

Norway

Population: 4.57 m. **Fertility rate:** 1.83. **GDP per capita:** USD 35 000 in 2003. **Children under 6 years:** 358 563.

Female labour force participation: 75.7% of women (15-64) are employed, of whom 33.2% are in part-time employment, compared to 10.3% of men (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

Labour force participation rate of women with children under 6 years: In 2003, 65% of employed women with children 0-6 years worked full-time and 35% worked part-time.

Maternity and parental leave: Since 2005, 43 weeks at 100% of earnings or 53 weeks of leave paid at 80% of earnings. 5 weeks leave for fathers are also available. In 2004, 89% of the fathers who were entitled to a father's quota (four weeks), made use of this right. 16.6% of the fathers made use of more than four weeks parental leave. Mothers took the rest of the parental benefit period, when families made use of all then 42/52 weeks.

Average duration of parental leave: Statistics are not available on the average duration of parental leave.

Compulsory school age: 6 years (for the first four grades, duration of schooling is 4 hours per day).

Social expenditure: 23.9% GDP. **Child poverty rate:** 3.4% after taxes and transfers (OECD average is 11.2%).

Total educational expenditure: 6.46% of GDP. **Legal entitlement to a free service:** From 6 years.

Funding of services for children 0-6 years: NOK 17.3 billion, or USD 2.768 billion dollars were expended by the State in 2003, that is 1.7% of GDP. This figure does not include the Child Benefit which remunerates parents who care for their child at home. For a child under 3, the annual unit cost for the State in the *barnehager* amounted to EUR 9 773 per annum; for a child between 3-6 years, EUR 5 355 per year.

Major service types and duration: *Familiebarnehager* or family day care (FDC) and *Barnehager* (kindergartens) offer either half-day or full-day, full year services for children 0-6 year. *Skolefritidsordningen* (SFOs) or out-of-school provision (OSP) or "day care facilities for school children" are available before and after school, during the academic year for class levels 1-4 (up to class level 7 for children with special needs).

Average costs to parents (ECEC): For children 0-6 years, parental fees are now capped at no more than 20% of costs. For out-of-school time provision (OSP) for children 6-10 years, municipalities decide the parental share of costs for this service.

Rate of access to regulated services (2003): Children 1-3 years: 48%; children 3-6 years: 88%; OSP for children 6-10 years: 68.2% of 6-year-olds, the figure declining after that age. The overall percentage access for 6- to 10-year-olds is 53%.

Designation and qualifications of key staff: In family day care (FDC), owner-managers are not required to be qualified pre-school teachers, but regulated FDC has to be supervised by a qualified pre-school teacher on a regular basis. *Barnehager* are staffed by *pedagogiske ledere* (pedagogues) with a 3-year tertiary college degree, and by assistants with a 2-year, post-16 apprenticeship. However, assistants do not necessarily need a diploma, and only one-third of staff are trained pedagogues. Qualifications of staff in SFOs are not regulated by national law, and municipal authorities or school owners decide which level of qualification is necessary, according to local needs. When the SFO is provided by a school, the school's head master/mistress should normally be the head of the SFO as well. The overall percentage of qualified staff in services comes to 32%.

Child-staff ratios: For children 0-3 years, the ratio is 7-9 children per trained pre-school pedagogue when children attend more than six hours per day. For children 3-6 years, the ratio is 14-18 children per trained educated pedagogue, but there can be several non-trained staff also present. In leisure-time facilities (SFOs) for children 6-10 years, there is no limit, but factual information shows an average of 8.6:1.

Maximum group size: Maximum group size is not regulated but decided at local level.

Auspices

In Norway, responsibility for development of ECEC legislation, and for funding and policy has been with the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (BFD) up to the end of 2005. The Ministry of Education and Research will now have responsibility for early childhood education and care, as well as for schools, out-of-school care and the training of pedagogues. At regional level, the county governor now has responsibility for both schools and ECEC.

In recent years, greater administrative responsibility has been devolved to the 19 counties and 435 *kommuner* or municipalities in Norway, which for the most part, have unified school and early childhood services into one department resulting in closer cooperation and coordination. The county governor administers the state grants to *familiebarnehager* (family day care), *barnehager* (kindergarten), and *apen barnehager* (open kindergartens or drop-in centres for parent and child, led by a trained pre-school pedagogue). The county informs and supports the different municipalities in the region on ECEC questions and policy. This involves planning and building ECEC places according to local need, approving of new facilities, supervising and inspecting new services. The municipalities can choose either to own and administer the services themselves or to contract private owners to operate ECEC. There is a national regulatory framework for *barnehager*, the *Barnehager Act*, 1995. A revised *Barnehage Act* entered into force on 1st January 2006. A new Framework Plan was introduced by the Ministry on 1st March 2006 and enters into force on 1st August. The national *Framework Plan for Barnehager* provides guidelines to *barnehager* concerning values and objectives, curricular aims, and pedagogical approaches.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 75.7%, increasing from 70.7% in 1990. Of those, 33.2% worked part-time, while 10.3% of men worked part-time (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). Mothers with a youngest child under

6 years had an employment rate of 18% in 2003, of whom 65% were working full-time and 35% were working part-time.

Parental leave: Since 1993 Norway has offered a universal 42 weeks of parental leave at 100% of earnings, or 52 weeks at 80%. From 1st July 2005 the period was lengthened with one week to 43/53 weeks. Mothers must take three weeks prior to the birth-date and a further six weeks after birth. Where both mother and father qualify for the parental leave entitlement and the mother has been in paid employment of at least half-time, a one month use-it-or-lose-it paternity leave is included in the parental leave quota. From 1st July 2005 the paternity quota was increased by one week, to five weeks in total. In 2004, 89% of the fathers who were entitled to a father's quota (four weeks), made use of this right, and 16.6% of the fathers made use of more than four weeks parental leave. Mothers took the rest of the parental benefit period, when families made use of all the 42/52 weeks. Time accounts are also used to enable parents to combine partial parental leave with flexible work hours, enabling a parent working part-time to benefit from parental leave for two years or more. The parental benefit is calculated on the income of the parent who takes the leave. If the parent's income exceeds 6 times the National Insurance basic sum (in 2005, NOK 364 194 annual) parental benefit does not cover the additional amount. In 2002, 77.8% of women giving birth qualified for parental benefit. Women who do not qualify receive a lump sum grant (in 2005, NOK 33 584/EUR 3 981/USD 4 852).

Access and provision

The operating hours and annual duration of services vary according to service type. Some 47% of *barnehager* are public (municipal) and cater for 57% of children using the service. Private *barnehager* are more numerous but smaller, and cater for 43% of children, but provision in private kindergartens is growing, and by 2005 was the majority provider. Provision rates are as follows.

Rates of provision

0-1 years: Care is predominantly home care by parents. Only 3% of children are in centre-based care.

1-3 years: Based on Norwegian government survey data, 42% of this group are cared for full-time by parents and 48% are cared for in ECEC regulated services. Given the high participation of mothers in the workforce, it may be presumed that some parents are choosing to use family and informal child-minding. The goal of the Ministry is to have full coverage (meeting demand) for pre-school children by the year 2006.

3-6 years: 88% of all children in this age group are cared for in ECEC services.

Out-of-school time provision is generally available for children aged 6-12 years. The highest level of usage is made by children aged 6 years in the first year of school, 68.2% of whom access out-of-school care. The overall percentage access for 6- to 10-year-olds is 53%.

Children with diverse needs

Children with disabilities: Children with disabilities have a priority right to services provided it is deemed by an expert that the child will be able to benefit from attending the day care institution. In 2003, nearly 2.5% of children in *barnehager* had a disability, and 3.2% received additional support.

Children from low-income families: The child poverty rate in Norway is 3.4% after taxes and transfers, compared to the OECD average of 11.2%. Because of effective redistribution policies, targeting low-income groups is not a focus for ECEC policy although additional educators may be supplied to centres receiving more migrant or low-income children. The *barnehage* is considered to play an important role in terms of preventive child welfare. In cases of children living in at-risk circumstances, places are fully funded by municipalities. Supports are provided also to enable *barnehager* accommodate children with disabilities, children from low-income families and bilingual children.

Ethnic and bilingual children: An indigenous ethnic group, the Sami, constitute 1.7% of the Norwegian population. Sami language kindergartens are funded generously whenever there is a concentration of Sami families. New immigrant groups constitute 3% of the population, with 28 000 children in primary schools (just less than 6% of school population) registered as non-Norwegian-speaking children. In the 1- to 6-year-old population, 7.8% of children (not including children speaking Danish, English or Swedish as their first language) do not have Norwegian as their first language. Of this group, approximately 50% are in ECEC services (2003).

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: Municipalities are responsible for the licensing regimes for family day care and ECEC services and must ensure that all services are registered and undergo annual health and safety checks. Ownership, purpose of the institution (*e.g.* the particular pedagogical or religious purpose), criteria for access, fees, opening hours and physical spaces are considered as part of licensing. Municipalities have responsibility for supervision and authorisations.

Funding: Total expenditure on ECEC, amounted in 2004 to 1.7% of GDP for children 0-6 years old. In 2004 Parliament set a parental fee of NOK 2 750/month (or EUR 326/USD 397) for an ordinary place in ECEC comprising a full-day or 41 hours or more per week. Part-time places are charged in proportion. Since 2005, fees should not exceed 20% of the cost of services – at the moment a maximum of EUR 280 per month. The costs to the State are as follows: the unit cost for a child under 3 amounts to EUR 9 773 per annum; for a child between 3-6 years, EUR 5 355 per year (Moser, personal communication, 2005). These costs, in so far as we can judge, do not include the Cash Benefit home care allowance (see below) or the 20% or so of fees that parents contribute. In centres, a separate charge is levied for meals. Municipalities have the duty to provide funding to their own services and to private providers. They also provide subsidies for additional places for families where more than one child is in ECEC, even when the children participate in different ECEC services within the municipality. In addition to family allowances and lone parent (22% of families) allowances, all parents are allowed tax deductions to cover care and kindergarten costs. There is also a Cash Benefit scheme that provides a cash grant to a parent who cares for a child at home (the intention of the policy), or part-time home and part-time regulated ECEC, or who places a child in an ECEC context that does not receive state grants (*e.g.* with a child minder or relative). At the time of writing (2005), the amount of the full-time grant is about USD 545 per month.

Staffing: 35% of the contact staff in Norwegian *barnehager* are qualified ECEC pedagogues. This is according to the personnel norms stated in the law. There are regional shortages of trained personnel but at the national level, forecasts of student enrolment in

the training colleges suggest that sufficient numbers of personnel will be trained to meet the demands of current regulations. The percentage of tertiary trained pedagogues is currently low compared to Denmark (60%) or Sweden (51%).

Training requirements: Heads and pedagogues in ECEC have 3-year tertiary level training at one of the state university colleges or private colleges. There is no formal qualification requirement for assistants, who make up the bulk of the staff in direct contact with children; although an increasing number holds either secondary vocational or tertiary diplomas.

Work conditions: Statutory working hours for ECEC staff are 37.5 hours per week. There are no statutory requirements for staff to receive either minimum or total hours of professional development. Working conditions are negotiated at local and at state regional levels. Based on a government survey of services (2002), 84% of staff conducted yearly reviews of performance (organised co-worker conversations), 72% participated in internal staff development programmes and 48% of services had separate budgets for this purpose. The status, pay and working condition of ECEC pedagogues compare unfavourably to those of primary school teachers. Men make up 8% of all ECEC staff in direct contact with children. A ministerial plan 1997-2000 aimed to bring the proportion of men up to 20% by the end of 2000. The aim was not reached, now the aim is 20% men by the end of 2007. Issues of status, pay, working conditions and programme content may need further consideration before the percentage can be achieved.

Child-staff ratios: For children 0-3 years, the ratio is 7-9 children per trained pre-school pedagogue when children attend more than six hours per day. For children 3-6 years, the ratio is 14-18 children per trained educated pedagogue. There is no fixed regulation for the number of assistants that can or should be employed. In regulated family day care homes, a maximum of five children over the age of 3 may be present at one time. A suitable home and staffing can be accredited for a double group of children (maximum 10 children) over 3. If the majority of children is under the age of 3, the number must be reduced to an unspecified level. In addition, for children in family day care, a trained pre-school pedagogue must be available for every 30 children. The 1995 and 2005 Acts also stipulate that the number and level of staff must be sufficient to carry out satisfactory educational activities based on the Framework Plan.

Curriculum and pedagogy: The first national curriculum plan – called a *Framework Plan* – came into force in 1996. The curriculum, which must be used by all *barnehager*, is based on the Nordic tradition of combining education and care. A Sami supplement is integrated in the plan. All *barnehager*, including *familiebarnehager* and *open barnehager*, must base their annual plans on this Framework, which is the National Curriculum. The *Framework Plan* emphasises that both local cultural values and the national cultural heritage, as reflected in the childhood environment, must be represented in the activity of the *barnehage* (Background Report for Norway, 1999). A revised *Framework Plan* enters into force on 1st August 2006. The main principles are the same, with the new Kindergarten Act giving children a legal right to participate in all questions concerning their daily lives in ECEC.

Monitoring, evaluation and research: In 2001, Norway introduced a three-year quality programme across ECEC to establish instruments and systems for maintaining and further developing the quality of services. Survey data (2002) indicated that there are quality improvement efforts underway in most services. There was no significant difference due to ownership (public or private), although in larger centres quality work is further

advanced. The high level of staff stability was a strong feature. Observation is the most commonly used method for evaluating children's well-being and progress. In autumn 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research will introduce a plan to increase evaluation competence in the sector, and will allocate almost NOK 60 million for this purpose.

Parent and community involvement: To ensure opportunities for involvement and co-operation between *barnehage* staff and parents, the 1995 and 2005 *Barnehage* Acts state that every *barnehage* must have a parents' council and a parent-pedagogue-owner co-ordinating committee. According to the regulations, the parents' council should promote the parents' shared interests and contribute to ensuring good collaboration. It has the right to express an opinion on all matters of importance to parental relationships with the *barnehage*. The co-ordination committee should in particular participate in discussions of the *barnehage's* underlying aims and practice and seek to promote contact between the *barnehage* and the local community. Parents are actively encouraged to take part in quality monitoring and in reviewing *barnehage* activity through meetings, conversations, committees and regular surveys.

Developments

In Norway, an integrated system of services for children from 0 to 6, with a well-established and extensive system of publicly-funded *barnehager*, has existed for many years. Underpinning the system is a clearly articulated vision of children, both individually and as a social group, of their place in society and their relationship with the environment. Since 2001 substantial adjustments to legislation and funding processes have been underway as Norway moves towards universal access to ECEC services for all children under 6 years. In 2003, an amendment to the Day Care Institution Act made ECEC services a legal duty of the municipalities, similar to health and social services. The amendment ensures that all municipalities must offer an ECEC place to all parents in the municipality who want to enrol their child. As yet, corresponding legislation has not been drafted to give a legal right to all parents to a place for their child, although this is anticipated once full coverage is attained in 2007. The aim is to give all parents, in the interim, a place for their child according to their needs and wishes. Children with special needs (physical and/or intellectual handicap) have had by law for many years a primary right of access.

In line with the strong progress towards universal access, the Norwegian government has committed itself to increased funding of *barnehager* in order to avoid excluding certain categories of children because of costs to parents. Parliament granted substantial additional investments to ECEC (from NOK 4.5 billion in 2000 to NOK 14.8 billion in 2006). The government aims that by 2006, state and municipality funding will cover at least 80% of ECEC services costs, leaving a maximum 20% to parents.

In addition, the Norwegian Parliament has passed a law requiring equal treatment of private and non-private ECEC where public financing is concerned. Until the passing of this law, municipalities were not legally obliged to fund the private sector services and hence, fees to parents using those services were higher. A maximum fee for a full-time place in all settings, whatever the age of the child, was set by the Parliament in May 2004. In the same legislation, siblings in a family are entitled to reduced fees (30% reduction for the second child, 50% reduction for third and subsequent children). Municipalities also must have subsidy schemes for low-income parents.

In parallel to this development towards universal service provision, the administration is also co-ordinating work to assess and evaluate the Day Care Institution Act, in order to make the law a tool for creating and ensuring good quality ECEC services. In mid-2004, an expert group made up of researchers, various partners in the field and ECEC field participants reported on revisions needed to the Act of Day Care Institutions and the *Framework Plan*. The group further articulated responsibilities and duties at various levels of authority, and assessed the need for documentation and information-sharing across the different levels. Another expert group was appointed by the Ministry to propose in July 2005, a revised *Framework Plan*. The new legislation entered into force in January 2006, and the revised framework plan is implemented in August 2006.

A striking development has been the transfer of ECEC policy and funding from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (BFD) to the Ministry of Education and Research. Several developments have been promised by the new government:

- Full coverage will be achieved by 2007.
- The maximum parental fees are to be reduced to NOK 2 250 from 1st January 2006, then further reductions to approximately NOK 1 800 (c. USD 279 or EUR 231) per month, per child.
- Government grants will be earmarked until full coverage is met, when a legal right to a place will be introduced.
- The number of pedagogues will be increased in the kindergartens (at present, 35%).
- Equal wage and working conditions will be enacted for both private and public ECEC.
- When full coverage is met, and not before 2008, the cash benefit scheme will be restructured. A limited scheme will be maintained throughout this parliamentary period.