

Inequalities in access to early childhood education and care in Sweden ^[1]

The equal access study

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EXCERPTS from the Introduction

This expert report highlights the problems associated with access in a Swedish context. This includes the current problem of municipalities providing enough places for all children without this resulting in large group sizes of children in preschool. While access does not appear a problem (all children have a right to attend preschool regardless of their background), variation occurs across municipalities in terms of how much access children actually have to preschool (time allocations), funding for preschools (some municipalities have socioeconomic models and some do not) and the types of quality monitoring in place (tools are chosen by the municipality).

This report consists of four chapters. The first chapter is preceded by a short overview of the Swedish early childhood education and care (ECEC) system. The first chapter gives an overview of the statistical data on ECEC access in Sweden on the national and local levels. Data is provided on current enrolment rates in preschool. Information on the enrolment patterns of children from a foreign background is also presented in chapter one. The first chapter concludes with a section on the diverse groups within society with access to ECEC.

The second chapter provides details about the multi-level governance of ECEC within Sweden. This includes information on the role of preschool, fee regulation and costing, municipal funding allocations and quality monitoring of ECEC services within Sweden.

Welfare policies and public debates on Swedish ECEC are explored in chapter three. Swedish welfare policies are combined with ECEC policies to target child poverty. A trend towards marketisation in the Swedish context is also discussed. Current media debates are also positioned to illustrate the public discourse around access and (in)equality in Swedish ECEC.

The final chapter (chapter four) reflects on the overall relationship between the welfare state, the structure of ECEC governance, and access and inequalities within Sweden. Current challenges are identified as well as potential strategies for dismantling barriers. The chapter concludes with reflections on a national quality monitoring system.

Related link:

Region: Europe ^[3]

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