



## Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

### STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN SETTING QUALITY GOALS

#### Challenge 1: Building consensus on the goals

Building consensus among ECEC practitioners and managers, parents and policy makers on the goals for quality improvement or on the role or scope of ECEC can be challenging because they have differing views and expectations of “quality” in ECEC.

Policy makers may wish to design policies to improve quality based on research; however, there is often a lack of knowledge on which quality aspects matter in ECEC. Furthermore, there are often competing – not understood as complementary – views on what the focus of ECEC should be, for example, to support female labour participation, to address child poverty and disadvantages or to ensure granting it as public goods.

#### *Clarifying the role and scope of ECEC*

- **Flanders (Belgium)** is preparing a Child Care Decree (for zero to three years) which intends to lay down the economic, pedagogic and social role and concrete organisation of child care and is supposed to create clarity and coherence in child care provision by providing information on affordability, accessibility, monitoring, definition and scope.
- In **Norway**, the responsibility for ECEC/kindergartens was transferred from the auspices of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Research in 2006. By transferring the responsibility for kindergartens to the Ministry of Education and Research, the government acknowledged the role of kindergartens as a first step in lifelong learning and as part of an active policy to reduce differences in society. Important policy goals regarding ECEC since the current government took office in 2005 include: coverage of kindergarten places, maximum parental fees, equality in the financing of municipal and non-municipal kindergartens and aiming at stimulating high quality in ECEC.
- **Czech Republic** set the main objectives of preschool as follows: preschools should facilitate children’s development and their ability to learn, enable children to acquire the basic values on which the Czech society is based, and enable them to learn how to become independent and express themselves as individuals in relation to their surroundings. The essential role of ECEC policy in the Czech Republic is equal access for all children, including those with special educational needs, children from problematic social backgrounds and foreigners. These objectives and goals were clearly stated to the ECEC sector and the general public.

- In **Finland**, the Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care, issued in February 2002, sets out a definition and the key principles for ECEC. The document indicates that the primary responsibility for nurturing and educating children lies with their parents, but that it is society's role to support parents in exercising their responsibility in this area. The process of caring for, nurturing and educating children should form a seamless whole which flexibly supports the individual development of each child at every stage of the child's growth and education.
- In 2008, under the adoption of the School Act, **Slovak Republic** made kindergartens a part of the Slovakian school system. The term "day care centre" was also abolished and replaced with the term "preschool institution" for all forms of ECEC. This further clarifies and emphasises the educational goals the government has in mind regarding ECEC.
- **Sweden** emphasised the educational scope and goal of ECEC during the 1990s when preschooling and school-age child care were being integrated at the state level with primary school, and its responsibilities shifted to the Ministry of Education. The government made this decision because it wanted to move away from the idea of child care as a part of family policy and aimed at moving towards preschool as part of the education system with a stronger focus on development and learning.

#### *Encouraging inter-sectoral collaboration*

- The government of **Manitoba (Canada)** affirmed its commitment to children and families through the proclamation of the [Healthy Child Manitoba \(HCM\) Act](#) in December 2007. The HCM Act recognises that the health and wealth of Manitoba's future is directly tied to the quality of investments in children and youth; and it commits the provincial government to inter-sectoral government collaboration, evidence-based decision-making, and increased investments in prevention and early intervention, particularly in the area of early childhood. Healthy Child Manitoba represents a cross-departmental and child-centred approach to best meet the holistic needs of children and youth as they grow within their families and communities. The shared work of nine government departments, in collaboration with many community partners, is to develop, integrate, implement and evaluate policies, programmes and services to help its youngest citizens and their families achieve their fullest potential.
- The government of **Prince Edward Island (Canada)** affirmed its commitment to children and families through the establishment of the Children's Secretariat in 2000. The Children's Secretariat is a group of community and government representatives working across sectors, communities and departments as a collective voice to improve outcomes for children up to age eight. In essence, the Secretariat is "a network of networks" that links with other existing networks and coalitions who are working on behalf of young children and their families. The focus is on profiling healthy child development, promoting knowledge exchange and public education, inspiring action, and influencing policy. The [Children's Secretariat membership](#) includes representatives from seven government departments and 12 community networks.