

**Question for written answer E-003315/2026
to the Commission**
Rule 144
Giuseppe Antoci (The Left)

Subject: Shortage of early childhood services and the employment of women in Sicily

The EU gender equality strategy and European care strategy recognise access to early childhood services as key to increasing women's participation in the labour market and promoting social inclusion.

According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics' data on the provision of early childhood education services and the Italian National Social Security Institute's gender report, Sicily continues to have one of the lowest female employment rates in Italy and childcare coverage significantly below the EU's targets. This makes it harder for women to strike a balance between work and family life, and increases their risk of unemployment and economic exclusion.

Despite the resources made available through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +) and cohesion policy, significant differences between regions in access to early childhood education services persist.

In view of the above:

1. Would the Commission say that the EU funds allocated to Sicily have been effectively used to expand early childhood services?
2. Will it further promote initiatives to support the regions that are lagging furthest behind on the EU's targets for female employment and educational services?
3. What tools will it use to monitor the effectiveness of EU funding in reducing the gender gap in the labour market and improving people's work-life balance?

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