

Gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the EU: the impact of the EU employment strategy

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Introduction

The visibility of the European Union's commitment to gender equality has risen considerably since the agreement at the Luxembourg summit in 1997 to include strengthening equal opportunities between women and men as the fourth pillar of the employment guidelines, alongside those of employability, adaptability and entrepreneurship. The inclusion of a new guideline on gender mainstreaming in 1999 that requires member states to consider the gender impact of all policies under each of the pillars¹ provided a further major impetus to the integration of equal opportunities issues into the employment framework. This impetus has been reinforced by many of the Council of Ministers recommendations on employment policy which have stressed the need to strengthen mainstreaming or other equal opportunities policies. The European employment strategy is part of the EU's adoption of the so-called 'open method of coordination' (Goetschy, 2001; Rodrigues, 2001) which allows member states to develop policy programmes appropriate to their particular situation but according to agreed common guidelines. This approach is also likened to benchmarking (Terry and Towers, 2000; Tronti, 1999; Plantenga and Hansen, 1999). Employment was the first of these programmes to use action plans along common guidelines but has since been followed by social inclusion. However, in the recent period by far the most important EU influence on equal opportunities policies has come from the employment strategy.

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¹ Each Member State is under an obligation to draw up a National Action Plan following the agreed employment guidelines, under the four pillars. These National Action Plans are subject to assessment by the European Commission and since 1999 Member States have also been the recipient of recommendations based on these assessments, but endorsed by the Council of Ministers, as to how the National Action Plans could be strengthened in the future to meet the objectives of the European employment strategy. Many of these recommendations touch directly or indirectly on equal opportunities issues. See also Goetschy, pp. 410–11 in this Review.

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The commitment to gender mainstreaming has provided a new platform for the development of a European-wide approach towards reducing gender inequalities. Gender mainstreaming requires gender equality issues to be built into all policy programmes and has the potential double benefit of ensuring that gender effects are taken into account in the initial design and of providing a basis for new and transformatory approaches to policy-making (Rees, 1998; Rubery *et al.*, 1999a). However, the introduction of mainstreaming does not necessarily reduce the need for gender specific policies to deal with gender inequalities and deficits. The maintenance of a specific equal opportunities programme within pillar four, alongside the gender mainstreaming requirement, has the added benefit of providing a continuing impetus towards gender mainstreaming which may be lacking if interest in dedicated gender equality policies were to lapse. The overall approach, therefore, follows the twin track approach—mainstreaming and dedicated equal opportunities programmes—recommended by the Council of Europe and other bodies that have explored the scope and role for mainstreaming (Council of Europe, 1998).

The profile of equal opportunities within the European employment strategy has been further enhanced by the two commitments made at the 2000 Lisbon summit; first to include a specific target for the female EU employment rate of 60% by 2010 to operate alongside the general target of increasing the EU employment rate to 70% by 2010; second to require member states to expand childcare provision, with reference to best practice provision in EU member states. These more quantitative targets add a further potential impetus to the equal opportunities strategy. The focus on equal opportunities has been maintained and expanded by the initiatives under the presidencies of the Council of Ministers in 2001 and 2002. Under the Swedish presidency new interim targets for the overall employment rate and for the female employment rate were agreed (at 67% for the overall and 57% for the gender employment rate by 2005) and further pressure was added to improve gender indicators in general and those relating to pay and to care and reconciliation in particular. Under the Belgian presidency there was an initiative launched to look at equal pay and a set of indicators agreed. This followed a precedent set under the French and Finnish presidencies in 2000 when indicators on female participation in political decision making and on reconciliation between work and family life were also agreed by the Council. At the Barcelona Council in March 2002, quantitative targets were also adopted for the provision of childcare places that should, by 2010, be sufficient to cover 33% of children aged under 3 and 90% of children aged between 3 and the mandatory school age.

The objective of this article is to assess the impact of this EU level approach to gender equality on the realities of equal opportunities policies at the member state level. It draws primarily on the work of the EC's gender and employment expert group² who have provided detailed country-level assessments of the commitment to gender equality within the employment strategy from a gender perspective. The findings from these assessments have been included in synthesis reports (Rubery *et al.*, 2000, 2001a) available on the web,³ alongside the reports by the national experts. However, before proceeding to an analysis of actual changes in policies we need first to consider some problems of definitions, meanings and implementation.

² This group acts as an advisory expert group to the Equal opportunities Unit within DG Employment. It consists of an independent expert from each member state ((Danièle Meulders- Belgium, Ruth Emerek- Denmark, Friederike Maier- Germany, Maria-Luisa Moltó- Spain, Rachel Silvera-France, Maria Karamessini- Greece, Ursula Barry- Ireland, Paola Villa- Italy, Robert Plasman- Luxembourg, Janneke Plantenga- the Netherlands, Ingrid Mairhuber- Austria, Maria do Pilar González-Portugal, Anna-Maija Lehto- Finland, Lena Gonäs- Sweden, Jill Rubery-UK) and is coordinated by Jill Rubery, together with colleagues at the European Work and Employment Research Centre, UMIST (Damian Grimshaw, Colette Fagan, Mark Smith and Hugo Figueiredo). The expert group is financed by the European Commission but the views expressed here are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission nor of the other experts.

³ <http://www.umist.ac.uk/management/ewerc/egge/egge.htm/>

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming: some problems of interpretation and implementation

Progress towards gender equality clearly cannot be adequately assessed unless it is clear what the target of a more gender equal society actually would look like. However, the meaning to be attached to equal opportunities within the EU employment strategy is not spelt out. As a consequence, the practical definition of what constitutes an equal opportunities policy is therefore very much shaped on the one hand by the overall objectives of the EU employment strategy and on the other by the internal objectives of the member state; the objectives of the former are to raise employment rates and reduce unemployment rates, assisted by the promotion of labour market flexibility and lifelong learning. This approach raises some fundamental issues for gender equality; raising the female employment rate has implications for the provision of care in society which have been partially addressed through new recommendations on childcare but not through a strategy to change the behaviour of men. Flexibility is not a gender neutral term but involves women disproportionately in non standard and flexible jobs (O'Reilly and Fagan, 1998; Yeandle, 1999; Rubery *et al.*, 1999b, Goetschy, 1999). Above all the strategy is focused on improving the supply side of the economy and not on changing the behaviour of employers, where many of the obstacles to gender equality may be encountered. Policy objectives such as closing the gender pay gap do not include quantitative targets in contrast to measures to raise employment or to assist the unemployed and are therefore less likely to attract the same attention from member states. The recent adoption of job quality targets may help to stimulate a more qualitative approach to gender equality in the labour market, but the holistic approach to employment and social and welfare policy, necessary to establish a new coherent and equitable system of social and economic organization (Rubery *et al.*, 2001b; Rubery, 2002; Supiot, 2001; OECD, 1994) still lies beyond the scope of the EU employment strategy and EU policy more generally. With the lack of a clear vision of what a gender equal society implies at the EU level, it is not surprising that among member states there are many different definitions of gender equality evident within their policy approaches. For some member states, women's role as primary carer is taken as a given and policies are primarily designed to facilitate and not to challenge women's dual role, while for others equal opportunities also involve changing the behaviour of men not just women.

Several countries see no incompatibility between partial integration of women into the wage economy and equal opportunities: for example, the Netherlands has effectively adopted 'the one and a half earner' model (Plantenga, 2000) and in the UK the diversity of working hours is seen by the government as a positive condition for the development of equal opportunities, despite the evidence of polarisation between men's long hours and women's short hours (Rubery, 2001). Spain has focused on extended leave entitlements for carers, assumed to be mainly women, which facilitate rather than challenge women's caring role (Moltó and Valiente, 2001). These approaches contrast with those found in, for example, Portugal and the Nordic countries. The Portuguese employment strategy emphasizes the need to spread the idea that reconciling work and family life is a right and duty of men and women (Gonzalez, 2001) while the Nordic countries have also been stressing the need to involve fathers in parental leave and take the full integration of women as a given objective of policy. There are therefore many different aspirations lying behind an apparent common commitment to pursue equal opportunities.

A further conceptual problem arises in the interpretation of what is meant by gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming requires the identification of gender issues in the process of design, implementation and evaluation of all policies; the objective is not to add to red tape but both to provide a means of taking into account the gender effects of policies from the start and to provide a new and potentially transformatory perspective on policy approaches and on the organization of society (Rees, 1998; Council of Europe, 1998; Rubery *et al.*, 1999a). In particular gender mainstreaming should in principle promote a more 'joined up' approach to government

by providing a more holistic analysis of policy effects, rather than a focus on the immediate impacts and beneficiaries, narrowly defined. In practice the approach taken may be much more limited, involving perhaps only gender disaggregation of potential and actual beneficiaries and only of those policies anticipated to have fairly clear cut gender effects. These partial attempts at mainstreaming may still be important as they could be the start of an incremental approach towards gender mainstreaming. Of even greater concern is the unwillingness of governments, particularly in the context of EU politics, to engage in a process of self criticism and critical evaluation of their policy programmes from a gender perspective. These political requirements militate against the transformatory potential of gender mainstreaming. If the aim is to highlight the linkages between the organization of employment on the one hand and the organization of social life on the other, the effect is to bring into the same policy net issues related not only to employment but also to tax and benefits, social infrastructure and public services, education and the time rhythms of daily life. However, governments are not necessarily prepared to meet the challenge of confronting policies in all these areas or to investigate the full policy package for both coherence and compatibility with a series of objectives including gender equality. The implementation of the gender mainstreaming requirements could be considered a potentially radical change to the whole process of policy making and many member states have not yet woken up to or indeed accepted this concept in all its ramifications. From this perspective, any movement towards a more holistic approach to policy making could be seen as a significant outcome of the employment strategy approach. With these problems of interpretation in mind, we can proceed to assess what impact the commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming has so far had on actual policy at the member state level.

The European Employment Strategy provides a catalyst for gender mainstreaming—but national politics determine trends and outcomes

From the perspective of 2001, the development of gender mainstreaming over the period of the Luxembourg process has been significant in most member states of the European Union. Most started out with at best a weak and often a non-existent base for gender mainstreaming. By 2001 almost all member states had put in place some formal mechanism for gender mainstreaming of employment policy or government policy more generally. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms and the extent to which they are becoming deeply embedded in the policy-making process varies greatly. Moreover, there are also major differences in the pace and direction of the development of gender mainstreaming mechanisms between countries. Above all else, the commitment to gender mainstreaming is a political issue; where it is taken up in the member states depends on the political interests of the parties and whether it is pursued with vigour is again a political issue. The role of the EU is in providing a catalyst, by putting gender mainstreaming on the agenda as an issue to be used within the internal political process by various interest groups and political parties. Because of the essentially internal and political nature of the process, the interpretation and meaning given to mainstreaming varies among EU states varies.

The timing of the development of gender mainstreaming initiatives has also varied. Only a minority of countries, six out of fifteen (Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Portugal), addressed issues of gender mainstreaming in their first employment National Action Plan in 1998. Although this preceded the EC requirement to gender mainstream added in 1999, these developments were not necessarily unconnected to the actions of the EU. Many of these initiatives were in preparation for, or followed on from, the Beijing World summit on women which made a commitment to gender mainstreaming, a commitment that might not have been made without the very strong support of the EU. However, the introduction of the gender mainstreaming guideline in 1999 represented a major step in the implementation of this Beijing commitment, even if, as we have argued, mem-

ber states have not fully appreciated the significance of this commitment.⁴ Nevertheless, significant developments in gender mainstreaming are evident post 1999 in seven of the nine remaining countries; it is among this set of countries that we find perhaps the greatest specific influence of the guidelines in promoting gender mainstreaming, although the political context in which the guidelines are interpreted remains critical. Only Spain and the Netherlands⁵ have so far failed to develop significant mechanisms for mainstreaming although there are signs of development in both countries.

It is not only the nature but the form that these initiatives have taken that has varied. As Table 1 outlines, most countries have established some institutional mechanisms at the centre of government or policy-making for implementing or overseeing mainstreaming. These involve:

- establishing a ministry with authority in this task (see for example the Ministry for Women's Affairs in Luxembourg, Swedish Minister of Gender Equality);
- setting up inter-ministerial committees (for example France, Belgium, Greece), inter-ministerial steering committees/work groups (the Netherlands, Germany, Austria), or committees at the office of the presidency (Portugal);
- establishing departments, units or taskforces with specific competence in equal opportunities and/or evaluation and monitoring duties (UK, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal) or providing an enhanced role for equal opportunities bodies (Spain);
- appointing parity/equality advisors on key committees or in ministries (Austria, Italy, Finland, Belgium, France, Portugal) or committees or mechanisms established for gender analysis of the budget (Sweden, France),
- passing new equal opportunities acts requiring mainstreaming (Denmark, Sweden) or drawing up national strategies or plans for equality (Portugal, Italy (planned), Greece, Belgium, Ireland(planned), France, Portugal);
- introducing mainstreaming or gender assessment into individual ministries or public services (Finland, Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg (planned), Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Austria);
- development of methodologies or guidelines for gender mainstreaming of government policies or employment policies (UK, Germany, Greece (planned), Ireland, Austria, Finland, Sweden);
- and commitments to undertake gender assessment of all new pieces of legislation (Finland, Germany (planned)).

This list provides a flavour of the range and diversity of developments that have been taking place in the field of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming in the member states. It refers mainly to central government policy and excludes activities related solely or mainly to the European structural funds or to local or regional government policy initiatives or to the social partners. In some countries the progress of gender mainstreaming activities is more marked at the regional or local level. For example, the devolved governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have made much stronger commitments to mainstreaming than the central United Kingdom government (for details see Rubery, 2000, 2001) The measures contained in this list are often not directly comparable; their meaning and effectiveness have to be interpreted and understood within a national context. For example, the implementation of some of the measures may be less strong in, for example, Greece or Italy than in the Nordic countries where there is a more developed commitment to equality policies. However, the very introduction of gender equality initiatives in the former

⁴ Even academic commentators have regarded this development as not even worth a mention; according to Goetschy (1999) the change to the guidelines between 1998 and 1999 were only 'minor', and those changes that she did identify did not include gender mainstreaming.

⁵ This failure is perhaps most surprising in the Netherlands as some of the major examples of tools for gender mainstreaming have been developed here through pilot projects but these are not being implemented in the context of the employment strategy.

group must be considered potentially a more important achievement than the strengthening of a gender equality commitment where it is already part of the established political agenda.

It is also obviously the case that this range of initiatives is not solely or even perhaps mainly a response to the European employment strategy. Many have much more to do with general government policy, including budgets, and where the EU dimension really takes a hold is in the operation of the structural funds, not in the general development of internal policy, even including those areas where the EU has competence such as employment. The EU's main role is in placing equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming firmly on the policy agenda and thereby establishing it as one of the list of options that internal political parties and leaders may decide to adopt for whatever reasons and ends.

The importance of internal politics in determining the timing and evolution of gender mainstreaming policies is only too apparent. Many initiatives can be directly related to changes of government. For example, in the UK and Germany the election of non Conservative governments led in the first case to the establishment of a Women's Unit and in the second to the introduction of gender mainstreaming into employment policy. In Portugal a global plan of action on equality was launched by a new Labour government in 1997 and it is this commitment to gender equality as a citizenship right which has underpinned a progressive approach to gender mainstreaming within the employment policy agenda. In France too commitments to gender mainstreaming have gone hand in hand with the Jospin government's development of a broader programme for gender equality, associated with measures to increase women's representation in the political process.

However, the adoption of the open coordination system for the European employment strategy was expected to lead to iterative policy development at the national and EU level (Goetschy, 1999, 2001). One of the advantages of this 'soft law' system is that it provides much greater incentives for member states to interact with and shape the policy agenda, in contrast to the 'hard law' system where the policy becomes fixed in legislation. Examples of such iterative processes are particularly evident when member states take over the presidency roles. In Austria in 1998, and more recently in France and Belgium, the taking over of the presidency role coincided with a more active commitment at the national level to gender mainstreaming. In Austria not only did the Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Health take pride in its role in securing the acceptance of the gender mainstreaming guidelines within the NAPs for 1999 but at the same time it promoted the implementation of gender mainstreaming within the Austrian employment policy through the development of mainstreaming committees and through new monitoring and evaluation committees. However, just as the EU had been an important element in driving the national agenda, so changes at national level have had a major impact on compliance with the EU agenda. With the change to a right wing government in Austria in 2000 much of the gender mainstreaming/gender equality policy developments during the 1998/1999 period were reversed or allowed to become ineffective. New policies are aimed more at assisting women to stay home with their children (Mairhuber, 2001). A similar approach to equality appears to have been taken by the Conservative government in Spain, in office throughout the period. Gender equality is seen as an issue of facilitating women's discontinuous or partial employment and as such there has been no major push towards gender mainstreaming as policies for equal opportunities are seen still as specific women-only policies. The Netherlands and the UK have also taken a particular approach towards gender equality: in both countries the high part-time rate among women in employment is treated as evidence of a successful combination of flexibility or adaptability with the reconciliation of work and family life. Little reference is made to problems with part-time work or even to the extensive array of policies in the Netherlands enacted within social policy to provide for greater security and to provide better ways of reconciling work and family life.⁶

⁶ We refer here to the Flex Security Act and the Working Time (Adjustment) Act.

Table 1: *The evolution of gender mainstreaming and the European employment strategy*

Institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming	Directions of developments 1998–2001 (year or years where most progress in brackets)	Ministries or inter-ministerial committees with responsibility for mainstreaming	Departments, units or taskforces with responsibility for mainstreaming/monitoring	Appointment of parity/equality advisors on committees or within ministries/services	New Equal opportunities legislation or national plans/strategies for equality	Introduction of policy/project appraisal within ministries/services/legislation
Belgium	Limited development at national level until 2000/1	Inter-ministerial committee set up at Federal level	Flanders: monitoring system in creation	Equal opportunities department represented in evaluation of Federal employment strategy	Strategic plan for equality 2001	
Denmark	Slow development as assumed that formal equality in law sufficient to bring about real equality. New initiatives 2001		Equal Status Department, and Knowledge Centre for Equal Opportunities		Equal Opportunity Act May 2000 to require GM in all public authority planning and administration.	Gender monitoring in public employment service; Gender monitoring of pay from 2001.
Germany	Steady progress since 1999	Inter-ministry work group for the improvement of equality	New competence centre for equal opportunities;			
Greece	Progress from 2000	Inter-ministerial committee set up in 2000 has helped to mainstream gender into structural fund programmes.			National Action Plan for Equality adopted 2001–6	Commitments in 2000 to develop statistics/ impact assessment tools but not implemented by 2001.

Spain	Very limited measures		An enhanced role for the Institute for Women and the Labour inspectorate in monitoring discrimination. New observatory on equal opportunities for women and men.			
France	Significant development from 1999	Inter-ministerial committee on rights of women covering 8 fields of action to be assessed on an annual basis.		Developing the function of equal opportunities advisor in public services/companies	New Ministry for Women's Rights 1998	8 fields of action to be assessed on an annual basis by inter-ministerial committee.
Ireland	Positive trend, especially since 2000, but driven by adoption of mainstreaming in National Development Plan, not the NAP		An Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring Unit- in Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to monitor GM.		Preparation of a National Plan for Women	GM Equality Unit in Dept. of Education and Science. GIA in National Development Plan (NDP).
Italy	Weak start 1998, marked progress since 1999.			Parity advisors to be members of the Central Commission for Employment Gender experts involved in NAP	Commitment made by centre-left government to develop a national plan for equal opportunities in employment but this commitment not honoured by incoming government in 2001.	Reform of public employment service involves integration of equal opportunities

Table 1: Continued

Institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming	Directions of developments 1998–2001 (year or years where most progress in brackets)	Ministries or inter-ministerial committees with responsibility for mainstreaming	Departments, units or taskforces with responsibility for mainstreaming/monitoring	Appointment of parity/equality advisors on committees or within ministries/services	New Equal opportunities legislation or national plans/strategies for equality	Introduction of policy/project appraisal within ministries/services/legislation
Luxembourg	Strong start in 1998 based on major role for Ministry of Women's Affairs subsequent consolidation	Ministry of Women's Affairs has responsibility for GM		The Committee on Women's Employment has the brief to monitor implementation of gender issues in the NAP.		Ministry of Women's Affairs can comment on any policy/piece of legislation
Netherlands	Very limited progress	New high level steering committee				Non systematic use of GIA - individual pilot projects in ministries
Austria	Strong development 1998/1999; continued development of institutions but under different political conditions	Inter-ministerial committee but less active role since 1999	Gender mainstreaming coordinating unit.	Gender mainstreaming experts in all ministries	Change in government has led to the abolition of the post of Minister for Women	GM in public employment service. Development of targets and evaluation 1998/9, discontinuation 2000/1

Portugal	Significant progress linked to the European employment strategy and reinforced by a global plan on equality	GM under office of the Presidency.	Committee for Equality in Work and Employment and Committee for Equality and Women's Rights	Equality advisors appointed to government departments	Duty to promote equality included in constitution in 1997. General Plan on Equal Opportunities also adopted 1997 just prior to NAP process.	Range of gender targets for employment/unemployment/training policies.
Finland	From 1998 gender mainstreaming introduced into government policies. (1998)			Equality specialist for NAP 1999 but equality responsibility now mainstreamed but the equality unit actively involved.		Commitment to GIA of legislation (first pilot completed). Six ministries involved in pilot projects on GM: results made available on web.
Sweden	Strong development throughout government since 1994	Minister of Gender Equality	Division of Gender Equality and the Minister of gender Equality	A special group on gender perspective in the budget process established. Gender equality experts in departments	Amendments to Equal Opportunities Act, equal opportunities index and plans for developing gender budgeting on national level	Methods of evaluation/ GIA by ministries to be reviewed and a handbook published.
UK	Some limited progress from 1998/9		Ministers for women and Women's Unit set up within Cabinet office			GM/GIA guidelines issued in 1999 but implementation not monitored.

Source: Ruberg *et al.* (2001a). GM is gender mainstreaming; GIA is gender input assessment.

High part-time rates boost measured employment rates under the EU targets and neither country appears to wish to draw attention to any problems with part-time working.

The different starting points in the member states create complications for trying to assess the impact of the EU strategy on gender equality policy. In the case of the three Nordic countries, these have had commitments to include gender issues within public policy for a long time. For example, Denmark had introduced some form of mainstreaming into its public employment service in the form of equality consultants to regional labour market councils as early as 1981 (Emerek, 2001) and in Sweden a decision to mainstream gender into all ministerial policy was also taken in 1994 (Gonäs, 2001). Nevertheless, there is less than clear evidence of a positive mainstreaming approach in the actual National Action Plans on employment, perhaps in part because gender mainstreaming has become effectively part of the normal policy process and there may seem to be little need on the part of policymakers in the countries concerned to mention it. Thus the Finnish NAPs have made very little reference to gender mainstreaming, even though over the same time period Finland has been in the process of running pilot projects on gender mainstreaming in six ministries, developing a methodology on the web and making a commitment to gender audit all new legislative measures. Denmark perhaps did the least in the early stages of the European employment strategy towards developing its gender mainstreaming tools and it was only in the 2001 NAP that new measures, including a new act requiring gender mainstreaming, were introduced.

The Southern countries of Greece and Italy together with Ireland had, at the launch of the European employment strategy, both weak traditions of equal opportunities policies and also relatively low female employment rates.⁷ It was in this context that the requirement to gender mainstream has had a significant impact on the approach to employment policy in all three countries. To some extent the reliance in all three countries, but particularly Greece and Ireland, on structural fund monies may have played a role as the requirement to gender mainstream and to develop equal opportunities policies has also been strengthened within the structural funds as part of an integrated employment strategy. Certainly in Ireland there is a much clearer commitment to gender mainstreaming in the National Employment Development Plan linked to the structural funds than there is in the NAP itself (Barry, 2001). In Greece and Italy action on gender mainstreaming was also spurred on by the inclusion of the gender mainstreaming guideline and the reinforcement of this message by Council of Minister recommendations to strengthen mechanisms for gender mainstreaming (Karamessini, 2001; Villa, 2001). Moreover in Italy it was perhaps the outcry after the 1998 social pact failed to include any women in the negotiations or to address gender issues that provided the momentum towards taking gender mainstreaming more seriously (Villa, 2001).

These differences, both in starting points and in political environments have meant that the gender mainstreaming approach has become much more embedded in some member states and conversely remains more fragile and subject to reversals in others. The process seems to be taking on a sustained life of its own in some countries, while being allowed to wither and die in others. By 2001 it could be said that in Finland gender mainstreaming had been understood by policymakers to be a permanent part of the policy formation, implementation and evaluation process (Lehto, 2001). Similarly in Sweden the process was moving into the phase of evaluating the methodologies used (Gonäs, 2001), while others were still simply struggling to develop their first tools. Three countries where the process seems to have developed its own momentum of recent date, subject of course to no change of government, are France, Portugal and Luxembourg.⁸ In France, despite a more recent beginning there does seem to be the emergence of what has been described as 'an equality reflex' in the

⁷ Portugal does not fit entirely into this group as it has a much higher female employment rate than the other Southern countries and Ireland.

⁸ Since this article was written there have been changes of government in France and Portugal.

development of public policy (Silvera, 2001), at least under the Jospin government. In Portugal there is evidence of an evolution of policy to include an emphasis on greater involvement of men in family life as well as policies to promote women's involvement in the labour market (Gonzalez, 2001). In Luxembourg the strong role given to the Ministry for Women's Affairs and to the social partners in monitoring gender mainstreaming in the NAPs is beginning to have an impact on the development and evaluation of policies from a gender perspective (Plasman and Rusinek, 2001). In contrast, even without a change of government, the UK has appeared to be already distancing itself from its initial commitments and enthusiasm; gender mainstreaming guidelines were issued in 1998 but in 2001 the NAP effectively left it up to individual departments to decide how to interpret the guidelines, with no prospect of external monitoring of progress towards gender mainstreaming (Rubery, 2001).

In comparing the development of gender mainstreaming across member states there are severe difficulties in distinguishing both between the rhetoric and reality of gender mainstreaming and between what are general statements of intent, including future commitments to new initiatives, and actual real policy change. Implementation of new approaches to policy making take time and evaluations of the impact of recent commitments to gender mainstreaming are premature, not just because of volatile political conditions but also because many of the policies have not yet been implemented and are only in the planning phase. For example, in Germany for gender mainstreaming to be effective it requires the Länder as well as the central government to implement the policy but this is a political process which takes time (Maier, 2001). With these caveats in mind, we turn to an assessment of the impact that the employment strategy has had on the visibility and development of equal opportunities policy in EU member states.

From institutions to policy: gender mainstreaming and gender equality policy in practice

What has been the impact of this enhanced commitment both to gender mainstreaming and to the promotion of gender equality actually on those policy areas which affect the quality and quantity of female employment?

It is perhaps a hardly surprising finding, as we document below, that the areas where the impact can be assessed to have been greatest are those which are most consistent with the main aims and objectives of the European employment strategy; that is with changes which promote the development of the supply side of the labour market. Progress has mainly been made in improving access for women to active labour market policies, in facilitating access to the labour market through the promotion of more gender neutral tax policies, in the development of schemes to assist women entrepreneurs and in the expansion of care provision at least for children. Even in these areas the development of policies has been patchy—as we outline below—with the possible exception of childcare provision, where the Lisbon summit requirement to improve provision has provoked a near universal expansion of provision, albeit from very different starting points. However, in other areas even though included in principle within the employment strategy, there has been very mixed progress.

Above all, any policy area that requires change at the workplace has been treated as an area to be left up to the social partners, with limited government involvement. The fact that unions are either too weak or not interested in effecting gender equality policies in female-dominated sectors has not emerged as an issue and the decision to leave change up to social partners has in many areas meant in practice leaving change up to employer discretion. Issues such as working time, pay, job segregation (in contrast to, for example educational choices and segregation) have attracted very limited attention. Yet it is arguably within these areas of policy where progress is required for there to be any chance of moving towards a more gender equal society within work and outside work. In particular, action on equal pay may be a precon-

dition of successful policies to change household labour supply decisions, much more important than for example taxation policy. We summarize below progress made within the main policy areas of relevance to gender equality in employment and included within the employment guidelines. We identify both the extent to which the principles of mainstreaming have influenced policy direction and the limitations of the understanding of that concept as revealed by the practice of employment policy.

Active labour market policies

One of the main areas where the EU employment strategy has promoted a change in public policy is with respect to the access of women to active labour market policies. These schemes have traditionally been directly or indirectly maintained as a preserve of men, by requiring specific eligibility conditions for access, such as being a benefit claimant (Rubery *et al.*, 1998, 1999) or working in a heavy industry or manufacturing. Examples of countries which have opened up access to job seekers whether or not they are eligible for benefits since the beginning of the EU employment strategy in 1997 include Germany, France, Belgium and Austria, while other countries such as the Nordic countries do not face the same disparities in eligibility for programmes as women have similar employment patterns to men. Several countries have established targets or minimum quotas for women's share of these schemes—including France, Germany, Greece, Austria and Spain. For example, Greece introduced in 1999 a 60% quota (equal to the share of women in unemployment) in all active labour market programmes and schemes. Some schemes include more innovative gender equality approaches: for example in the new traineeship scheme in Portugal the underrepresented sex is always to be encouraged and in Sweden some jobseekers are placed in 'break projects' aimed at reducing gender segregation of the labour market. In Italy as part of the reform of the public employment service, personnel with equal opportunity competence were to be appointed in each local employment office. In contrast the UK and Ireland have continued to restrict access to the main active labour market policies to those eligible for benefits, thereby excluding many female unemployed. The proportion of women on the New Deal programmes in the UK as a result are much lower than their share among the unemployed, using the ILO definition.⁹

Tax and benefit policies

There have been further moves towards individualization of taxation systems, aimed at removing disincentives to participation by women and other groups. The Netherlands, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium have all moved towards more individualized systems independent of marital or household status, although Spain and Ireland stopped short of a fully individualized systems and included some subsidies for nonworking spouses. The Netherlands has a fully individualized system but within this has both retained a general tax benefit for everyone, including those who do not work, and has introduced a very small benefit for anyone who combines work and care (defined as looking after a child aged below 12). This focus on taxation reform for promoting participation follows very much the line of the recommendations from the EU. However, research has shown that with the exception of Germany (which has maintained its income splitting tax system that does create strong financial incentives to non participation) the impact of non individualized taxation on female participation is at most weak (Vermuelen *et al.*, 1994). Much more important in creating disincentives are household-based means-tested benefit systems, but these issues have yet to be addressed in most countries. Instead there are moves in a number of cases—for

⁹ Women's share of the New Deal for Young People and New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed is less than a quarter while their share of the ILO unemployed population is around 40%—(Rubery and Rake, 2000; Rubery, 2001).

example France and Belgium as well as the UK—towards in-work benefits as a means of promoting participation in low paid work. Belgium is planning an individualized approach (Marage and Meulders, 2001), while the UK has opted for a household based approach with strong disincentives for female participation among couple households. The likely impact of the proposed French scheme is not yet known (Silvera, 2001). There are therefore still contradictory forces at work in tax and benefit reform, at both the EU and the member state level. These contradictory forces can be said to arise out of a failure of gender mainstreaming; the promotion of low paid work, seen by both the EU and many member states as a way of reducing unemployment is developed as a separate agenda from equal opportunities and the promotion of female participation, even though the vast majority of the low paid are women.

Lifelong learning

In 2001 lifelong learning initiatives were given more emphasis in the employment guidelines and at the same time the guidelines were revised to include a specification to pay attention to access for those in atypical jobs, an issue of particular importance for women. There has been a relatively limited development of an equal opportunities dimension to lifelong learning initiatives with many schemes still focused on those in full time employment. There were, however, some moves in 2001 to extend access in ways which may favour women. For example in the Flanders region of Belgium training credits were introduced that allow for career breaks or reduced working time for training and learning leaves were introduced for part-timers; Spain expanded the range of organizations and workers eligible for state funded training; Italy's new law on parental leave gives a right to up to one year's unpaid leave for life-long learning, Portugal requires attention to gender balance in all its expanding training programmes and the UK is asking its Learning and Skills Council to draw up equal opportunities strategy and is targeting recruitment of part-timers in some programmes. There are still relatively few programmes not linked to employment status; one exception is the Swedish adult education project for those who missed out on upper tier of secondary education where grants are available to go back to school; women account for 67% of the participants.

Entrepreneurship

The majority of member states have established some specific programmes or set gender targets within existing programmes to support the development of female entrepreneurship. The impetus for this development comes not just from the EU employment strategy directly, but from the associated guidelines attached to the structural funds that provide a good part of the support for business start-up programmes in many countries. The types of gender specific approaches that can be identified include counseling and advice targeted at new female entrepreneurs, access to finance and training. In this context what is perhaps more surprising is how limited and inconsistent these developments are in a number of countries. For example, it is not clear if measures for women indicated in three countries—Ireland, the Netherlands and Austria—are continuing as these disappeared from the 2001 NAPs. Ireland and the UK both have programmes focused on benefit recipients, even though in both these countries women are very underrepresented within this group.

Working time, flexibility and work reorganization

The strategy within the EU employment policy is to cede the initiative in issues of working time, flexibility and work reorganization to the social partners. The result of this approach is that in many countries very little has happened.

Moreover, where there are significant innovations and developments these have been initiated largely as part of wider country specific programmes, not directly

influenced by the European employment strategy, except so far as this has heightened awareness of gender issues. The prime example in this regard is France where implementation of the 35 hour week has been much more sensitive to gender issues in its second than its first phase, reflecting the greater emphasis on gender mainstreaming within French public policy since 1999 (Silvera, 2000, 2001). There are now no fiscal incentives to create part-time jobs within the policy as in France the promotion of part-time work is seen as acting to undermine women's integration on an equal basis in the labour market. Instead there are increased opportunities to move from part-time to full-time work. Belgium has also started down the route of collective reductions in working time, and is introducing new annual time credits to help reconcile work and family in preference to a policy of promoting part-time work. There are some other examples of working time policies, pursued by both the state and by social partners aimed at reconciliation. For example in Italy, a new law on parental leave provides support for organizations adopting working time arrangements aimed at reconciliation. In Ireland there is a new National Framework Committee for the Development of Family-Friendly Policies at enterprise level. A New National Centre for Partnership and Performance in Ireland has also identified equal opportunity and family friendly working as areas for enterprise partnership agreements. In the Nordic countries the social partners are engaged in new arrangements to either cut working hours or to allow for individual adaptation, although the attention to gender issues, at least in Sweden is argued to be limited (Gonäs, 2001). It is difficult, however, to undertake a general assessment of the role of social partners in pressing for gender equality issues through the information provided in the NAPs: for example in Finland there is both active trade union involvement in all work organization programmes and a strong tradition of equality bargaining, but the outcome of these efforts are not reported by the Finnish government in the National Action Plan (Lehto, 2001). France is one of the few countries to have a government-led policy of encouraging equality bargaining by the social partners; a new law, yet to be enacted, will require equality bargaining as part of the collective bargaining between employers and trade unions. However, there is little evidence within the EU strategy or within the country NAPs of any awareness of potential gender bias arising from the lower representation of women within unions and collective bargaining.

Another area where there continues to be some progress made, above and beyond that required by EU directives, is in the provision of protection and rights for flexible or non standard workers. For example, Italy has new regulations on part-time work that assert the principle of non discrimination and provide incentives for long and stable part-time work at the same time as offering some more flexibility to employers. In Finland a new Employment Contract Act has been assessed for gender effects: the law makes it more difficult to use successive short term contracts, from which women suffer particularly, but the gender evaluation of the new law has suggested it does not yet go far enough. A test of the value of this auditing process will be whether the assessment is used in the future to monitor and perhaps strengthen the law. While in these two examples there has been explicit recognition of the gender dimension, the Netherlands provides an example of a major innovation in the development of protection for atypical workers through its Flexibility and Security Act that has not been based around a process of gender mainstreaming. Indeed the evaluation of this policy was carried out for the labour force as a whole and has not involved an analysis by gender (Plantenga, 2001).

Gender pay gap

Action to close the gender pay gap has moved up the European agenda but so far has not been matched by action at the member state level; the Belgian presidency commissioned a study on gender pay indicators and the gender pay gap has been included within the broad economic indicators of the European Union. For the first time in 2001 the employment guidelines recognized that some policies within the

employment strategy, for example to promote low paid jobs, may conflict with the objective of closing the gender pay gap. Member states were asked to assess all policies for their impact on the gender pay gap, a request which appears to have been universally ignored. There has also so far been relatively little new action at the member state level with the exception of the Nordic countries and potentially France, if the new law requiring equality bargaining, including pay issues, comes into force. In contrast to the inactivity in other countries, where actions are largely limited to new studies, the Nordic countries have been developing new and potentially innovative approaches. In Finland an equality item to raise pay in female-dominated low paid segments has been included in collective pay agreements and in Denmark and Sweden there are new bills to make public the wages paid to men and women at enterprise level and to promote gender pay audits and job evaluation at the enterprise level. It is only in these three countries¹⁰ where we see measures which intervene in the policies and practices of enterprises, other than through voluntary practices. In Ireland the Equality Authority is planning to undertake enterprise level equality reviews and action plans but without the backing of publicly available information on wages. In the UK a proposal from the EOC for statutory gender pay audits was rejected by the government in favour of voluntary audits.

One measure which is emphasized by the UK is the above inflation increase in the minimum wage in 2001, as a policy likely to close the gender pay gap. This could be considered a good example of gender mainstreaming, except it is not clear that the decision to raise the minimum wage was motivated by a desire to close the gender pay gap.¹¹

Segregation

Actions to desegregate the labour market have mainly taken five forms; incentives or programmes aimed at diversifying the occupations or training programmes entered by the unemployed or by women returners (for example Portugal, France, Sweden); programmes designed to influence initial choices of education, training and career (for example Finland, France, Austria, Portugal, Sweden); schemes to increase women's representation in IT occupations (for example in Belgium, Greece, Sweden and Germany); positive action programmes, particularly in public services (for example Ireland, Luxembourg, Germany); and finally some limited incentives in some countries to employers to diversify occupations. For example, in Spain employers receive rebates on social security if they offer women permanent contracts in jobs in which they are underrepresented. However, the majority of these actions focus on choice made by the unemployed or inactive and little is done to change the behaviour of employers in providing access to jobs and to promotion; there are notably few initiatives to reduce vertical segregation. Moreover no member state included any developed gender dimension in their response to the new guideline asking for measures to deal with skill shortages. The gender dimension was notably absent in two respects. First women were not considered as a possible source of supply to key job shortage areas such as IT. Secondly there was no reference to skill shortage in female dominated areas such as teaching and nursing, even though a number of countries were experiencing problems in these areas (Rubery *et al.*, 2001a). Austria, in line with the policy stance of the new government, has withdrawn its financial support for workplace-based programmes promoting desegregation. The most promising measures that have been introduced involve gender audits of progress towards desegregation which enterprises or public sector organizations are required to produce in the Nordic countries. However, where this obligation applies in principle to the private sector as in Sweden and Finland it is very weakly enforced.

¹⁰ Finland also requires enterprises to undertake gender audits. The new Danish government has postponed implementation of the requirement to make wages public.

¹¹ Other issues such as the need to keep down the cost of the Working Families Tax Credit may have played a more important part, together with the election in 2001.

Leave arrangements

One of the concrete and positive developments in equal opportunities policies has been the expansion and development of leave entitlements. In Spain and Austria there are some question marks over these policies as they represent an apparent attempt to reinforce women's role as carers (Mairhuber, 2001). Table 2 (see Appendix) documents the recent changes and developments, albeit from very different starting points. The new developments tend to stress the involvement of fathers and the expansion of leave entitlements to deal with sickness or to care for adults. The latter developments could also have a reinforcing impact on women's role as the main carer but the recognition of the need for leave for other than planned childcare is nevertheless a positive move for reconciliation of work and family, broadly defined. The measures to involve fathers are found in quite a number of countries although they would remain very limited even if fully taken up. Some countries have provided incentives towards take up, by extending total leave entitlements or allowances if both share in the leave.

Care provision

Perhaps the strongest evidence of a response to the higher profile of equal opportunities is found in the almost universal improvements in care provision across EU states (see Table 3 appendix for planned developments). Many of these initiatives are found in countries with very low starting points and there are many arguments why the increased provision may still be inadequate; nevertheless for many countries the rate of increase in provision is quite high. Even countries with good provision such as France and the Nordic countries are expanding provision or making other changes. There is much less evidence of increased eldercare provision.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that equal opportunities has moved up the policy agenda both within EU policy and at the member state level and that these two processes are interlinked even if the relationship is far from determinate. The pace of change has been, by historical standards, quite dramatic but the innovations are not always followed through and effectively implemented due to inertia and also to misunderstanding of the implications of a policy commitment to mainstreaming. Moreover, internal political developments have rendered many of these innovations unstable. The intertwining of EU and member state policy has had the benefit of kick starting equal opportunities initiatives in countries where there has previously been little commitment to gender equality in public policy. The downside of this intertwining is that the approach taken towards equal opportunities has been shaped by the agenda of the European employment strategy. This approach can at best be considered partial and incomplete; at worst it can be considered a policy which values the contribution of women's employment simply as a means of achieving quantitative targets in the employment sphere. We can see here the positive and negative side of the benchmarking process; on the one hand it starts things moving, on the other hand it values developments, simply as a means of achieving the benchmark targets. Yet when we look further at the reasons for the EU adopting a strategy of raising the overall employment rate, to fight social exclusion and to provide a stronger fiscal base, we find that promoting women's employment without attention to job quality may not achieve either of these objectives (Rubery *et al.*, 2001b). We need to see if the notion of job quality as a new policy agenda has an influence on the main thrust of the EU employment strategy, away from quantitative towards more qualitative improvements in women's employment position. We also need to see more evidence of action on the part of the trade unions to promote equal opportunities within the sectors where they are able to exert pressure, and moves to find substitutes for their actions in sectors where they are still too weak to bring about change without state

support. Nevertheless we should heed Jones's (2000) warning that 'by placing too much emphasis on the work that remains we risk discounting unnecessarily the achievements that have been made' (2000: 247).

It remains however clear that the full implications of a commitment to promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming have not been understood; it is not just a question of allowing women access to the labour market but also a question of changing and indeed transforming the economic and social structures underpinning the labour market system. There is now a recognition that if women are to enter the labour market to meet employment targets then there needs to be more provision of childcare. Nevertheless there is little attention paid either to how to achieve equality in the labour market, in terms of job quality or income equality or to how to change the behaviour of men, so that there is greater equality in the division of non wage work. The problems of developing a more holistic approach to social and economic change could in fact be increased by the new legislation on other forms of discrimination, including race, age, ethnicity, religion and sexuality, if this were to lead to gender issues being incorporated within a general approach focused on reducing discrimination against disadvantaged groups. This extension of areas of discrimination is an important and necessary development in EU social and economic policy. It could, however, detract from the gender mainstreaming objective which has as its implicit overall aim the restructuring of society to fit the growing incidence of dual earner or single person households, and to move away from the outdated traditional male breadwinner models that underpin both the employment systems and the social welfare regimes in many member states. This more general objective also has the merit of moving the economy and society towards a position where women's employment is more likely to contribute towards both a stronger fiscal base and fighting social exclusion. In these areas there are complementarities between EU objectives and the objectives of equal opportunities but so far these complementarities have been only partially realized.

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Appendix A

Tables 2 and 3 overleaf

Table 2: *Recent changes to leave entitlements.**Changes to length of parental leave*

Ireland: Extension of paid maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks and unpaid leave from 4 to 8 weeks
 Italy: Longer leaves for more equal sharing:
 Luxembourg: 1999 6 month full or 12 months part-time
 Austria: Extension of duration of entitlement to childcarer's benefit under the new scheme (up to third birthday, not dependent on employment status)
 Sweden: Extra month of paid leave
 UK: Minimum entitlements under parental leave implemented

Changes to pay associated with parental leave

Germany: Higher allowance if return in less than one year
 Italy: Possible to finance learning leaves through use of pension funds
 Luxembourg: Paid at flat rate
 Austria: Move from an insurance to a non insurance based benefit—eligibility for childcarer's benefit regardless of employment status.
 Sweden: Increase in guaranteed level of pay.
 UK: Unpaid parental leave.
 Extension of paid maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks Increase in flat rate maternity pay.

Changes to flexibility of leave

Germany: Combine with job up to 30 instead of up to 19 hours of work.
 Italy: Flexible over first 8 years—Training opportunities for those returning from leave schemes
 Luxembourg: Full or part-time leave but one parent must take leave immediately after birth. Other parent can take it in one period before child is 5.
 Austria: Opportunity to use leave up to child is age 7 in several blocks and for part-time leave but childcarer's benefit cannot be claimed after the child's third birthday.
 Finland: New studies to explore more part-time leave.
 Sweden: Increase in flexible arrangements for parental leave.

Changes to father's parental leave

Belgium: 10 days parental leave for fathers paid at 85% of wage

Denmark: Since 1998 father entitled to take 2 weeks leave at same time as mother; either father or mother can take leave in weeks 15–24; only father in weeks 25–26. Public employees receive full pay for 25–26 weeks leave.

Germany: Both parents able to take leave at same time

Spain: 1999 increased from 4 to 10 weeks

France: higher parental presence allowance if leave for seriously ill child is shared by father and mother; paid paternity leave extended from 3 to 14 days

Italy: Parental leave for both parents—total leave for couple increases from 10 to 11 months if fathers take at least 3 months leave

Luxembourg: Paid leave for both parents

Austria: Fathers entitled to leave in own right. New childcare benefit scheme reduces opportunities to earn money 'on the side' when claiming part-time parental leave therefore making taking leave less attractive for men.

Portugal: Increase in men's rights to paternity leave; reinforcement of rights for both parents plus code of good practice for maternity and paternity leave. Fathers to have same legal protection as mothers when taking leave.

Finland: One month leave for fathers in their own right is under consideration. Employment Contract Act emphasises fathers' rights to leave, family allowances, stay with sick child. New studies to explore more leave for fathers.

Sweden: Extra month of paid leave directed towards closing the gap in leave taking between mother and fathers: available to either mothers or fathers. Second father's month from 2002.

UK: Two weeks paid paternity leave

Other changes to parental leave

Spain: Promotion of hiring replacements for those on maternity leave through subsidies. Training opportunities for those on leave schemes

Ireland: Has to be amended to allow leave for parents with child born before the Act. Commitment to review the parental leave act.

Italy: Training opportunities for those returning from leave schemes

Luxembourg: Detailed evaluation of parental leave policy underway.

Austria: new childcare benefit scheme reduces job protection for parents who want to share parental leave

Changes to other leave entitlements

Belgium: Up to one year's leave to care for family members

Spain: Non paid leave for up to one year for an adult relative; also may reduce working time by between a third and a half.

Previously rights restricted to childcare

France: Parental presence allowance for up to 4 months in 12 months for a seriously ill child;

Ireland: Carer's Leave introduced in July 2001 for 65 weeks along with a parallel Carer's benefit

providing weekly income support and protection of employment rights.

Netherlands: Leave to be streamlined under new Work and Care Act—10 days paid care leave for children or elderly to be introduced—costs shared between employers, state and employee.

Austria: Statutory pension insurance for care-givers who care for a close relative

UK: Emergency care leave up to 7 days-unpaid

Source: Rubery *et al.* (2001a).

Table 3: *New initiatives in the area of childcare*

Country	Additional childcare places	Other initiatives
Belgium	Increased supply at community/regional level Flanders to increase childcare places by 2500 per year; Brussels to double childcare places	Increases in tax deductions for childcare. Childcare facility for the unemployed in Brussels region. More flexible provision.
Denmark	Extension of childcare facilities	Waiting list for childcare place for children aged 0–10 to be no more than 0.8% of these children. More flexible hours.
Greece	Increase in crèches and nurseries: medium term national targets sets for increase in both childcare and day centres of elderly provision.	Daylong kindergartens and primary schools. After school clubs.
Spain	Vague commitment, with no budget announced	
France	250,000 more places 2001–4	More flexible opening times for school and childcare.
Ireland	Additional investment in childcare £250m 2000–2006 30% increase, from a very low base	Upgrading of premises and increased training
Italy	Act on childcare supporting provision passed but no details as to time scale and extent of support	Vouchers to be provided to households for the purchase of care services.
Luxembourg	1000 additional places in medium term	Expansion of places also involves introduction of an early education system. Increased state support for after school care
Netherlands	Additional 71,000 childcare places, an increase of 80% in four year period ending in 2002	
Austria	19,000 new places 1998 and 10,200 1999; in 2000 commitment to second tranche of kindergarten extension	
Portugal	Financial support for expansion of day nurseries—100,000 0–3 year olds to have places; preschool for all 5 year olds and for 75% of 3–4 year olds by 2006	Fiscal incentives to employer providing childcare
Finland	None because childcare available for all children	Free preschool teaching for 6 year olds
Sweden	Preschool activities to be extended to all 4–5 year olds free of charge	New ceiling to costs of public childcare. Childcare now available to job seekers. The right to childcare extended in 2002 to include children with parent on parental leave with siblings.
UK	National Childcare Strategy: 1.6m new places by 2004	Childcare tax credits for households receiving Working Families Tax Credit; Integrated Child Credit which will provide childcare credits for all low to medium income households. Increased training of childcare workers and new fund for childcare of older children in disadvantaged areas.

Source: Rubery *et al.* (2001a).