



Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING QUALITY REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

Challenge 1: Securing financial means for quality enhancement in ECEC

There is increasing financial pressure on governments, especially in the time of economic crisis, which squeezes funding for ECEC in many OECD countries. When aiming at improving the level of quality of ECEC services, a question often arises about whether expanding access should be the priority instead of quality enhancement. There is a growing research body that indicates that “quantity without quality” could be harmful for child development, while it could boost female labour participation. However, the evidence is still limited.

Furthermore, funding is limited for ECEC to begin with. In some countries – if not all – where ECEC falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare or Ministry of Children, ECEC is often less of a policy priority than compulsory or tertiary education, and therefore, less public spending is allocated per child; and resources and staff allocated to work in the Ministry unit are small compared to the resources and staff allocated to work on compulsory schooling. This can be due to the lack of awareness among policy makers of the importance and relevance of quality ECEC provision for better child development in later education outcomes, despite the fact that more and more research consolidates the evidence base for this.

Revising quality standards in expanding access, raising participation and improving quality

- Municipalities in **Flanders (Belgium)** with a population density of more than 1 500 inhabitants per square kilometre are now able to build new schools for mainstream nursery and primary education more quickly: the minimum distance requirement of two kilometres between schools has been reduced to 250 metres, stimulating the fulfilment of increasing provision of quality ECEC. In addition to this, the Flemish government decided to change the ratio of staff per ECEC places in subsidised day care from 1:7 to 1:6.8 in 2003; and they changed it again in 2005 to 1:6.5.
- **Korea** strengthened regulations on child care centres by amending the Childcare Act in 2005 to improve the quality of child care. A child care centre can serve 300 children maximum and should be located at least 50 metres away from any dangerous facilities. Additionally, regulated space for children increased from 3.64 to 4.29 square metres; the classroom space per child was changed to 2.64 square metres. Furthermore, the staff-child ratio was reduced from 1:5 to 1:3 for under-one-year-olds; 1:5 for one-year-olds; 1:7 for two-year-olds; 1:20 to 1:15 for three-year-olds; and 1:20 for four- and five-year-olds. For better access to quality educational services, Korea is currently expanding

public kindergartens in urban areas, while combining 322 small-scale kindergartens attached to elementary schools in rural areas to 112 kindergartens by 2012.

- **Manitoba's (Canada)** minimum standards for ECEC are set in The Community Child Care Standards Act and Manitoba Regulation 62/86. As part of Family Choices (Manitoba's Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care), the government committed to reviewing and modernising The Community Child Care Standards Act. In September 2009, new regulations came into force requiring all licensed child care facilities to have an inclusion policy with respect to children with additional support needs. Furthermore, in May 2010, The Child Care Safety Charter (an amendment to The Community Child Care Standards Act) came into force. Under the Safety Charter, all licensed child care facilities in Manitoba are now required to have approved safety plans and codes of conduct, including procedures for controlling visitor access. Further revisions in standards are planned for the future.
- In **Prince Edward Island (Canada)**, the Early Learning and Child Care Act is in development to replace the Child Care Facilities Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1988 cap. C-5. The regulations to correspond with this new act are currently in the development and draft stage. Consultations with the child care sector were held about the changes in the new act, and further consultations will be taking place with the regulations in autumn 2011. Based on these consultations, revisions to regulations will be drafted and proposed, which should make regulations more up-to-date and stimulate quality in ECEC.
- An evaluation of current ECEC services in **Spain** shows that minimum standards for zero-to-three-year-olds are set at the regional level, and the level of quality for the youngest children greatly differs across the country. Because of these differences, Spain is planning to develop national minimum standards for the ECEC sector for zero-to-three-year-olds by revising the regional standards and setting out national minimum standards.

Aligning quality enhancement of ECEC with that of compulsory education

- In 2009, the **United States** allocated USD 4.35 billion for the Race to the Top (RTT) Fund, a competitive grant programme designed to encourage and reward states that are creating conditions for education innovation and reform, including education systems from preschool to primary and secondary education. In 2011, of the USD 700 million that will be awarded, USD 200 million will be used to improve K-12 education. USD 500 million will be awarded under a new competition, the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), to states that plan to improve the quality of early learning and development programmes. Jointly administered by the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, the competition calls for states to take a comprehensive approach to developing integrated, high-quality early learning systems, which in turn will help ensure that more children, especially children with high needs, enter school ready and able to succeed. Specific competition requirements, priorities and selection criteria are still under development. However, consistent with the statute, applicant states will need to:
 - increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programmes;

- design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programmes and services; and
- ensure that any use of assessments conforms to the recommendations of the National Research Council's reports on early childhood.

Linking quality standards to public funding

- Since more children in **Flanders (Belgium)** are participating in ECEC, providers need financial resources for meeting the standards on staffing. In some municipalities with a sharp increase in the number of pupils attending nursery education, schools are allocated additional "teaching periods". Schools receive funding based on teaching periods according to statutory funding tables. When more children attend, a nursery school receives more teaching periods as well as more public funding to meet the quality standards for staff-child ratio. Teaching periods and funding is recalculated as soon as the number of pupils enrolled in school increases with at least 12 pupils on the first school day of October 2010, in comparison with the first school day for the 2010-11 school year. A decrease of 12 pupils or more is deducted at a rate of one teaching period per pupil from the teaching periods, according to statutory funding tables. This is only valid for the education sector and does not apply to the care sector.

Using international country examples to inform regulations and standards

- **Australia** used international research evidence on the positive impacts of ECEC on the development of children to help convince stakeholders to adopt regulations and standards.

Setting standards high on the policy agenda

- *Kind and Gezin* in **Flanders (Belgium)** decided to give high priority to offering high-quality ECEC to all young children, which stimulated co-operation of politicians on improving quality in ECEC. The political commitment led to an increase in available funding.
- In **Czech Republic**, the government put revising standards for ECEC high on their political agenda and is currently preparing revision of legislative conditions relating to quality in ECEC. Since this is now a priority for the government, more political attention is given to ECEC.