



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

### STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN SETTING QUALITY GOALS

#### Challenge 3: Implementation – translating goals into actions

Translating goals into action is a challenge in virtually all OECD countries. First and foremost, successful implementation requires full support and buy-in from stakeholders who are at the front-line of implementation. Gaining their support and buy-in requires strategic thinking, a realistic timeline, sufficient funding and strong political leadership.

In reality, however, many countries report that there are not sufficient financial or human resources allocated for the implementation of goals. They feel they do not have sufficient knowledge on managing the implementation process; and they often find that the implementation plan is not realistically drafted under the pressure to complete it within the election cycle.

#### *Designing laws or policy papers to stimulate fulfilment of goals*

- In **Mexico**, to ensure that the goal of increased ECEC participation is being met, the national government reformed Articles 3 and 31 of the Mexican Constitution in 2002. The reform included a change to make preschool education compulsory. This increased participation in ECEC, especially among four- and five-year-olds.
- In 2009, the government of **Norway** presented a White Paper to the Parliament focusing exclusively on the quality of kindergartens in Norway. Three main aims were presented in the paper: 1) ensuring equity and high quality in all kindergartens; 2) strengthening the kindergarten as an arena for learning and development; and 3) making sure that all children have the opportunity to participate actively in a safe and inclusive kindergarten environment. The paper describes the status and challenges in this field and makes propositions for actions toward the development of high and equitable quality in all kindergartens. Pending on the White Paper, two public commissions have been set up: one to give advice on the steering of the sector, another to propose different measures to secure high-quality, structured ECEC for all children.
- In **Poland**, in order to increase participation in ECEC, several reforms in the education system were introduced: the School Education Act of 1991 has been revised, leading to compulsory school education from age six onwards, whereas it used to be seven, and compulsory preschool education for five-year-olds. Additionally, new regulations were introduced allowing for the provision of ECEC services in institutions other than traditional kindergartens, such as kindergarten centres and points. These institutions have to implement the same standard curriculum but can operate on different hours than traditional kindergartens and are easier to establish. The changes in regulations led to

an increase in the ECEC participation rate of three-to-five-year-olds from about 45% in 2006/07 to 65% in 2010/11.

- The White Paper on Education in **Slovenia** (1995) emphasises that the quality education and permanent professional training of professional workers in preschools represents a fundamental condition for their professionalism, autonomy and accountability. The White Paper served as the basis for systemic and legislative changes regarding quality enhancement in ECEC and education.
- States and territories in **Australia** signed the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The Declaration states the goals Australia aims to achieve for their youngest population group.
- In 2011, **Manitoba (Canada)** passed The Preparing Students for Success Act, requiring an early learning and child care facility to be included in all new schools and major renovations to existing schools. This Act contributes to the goal of Manitoba to ensure improved access and provision to ECEC for all children and families and ensures that new ECEC structures are being established.

#### *Allocating funding for implementation of quality goals*

- Municipalities in **Flanders (Belgium)** experienced a sharp increase in the number of pupils attending nursery and primary education, so extra teaching periods have been allocated to schools according to statutory funding tables. The extra teaching periods include an increase in funding for personnel/staff. A recalculation of funding allocation is performed as soon as the school's number of pupils in mainstream primary education experiences a rise of at least 12 pupils on the first school day of October 2010, in comparison with the year before. A decrease of 12 pupils and over is also deducted at a rate of one teaching period (with the allocated amount) per pupil from the teaching periods.
- In **Australia**, the government is investing funds to support the introduction of the new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. In addition, Australia is providing financial support in the form of one-off grants to Long Day Care services in disadvantaged areas to allow them to prepare for the National Quality Framework.
- **Spain** has set out to increase the number of places in ECEC for zero-to-three-year-olds (cycle one). To achieve this goal, the government has provided funding to open new public pre-primary schools, enlarge already existing facilities, and turn regular day care facilities into more education-oriented services for young children. A total of EUR 1 087 million has been budgeted for 2008-12 for this and for the improvement of the level of quality of these provisions by, for example, increasing the provision of training for ECEC professionals.
- **Korea** increased investment in ECEC to 0.62% of GDP in 2010. Compared to the government's investment in 2005, it has increased two-and-a-half times in early childhood education and three times in child care. Starting from March 2012, all five-year-olds, regardless of household income levels, will be entitled to free education and care.

- To encourage meeting the goal of increasing ECEC participation in **Mexico**, the Social Affairs Ministry developed a programme which stimulates access to and participation in child care for children of working mothers who did not have access to child care services offered by the Ministry of Education and Health. This service is called *Estancias Infantiles*. The programme, implemented in 2007, includes the establishment of care centres in urban areas for children of low-income, working parents.
- **Ireland** implemented the National Childcare Investment Programme (2006-10). This was a major programme of investment in child care infrastructure, which followed the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-06 (EUR 500 million). The programme aimed at creating up to 50 000 new child care places, with the objective of assisting parents to access affordable, quality child care.
- **Norway** earmarked financial means to increase participation in ECEC since, in Norway, the right to a place in kindergarten for each child is considered an important quality goal. The financial means were earmarked grants for the establishment of new kindergarten places (to all kindergarten owners both public and private). Due to political time limits, an earmarked grant was introduced for the establishment of temporary places in kindergartens. The financing system also addressed the municipalities' need for extra grants to cover the costs that followed the expansion. The state grants for the sector were increased from 0.5 to 0.8 of the GDP from 2003-08 (NOK 4.5 billion in 2000 to NOK 24.3 billion in 2009). Besides this, in 2009, a legal right to a place in ECEC for each child over age one came into force.
- **Manitoba (Canada)** has invested in enhancing the quality and meeting their goals of early learning environments through the development of purpose-built space for early learning and child care. As part of Family Choices (Manitoba's agenda for early learning and child care), Manitoba has invested in a capital building fund for improving quality in early learning and child care centres. Since 2008, 114 projects have been approved for funding, including 54 new child care sites that have been approved to proceed or have already been completed. Many of the new sites are located in schools or on school property; and there is a partnership with the Department of Education, which supports the construction of non-profit early learning and child care centres linked to public schools. Family Choices also incorporates other initiatives that support meeting the goal to improve quality, such as efforts to strengthen the workforce through training and recruitment and retention strategies.
- **Sweden** implemented special targeted state grants to ensure meeting its goal of increasing ECEC participation and supply.
- In **Poland**, financial means were earmarked to increase the supply of and access to ECEC as well as overall participation rates. Poland received a significant amount of funding from the European Union, which was put towards the establishment of new kindergartens, new forms of kindergartens, and development and support of existing preschool facilities. For 2007-13, over EUR 305 million has been allocated to ECEC with special focus on the development of preschool facilities in rural areas where participation rates are lowest.

### *Establishing an expert task force to guide implementation*

- When kindergarten was being integrated with primary school in an effort to enhance quality in **Prince Edward Island (Canada)**, a specialised Kindergarten Transition Team (KTT) had been established to guide the implementation. The team included staff from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, early childhood development staff and seven other partners. There were nine work groups created to deal with issues in the critical areas of transition. Each work group developed a Work Plan in co-operation with KTT, and each was given nine months to implement the transition. By September 2010, 1 410 young children in Prince Edward Island began kindergarten in public schools, and the transition was implemented very well. The costs of the plan were estimated at CAD 10 million. In addition, Prince Edward Island has established an Early Years Steering Committee to monitor the implementation of the Preschool Excellence Initiative. This committee is comprised of government and community stakeholders.

### *Changing the school starting age to ensure fulfilment of participation goals*

- In 2010, the government in **Slovak Republic** adopted the decision to make the final year of preschool education in kindergarten mandatory by the year 2014. This is expected to significantly increase ECEC participation.
- In 2002, the government in **Mexico** made preschool education compulsory. This was implemented in phases: in 2004/05, the third year of preschool became compulsory, while the second year of preschool became compulsory one year later in 2005/06. In 2008/09, the first year of preschool (three-to-four-year-olds) was made compulsory. The major positive effect has been increased enrolment rates of four-to-five-year-olds.
- In July 2008, **Prince Edwards Island (Canada)** lowered the age of school entry to age five by December 31 of the child's kindergarten year, which brought the age of school entry in line with most of the other Canadian provinces. It increased participation in early education and makes ECEC more accessible.
- In **Poland**, in order to increase participation in ECEC, the starting age of compulsory school education was lowered to age six, whereas it used to be seven, preschool education for five-year-olds was made compulsory. This change led to an increase in ECEC participation rates of three-to-five-year-olds from about 45% in 2006/07 to 65% in 2010/11.
- In **Spain**, the age for which education is free of cost has been reduced to age three as part of the National Education Plan 2008-10. This means that preschool education for all three-to-six-year-olds is free of charge, followed by free compulsory education from age six onwards. This initiative has greatly increased ECEC participation.

### *Analysing or measuring the outcomes of implementation*

- The **China** Development Research Foundation ([CDRF](#)) analysed what outcomes their early childhood development projects in Xundian County had one year after implementation of the programme. The purpose was to analyse whether their goals of improving the health conditions of young children and the coverage rate of early education was being met. They found that both nutritional conditions and coverage

improved: the anaemia rate for 6-to-24-month-olds dropped from 71.7% to 52.2%. The moderate to severe stunting rate dropped by 25%, and the coverage of early education was 89% over one year into the programme.

- **Spain** is planning to evaluate the implementation of their *Educa3* programme to analyse whether the goals of the programme are being met and what outcomes the programme has led to regarding the quality of ECEC provision for zero-to-three-year-olds.