



Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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

Challenge 3: Adaptation to local needs

Regional and local ECEC contexts can vary widely within one country, and at the national level there might be insufficient knowledge about local needs. Therefore, it is understood that it is most efficient if the standards are adopted to meet the local needs.

However, making regulations and standards relevant to different regional or local circumstances can run a risk of making uneven quality across the country. This poses a policy concern from the children's perspective: a child born in one region may have access to high-quality ECEC while a child born in another region may not because that region has adopted lower quality standards. Minimum standards should be defined at the national level and be followed, while adapting to the local needs.

Delegating responsibilities to local authorities

- In **Belgium**, child care responsibilities were transferred to the different communities (Flemish, French and German speaking), resulting in different regulations for the different communities, which match the needs and views on child care of those communities.
- In **Finland**, decision-making powers have been increasingly delegated to the local level through the Local Government Act of 1995. With this, the autonomy of municipalities increased, and local authorities now have higher levels of freedom in terms of implementation of ECEC. Although the Finnish system is decentralised, the national legislation continues to set out clear requirements for municipalities on, for instance, access, the pedagogic goals, staff qualifications, adult-child ratios and day care fees.
- In 2000, a major decentralisation in the management of early education took place in **Slovak Republic**. The responsibility of kindergartens was transferred to cities and communities. With this change, municipalities became the founders of kindergartens as did, to a large extent, employers of the pedagogical staff and administrative staff in early education. With this shift, ECEC provisions could be more easily adapted to local needs.
- In 2008, **Korea** transferred the entire education budget to local authorities including those of early childhood education. Consequently, local Offices of Education came to have more autonomy and responsibility in setting specific regulations under the general guidelines of the central government, thus accommodating local needs efficiently.