

Norway High-Level Roundtable on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Barbara Ischinger: Closing remarks

Minister Halverson, Ministers, Honoured guests and participants, Ladies and Gentlemen. This has been an extremely enriching and enlightening event. It is very clear from our discussions that enhancing the quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a major policy priority across OECD countries.

Today, we have given you the OECD's new policy toolbox ***Starting Strong 3*** to take back home and together we have explored some ways in which these policy tools could be used. Our discussions here have enabled us all to learn much more about the different and common challenges we face and inspired us with new ideas and possibilities. I hear that already many of you are planning to use this comprehensive set of practical tools as soon as you get back home to set priorities, consider alternatives and figure out how to overcome obstacles.

Of course, in these difficult economic times, one of the big challenges we all face is financing. Yet the evidence pointing to the importance of investing in high quality early childhood education and care is compelling. It yields net benefits for children, providing them with strong foundations for lifelong learning and economic and social well-being.

Many participants have underlined the importance of high quality ECEC for parents, especially because it makes it possible for mothers to pursue their careers, knowing that their children are being well cared for in a strong early learning environment. Supporting working mothers also raises family incomes and provides more tax revenues. This should be good news for finance ministers.

Let me now turn to where we go from here. We have just been hearing about how can we measure quality and how can we assess our progress in improving it. These are not easy questions to answer at any level of education and most certainly not for young children. But they are extremely important. Because of this, I would be keen to extend the OECD's analysis in two particular ways, with your support.

First, we would like to look carefully into the policies and practices that could, or are already, being used for monitoring and evaluating quality of early learning, either at the level of the individual provider or for the system as a whole. There are some delicate issues here and it is very important that we develop measures that support the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children. But I believe that this can be done.

Second, we will try to collect better international indicators of quality, access and participation in early childhood education and care and include them with our other education statistics. International comparisons are the foundation of OECD work and there are gaps that need to be filled concerning the years before school. Filling these data gaps is important to support deeper analysis of early learning policies and their effectiveness – for us at OECD and for you in your countries.

My OECD colleagues and I thank you all once again for making this roundtable a great success and on behalf of you all, I would like to thank our wonderful Norwegian hosts – Minister Halvorsen and the Ministry of Education and Research. It's very cold outside, but you have taken great care of us with warmth and hospitality.

Let me end by saying that I am confident that we are well on the way towards giving all children a strong start through high quality early childhood and care. Let us all continue to work together towards better policies for better lives, for children, for their parents and for society's future.