

Early childhood education and care practices across countries

Detecting common barriers and development opportunities

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The importance of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) is now widely recognised. With expanding access and enrolment in ECEC programmes across countries, governments are increasingly interested in answering questions like: Who are the staff working with young children? What do children learn and do in ECEC settings? Is the quality of ECEC settings the same for all children?

The *OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey* ([TALIS Starting Strong](#)) was designed to answer these questions, and many more. It is the first international survey of the ECEC workforce and took place in 2018 in nine countries: Chile, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Norway and Turkey.

The [first results](#) from TALIS Starting Strong highlight the very different contexts and ECEC systems of these countries, but also suggest some clear similarities. For example, in all nine countries, staff report using more practices to support children's socio-emotional development compared with practices that put a specific focus on literacy and numeracy development.

Another common theme across countries is a shortage of ECEC staff. This is reported by staff as a top barrier to their participation in professional development activities: There are no other staff available to fill in for them. It is also reported by ECEC leaders as a barrier to their effectiveness in their jobs.

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The findings presented in the first report on TALIS Starting Strong suggest several areas where ECEC policies can help support the workforce working with our youngest children, with a goal of enhancing overall quality in these settings. The policy areas are:

- **Promoting practices in ECEC that foster children's learning, development and well-being.** Across countries, staff tend to have education beyond secondary school, but training specifically to work with children is not universal. Ensuring that pre-service and in-service training programmes lead to a common understanding of good practices is essential to providing high-quality early experiences for young children.

- **Attracting and retaining a high-quality workforce.** Fewer than 4 in 10 ECEC staff in participating countries are satisfied with their salaries. In most countries, staff are also unlikely to agree that their profession is valued in society. With staff shortages as a major concern, policies can help raise the status of the profession as well as address sources of instability and stress for the ECEC workforce.
- **Giving a strong start to all children.** ECEC can help reduce inequalities among children from different backgrounds, but staff need adequate training and professional development opportunities to adapt their practices in meaningful ways. Allocating resources to centres where they are most needed, and facilitating access to a range of ECEC centres for all families, can help realise the promise of ECEC for all children.
- **Ensuring smart spending in light of the complex governance and service provision in the sector.** Spending on ECEC has increased in many countries, along with the surge in attention to the long-lasting benefits of ECEC participation. But the ECEC sector still relies more on private management and funding than other levels of education. With oversight of the many different types of ECEC programmes happening at different levels of governance, monitoring the quality of ECEC is a challenge that needs to be met through tailored policies and attention to spending in areas that can improve quality.

Policy changes often require trade-offs; TALIS *Starting Strong* highlights possible priorities for each of the participating countries. Around the world, people care deeply about young children; learning from the ECEC workforce is critical to ensuring policies best support children's early development and well-being.

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