



**March 2007**

## **PES Employment Ministers Declaration on Childcare**

Childcare is a basic necessity for the 21st century family.

It gives children the best possible start to their education. For children from less advantaged backgrounds childcare makes a substantial difference to life chances. Local childcare facilities integrate parents and children into the community, and lay the foundations for stronger communities now and in the future. Contact with childcare workers and other parents provides priceless support for many families.

Childcare frees parents to enter paid employment, which is essential if Europe is to rise to the challenge of demographic change and boost its competitiveness. It gives the increasing number of single parent families a chance to escape from the cycle of poverty. Childcare creates local jobs, which further stimulates economic growth, including in deprived communities.

Five years ago – on March 15-16 2002 - the European Council, meeting in Barcelona, agreed targets for pre-school childcare.

EU member Governments agreed

“Member states should ... strive ... to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 per cent of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age”.

We reiterate our commitment to working towards those targets – for the benefit of our children, for removing the disincentive to female labour force participation, for community integration, for giving a helping hand to the family.

We believe there is a need to inject a sense of urgency into Europe's efforts to achieve the Barcelona childcare targets.

We regret that the European Union as a whole is a long way from meeting those targets.





We congratulate those Governments that have achieved the Barcelona targets, we applaud those Governments that have made serious efforts to increase childcare provision and we give every encouragement to other Governments to take the necessary steps.

Europe's aim should be to go beyond the Barcelona targets. We believe that childcare should be a universal service - available to all who want it.

We believe that each member state must determine its own means to achieve universal childcare and decide its own type of childcare provision.

We urge the European Commission to monitor the implementation of the Barcelona childcare targets, to report regularly on progress, to encourage the sharing of best practices in the financing and organization of childcare, and come forward with proposals for achieving the targets.

