STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Challenge 1: Lack of awareness and motivation

Motivating the community to engage in ECEC and encouraging centres to involve the community have not been major policy objectives in many OECD countries. The notion of “community” varies across countries and across centres within a country: it is thought of as a neighbourhood where children grow up as well as wider community partners, including public services for young children, education services, libraries and museums, NGOs, private foundations and faith organisations.

There is a lack of awareness among staff, centre managers and parents about the potential resources within communities. There is also lack of knowledge among community organisations about how they can work with ECEC centres.

Making community engagement a policy priority, an obligation or right

- **Finland** made it a legal obligation for municipalities to set up a plan for arranging and developing child welfare services (Child Welfare Act 2007/147). The plan should include arrangements for co-operation between the different public authorities and the organisations and institutions that provide services for young children. Additionally, Finland’s *Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education* (2010) states that every effort must be made to involve as many people as possible in implementing education to ensure commitment to and compliance with it.

- **In Norway**, the Kindergarten Act (sections 8, 21 and 22) defines the responsibility of the municipalities to co-operate with social and child welfare services, kindergartens, schools and special education assistance and share information among the various services. Chapter 5 of the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens describes the co-operation with other institutions and services in more detail. Additionally, the Ministry of Education stressed the importance of community involvement in early education in the draft of White Paper No. 28 (2007-08) on language learning and development.

- **In Spain**, the participation of communities in schools and preschools is regulated by the Spanish Constitution of 1978 (Article 27.7). The Education Act 8 of 1985 also stipulates the right of communities to be involved in decision-making bodies. Additionally, the Act on Education of 2006 urges preschools and schools to promote participation of communities and staff in ECEC and education. The core curriculum for the second cycle of ECEC (pre-primary education for three-to-six-year-olds) also highlights the importance of community engagement.
In **Turkey**, Law No. 22 on Primary Education, which includes preschool programmes, states that preschools and primary schools “should co-operate with the community”. The country’s National Action Plan for Education also emphasises the importance of community engagement.

The Ministry of Education in **British Columbia (Canada)** emphasises the importance of family and community connections in its Kindergarten Guidelines in section 5 on “Kindergarten, Family, and Community”.

In **Manitoba (Canada)**, under section 22 of the Healthy Child Manitoba Act, Parent Child Coalitions, have been enshrined in legislation. Parent Child Coalitions bring together parents, early childhood educators, educators, health care professionals and other community organisations to plan and work collaboratively to support the healthy development of children ages zero to six. Parent Child Coalitions support existing community programmes for families with young children and develop new initiatives that reflect each community’s diversity and strengths. There are currently 26 funded parent child coalitions province-wide.

**Australia** included community engagement in their **National Quality Standard Framework**, obliging ECEC services to “form collaborative partnerships with parents and communities”.

**Prince Edward Island (Canada)** Children’s Secretariat is comprised of government and community members working together on behalf of children and families. Under the leadership of the provincial government, it is stated that the community should be a key stakeholder in the work and function of the Secretariat.

**Korea** included community engagement as one of the indicators in the national evaluation of kindergarten and child care centre accreditation. This indicator focuses on how closely these institutions co-operate with community and how to exchange and utilise human and material resources of the community. Community involvement is also emphasised in pre- and in-service ECEC teacher training.

**Ireland** included community involvement as one of its 16 standards in **Síolta**, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, stating that “promoting community involvement requires the establishment of networks and connections evidenced by policies, procedures and actions which extend and support all adults’ and children’s engagement with the wider community i.e., it requires a proactive partnership approach evidenced by a range of clearly stated, accessible and implemented processes, policies and procedures”.

**Japan** included community engagement in its **Course of Study for Kindergartens**. The curriculum states that kindergartens should give consideration to “deepening the understanding of community members of the importance of early childhood education by creating opportunities for information exchange with the community”.

Providing public financial resources to engaged communities

**Japan** provides financial remunerations to stimulate the participation of members in the education management council of community schools. The council consists of parents and other community members.
Australia gives financial incentives to community members who wish to work as tutors in the Home Intervention Program for Parents and Youngsters: tutors receive remuneration to encourage their interest in the work.

In the United States, community members participating in substance abuse prevention projects were paid a monthly remuneration for their involvement. Five Head Start programmes developed model substance abuse prevention projects in 1994. The goal was to strengthen families and neighbourhoods of economically disadvantaged preschool children, and the initiative was called Free to Grow. Families and neighbourhoods of Head Start children were targeted in an effort to protect them from substance abuse and its associated problems. Due to the large public funding available for these projects, a monthly remuneration (USD 100) could be paid to parents and community members who were the main implementers of the programme.

In 2006-08, the government of British Columbia (Canada) provided funding to community members (local residents) to create official child care spaces in their own homes. This increased the number of child care spaces in the province. The provincial government also provided funding to a community service organisation focusing on strengthening and supporting families. The funding was allocated to develop a post-secondary certification programme that was offered to individuals working in community programmes providing support to families.

Municipalities in the French Community of Belgium can, on a voluntary basis, set up advisory committees regarding child care and receive subsidies from the French Community to hire a co-ordinator for the advisory committee to ensure that the committee is well-structured and co-ordinated. Additionally, the 2006 decree Culture-école stimulates preschools and schools to co-operate with cultural institutions to broaden children’s cultural experiences and knowledge. To enhance these co-operations, funding from the French Community is available.

Engaging the community in an advisory or management body for ECEC policies and services

Flanders (Belgium) has set up the Local Consultative Forums for child care and out-of-school care, which include ECEC professionals, ECEC managers, parents, local administration servants, community members, integration centres, immigrant representative organisations and other stakeholders. Within the Forums, stakeholders can share their opinions, ideas and concerns regarding ECEC. The Forums function as a municipal advisory body and give advice on child care or nursery education to the local administration/authority. There are currently 301 Forums for nursery education.

In Japan, a system of school management councils (community schools) was introduced in 2004. Parents and local residents have the opportunity to participate in the management of the preschools and are assigned certain tasks and responsibilities regarding the management of the centres. The councils discuss the curriculum and methods of co-operating with the community to ensure that the views of the parents and local residents are reflected in the curriculum and engagement initiatives.

Portugal has a strategic governing body named Conselho Geral (General Council). The council is represented by early education teaching staff, parents, local authorities and the local community. This governing body approves, by voting procedures, the internal school rules and regulations and strategic and planning decisions. ECEC staff, parents
and community members choose which individuals or community organisations will be members of the council. With regard to community organisations, this can be health centres, foundations, conservatories, enterprises, etc.

- In **British Columbia (Canada)**, a member of the business community can become a member of the Provincial Child Care Council, which is a statutory body that provides advice and recommendations to the Minister of Children and Family Development on issues related to child care. This engages the business community on child care issues and provides an avenue to explore closer connections between business and child care services.

- In **Korea**, a representative of the community is obliged to participate in the Early Childhood Education Policy Committee or Child Care Policy Committee in co-operation with local governments.

**Engaging communities as providers of ECEC**

- In **Norway**, there is a large variety in ownership of kindergartens. NGOs, churches, parents, business communities, private owners and companies can open and run kindergartens as long as the kindergarten meets legal requirements and has been approved by the local authorities. In a period when kindergarten places were lacking, the business community was engaged in both running and providing ECEC services as well as co-operation with ECEC services. The motivation for businesses to engage in ECEC has been to ensure that their employees have care and education places for their children and to stimulate continuous parental employment.

- In **Turkey**, private businesses and civil society organisations can run ECEC services, as well as co-operate on the organisation of ECEC activities, such as field trips or giving young children “classes” on their field of expertise, e.g., nature or healthy living.

**Engaging communities as volunteers to the centre**

- **Japan** offers a “day in the life of a nursery teacher” experience to community members. Local residents can voluntarily do an “internship” for one day in an ECEC centre and work as a nursery teacher to better understand the profession. This promotes trust between the nursery centre and the community.

- **Mexico** offers community members the possibility to volunteer in the ECEC centre. A popular activity is parents giving a “class” on what their profession is about, what kind of work they do and demonstrating the work to the young children – making it an interactive event.

- Most schools in **British Columbia (Canada)** welcome community volunteers to take part in kindergarten and school activities. Typically, volunteers are involved in reading with or to children, doing art and sport activities and offering other support to the kindergarten staff. Members of the aboriginal community often provide children with cultural experiences and information about their culture to enhance mutual respect and understanding.
Encouraging private foundations to support the ECEC centres

- The Haus der kleinen Forscher (Little Scientist’s House) association in Germany promotes nationwide early childhood education in the areas of the natural sciences and technology. Its goal is to promote interest in natural phenomena among three-to-six-year-olds. The foundation develops workshops and teaching materials for educators, hosts annual promotion days and provides comprehensive background information and experiments on the internet. To offer workshops throughout Germany, the foundation established local networks.

- In Japan, Sony established the Sony Foundation for Education. Its Early Development Activity Centre conducts an extensive programme of activities in its quest to make science widely known among the public, to foster well-balanced personality development in young individuals and to educate the general public about the importance of building a healthy relationship between parents and children. The achievements of the various programmes and the lessons learned about child rearing are shared in various ways with parents, the community and child care workers. The Foundation gives awards to ECEC centres to stimulate excellent practices and support teachers by providing materials, such as booklets and posting information, experiences and lessons learned on the internet. The Foundation also actively promotes science in early education through its Science Education Programme.

Offering qualifications and employment opportunities for local communities

- To stimulate local development of very low-educated people, community child care centres in Flanders (Belgium) provide training and employment opportunities for these people within the centre. The training results in an official qualification and can be retrieved while being employed at the care centre.

Embedding community engagement in a wider evaluation process

- Japan introduced school evaluation in 2007. Evaluation councils are made up of persons related to the kindergarten, such as parents and local residents. They evaluate the results of the self-evaluation assessments as implemented by the kindergarten staff and decide whether they agree with the self-evaluation exercises or not. This is done through observing the kindergarten’s daily activities and analysing the information exchanged with parents and the community.

- In Australia, as part of assessment and rating against the National Quality Standards, long day care, family day care, preschool and out-of-school-hours care services will be assessed from 2012 onwards on how well they maintain collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

- In Norway, the early development project Språkløftet (Language Promotion), which stimulates participation in the ECEC of children in need of language stimulation through co-operation with health services, will be subject to an evaluation in 2012.