stay in work. Developing early childhood education and care, usually referred to as childcare, addressing child poverty and preventing early school-leaving are key instruments to this end. The quality, affordability and accessibility of related services play a crucial role"*.

The quality of female employment in general has been neglected by the CSRs. One notable exemption can be found in the Council Recommendation addressed to Austria. The introductory text takes note of the presence of women in marginalised and low-wage jobs. Nevertheless no specific measures are proposed to tackle this challenge.

Scattered references to the (lack of) quality of female jobs can also be found in the staff working papers accompanying the publication of the CSRs. They are: *"Female labour market participation"*³, *"Adequacy and sustainability of pensions"*⁴ *"Poverty and social inclusion"*⁵ *"Quality of education and training"*⁶ *"Early school leaving"*⁷ *"Tertiary education attainment"*⁸ *"Youth unemployment"*⁹ *"Green jobs employment potential and challenges"*¹⁰.

¹ Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/>

² See: "Employment must be at the heart of the European Semester – ETUC position in advance of the June European Council (27-28 June 2013)" available at <http://www.etuc.org/a/11300>

³ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/31_labour_market_participation_of_women.pdf pag.4

⁴ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/04_pensions.pdf

⁵ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/33_poverty_and_social_inclusion.pdf

⁶ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/30_quality_of_education_and_training.pdf

⁷ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/29_early_school_leaving.pdf

⁸ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/28_tertiary_education.pdf

⁹ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/21_youth_unemployment.pdf

¹⁰ See: http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/19_green_jobs.pdf

Below are a list of CSRs with a gender dimension addressed to Member States since 2011.

1. Foster labour market participation of women

2013	7 countries	AT, CZ, HU, IT, MT, NL and PL
2012	4 countries	HU, IT, NL and PL
2011	7 countries	AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, NL and PL

Comment:

According to Eurostat the female employment rate is below 60% in Malta, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Hungary, Spain, Romania, Poland and Slovakia. The figure is even lower when the employment rate is considered in fulltime equivalent, due to the high percentage of women in part-time jobs. Most of the EU countries which need to increase the participation of women in the labour market have not addressed in any recommendation. In the ETUC's view more efforts should be made in order to raise not only the level of women's employment but also the quality of their jobs. Although the crisis has mostly hit male-dominated sectors, various studies (including the ETUC survey, 8th March) show how the on-going process of fiscal consolidation is increasingly involving staffing freezes or personnel cuts in the public sector which is female-dominated. According to the European Commission this trend "*diminishes the prospects of a swift recovery for female employment in several countries*"¹¹.

2. Providing childcare and out-of-school care services

2013	11 countries	AT, CZ, DE, EE, HU, IT, MT, PL, SK, SP and UK.
2012	9 countries	AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, MT, PL, SK and UK.
2011	7 countries	AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, PL and UK.

Comment:

In 2002, the Barcelona European Council set out the following objectives: "*Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age*".

10 years later it appears that only a minority of Member States (six) have achieved such a goal. Even if the number of countries receiving recommendations on the need to increase the availability of childcare provisions has increased over the last three years, CSRs still lack of consistency in this area. Countries like Bulgaria and Romania for instance, are far from achieving the targets but have never been addressed in CSRs in relation to tackling the problem. According to a recent EU study¹² the 6 Member States that have achieved both objectives are SW, BE, FR, SL, DK and the UK; 7 have achieved one of the two objectives: PT, ES, NL and LU for the first age group and DE, IT and EE for the oldest children. Most Member States still need to make significant improvements, in particular Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Regrettably, the CSRs have only drawn attention in a few cases to the issues of the quality and affordability of childcare provisions and stable funding for qualified staff (Poland and UK).

3. Removing fiscal disincentives for second earners

2013	3 countries	DE, NL and IT
2012	3 countries	DE, NL and IT
2011	3 countries	DE, NL and IT

Comment:

Tax incentives should be carefully designed in order to support women (who are usually the second earners in a couple) when moving from unemployment into full employment but also to ensure that they move from part-time to fulltime jobs. Moreover, tax benefits should be one component of a comprehensive strategy to help the transition from welfare to work which should include (but not be

¹¹ Commission staff working document "Report on Progress on equality between women and men in 2012" of 8th May 2012, p.6. http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/swd_2013_171_en.pdf and ETUC 8th of March Survey 2011 <http://www.etuc.org/r/1368>

¹² EC « Barcelona objectives : The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth", 2013

limited to): provision of childcare subsidies, effective active labour market policies, under certain conditions, a minimum wage set at an adequate level and rules to prevent employers from pocketing the earnings subsidy introduced by the incentives.

4. Tackling the gender pay gap

2013	1 country:	AT
2012	1 country:	AT
2011		None

Comment:

The latest Eurostat figures show that the gender pay gap stood at 16.2 % in 2011 in the EU as a whole. The GPG exists in all Member States, with some notable differences. It is higher than 20% in Estonia, Czech Republic, Austria, Germany and Greece and below 5% only in Poland and Slovenia.

It is therefore very difficult to understand why only one country (Austria) has been addressed in a recommendation to tackle this EU-wide form of discrimination, banned by the EU Treaties and related Directives. In the ETUC's opinion, all EU Member States registering a GPG should be addressed recommendations in order to undertake meaningful measures to eliminate it.

5. Harmonising pension ages and the rights of women and men

2013	2 countries	AT, BG
2012	3 countries	AT, BG, SI
2011	1 country	AT

Comment:

The ETUC position on the Commission white paper¹³ on pensions expresses strong concerns on introducing a rise in the female retirement age to bring it in line with the male. The harmonisation of men's and women's pension rights is an example of CSRs framed in a gender-neutral way that can be particularly detrimental to women.

6. Promoting flexible working arrangements

2013	1 country	MT
2012		None
2011	1 country	CZ

Comment:

Women's over-representation in part-time work (in the EU women's part-time work rate is 30.7 % points higher than men's) is not sufficiently acknowledged by the CSRs, nor its links to the gender pay gap. The fact that gender inequalities in the labour market are linked to inequalities at home is also neglected: there should be greater acknowledgement of the unequal share of care responsibilities between women and men.

¹³ See : <http://www.etuc.org/a/10299>

Annex 1:

Full text of country specific recommendations related to gender equality adopted in 2011, 2012 and 2013

	CSRs 2011 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/2011/index_en.htm	CSRs 2012 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/2012/index_en.htm	CSRs 2013 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm
AT 	<p>3. In consultation with the social partners and according to national practices, take steps to further limit access to the current early retirement scheme for people with long insurance periods and take steps to reduce the transition period for harmonisation of the statutory retirement age between men and women to ensure the sustainability and adequacy of the pension system. Apply strictly the conditions for access to the invalidity pension scheme.</p>	<p>3. Bring forward the harmonisation of the statutory retirement age between men and women; enhance older workers' employability and monitor closely the implementation of the recent reforms restricting access to early exit channels in order to ensure that the effective retirement age is rising including through linking the statutory retirement age to life expectancy.</p>	<p>2. Bring forward the harmonisation of pensionable age for men and women, link the statutory retirement age to life expectancy, implement and monitor the recent reforms restricting access to early retirement and improve older workers' employability in order to raise the effective retirement age and the employment rate of older workers.</p>
	<p>4. Take measures to enhance participation in the labour market, including the following: reduce, in a budgetary neutral way, the effective tax and social security burden on labour, especially for low- and medium-income earners; implement the National Action Plan on the equal treatment of women and men in the labour market.</p>	<p>4. Take steps to reduce the effective tax and social security burden on labour especially for low income earners with a view to increasing employment rates for older persons and women given the need to counteract the impact of demographic change on the working population. Shift the tax burden in a budgetary neutral way, towards real estate taxes, and environmental taxes. Reduce the high gender pay gap and enhance full-time employment opportunities for women, in particular through the provision of additional care services for dependants.</p>	<p>3. Take new measures to increase the labour market participation of women, namely by further improving child care and long-term care services and address the high gender pay and pension gaps. Fully use the labour market potential of people with a migrant background by improving the recognition of their qualifications and their education outcomes. Reduce the effective tax and social security burden on labour for low income earners in a budget-neutral way by relying more on other sources of taxation less detrimental to growth, such as recurrent property taxes.</p>
BE 			

<p>BG</p> 		<p>2. Take further steps to reduce risks to the sustainability and to improve adequacy of the pension system by making the statutory retirement age the same for men and women with full career contributions. Introduce stricter criteria and controls for the allocation of invalidity pensions.</p>	<p>2. Phase out early retirement options, introduce the same statutory retirement age for men and women and implement active labour market policies that enable older workers to stay longer in the labour market. Tighten the eligibility criteria and controls for the allocation of invalidity pensions to effectively limit abuse.</p>
<p>CY</p> 	<p>5. Take further steps, within the reforms planned for the vocational education and training system, to match education outcomes to labour market needs better, including by setting up post-secondary vocational education and training institutes. Take measures to increase the effectiveness of the vocational training system by increasing the incentives for and improving access to vocational education and training, especially for low-skilled workers, women and older workers</p>		<p>To avoid duplication with measures set out in the Economic Adjustment Programme, there are no additional recommendations for Cyprus.</p>
<p>CZ</p> 	<p>3. Enhance participation in the labour market by reducing the barriers for parents with young children to re-enter the labour market through increased availability and access to affordable childcare facilities. Increase the attractiveness and availability of more flexible forms of working arrangements, such as part-time jobs.</p>	<p>3. Take additional measures to significantly increase the availability of affordable and quality pre-school childcare.</p>	<p>4. Take measures to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the public employment service. Increase significantly the availability of inclusive childcare facilities with a focus on children up to three years old, and the participation of Roma children, notably by adopting and implementing the law on private childcare facilities and strengthening the capacities of public childcare facilities.</p>
<p>DE</p> 	<p>3. Enhance participation in the labour market by improving equitable access to education and training systems and by taking further steps to reduce the high tax wedge in a budgetary neutral way and improve work incentives for persons with</p>	<p>3. Reduce the high tax wedge in a budgetary neutral way, in particular for low-wage earners, and maintain appropriate activation and integration measures, in particular for the long-term unemployed. Create the conditions for wages to grow in line with productivity. Take</p>	<p>2. Sustain conditions that enable wage growth to support domestic demand. To this purpose, reduce high taxes and social security contributions, especially for low-wage earners and raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged people.</p>

	low income perspectives. Increase the number of fulltime childcare facilities and all-day schools. Closely monitor the effects of recent reform measures to reduce tax disincentives for second earners and take further measures in case disincentives remain.	measures to raise the educational achievement of disadvantaged groups, in particular through ensuring equal opportunities in the education and training system. Phase out the fiscal disincentives for second earners, and increase the availability of fulltime childcare facilities and all-day schools.	Maintain appropriate activation and integration measures, especially for the long-term unemployed. Facilitate the transition from non-standard employment such as mini-jobs into more sustainable forms of employment. Take measures to improve incentives to work and the employability of workers, in particular for second earners and low-skilled, also with a view to improving their income. To this end, remove disincentives for second earners and increase the availability of fulltime childcare facilities and all-day schools.
DK 			
EE 	4. While implementing the education system reform, give priority to measures improving the availability of pre- school education , and enhance the quality and availability of professional education. Focus education outcomes more on labour market needs, and provide opportunities for low- skilled workers to take part in lifelong learning	2. Improve incentives to work by streamlining the social benefits system and increasing flexibility in the allocation of disability, unemployment and parental benefits, while ensuring adequate social protection. Improve delivery of social services, while better targeting family and parental benefits and removing distortionary income tax exemptions related to children. Increase the participation of the young and the long-term unemployed in the labour market.	2. Improve incentives to work by making the various existing social-benefit systems more consistent and by increasing the flexibility and targeting of benefit allocation. Improve the delivery of social services, including childcare, while increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of family policy. Strengthen activation measures to facilitate the return to the labour market of the long-term unemployed and people receiving disability benefits and incapacity for work benefits. Establish a coordinated strategy for fostering economic development in regions affected by high unemployment.
EL 			To avoid duplication with measures set out in the Economic Adjustment Programme , there are no additional recommendations for Greece.
ES 		7. Improve the employability of vulnerable groups, combined with effective child and family support services in order to improve the situation of people at risk of poverty and/or	6. Adopt and implement the necessary measures to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion by reinforcing active labour market policies to improve employability of people further away

		social exclusion, and consequently to achieve the well-being of children.	from the labour market and by improving the targeting and increasing efficiency and effectiveness of support measures including quality family support services.
FI 			
FR 			
HU 	3. Enhance participation in the labour market by alleviating the impact of the tax reform on low earners in a budget-neutral manner. Strengthen measures to encourage women's participation in the labour market by expanding childcare and pre- school facilities.	3. Make the taxation of labour more employment-friendly by alleviating the impact of the 2011 and 2012 tax changes on low earners in a sustainable, budget-neutral manner, for example by shifting part of the tax burden to energy taxes and recurrent taxes on property. Strengthen measures to encourage women's participation in the labour market, particularly by expanding childcare and pre-school facilities.	4. Address youth unemployment, for example through a Youth Guarantee. Strengthen active labour market policy measures and enhance the client profiling system of the Public Employment Service. Reduce the dominance of the public works scheme within employment measures and strengthen its activation elements. Reinforce training programmes to boost participation in lifelong learning. Continue to expand childcare facilities to encourage women's participation. Ensure that the objective of the National Social Inclusion Strategy is mainstreamed in all policy fields in order to reduce poverty, particularly among children and Roma.
IE 			To avoid duplication with measures set out in the Economic Adjustment Programme , there are no additional recommendations for Ireland.
IT 	2. Reinforce measures to combat segmentation in the labour market, also by reviewing selected aspects of employment protection legislation including the dismissal rules and procedures and reviewing the currently fragmented unemployment benefit system taking into account the budgetary	4. Adopt the labour market reform as a priority to tackle the segmentation of the labour market and establish an integrated unemployment benefit scheme. Take further action to incentivize labour market participation of women, in particular through the provision of childcare and elderly care. Monitor and if needed reinforce the implementation of the	4. Ensure the effective implementation of the labour market and wage setting reforms to allow better alignment of wages to productivity. Take further action to foster labour market participation, especially of women and young people, for example through a Youth Guarantee. Strengthen vocational education and training, ensure

	constraints. Step up efforts to fight undeclared work. In addition, take steps to promote greater participation of women in the labour market, by increasing the availability of care facilities throughout the country and providing financial incentives to second earners to take up work in a budgetary neutral way.	new wage setting framework in order to contribute to the alignment of wage growth and productivity at sector and company level.	more efficient public employment services and improve career and counseling services for tertiary students. Reduce financial disincentives for second earners to work and improve the provision of care and out-of-school services. Step up efforts to prevent early school leaving and improve school quality and outcomes, also by reforming teachers' professional and career development. Ensure effectiveness of social transfers, notably through better targeting of benefits, especially for low-income households with children.
LT 			
LU 			
LV 			
MT 		3. Take steps to reduce the high rate of early school leaving. Pursue policy efforts in the education system to match the skills required by the labour market. Enhance the provision and affordability of more childcare and out-of-school centres, with the aim of reducing the gender employment gap.	3. Continue to pursue policy efforts to reduce early school leaving, notably by setting up a comprehensive monitoring system, and increase the labour-market relevance of education and training to address skills gaps, including through the announced reform of the apprenticeship system. Continue supporting the improving labour-market participation of women by promoting flexible working arrangements, in particular by enhancing the provision and affordability of child-care and out-of-school centres.
NL 	3. Enhance participation in the labour market by reducing fiscal disincentives for second-income earners to work and draw up measures to support the most	3. Enhance participation in the labour market, particularly of older people, women, and people with disabilities and migrants, including by further reducing tax	4. Take further measures to enhance participation in the labour market, particularly of people at the margin of the labour market. Continue to reduce tax disincentives on

	vulnerable groups and help them to re-integrate within the labour market.	disincentives for second-income earners , fostering labour market transitions, and addressing rigidities.	labour, including by phasing-out of transferable tax credits for second income earners. Foster labour market transitions and address labour market rigidities, including by reforming employment protection legislation and the unemployment benefit system.
PL 	5. Increase female labour market participation by taking measures to ensure stable funding for pre-school child-care arrangements, to increase enrolment rates of children under three years.	4. Reinforce efforts to increase the labour market participation of women and raise enrolment rates of children in both early childcare and pre-school education, by ensuring stable funding and investment in public infrastructure, the provision of qualified staff, and affordable access. Tackle entrenched practices of early retirement to increase exit ages from the labour market. Phase out the special pension scheme for miners with a view to integrating them into the general scheme. Take more ambitious, permanent steps to reform the KRUS to better reflect individual incomes.	4. Continue efforts to increase female labour market participation, in particular by investing in affordable quality childcare and pre-school education, by ensuring stable funding and qualified staff. With a view to improving sectoral labour mobility, take permanent steps to reform the farmers' social security scheme KRUS. Phase out the special pension system for miners with a view to integrating them into the general scheme. Underpin the general pension reform with measures promoting the employability of older workers to raise exit ages from the labour market.
PT 			To avoid duplication with measures set out in the Economic Adjustment Programme , there are no additional recommendations for Portugal.
RO 			
SE 			
SI 		2. Take urgent steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of the pension system, while preserving the adequacy of pensions, by: (i) equalising the statutory retirement age for men and women; (ii) ensuring an increase in the effective retirement age, including through linking the statutory retirement age to life expectancy; (iii) reducing	

		early retirement possibilities; and (iv) reviewing the indexation system for pensions. Increase the employment rate of older workers also by further developing active labour market policies and lifelong learning measures.	
SK 	4. Enhance the administrative capacity of public employment services with a view to improving the targeting, design and evaluation of active labour market policies to ensure more individualised employment services for the young, the long-term unemployed, older workers and women. Ensure the provision of childcare facilities. Reduce the tax wedge for low-paid workers and adapt the benefit system.	3. Take measures to enhance the capacity of public employment services to provide personalised services to jobseekers and strengthen the link between activation measures and social assistance. More effectively address long-term unemployment through activation measures and tailored training. Enhance the provision of childcare facilities, in particular for children below three years of age. Reduce the tax wedge for low-paid workers and adapt the benefit system.	4. Enhance the administrative capacity of public employment services with a view to improving the targeting, design and evaluation of active labour market policies to ensure more individualised employment services for the young, the long-term unemployed, older workers and women. Ensure the provision of childcare facilities. Reduce the tax wedge for low-paid workers and adapt the benefit system.
UK 	4. Take measures, within current budgetary plans, to reduce the number of workless households by targeting those who are inactive because of caring responsibilities , including lone parents.	4. Step up measures to facilitate the labour market integration of people from jobless households. Ensure that planned welfare reforms do not translate into increased child poverty. Fully implement measures aiming to facilitate access to childcare services.	4. Enhance efforts to support low-income households and reduce child poverty by ensuring that the Universal Credit and other welfare reforms deliver a fair tax-benefit system with clearer work incentives and support services. Accelerate the implementation of planned measures to reduce the costs of childcare and improve its quality and availability.

Annex 2:

Full text of introductory text related to gender equality of 2013 country specific recommendations

Austria

(10) The still relatively widespread use of early retirement and invalidity pension schemes as well as a relatively low statutory retirement age for women (60), which is going to increase only very gradually in the future, has a negative impact on the labour supply of older workers.

(11) Although the female employment rate in Austria is relatively high (70.3% compared to 62.4% at EU level in 2012), there is still scope for increasing it by reducing gender segmentation in the labour market. The share of women in part-time employment is among the highest in the EU and availability of childcare and long-term care services is limited. Female employment rates measured in full-time equivalents suggest that Austria has particular difficulties in fully tapping the potential of its female labour force. Moreover, women are found almost twice as often in marginal employment and are highly concentrated in low-wage employment. This pattern results in a gender pay gap of 24%, which is the third highest in the EU. A reduction of the tax burden for low income earners could provide higher incentives to increase labour market participation.

Bulgaria

(11) Reducing early labour market exit is a key challenge for improving the adequacy of the pension system, as well as for the supply of labour. The employment rate of older workers, in particular of older women, is below the EU average and results in inadequate pension entitlements for a large share of the beneficiaries. Whilst important reforms are already being undertaken in this area, the remaining special schemes for certain professions are among the factors contributing to lowering the effective retirement age. Continuing the progress achieved in raising the pension age, Bulgaria should also prepare and set a date for the introduction of the same statutory retirement age for men and women with full career contributions. A review of the criteria and controls for the allocation of invalidity pensions (e.g. introduction of ability to work as criterion) would be an important contribution to effectively limiting abuse.

Czech Republic

(14) Recent OECD projections show that full convergence of the female and male employment rates would halt the projected decline of the total labour force and increase GDP per capita by as much as 16.5% by 2030. The government has proposed a draft Act on 22 May 2013 to introduce 'child groups' led by professional nannies, accompanied by tax subsidies for care providers and participating families. This is a step in the right direction but is only a partial response to the issue. Because of a continued shortage of childcare facilities, in particular for under three year olds, there is a need for further increase of budgetary support to public pre-school childcare facilities. The employability and labour market participation of disadvantaged people also remains a problem: there is scope for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public employment services.

Estonia

(9) The cost efficiency of family policy expenditure could be improved in a budget-neutral way, including by reallocating financing from parental benefit to more efficient measures such as childcare services with an expected positive effect on female employment. Economic development in the regions has to be addressed in a more coordinated way to provide more visible results.

Germany

(13) Germany has taken only limited action to remove significant disincentives faced by second earners and the availability of full-time childcare facilities and all-day schools should be further increased

Hungary

(13) In the last five years, the employment rate of women remained approximately at the same low level. In order to encourage women to participate in the labour market, the government expanded child-care facilities and promoted flexible working arrangements.

Italy

(15) The participation of women in the labour market remains weak and the employment gender gap is one of the highest in the EU.

Malta

(13) Malta has also taken significant steps to increase participation by women in the labour force, mainly aimed at improving reconciliation of work and family life. Also benefitting from a favourable cohort effect, the employment rate of women continues to rise. However, there is room for improvement: the employment rate of women still remains low, parenthood still has a significant effect on the participation of women on the labour market, and the gender employment gap is the highest in the EU. Reinforce the promotion of flexible working arrangements and increase the provision of affordable childcare and afterschool facilities to a wider segment of the population can contribute to further increasing the employment rate of women.

Poland

(12) With respect to early childcare, government efforts have concentrated on implementing the 'Toddler programme'. As a result, the number of nurseries has almost doubled over the last two years, but is still low in relative terms and do not satisfy demand.

Slovakia

(11) Increasing labour-market participation of women and older people would help to increase the overall employment rate and reach the 2020 national employment target of 72%. However, the lack of adequate child care facilities in particular for children under three makes it more difficult for mothers to return on the labour market.

The Netherlands

(13) The labour market reforms proposed by the government aim to increase labour market participation and mobility. The Participation Act reform is ambitious and relevant to boost labour market participation. However, the reforms are not yet enshrined in law. In addition, further measures are needed to improve the employability of people at the margin of the labour market, including women, people with a migrant background, people with a disability and the elderly.

UK

(13) The UK also faces ongoing challenges to increase parental employment and improve access to high-quality, affordable childcare. At 17.3%, the proportion of UK children living in workless households is the second highest in the EU. Currently, childcare costs in the UK are among the highest in the EU, which poses particular problems for second earners in couples, and for single parents. In 2010, only 4% of children under three used formal childcare on a full-time basis, well below the EU average of 14%.