



BARNE- OG FAMILIEDEPARTEMENTET

The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs

Background Report and OECD Country Note

OECD – Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Norway

February 2001



Introduction

Early childhood education and care has experienced a surge of policy attention in the OECD countries over the past decade. Policy makers have recognised that equitable access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families. There is a need to strengthen knowledge of the range of approaches adopted by different countries, along with the successes and challenges encountered. Recognising that this cross-national information and analysis can contribute to the improvement of policy development, the Education Committee launched the Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in 1998.

Twelve countries volunteered to participate in the review: Australia, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. The review has taken a broad and holistic approach that considers how policies, services, families, and communities can support young children's early development and learning. The term *early childhood education and care* (ECEC) includes all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content. The methodology of the study consists of four elements: (1) preparation by participating countries of the Background Report (BR); (2) review team visits to participating countries; (3) preparation of the Country Note (CN); and (4) preparation of the Comparative Report (CR).

In this leaflet the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs publishes the Background Report from Norway and the OECD Country Note. The BRs and the CNs from Norway and the other participating countries are published in printed versions and also available on the OECD home page. The Comparative Report from the review will be released in June 2001 and will also be available on the OECD home page

Current challenges in the ECEC field in Norway today

The White Paper concerning *barnehager*

In the Ministry's Background Report for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy is a list of 15 challenges in the field. These challenges are discussed further in the White Paper on Norwegian ECEC which was discussed in the Parliament in spring 2000. The Ministry is now working out the means to reach the political goals for the ECEC sector.

Goal for access

In the end of 1999 Norway had a coverage of about 61% for children aged 1-5. The most important challenge is to reach the goal of full access for all children whose parents want it. For children over 3 years there is almost full access, the great lack of places is for children under the age of 3. Norway wants to reach this goal in the year 2003. The Parliament has approved this goal. But Norway can't just have national goals. The state must co-operate with the local authorities in order to reach full access, and use both legal and economic means in addition to information, supervision and guidance.

A legal obligation for the local authorities to offer *barnehager*

In spring 2001 the Government plans to propose a bill to the Parliament. The most important proposal will be to introduce a legal obligation for the local authorities to offer places in *barnehage* for those who want. The Government wants the local authorities to have freedom to offer places in accordance with local needs.

Financing of the sector

The running costs for *barnehager* are shared between the state (earmarked grants), the local authorities and the parents. A former goal has been that the sharing of the costs between the state/the local authorities/the parents should be 40/30/30 per cent. Today the parents pay approximately 38 per cent of the total running costs. It is a goal to lower the

parents' fees by increasing the grants from the state. This is approved by the Parliament. This goal is planned to be reached in 2005. In the governmental budget 2001 there is a start in the increase of the state grants. The goal is that the sharing of costs between the state, the local authorities and the parents should be 50/30/30 per cent.

A programme for quality improvement

The Government plans to work with quality improvement. Quality is not measured and reached once and for all. The Norwegian *barnehage* have a high standard of quality, but the sector must work to improve quality as society changes, children's living conditions and parents' needs change. The Framework plan emphasises self evaluation with participation from both parents and the children themselves. The Ministry is starting a three years programme on quality improvement as part of the work to follow up the Parliament's discussion of the white paper. The programme will last from 2001 – 2003. The quality plan has three central elements:

- *A barnehage for all children.* The Government wants *barnehage* for all children, also children with special needs. They should be integrated in the ordinary *barnehager* and get extra support if needed, whether they are children with handicaps, have difficult living conditions or children from ethnic and cultural minorities.
- *Flexible and user-oriented services.* Both children and parents are looked upon as users. The services must take parents' working hours or special situation into account, together with the children's own interests.
- *A competent staff.* The staff will have an active part in the programme. The staff is the most important resource in the *barnehage*. They have a key role in the work to develop *the barnehage* in accordance with the needs of the children, the parents and the society.

Oslo, February 2001