



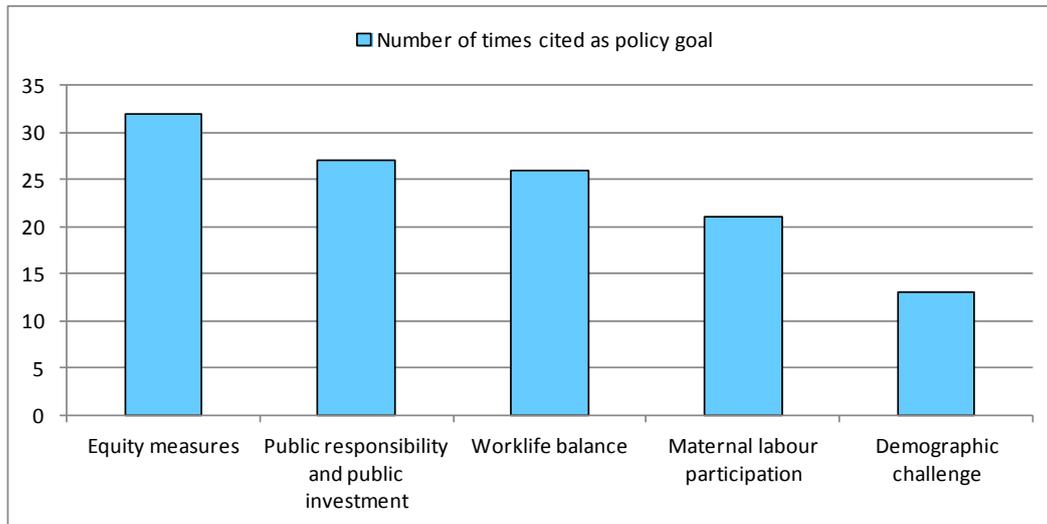
Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON: POLICY GOALS

Findings

- “Equity measures” is the most commonly cited policy goal of ECEC, followed by “public responsibility and investment”. This indicates that governments aim to establish fair and inclusive ECEC systems, accessible for all children, and that they regard ECEC services as public goods. ECEC policy is designed as not only as part of education and child care policy but also labour market policy. In fact, “facilitating work-life balance” and “increasing maternal labour participation” are referenced as goals of ECEC. While ECEC is often referenced as a means to tackle falling fertility rates and respond to the needs of increasing immigrant children, only a few countries consider ECEC as a tool for “tackling demographic challenges” (Figure 1).
- The most frequently cited focus of quality goals in ECEC is related to learning standards, curriculum and pedagogy. They are considered effective tools to guide ECEC staff to improve their instruction strategies and, thus, enhance child development. Another frequently cited focus includes “workforce/working conditions”, recognising the importance of staff to facilitate better child development. While it is difficult to steer by policy interventions, “parental and community engagement” is also cited as a quality goal by many respondents. Although “monitoring and evaluation” as well as “regulations” are typical government steering tools, they are less frequently cited than the formerly mentioned focuses. A few countries regard “equity” as part of quality goals. Some countries do not set out any quality-specific goals (Figure 2).

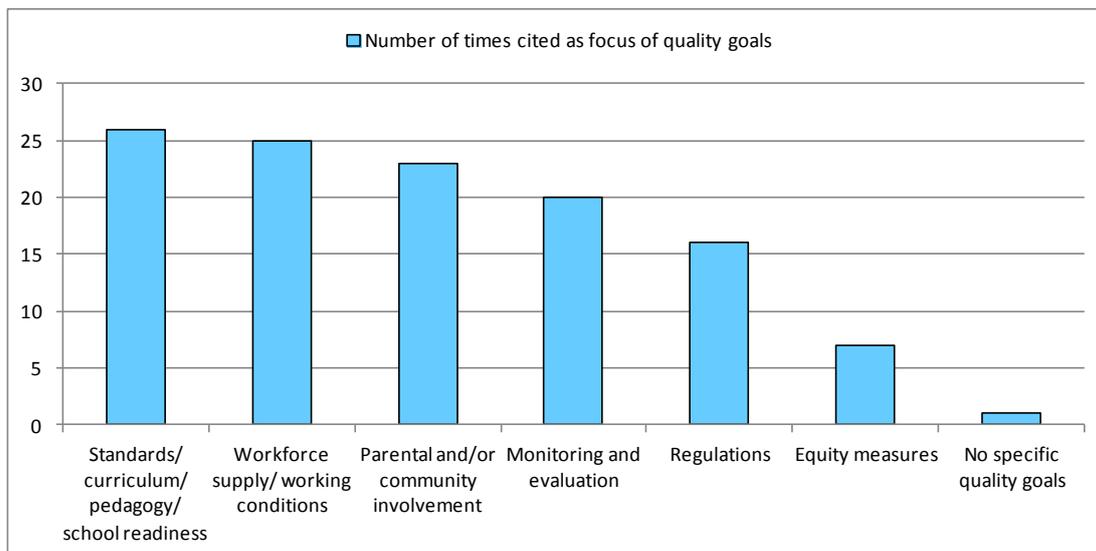
Figure 1. Overall policy goals for ECEC¹



Note: Countries were given a list of example policy goals to choose from based on *Starting Strong II* (2006). Respondents may list more than one policy goal.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care’s “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal”, June 2011.

Figure 2. Focus of quality goals in ECEC²



Note: Countries were given a list of example quality goals to choose from based on *Starting Strong II* (2006). Respondents may list more than one policy goal.

Source: OECD Network on Early Childhood Education and Care’s “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal”, June 2011.

¹ Based on responses from: Australia, Austria, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), British Columbia (CAN), Manitoba (CAN), Prince Edward Island (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, England (UKM), Scotland (UKM) and United States.

² Based on responses from: Australia, Austria, Flemish Community (BEL), French Community (BEL), British Columbia (CAN), Manitoba (CAN), Prince Edward Island (CAN), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and Scotland (UKM).

For more detail, see the Survey Response Table on “Policy Goals” (Excel file) in the online Quality Toolbox at www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood/toolbox.

Definitions and methodologies

Policy goals refer to the aims and expected outcomes of ECEC policies. They can give early childhood services their overall orientation but also contribute to specific areas. The OECD’s *Starting Strong II* (2006) identified five overall ECEC policy goals, providing potential responses for the OECD survey (Figure 1):

1. **Maternal labour participation:** responds to the rise of the service economy and the influx of women into salaried employment.
2. **Work life balance:** reconciles work and family responsibilities, especially in a manner more equitable for women.
3. **Demographic challenges:** responds to changes in fertility rates and continuing migration/ immigration.
4. **Equity measures:** refers to the idea that the ECEC system should be fair and inclusive, acting against child poverty and educational disadvantages.
5. **Public responsibility and investment:** recognises ECEC as a public good.

The findings presented here are based on data from the OECD Network on ECEC’s “Survey for the Quality Toolbox and ECEC Portal” (2011) and on the OECD’s desk-based research. For each graph and table, the countries or regions for which data is used are listed.