

A photograph of a man with glasses, wearing a grey sweater, holding a young child in a red and blue raincoat. The child is laughing and has their legs raised. They are in a forest with trees and autumn foliage. In the background, another child is visible climbing a tree.

**Taking gender issues a
step further ... (?)
Gender equality and
diversity in Norwegian
ECEC**

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My agenda

- Give an overview of how we organize ECEC in Norway
- To reflect on the gender concept
- Gender balance among the staff in Norwegian ECEC - how and why?





Some «big» words

- All people need to be seen and heard, make their own choices, and shape their own lives.
- These rights shall be independent of gender.
- Each individual has such rights.

It is all about human rights!





Background information Norwegian ECEC

74% of all women are attending the working life (SSB 2014)

Almost every child in Norway attend ECEC (barnehage):

- ECEC are places for playing and learning for children 0-5
(not compulsory)
- National laws, framework and curriculum
- The municipalities are responsible
- Statutory right to nursery after the age of one year
- There are both private and public ECECs
- Rates and admission requirements may vary but there is a maximum fee (approx. 300 euro – but can be means-tested)





Background information Norwegian ECEC

Almost every child in Norway attend ECEC :

- 90 percent of all children aged 1-5 years are attending an ECEC
- 92 percent of these children had an agreed attendance of 41 hours or more per week (SSB 2014).
- Since 2006 all ECECs are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research and are considered a part of children's education and not just a place for care, as a substitute for home.
- The Norwegian welfare state provides opportunity for men to be included in care for young children, both private and professional.





Background information

Norwegian ECEC

- ECECs have both professional and non-professional employees.
- The professional staff has a 3 year Bachelor's Degree specialized in early childhood.
- Men accounted for 8.7 percent of all employees in basic activities as managers, educational leaders and assistants
- The share of men in ECEC teacher education are approx. 16 %.





Let us establish:

Sex and gender matters, both biologically and socially.

The importance of gender and how gender is expressed depends on the society and the culture we live in.

What possibilities the children and employees get in the ECECs , and society in general, is influenced by our attitudes towards equality and gender.





Gender is one of the most basic way we categorize people

The focus has changed from:

Battle between genders

The intention is no longer to “shape” boys and girls similar

To:

Attention to *both* boys and girls

Reflect on how gender determines

To give individual rights - independent of gender





Important concepts

Gender - a word with multiple meanings.

In a Norwegian context – we focus on both the biological and the “social gender”.

Biological sex is linked to the body and its functions.

Social gender is attributed to the biological sex

- The construction of traits and behaviors that is created in the interaction between the individual and the outside world





Important concepts

Equality - gives different meanings for different people, depending on the perspective

- **Formal equality** means that, by law, everybody have equal opportunities to participate, and make own choices

- **Real equality** is how this turns out in practice: about equal distribution of participation, benefits, power and responsibility.

Gender equality - equal opportunities and rights regardless of gender. Gender Equality in ECECs involves both the educational work with children but also the importance of the employees' sex.





Important concepts

Equal worth- means equal and are used in a wider sense than gender equality. As an umbrella concept.

All people are equally valuable - in spite of human diversity and variation in characteristics.

Gleichwertig





Important concepts

Diversity:

Synonyms: heterogeneity, differences.

A complex concept. In a society implies a greater variety of lifestyles, values issues, religious forms and expressions.

Diversity in a Norwegian sense refers to diversity in relation to immigration and the diversity arising from individualization and differentiation of values and ways of life in general (Bld 2011: 29).

Diversity policy is aimed at everyone in society and also includes gender diversity.

We also refer to diversity in the staff in ECECs





ECEC plays an important role

- ECEC is an important contributor to the goal of an egalitarian society. Hence the need to work with what equality in ECECs means in practice, and what it means for children's socialization, learning and development.
- The goal of gender equality is enshrined in laws, regulations and curricula. The government has decided that gender equality should be one of the platforms for learning and teaching in ECECs and primary education.
- Equality in ECECs involves rights, power, liberating relationships, and questions of equality is therefore a question of democracy (Rossholt 2003).





Focus in Norwegian ECECs

- Gender equality is equally important for boys and girls, and measures need to include both genders (Emilsen 2011).
- Studies show that gender equality has limited attention in ECECs (Likestillingssenteret 2010, Østrem 2009).
- Instead of working to counter traditional gender patterns, ECECs often reinforce this pattern (Likestillingssenteret 2010)
- Some argue that men's presence in the ECECs reinforces gender stereotypical pattern (Friis 2006, Østrem 2009)





Why do we want gender balance in Norwegian ECEC among the staff?

In Norway there is a consensus about the importance of men taking part in young children's lives.

- In order to give young children a stimulating and pedagogical environment it is important to provide more gender balance in ECEC.
- It is important for young children to experience diversity, both in play and learning.
- Gender differences in interaction with children can provide a rewarding diversity among the staff.
- This is also declared in the Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research 2006).



There has been several action plans for Equality In Norway

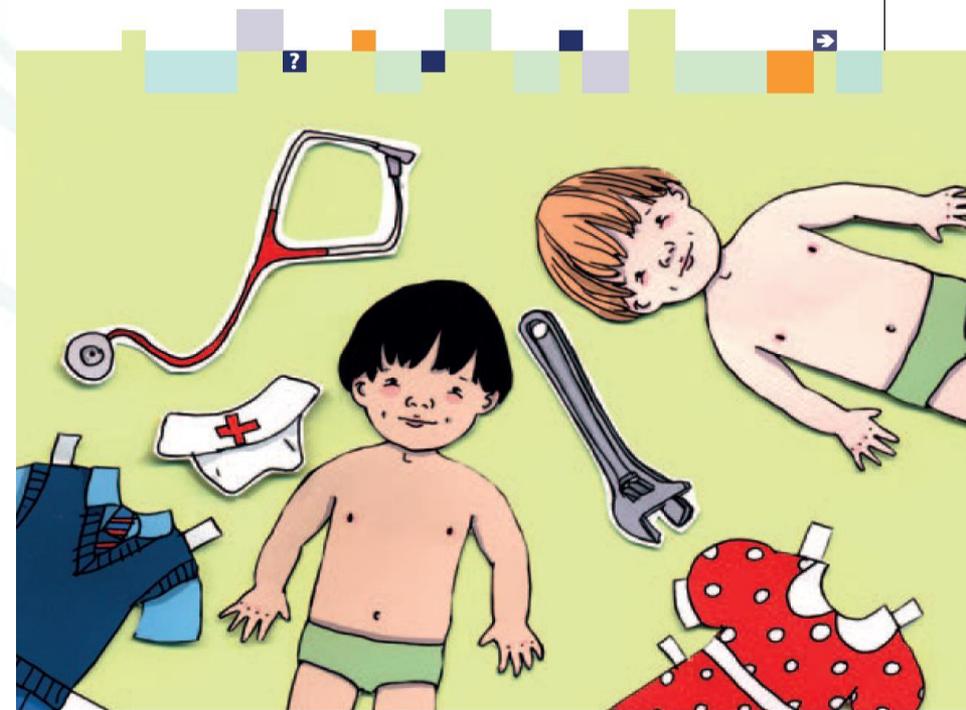
Equal opportunities and rights for women and men are basic human rights. In addition, equality is profitable. Norway is regularly rated as one of the world's best country to live in. Focusing on an equal society where women participate on an equal basis with men is an important explanation for this.

By ensuring equal opportunities for all, both women and men, a country will achieve progress, both socially, economically and politically. That is why equality is central UN Millennium Development Goals and is one of the priorities in the government's development policy. "

Handlingsplan

Likestilling 2014

Regjeringens handlingsplan for likestilling mellom kjønnene





Why do we want gender balance in Norwegian ECEC? in general:

There is no significant research that explains:

- why we have achieved 9 % men in Norwegian ECECs.
- the significance of men in ECECs.

It is generally agreed that it is important to recruit more men in care for the youngest children:

The discourse about why we need more men in ECECs can be put in three categories of arguments:

- It is important for children - male role models
- The importance of equality in general
- Children should experience diversity





Status gender equality in Norway

"Both men and women want a working environment with more gender balance than is often the case in today's ECEC.

There is also a clear perception that children in ECECs will benefit from interaction with adults of both sexes.

Does a higher proportion of men lead to a greater focus on gender equality in ECECs?

- not necessarily!





Some important questions

- How can we provide for equal rights independent of gender
- How can we understand the relevance of gender in ECEC in practice?
- How can we give attention to this issue in education and in daily life?





Status gender equality in Norway

- Generally there seems to be a perception that men and women in ECECs have equal tasks and duties.
- In spite of this, it turns out that tasks such as maintenance, washing and tidying, and others that perhaps are less related to ECEC core tasks, is more governed by traditional gender role patterns.





To sum up!

There are biological differences between girls and boys, women and men. The consequence of these biological differences are culturally determined.

The kindergarten has a significant role in the development of children's gender identity. Children learn to be feminine and masculine subjects in ECECs.

The goal is to provide the opportunity for diversity, and allow the children to be boys and girls in many ways.

The idea of equality must permeate ECECs practice for both girls and boys.

