Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING FAMILIES IN ECEC

Challenge 3: Time constraints

Involving parents who work or study full-time, work non-standard hours or those getting back into employment poses a great challenge. The magnitude of the challenge is increasing as family structures, circumstances and lifestyles are changing.

Changing the operational hours

- **Norway** adapted the opening hours and provision of ECEC services to changing parental needs during the 1990s. This resulted in longer and more flexible opening hours of kindergartens. Additionally, meetings with parents can be planned in the evenings for parents who work and/or study.

- In **Korea**, late-night child care services have been operating in major cities since March 2010 to meet parental needs, especially for dual-earning families. After attending full-day kindergartens, which finish at 19:00, children can attend the late-night service to receive care until 22:00. At present, a total of 173 facilities – one in each gu (district) – are operating as part of a pilot programme. The late-night child care kindergartens are required to have 15 to 20 children per group, and the central government financially supports these services (USD 250 per class each month). After implementing the late-night child care service, the level of parental satisfaction increased from 58% in 2009 to 97% in 2010. In addition, there are all-day care classrooms available that operate from 6:30 to 22:00, which have been operating on a trial basis since March 2011 in a total of 1 000 institutions across the country. The central government has operated the classrooms in diverse service forms, tailored to local needs. For example, there are classrooms operating in both kindergartens and primary schools in a certain region where there are large parental demands for providing care service through partnership between kindergartens and primary schools. These all-day care classrooms receive financial support from the central government (USD 50 000). The services are also expected to create job opportunities for women who left their job in the past due to family duties and who hold a teaching licence: they are given priority in the recruitment process of ECEC practitioners.

Guiding ECEC centres in setting more flexible times for contacts and communication

- ECEC staff in **Japan** attempt to speak briefly to parents every day when they drop off or pick up their child since many parents do not have time for long meetings. They speak about what the child will do, or has done, and how the child is developing in general. It is
an important information source for parents but also for staff since they have the chance to ask parents a few questions about their child. Additionally, informative meetings with ECEC staff are organised in the evenings for parents who cannot attend parent-teacher meetings during daytime.

- Pre-primary education schools (preschools) in Spain are stimulated to open early in the morning and/or later afternoon, during general school holidays, and to offer additional services, such as meals, transport and extra-curricular activities. This is to suit parental needs regarding extension of ECEC provisions. Such additional services and opening hours increase the chance that staff can communicate with parents.

- ECEC centres in Thuringia (Germany) are open for at least ten hours per day, which is a full day of day care and early education. Centres are allowed and encouraged by law to be open longer than these ten hours per day, and some also open during weekends and holidays. This gives parents greater flexibility in organising their professional and work lives.

- Several countries, including Flanders (Belgium), the Netherlands and Finland, organise informational meetings for parents conducted by ECEC staff or parent umbrella organisations and debates about ECEC services at times more convenient for working parents. Meetings and debates are organised in the (late) evening to stimulate their engagement, since they are unable to participate in activities during regular work hours.