Chapter 6

Parent Involvement in the Norwegian Context

The authors of this scholarly work attempt to provide insights into parent involvement in ECEC across different contexts with a Norwegian emphasis. To have a full understanding of parental involvement in the Norwegian Context, there is a need to define what is considered a family, who are its members, and what are their duties and responsibilities to the children. It is also important to understand whether these definitions are legally mandated throughout the Norwegian system such that it is recognized by different governmental offices/ministries or departments—and if any specific governmental offices have jurisdiction over these matters. Once these are established, programs and practices on parental involvement in governmental documents will be easier to identify and examine. Hence, this chapter provides exhaustive information on 1) the Family in the Norwegian context, 2) the History of families in Norway, 3) Norwegian families towards sustainable goals, 4) the Background of ECEC in Norway, 5) Norwegian government and welfare state efforts about families and children.

As emphasized in the Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Rammeplan) (UDIR, 2017), having good relations between kindergartens and home is of utmost importance to children's well-being and development, and is an indicator of quality. Kindergartens are mandated to ensure that parents are actively participating by engaging with them on an individual and group level. Parental cooperation is often in the form of parent councils as discussed and described in the previous sections. In addition, kindergartens are mandated to serve as an "active channel for maintaining contact between the parents and the kindergarten" (UDIR, 2017, p. 30). As the kindergarten has what could be considered a 'mediating' role between parents and the kindergarten staff, research on communication and language-related barriers connected with inclusion and integration has proliferated in recent years.

Image used under license from Shutterstock.com

To have a full understanding of parental involvement in the Norwegian Context, there is a need to define what is considered a family, who are its members, and what are their duties and responsibilities to the children. It is also important to understand whether these definitions are legally mandated throughout the Norwegian system such that it is recognized by different governmental offices/ministries or departments—and if any specific governmental offices have jurisdiction over these matters. Once these are established, programs and practices on parental involvement in governmental documents will be easier to identify and analyze.

Family in the Norwegian context

While the family is not specifically defined in Norwegian Law, the Marriage Act (Ekteskapsloven) (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 1993) and Barcelona (The Children's Act)/ Lov om barn og foreldre (Act on Children and Parents) (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 1982) both contribute to the societal understandings of the family. It is often broadly understood to include both nuclear and extended families that have the responsibility to make decisions for and with the family members

(Garvis & Ødegaard, 2018). The Norwegian Marriage Act specifies that any two people, regardless of sex, can get married under the law (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 1993). Therefore, getting married entails joint financial and social responsibilities that include but are not limited to child-rearing. In addition, families in Norway usually live within the same households even though the parents of the children are not married (Sture, 2006). Cohabitation, or partnership without marriage, is also recognized as a valid family unit (Sture, 2006).

In the Children's Act (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 1982), parenthood is explicitly outlined such that paternity is determined when the man to whom the mother is married at the time of birth is considered the father of the child. On the other hand, the woman who gave birth to the child is automatically considered the mother of the child (ibid). If the mother is married to another woman at the time of birth, then this woman becomes co-mother to the child. According to this law, a child cannot have both a father and a co-mother (ibid). In addition, the Children's Act (1982) determines parental responsibility of the parents. It is stipulated that parents have the right and duty to decide for the child in personal matters, but the child must also have a say in all matters that will affect them (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 1982).

History of families in Norway

Norwegian marriage and fertility statistics have seen many changes throughout the years. During periods when there was an economic recession, fewer people got married because they could not afford to raise families (Sture, 2006). Historically, Norway had moderate fertility rates until around the 19th century when the country saw an increase in population (ibid). Around this time, ca. 1865-1930, part of the Norwegian population emigrated to different countries, particularly to the United States of America. During this time of recession, resources became scarce to support an increasing population which led to a decrease in fertility rates. For instance, in 1930, the mean age for marriage was 26.4 years for women and 29.3 years for men and the fertility rate was down to 1.78 children for women (ibid) After the 2nd world War, these statistics drastically changed. People got married earlier, and there was a 'baby boom' from 1946 until the start of the 1960s (ibid). However, around the 1950s, cohabitation also became a rising trend that is related to not being able to afford a "socially accepted

wedding" (Sture, 2006, p. 2). Cohabitation constituted what is considered "the contemporary family in Norway, very similar to a status of "being engaged" or a "pre-marriage trial period":

By 1970, the high marriage rates culminated. Up to this point in time, divorces were rare, and almost all children (95%) were born to married couples. From 1970, however, this situation started to change rather dramatically, fewer couples married, more couples divorced and more children were born outside marriage. Cohabitation became a form of living together that first developed among young couples. This form of cohabitation could be compared with a stage of engagement before marriage. (Sture, 2006, p. 4).

The new trend of cohabitation among the young implied that few women under the age of 25 married. Still, very few had children during this stage. Later, when cohabitation started to be more common, people started to have children when still cohabiting. This new stage of cohabitation has by some demographers been described as the transformation from a traditional to a modern family formation pattern (Blom, Noack og Østby, 1993).

As cohabitation is largely considered a "well-established and fully accepted family form in Scandinavian countries" (Eriksen, 2001, p. 72), parents in cohabitation in Norway consider their parenting roles as like married parents (Ramsøy, 1994 in Eriksen, 2001). Therefore, there are no huge differences in parenting practices in these contexts, and government support is the same, if not better for cohabiting parents (Eriksen, 2001). Families then, could take many forms and also do not necessarily live within the same household but are "emotionally attached, detached or related by kin" (Garvis & Ødegaard, 2018, p. 2).

Another movement that was influential in the formation of families, parenting, and parenting practices in Norway was the feminist movement that started in the 1800s. It is widely acknowledged that Norway is one of the countries that have advanced women's rights earlier than the rest of the world. The universal suffrage for men and women in Norway took years in the making, but as early as 1911, a woman named Anna Rogstad held office in the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget, 2021). Suffrage for women was successfully introduced in 1913 which sparked discourses on roles and duties in society and equal pay for all (Bergstrøm, 2013). The feminists in Norway called for societal reform to have legal abortion and women's protections for many years but it was only in 1978 when the Equality Act was passed and implemented that woman started taking university degrees and participating in the workforce (Bergstrøm, 2013). This empowerment

was a driving force in making solutions for women and men to be better able to have good work conditions and balance family life and parenting at the same time (Leira, 2002). Solutions came in the form of early childhood places for children so parents would have somewhere safe to leave their children while they worked during the daytime. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Families towards sustainable goals

In the UNICEF (2018) synthesis report on key findings on families, family policy, and sustainable development goals, families have a broader role in attaining sustainable development goals (SDGs) than just attaining target 4.2 which ensures all children have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. The report identified six SDGs (SDG 1 no poverty; SDG 3 good health and well-being; SDG 4 quality education; SDG 5 gender equality; SDG 8 decent work and economic growth, particularly youth unemployment; and SDG 16 peace, justice and strong institutions with a focus on ending violence) where families have an important role, highlighting the need for more family-focused programs supported by national and local policies (UNICEF, 2018).

Norway has aligned its development policies and efforts in attaining Sustainable Development Goals by pledging to uphold good governance, respect human rights, and promotion of rights-based implementation of the SDGs (Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations, n.d.). Norway has also served as a haven for stateless individuals and families that have been affected by war in different parts of the world as part of their humanitarian initiatives. This includes the provision of free education at all academic levels to residents, including refugees and immigrants. For families with the youngest children, kindergarten places and mother-tongue interpreters are provided, along with free access to healthcare.

Background of early childhood education in Norway

The history of kindergartens in Norway is linked to the country's socio-economic and workforce conditions as well as the women's reform movement (Johansson, 2020). For a long time, circa 1920s and 1930s, there was

high unemployment. Women who worked away from home worked in factories, agriculture, or other people's homes (ibid). Parents had different options for child care: Most mothers stayed at home to take care of the children, some organized care for other children within their homes with the help of relatives, and those who could afford it hired babysitters (ibid). Half-day kindergartens for five- and six-year-olds were introduced around the 1900s, but places were limited (ibid). In 1965, it was found that many women with children were just working part-time in jobs outside of their homes, if at all. The government's support in creating kindergarten places made it possible for most mothers to combine studies and work with having children and families (ibid). From the 1970s parts of the kindergarten policy were focused on preparing children for primary school until the reform in 1997 when the framework for kindergartens was introduced (ibid).

In 2003, there was political support for building kindergartens for children of all students and parents in the workforce (Johansson, 2020). Also during this time, a "local price" was introduced for kindergarten places (ibid). In 2010, most children were attending kindergarten. In 2019, the government provided more support for 2-5-year-olds to attend four hours a day for children who have parents who have low incomes (ibid). The Norwegian government also provides more provisions for families and children, which will be discussed in a separate section of this paper.

Norwegian Government and welfare state efforts in relation to families and children

The family is an important unit of society in Norway that warrants a specific government office responsible for policies, programs, and practices related to it. As early as 1956, the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs [Departementet for familie- og forbrukersaker] was established to administer, coordinate, and legislate on family and consumer matters (Store Norske lexicon, 2020). In 1991, the Ministry of Children and Families [Barne- og familiedepartementet] (BFD) was created in lieu of the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs [Departementet for familie- og forbrukersaker]. The new ministry was responsible for creating and administering government policies and programs on the upbringing of children and framework conditions for families to operate (Berg et al., 2021). Over the last three decades, BFD has had many changes in name and areas of responsibility (ibid). In 2006, when it was called the Ministry of Children and Equality. In 2010,

it changed its name to the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion, which it was called until 2016. After this, the ministry was called the Ministry of Children and Equality until 2019 when the ministry then took back its old name, the Ministry of Children and Families (Berg et al., 2021).

BFD is responsible for creating and implementing policies that include child protection, upbringing, and living conditions of children, young people, and their families [Regjeringen, n.d.]. The ministry consists of four departments: Child Protection Department [Barnevernsavdelingen], The Consumer, Faith and Philosophy Department [Forbruker-, tros- og livssynsavdelingen], Planning and Administration Department [Plan- og administrasjonsavdelingen], and the Family and upbringing department [Familie- og oppvekstavdelingen] (Regjeringen, n.d.). It is the family and upbringing department that has the primary responsibility for designing and coordinating children and young people's welfare and well-being through programs and policies that involve their families. This includes the development of child and family laws, the development and administration of transfer arrangements for children's families, preventive family protection, grants, and policy development for children and young people, development of adoption policy as well as key measures in policies to prevent and assist people exposed to violence in close relationships (Regjeringen, n.d.). As such their programs are geared towards these themes. In addition, BDF has a subordinate agency called the Directorate for Children, Youth and Families (Bufdir) which is a professional body that manages the Children, Youth and Family Agency (Bufetat) that works within the areas of child welfare, family protection, adoption, cohabitation measures, matrimonial matters, research and development, parental guidance, youth exchange, among other things (Regjeringen, n.d.). Bufdir offers local and online initiatives to support parents. One example of this is through the website "Foreldrehverdag.no" which is a recognition that there should be online resources and tools where parents could get information about parenting.

Kindergartens in Norway have been administered by the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs from 1958 until 2006. For a long time, childcare of the youngest children was deemed by the government to be the mother's responsibility within their homes (Johansson, 2020). Women who were part of the workforce had to hire private nannies, ask for help from their relatives, or turn to private care solutions for their children before the introduction of state-owned care institutions (ibid). Therefore, with the advent of social support of the state through kindergartens, one can argue

that kindergarten pedagogy was developed and strengthened by taking inspiration from European proponents such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel (Johansson, 2020) and that the responsibility for upbringing and education of children and young people in institutions are largely the state's responsibility.

In terms of children and young people's education, a different government office is responsible for overseeing the policies, programs, and practices in this regard. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research [Kunnskapsdepartementet] has a long history that dates back to 1814, making it the first ministry to be established in Norway (Regjeringen, 2007; Helsvig, 2014). The Ministry of Education and Research has primary responsibility for educational institutions across all lifespans: primary, secondary, upper secondary, tertiary, cultural, vocational, research, and training schools. In 2006, the jurisdiction of kindergarten moved to the Ministry of Education and Research (Regjeringen, 2007).

The Ministry of Education and Research also has an executive agency, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [UDIR], that is responsible for the development and supervision of kindergarten, primary and secondary school matters (UDIR, 2021). This executive agency develops, conducts, and monitors research and development within its jurisdiction. UDIR's work involves research and development on the quality of kindergartens and schools, the framework plans for educational institutions, and competence frameworks for teachers (UDIR, 2021). UDIR is also the government body responsible for carrying out research on educational matters, which includes parent involvement. In 2016-2019, UDIR conducted yearly parent surveys to find out parent's satisfaction with the conditions and offers of kindergartens in Norway. The UDIR has also been responsible for developing and evaluating the Kindergarten Framework Plan [Rammeplan] (UDIR, 2017).

Apart from children's education, the Norwegian government also has an administrative agency established in 2006, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) which is responsible for administering different welfare schemes to everyone living in Norway (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, 2019b). NAV's main goals are to facilitate having more people active and in work, fewer people on benefits, a well-functioning job market, and providing the right services and benefits at the right time, and providing good services tailored to the users' needs and circumstances to have a comprehensive and efficient labor and welfare administration (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, 2019b).

To support families with children, NAV administers family-related benefits, particularly for mothers active in the labor force (Sture, 2006). These benefits enable parents to be still actively working while they have children. These family-related benefits are also in place to support families that have difficult economic situations such as those at risk, who have broken up, or who just recently moved to the country as refugees or immigrants. The benefits are discussed in the succeeding section.

Family Related Benefits in Norway

NAV's family-related benefits are grouped into five categories: 1) Related to pregnancy, birth, and adoption (foreldrepenger, engangsstønad og svangerskapspenger), 2) child benefit and cash benefit, 3) benefit for single parents (mother/father), 4) child/ support/ advance payments of child support, 5) support related to family matters and concerns (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, 2019a).

Related to pregnancy, birth and adoption (foreldrepenger, engangsstønad og svangerskapspenger)

Parental allowance (foreldrepenger) is the money one can apply for to replace their income when one has to be at home in connection with giving birth to a child or adoption. This applies to mothers, co-mothers, and fathers of the children. In addition, parents are entitled to a total of 12 months' leave in connection with the birth and after the birth. These 12 months include the mother's right to leave for up to 12 weeks during the pregnancy and six weeks of leave reserved for the mother after the birth. In addition to the benefit of leave for the first 12 months, each of the parents is entitled to one year of leave for each birth. This leave must be taken directly after the first year of the child. Single parents are entitled to both the years. Other people who care for the child may also be entitled to leave: adoptive parents and foster parents have equal rights to leave, from the first day of officially assuming care responsibility for the child. The right to leave does not apply to people who will adopt a stepchild or if the child is aged over 15.

On the other hand, when a person who has not had a job in the past year is expecting a child, this person can apply to receive a lump sum (one-off benefit or engangsstønad) instead of the parental allowance. In addition,

women who have to stop working because of higher-risk pregnancies can apply and receive maternity pay benefits.

Child benefit and cash benefit

If a person has a child under 18 under their care, they are entitled to child benefits that could help cover the cost of raising a child. Parents, single parents, and foster parents can receive the child benefit. For the latter, the child should be residing with them permanently (for more than 3 months). The child must be living in Norway or have been in Norway for at least 12 consecutive months.

The child benefit is a fixed amount per month per child. If one has more children, then there is an extended child benefit to cover all children. Child benefit is paid out one month before a child turns 18, for as long as residency conditions are still met.

In addition, there is an additional cash benefit supplement for children ages 1-2 years who do not attend kindergarten full-time.

Benefit for single parents (mother/father)

Single parents who have children under the age of 8 years can apply for and receive a transitional allowance for up to three years. There is also an additional allowance to cover part of the daycare and after-school care costs of single mothers and fathers. They are eligible to receive this allowance until the end of the child's 4th grade. In addition, single parents can receive an allowance for school fees that cover expenses for tuition fees, semester fees, and examination fees for the children..

Child/ support/ advance payments of child support

For children who do not live with their parents, the children must be supported through monthly child support. This child support is paid to the parent who the child lives with. This is also true if the child/ren lives with someone other than their parents. For example, if a child lives with and is taken care of by his/her grandparents, then the parents still must provide for the child and the grandparents can receive the contribution. In all cases,

NAV can help decide how large the child support could be, depending on the circumstance of the parent/s.

Support related to family matters and concerns

NAV also facilitates other benefits that families can apply for which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Attendance allowance in connection with a child's illness
- Care allowance in the final phase of life
- Care benefit
- Training allowance
- Spousal support
- Paternity and parental responsibility
- Acquired rights for care work
- Grant for funeral
- Allowance for transportation of the deceased
- Basic benefit
- Attendance benefit
- Higher rate attendance benefit

Garvis & Ødegaard (2018) have offered an overview of policies, parental provision and welfare support for children and their families within the context of Nordic countries. Their overview includes Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland.

Table 1.1. Nordic policy around childhood

	Sweden	*Norway*	*Finland*	*Denmark*	*Iceland*
Ratification of UN Rights of the Child Convention	1990	1991	1991	1991	1992
Corporal punishment law	1979 (UN) 1958 (forbidden to hit children in schools)	1987 (UN) 1936 (in schools)	1983 (UN) 1890 (in schools)	1997 (UN) 1967 (in schools)	2003 (UN)
Universal access to kindergarten	3-6 years are free for 15 hours a week since 2003 Children can start from 1 year of age since 1995 6-year-old right to free preschool since 1975	Every child, age 1-6, has a legal right to a place in kindergarten since 2009	8 months to five years since 1990 6-year-old kindergarten class since 1996	Children should be offered a place in day care facilities (dagtilbud) if they parents want it Some local authorities guarantee a place since 1997. Since 2000-2003 there has been a financial agreement between the central government and local authorities of offering all parents day care places.	Day care obligatory for bilingual children from 3 years Children can start from 1 year of age
School starting age and years of compulsory schooling	7 9	6 10	7 9	6 10	6 10

Profile of frameworks for early childhood	Play and learning Democracy Scientific documentation Qualification socialization and subjectification	Play and learning Democracy Continuous observation of whole child development and happiness Socialization, qualification and subjectification	Play and learning Democracy Individual plans Socialization, qualification and subjectification	Play and learning Democracy Language screening of 3-year-olds Socialization, qualification	Play and learning Democracy Equality Assessment of every child's development Socialization, qualification and subjectification
Provisions provided in education	Basic rights to free education, including necessary equipment, textbooks, school transport and meals	6-18 basic rights to free education, including necessary equipment, textbooks and school transport	Basic rights to free education, including necessary equipment, textbooks, school transport and meals	Maximum cost is 2.551 (Copenhagen) Low family income, free or low fee	Parents pay 30% of actual cost in public institution and up to 50% in private institution

The policies in Table 1.1. (Garvis & Ødegaard, 2018) remain the same.

Table 1.2. Policy for parents in Nordic countries

	Sweden	*Norway*	*Finland*	*Denmark*	*Iceland*
Amount of maternity and parental leave	Both parents are entitled to up to 8 months of paid leave per child, which makes it possible for a total of 16 months per child Of this amount, 13 months are paid at 80% of the most recent income up to a ceiling of approximately 443,000 SEK (€51,100) per year in 2016	Mothers can take 35 weeks at full pay or 45 weeks at 80% pay Fathers can take up to 10 weeks on the mother's income. Together the parents can receive an additional 56 weeks of full pay of 80% pay	Maternity leave is for 18 weeks Parental leave is for 26 weeks Paternity leave is for 9 weeks and covers the first year of a child's life Benefits during maternity, paternity, and parental leave are between 70 to 90% of previous annual earnings	18 weeks of maternity leave Fathers get 14 days Parents can then split an additional 32 weeks	Parents can split 9 months of post child-birth leave Mothers get 3 months and then fathers get 3 months Both parents receive 80% of their salaries
Father's rights	A new father or the other parent also has the right to 10 days with compensation when a child is born	Fathers (other parents) can get 10 weeks on the mother's salary, and they split the rest	Fathers can take 18 weeks of paternity leave while the mother is on maternity leave	14 days paid leave at birth, then until 32 weeks paid parental leave Can extend the leave on reduced pay	Fathers are given 3 months and the possibility to an additional 3 months so share with mother
Provision	Free prenatal care	Free prenatal care	Free prenatal care	Free prenatal care Maternity package	Free prenatal care

An update to Table 1.2. (Garvis & Ødegaard, 2018) for the Norwegian context, at the time of writing in 2022, the total period for maternity and parental leave is 49 weeks with full pay or 59 weeks with 80 % pay. The mother must use the first six weeks immediately after the birth, and the other parent can get 15-19 weeks on the mother's salary, depending on the percentage of benefit coverage. Generally, when parents choose the lower percentage of coverage, they are entitled to longer parental leave.

Table 1.3 Welfare support for children

	Sweden	*Norway*	*Finland*	*Denmark*	*Iceland*
Health care provision	Children below 20 are entitled to free health care (including dental care)	Children below the age of 18 receive all of their medical care free (including dental care)	Children below the age of 18 receive all of their medical care free.	Every legal resident gets a free health care Free dental care for children until 18)	Children below the age of 18 receive all of their medical care free Pay for medicine
Entitlement to care for sick children	120 days per child per year for children under 12 years Salary is at 80%	20 days per child per year for children under 12 years Salary is 100%	Parent has the right to stay home to look after sick children.		12 days per child under 13 years per year For chronically ill children 80% salary for 9 months
Child benefit	Child allowance amounting to SEK 1,050 (about €122) per month and per child with supplements for large families	Child allowance amounting to NKR 970 (€107) per month and per child under 18, with supplements for large families	Working parents are entitled to work shorter hours from the end of the parental leave period until the end of the child's second year of school A flexible care allowance encourages parents of children under the age of 3 to combine part-time work with part-time care. An amount of €244.18 per month is paid to parents working a maximum of 22.5 hours per week or 60%, of their normal full-time hours, and €162.78 to those working a maximum of 30 hours per week, or 80% of their normal full-time hours	Families (mothers) with children 0-2: DK 17,772 (€ 2390) per child per year 2-6: 14,076 per child per year 7-17: 11,076 per child per year	Child allowance is provided for low-income families depending on income, number of children and their ages

	Sweden	*Norway*	*Finland*	*Denmark*	*Iceland*
Cost and access for kindergarten	Preschool is free for children 3-5 years for 15 hours a week Parental fees are directly proportional to parents' income and inversely proportional to the number of children in a family The fee can be up to 3 per cent of the family's monthly income but no more than 1,260 SEK (about €146) per month	Maximum price is NOK 2.480 (€264) Low-income families get reduced or free cost	The monthly fee per child varies between €0 and €283 in 2015 depending on family size and income Education for 6-year-old children (pre-primary) is free	Maximum price is DK 2.551 (€ 343) with lunch included	Prices vary between municipalities Meals are included For those who cannot get a place in lekskola, can get subsidies for private day care
Support for children who do not access kindergarten	A flat rate allowance of untaxed 3,000 SEK (€312) per month	Families who do not use kindergarten service at all get NOK 6,000 (€639) per child per month If the child uses kindergarten service less than 20 hours a week, the family gets NOK 3,000 per child per month	Parents are also entitled to paid childcare leave with an allowance after the end of parental leave if they do not use day care This enables parents to look after a child under the age of 3 without giving up their jobs In 2015 this basic childcare allowance was €342.53 per month per one child	Children from families in need for language support can get access to a language stimulation program 15 or 30 hours a week	No support

As an update to Garvis & Ødegaard's (2018) table on welfare support for children (Table 1.3.), for the time being, the child allowance per child per month is NOK 1,766 for children under 6 years of age and NOK 1,510 for children over 6 years of age. As before, there are supplements for large families and single parents (NAV, n.d.). As of August 1, 2024, the maximum price in kindergarten to NOK 2000 a month. In the 189 most sparsely populated municipalities, the price will be NOK 1500 a month. As before, families with incomes get a further reduction. While 9 out of 10 children in Norway now attend kindergarten (UDIR, 2019), some families prefer to keep childcare within the home. As kindergarten is not compulsory, these families are also given cash support by the government, which is dependent on the family circumstances and the amount of time the child/children spend in childcare facilities (if any) (NAV, 2024). In addition, the Norwegian government also provides other childcare benefits connected to children's health and well-being. Some examples are contributions, payments, and reimbursement of travel expenses to go to doctor appointments, surgeries, and purchase of special equipment such as wheelchairs, PC or tablets for learning differences, wigs, orthopaedic shoes, or orthotics, to name a few. Having these benefits enable all parents to have the capacity to participate in the workforce knowing that their children and family are taken care of and have safe spaces to belong while they work.

Norwegian Laws related to family involvement in schools and kindergarten

The Education Act and the Kindergarten Act are two overarching laws that have provisions for the involvement of parents in their children's upbringing and education. The Education Act [Lov om grunnskolen og den vidaregåande opplæringa (opplæringslova)] aims to provide training and apprenticeship to young people in cooperation with their home and families to prepare them for participation in local and international societies in the future (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 1998). This law has been in force since 1998 and covers primary and secondary education and training. In Section 11-4 of the Education Act, primary schools are mandated to have parents' councils [Foreldrerådet] to have good partnership and cohesion between home and school to facilitate positive development and well-being of children (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 1998). All parents who have children in the school are automatically members of the parents' council,

and representatives of this parents' council also take part as members of the school board.

"Parent involvement in early childhood education (ECE) in Norway is currently framed by the Act of Kindergarten (2005, updated in 2008 and 2010) and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens: Content and Tasks (UDIR, 2017)" (Sadownik & Skoglund, 2021, p. 174). The Kindergarten Act [Lov om barnehager (barnehageloven)]'s Section 19b stipulates kindergarten's cooperation with the children's parents, especially when a child needs different assistance and services (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Similar to the Education Act, Section 4 of the Kindergarten Act also mandates kindergartens to have parents' councils and coordinating committees which are part of the decision-making body of the institutions (ibid).

In Norway, home-kindergarten partnerships are referred to as 'foreldresamarbeid,' or parental cooperation. As previously mentioned, parental cooperation in kindergartens and schools is in the form of parents' councils (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager (FAU)) consisting of all parents/guardians of the children in the kindergarten (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). The parents' council shall promote their common interests and contribute to the collaboration between the kindergarten and the parent group creating a good cooperative environment (ibid). The FAU must also take the initiative for activities in the kindergarten (autumn/summer parties, volunteer events, ski days, etc) and help to carry them out (ibid). FAU must encourage and ensure participation from parents/guardians and share responsibility for ensuring the learning environment is safe and good. The Parents' Council chooses its leader and secretary who become the parents' representatives in the cooperative committee (Samarbeidsutvalg (SU)) (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.).

According to Section 4 of the Kindergarten Act (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2006), the kindergarten must have a cooperation committee (SU) which acts as an advisory, contact-making, and coordinating body. It consists of parents/guardians and staff in the kindergarten, so each group has 2 representatives (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.). If the kindergarten has more than two departments, the number of representatives from these two groups is increased. The kindergarten owner elects 2 representatives to SU, but not with more representatives than each of the other groups (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.). The municipality can also elect a representative to the cooperation committee. The owner's representatives are elected for 2 years, the others for 1 year (Foreldreutvalget

for barnehager, n.d.). The collaboration committee constitutes itself, which means that the committee itself decides who will be chairman and deputy chairman (ibid).

As an advisory body, SU must be used actively concerning the kindergarten (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.). As a contact-creating body, SU must work actively to initiate measures that can create contact between the various parties in the kindergarten. Activities, themed evenings, and various celebrations together with the children, as well as taking responsibility for the kindergarten creating contact about the local community. As a coordinating body, the committee must in various contexts, including where conflicts arise, work to find joint solutions.

SU's tasks can include, but are not limited to the following:

- Discuss the kindergarten's ideals
- Promote contact between the kindergarten, school and the local community.
- Determine the annual plan.
- Have matters presented that are important for the kindergarten's activities
- Building the relationship with the parents, the kindergarten and the local community

The SU has to accomplish these within the framework set by applicable laws, regulations, the kindergarten's statutes, and budget (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.).

While there are overarching guidelines for having parent councils in kindergartens and schools, its implementation is subject to the interpretation of school/kindergarten administration. For example, as each barnehage and school is mandated to inform the parents of the FAU and SU as automatic members, they usually upload this information to their websites. Additionally, each barnehage has different activities and practices stemming from this umbrella program. Below are some common activities of parent councils:

- Arrangement of various social events for children and their parents.
- Pre-Christmas party/Christmas party
- May 17 celebration in the kindergarten
- Other social activities such as volunteer days (in collaboration with the kindergarten)

– Other social events, such as an open barbecue hut, sledding day or parents' evening

Foreldreutvalget for barnehager (FUB) is the national committee appointed by the Ministry of Education for parents with children in kindergartens. Apart from ensuring that kindergartens are upholding the policy of having parent councils, FUB also offers guidance for both parents and kindergarten staff in the form of lectures on how cooperation between families and kindergartens can be strengthened (Foreldreutvalget for barnehager, n.d.)..