

Brussels,

20.03.2009 - 0000234

Dear Ms Nowicka,

Thank you for your letter concerning childcare services in the EU and the meeting of EU Ministers for Family Affairs under the Czech Presidency.

As part of its policies for equality between women and men, the Commission is fully committed to improving the provision of childcare services in the Member States. In its report of October 2008 reviewing the implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children, the Commission notes that although there has been some progress made, a lot still needs to be done to achieve satisfactory levels of childcare provision, particularly for children under three years of age.

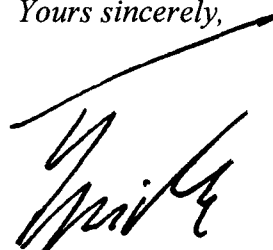
The Commission will continue to support the achievement of the Barcelona objectives by monitoring progress, providing statistics and, where necessary, making specific recommendations to certain Member States. The Commission will also promote exchanges of national experience relating to childcare facilities and encourage research into working conditions in the pre-school childcare sector.

Nevertheless, the Member States remain very largely the centre of gravity for policies in the field of childcare services. All stakeholders, in particular the national and local authorities and social partners, will need to play an active part in developing the provision of accessible, affordable, quality early-childcare services.

In order to strengthen the Member States' commitment to making progress in the provision of childcare services in the future, the Commission will support the idea of maintaining EU targets in the field of childcare services after 2010.

I wish to reassure you that the Commission will continue to work actively with the Member States to promote gender equality, notably through better provision of care services.

Yours sincerely,



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