

Norway High-Level Roundtable on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Barbara Ischinger: Welcoming remarks

Minister Halvorsen, Ministers, participants, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to this high-level roundtable on behalf of the OECD. I would like to thank you, Minister Halvorsen, for hosting this important meeting.

We are here today because we share a common interest in giving all children a strong start in life through high quality early childhood education and care. Because we care about children; we also recognise that investing in high quality early childhood education and care pays off. In fact, it's a very good investment. It leads to:

- better child well-being and learning outcomes;
- more equitable child outcomes and reduces poverty;
- increased intergenerational social mobility;
- higher female labour market participation and gender equality;
- increased fertility rates; and
- better social and economic development for society at large

Over the last few years, many countries have introduced some type of new policies and initiatives to enhance early childhood education and care. To name a few – Norway considers competent staff the most important factor concerning quality and, therefore, a strategic plan was designed for a competence development initiative for 2007-2010 with a special focus on pedagogical leadership, language stimulation, children's agency and transition from kindergarten to school. Providing a learning environment in tune with how small children develop and learn is essential in ECEC. Australia considers an overall strategy as an essential driver for quality enhancement. It has set up an overarching National Early Childhood Development Strategy, which aims to ensure that by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation. Korea has developed a common curriculum for age 5, regardless of which centre a child goes to. This will help ensure even quality across different service types. I welcome all these initiatives and congratulate you for them.

However, we also know that many countries still face a range of challenges in developing and implementing policies that improve quality in early childhood education and care and securing the resources to make it happen. This is why the OECD has spent the last two years developing the Starting Strong III Policy Toolbox that we are launching today.

The Starting Strong Policy toolbox focuses on five policy levers that countries can use to improve quality in early childhood education and care. It looks at why, what and how to improve quality. Later today you will be able to explore for yourselves how these policy levers and tools can be used.

Of course, expanding access is also a key priority for a number of countries – providing more places for children of working parents and ensuring that the most disadvantaged children are reached. Norway has lately seen a large increase in the number of places in ECEC at the same time as keeping a focus on quality. I expect the Minister to be elaborating on this in her speech. Effort in expanding access must

however go hand-in-hand with providing a high-quality early learning experience for all children. Indeed research has shown that low quality childcare can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development.

Lastly, a major challenge is to convince a wider audience and the public at large that quality matters. One of the ways the OECD can help enrich the policy debate in each country is by providing examples from other countries and sharing lessons learnt. You will find the Starting Strong Policy Toolbox full of country examples and case studies. And sharing experience across countries and from different stakeholders' experience is why we are here today for this High-level Roundtable. So I would encourage each and every one of you to participate actively, share your experience and learn from each other.

Together we can find ways to support a better future of all children, through high quality early childhood education and care.

Thank you.