

Norway: Early childhood education and care policy review^[1]

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Excerpted from the executive summary

Norway's early childhood education and care (ECEC) system has experienced a strong expansion over the last decade. More children than ever are enrolled in its kindergartens. Norway is among the OECD countries with the highest share of public income spent on early childhood education and care, and public funding for the kindergarten sector has strongly increased over the past 15 years, enabling a rapid expansion of service provision. Workforce participation among mothers has steadily increased in Norway and the gender pay gap is low by international standards. With a generous parental leave benefit available for parents of children up to the age of one, the majority of parents enrol their children in kindergarten from age one to five. A cash-for-care benefit is available for parents not using kindergarten for their 1-year-olds. In an increasingly diverse society, efforts have been made to ensure that the education and ECEC system will become more responsive to the needs of migrant students and children.

Norway has integrated responsibility for ECEC provision and schooling under the Ministry of Education and Research since 2006 and, from 2012, certain tasks were delegated to its subsidiary Directorate for Education and Training, which facilitates smoother transitions of children across different levels of education and more coherent governance. In line with Norway's holistic approach to ECEC, young children of all ages are served the same settings before entering compulsory school. Municipalities play a key role in ECEC governance, and funding and stakeholders are being involved in key decisions. For instance, in 2010 a national parent's committee for kindergarten was established. Since 2011, kindergartens were included in the block grants transferred to municipalities, replacing the earmarked grants used for the expansion. Municipalities own half of Norway's kindergartens and oversee all public and private kindergartens in their districts. This allows local authorities to adapt kindergarten provision and other services to local needs. At the same time, it also makes it difficult for the national government to ensure that policies are adequately implemented across the country, especially since incentives through earmarked grants have been phased out. In 2003, a political agreement and regulation was reached to ensure more equal public funding of private and public kindergartens, and by 2014 private kindergartens received 98% of the public funding received by municipal kindergartens. However, the funding of private providers remains complex and uneven across municipalities. Norway could further consolidate its steering of the sector by attaching additional financial payments to selected targets and simplifying the funding of private providers

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