

A close-up photograph of a young girl with a blue headscarf, looking intently at a tablet computer. The background is a bright blue wall. The UNICEF logo and tagline are in the top right corner.

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BUILD TO LAST

A framework in support of universal quality
pre-primary education

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BUILD TO LAST

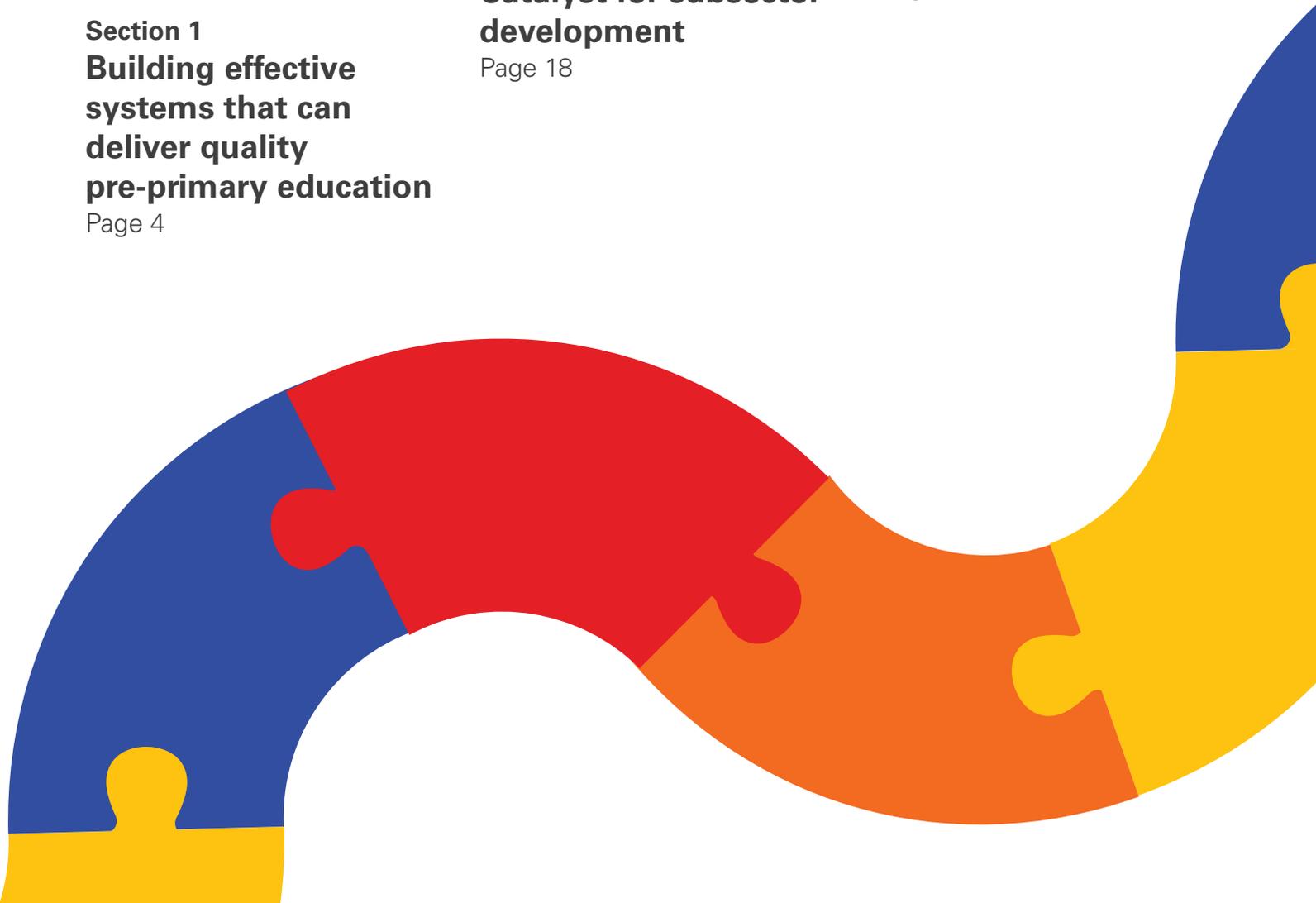
**A framework in support of universal quality
pre-primary education**

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Section 1

Building effective systems that can deliver quality pre-primary education by 2030



Why do we need this framework?

Today, the world is facing a learning crisis: While millions of children have entered education systems for the first time, many of them cannot read, write or do basic mathematics, even after several years of primary school.¹ This global learning crisis has its roots in children's earliest years, when failure to invest in quality early childhood education (ECE) results in children starting school already behind in a host of critical skills they need to succeed in primary school.²

Investing in the foundations of learning during the child's early years benefits children,³ families, education systems and societies at large.⁴ Participation in quality ECE sets in motion a positive learning cycle and is a proven strategy to address the global learning crisis at its roots by closing early learning gaps, strengthening the efficiency of education systems and providing a solid foundation for human capital development and economic growth.⁵

Children who attend quality pre-primary education:

- **start school at the right age with strong foundational skills;**
- **are more likely to stay in school and complete primary education;**
- **demonstrate better learning and academic performance in both literacy and math;**
- **have higher earning potential as they grow up.⁶**

The Sustainable Development Goals highlight the critical importance of pre-primary education in Target 4.2, and set the broad ambition that by 2030, "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education." An associated indicator calls for universal participation in at least one year of pre-primary education before the official age of entering primary school.⁷ This global target has revitalized global momentum for making quality pre-primary education available to all children and is generating growing recognition of the subsector's importance with respect to education sector reforms and plans.

Despite the importance and benefits of early learning, progress in expanding access to pre-primary education has been slow and uneven. While the global rate of enrolment in pre-primary education increased from 32 per cent in 2000 to 50 per cent in 2017, half of the world's pre-primary-age children are left without access to any type of early education programme.⁸ In low-income countries, recent data indicate that only 2 in 10 children are enrolled in pre-primary education, and those least likely to attend early learning programmes globally are children from poor and vulnerable families.⁹ Only 1 in 3 children affected by emergencies are enrolled in pre-primary education programmes. The data from many countries also reveal major gaps in financing and quality of available services, even when expansion to pre-primary education services is underway.¹⁰

Providing universal access to quality pre-primary education by 2030 requires urgent action by governments and practical yet bold approaches. Many countries are still near the start of their journeys and need support with setting the foundations of their ECE systems. Others are looking for ways to strengthen and, in some cases, reform existing pre-primary systems. Setting a comprehensive set of priorities for their ECE subsector, acting on them and navigating trade-offs will be key to how governments are able to build education systems that will place millions of children today on the path to fulfilling their potential.¹¹

Setting a comprehensive set of priorities for the ECE subsector and acting on these will be key to building equitable education systems that will place millions of children today on the path to fulfilling their potential.

As the momentum grows – and governments and their partners seek to scale up pre-primary education – it is critical for these efforts to be guided by a strong, comprehensive and systemic vision. *Build to last* is developed as a framework that will help ensure these efforts are designed for long-term sustainability. The framework is developed to complement existing international frameworks and resources by addressing some of the gaps that appear in those documents with respect to ECE specifically.¹²

As governments and their partners seek to scale up quality pre-primary education, it is critical for these efforts to be guided by a strong, comprehensive and systemic vision.

Custom resources to complement *Build to last*

A series of complementary resources has been developed in tandem with this framework to assist in the policymaking and implementation processes at the country level. When used as a guide to planning and collaboration between governments and their partners, the framework and related resources provide a strong foundation for building or strengthening the pre-primary education system and making decisions on how services should be delivered. This, in turn, will support the goal of giving all pre-primary-age children the opportunity to participate in quality learning.

For details on these resources, see 'Additional resources' in Section 5.

Drawing on research and international experience, *Build to last*:

- ✔ identifies the essential, interrelated features of an effective pre-primary subsector, which help ensure children's optimal learning and development in ECE programmes;
- ✔ promotes a systems approach to planning and improving access to quality of ECE;¹³
- ✔ supports national and global efforts to advance the achievement of universal access to equitable, high-quality ECE.

PPE in the context of holistic ECD

Pre-primary education refers to organized programmes that are intentionally designed to include educational content for children usually aged 3 years up to the start of primary education, often around age 6. Because school systems vary from country to country, this can be up to age 8. The terms ‘pre-primary education’ and ‘early childhood education’ are used interchangeably throughout this framework for readability.

The focus of pre-primary education programmes includes developing children’s school-readiness skills (e.g., early literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional skills)

and providing opportunities to interact with peers and educators.¹⁴ Participation in pre-primary education should be viewed as an important part of ensuring optimal early childhood development outcomes. Many services and supports in and outside the family are required to safeguard the healthy development of a young child, and to maximize the impact of pre-primary programmes, including those shown in Figure 1. Opportunities for children’s early learning through organized early childhood education programmes are crucial in ensuring a child’s optimal development.

Figure 1. Learning in the context of early childhood development



The complex landscape of pre-primary education provision

The diverse nature of pre-primary education services presents both a persistent challenge and an opportunity to establish a dynamic ECE system that makes it possible for governments to reach the target of universal participation. As illustrated in Figure 2, the provision of services across the subsector is characterized by four main factors:

- **Multiple service providers.** Organized ECE programmes are often provided by a mix of actors, including the government, private not-for-profit organizations, and private for-profit enterprises. Adding further complexity, local/regional governments, directorates or sub-directorates, or private institutions may be in charge of different aspects of pre-primary education, frequently with limited collaboration.
- **Different settings where pre-primary education takes place.** Pre-primary education can be provided on school premises, as in the case of kindergarten education in many countries; it can be community-based; and it can take place in home settings, such as home-based preschools. This often entails varied definitions of 'quality' and a wide variation of associated standards and requirements that need to be considered when developing the preschool system.
- **Varying programme duration.** Governments have important policy decisions in terms of programme duration. Some governments are making one year of pre-primary education available immediately before a child's entry into primary school, while others aim to provide two or more years. Another option is an accelerated or short-term pre-primary programme, in which children enrol for just a few weeks or months in an intensive effort to prepare them for primary school.
- **Varying hours of service provision.** Pre-primary programmes sometimes serve children for only a few hours a day and only a few days a week, while other programmes operate a full-day schedule. Pre-primary programmes that serve working families may operate all year long with few vacation breaks, while others may follow a more traditional school schedule. Policy decisions with respect to the hours of ECE services have implications for the cost of universal provision.

Governments have important policy decisions to make in terms of leveraging programme models and providers to ensure that all children have quality early education opportunities. This often requires coordinating a range of providers, while ensuring that government maintains a central role in quality assurance and standard-setting across the subsector.

Within the pre-primary subsector, quality assurance and monitoring may be uneven, access may be inequitable, curricula and teaching strategies may vary widely in appropriateness, and resources may not be allocated where the greatest need exists. Building an effective pre-primary system means setting mechanisms to ensure that the quality of services is consistent across providers. It also involves prioritizing children who stand to benefit the most, especially those who are poor, marginalized and vulnerable.

Governments have important policy decisions to make in terms of leveraging the mix of available service providers and programme models to ensure that all children have quality early education opportunities. This often requires mobilizing and coordinating a wide range of providers, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations, making smart choices about public programme models and duration, and ensuring that government maintains a central role in quality assurance and standard-setting across the subsector.¹⁵ The next section outlines how a systems-strengthening approach can make it easier for governments to navigate the diversity of the pre-primary landscape and overcome potential fragmentation.

Figure 2. Characteristics of pre-primary education service provision



A systems-strengthening approach to delivering quality ECE at scale

Delivering quality ECE at scale requires the recognition of pre-primary education as a subsector, or a system in its own right, rather than an ‘add-on service’. Once we shift the conversation from implementing isolated programmes to building a sustainable ECE system, we open the space for systems-strengthening work that needs to take place – from the national to the local levels – and enable long term planning and sustainability of pre-primary education.

A system-strengthening approach to ECE seeks to gradually shape the core functions and structures necessary to deliver and coordinate quality pre-primary education at scale – looking not only at each part of the system (see next section) but also at the sum of these parts and how they interrelate.¹⁶ This approach also situates the pre-primary subsector within the broader education system. Various analyses demonstrate the advantages of having one main ministry in charge of ECE and bringing policymaking under this ministry.¹⁷ One important factor is that ministries of education will already have established mechanisms and human resources that can be extended to learning programmes for younger children. Because the ministry of education is likely to be staffed with experienced administrators, along with a training authority, pedagogic evaluation or advisory body, and statistical and monitoring units, anchoring pre-primary education in the ministry of education will enable the sustainable development of a

pre-primary subsector. Given the complexity of pre-primary education service provision, it is also vital that ministries of education work in coordination with early childhood specialists and other ministries.

Finally, systems strengthening approach takes into account the various layers of education systems – national or central, subnational (provincial, district, regional or state) and local (subdistrict, municipal, community). As the plans for a pre-primary education subsector are drawn up, consistent coordination and communication is needed across these levels, particularly in countries with decentralized systems.

The *Build to last* framework puts forward a systems-strengthening approach to advancing access to high-quality pre-primary education. It aims to inform the plans and work of ministries of education, UNICEF and its diverse global and national partners.

Advantages of placing pre-primary education within the education ministry

The benefits of positioning pre-primary education within ministries of education include:

- improved public management of services;
- greater continuity between early childhood education experiences and primary school learning;
- more coherent policy and better regulation, often leading to more consistently high-quality programmes.

Expanding equitable access to pre-primary education and delivering quality at scale will also strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire education system, for example, by decreasing dropout and repetition rates and increasing children’s odds of completing primary and secondary schooling.¹⁸



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The pre-primary and other subsectors: Distinctive yet connected

Although this framework focuses on the pre-primary system, it can offer valuable suggestions for expanding quality programmes for ages 0–3 as well as the primary subsector. If we think of early childhood as including the years from birth through age 8,¹⁹ then the pre-primary years are situated firmly in the middle. This means that the subsector needs to link with programmes addressing policies and services for infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) and with those focusing on primary-school-age children, particularly the primary education subsector. This can be challenging for many reasons, including differences in ministerial responsibilities, perceived focus and mission, and funding streams.

However, linking the pre-primary subsector to primary education and the education sector as a whole – including higher education, where pre-primary teacher certification often resides – can have a double benefit to the system, not only ensuring children enter school ready to succeed but also bringing some of the engaging and effective pre-primary teaching and learning practices into the early grades of primary school. Equally important is an emphasis shared with the 0–3 early care and education subsector, which has a holistic perspective, as well as an emphasis on responsiveness to and engagement with families.²⁰

Elements of an effective early childhood education system

A strong pre-primary system places children's learning and development outcomes at the core of its work. These desirable outcomes include, but are not limited to, children's physical well-being, social and emotional competence, and cognitive and communication abilities, as well as children's overall curiosity and motivation to learn, often referred to as school readiness skills.²¹ The acquisition of these critical skills depends, to a large extent, on availability and equitable access to pre-primary services and equally on the quality of these services.²²



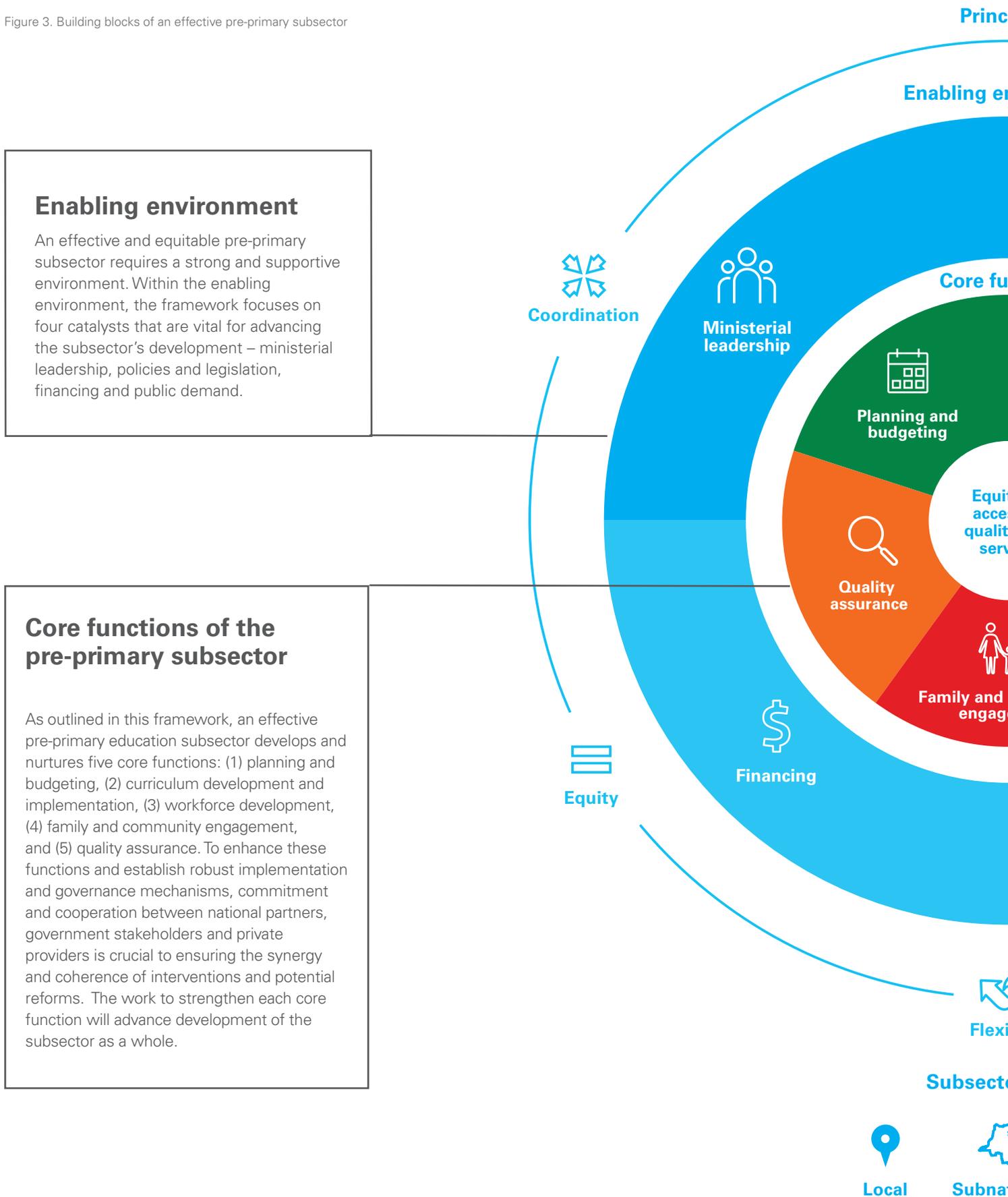
Contextual importance of ECE systems

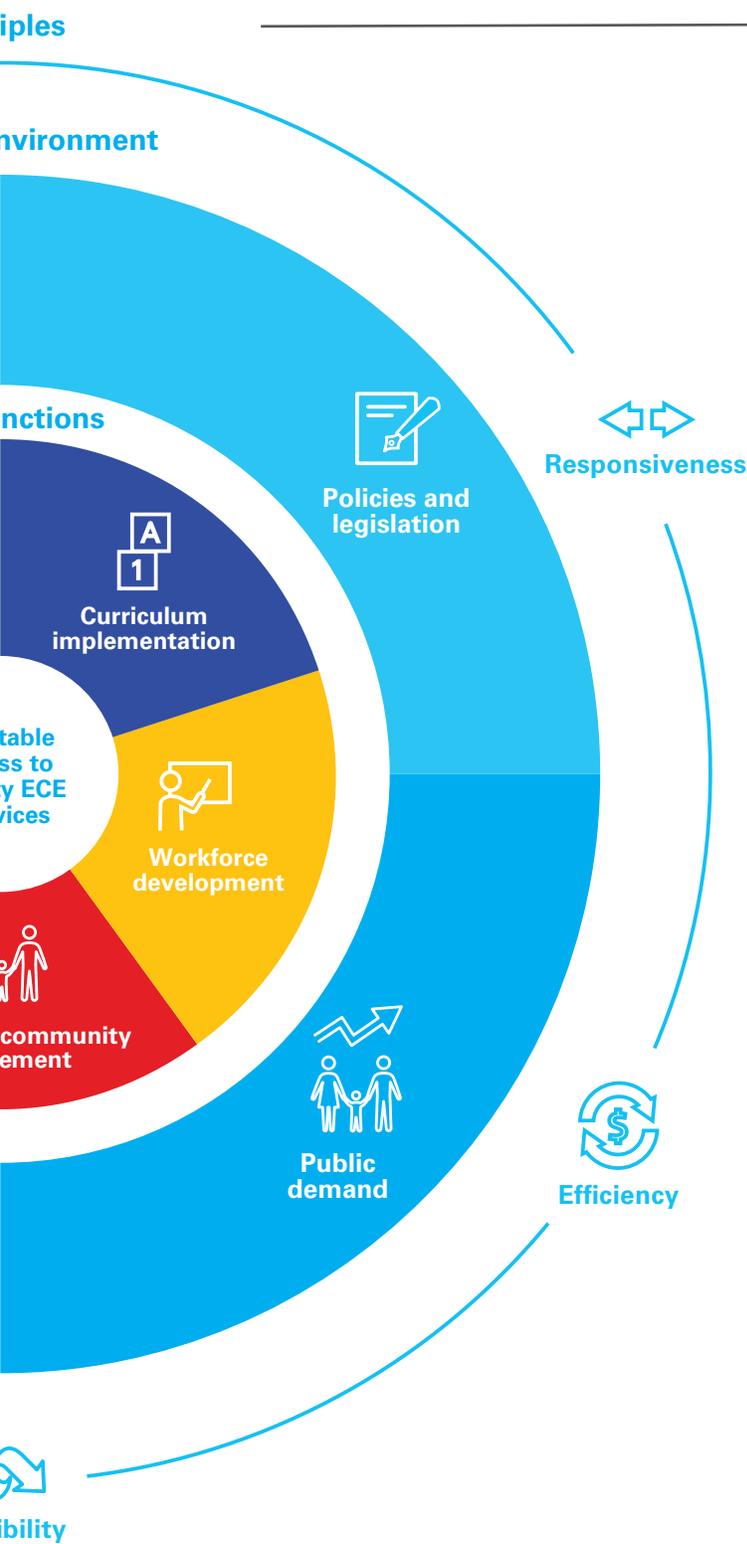
Content throughout the framework highlights the crucial components of ECE systems in the context of multiple programme and delivery approaches and aims to clarify the role of government in a dynamic and mixed-provision landscape. Countries, contexts and cultures differ greatly, so the framework does not recommend a rigid sequence of steps that should be followed in developing or enhancing pre-primary services and systems. The principles and goals presented in *Build to last* are meant to be adapted, added to, prioritized or combined in ways that make sense within a specific context.

The structure of this framework – which is based on the requirements for an effective ECE system – is composed of a set of guiding principles, elements of the enabling

environment, five core functions of the subsector²³ and a ‘whole system’ approach across all levels of government, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Building blocks of an effective pre-primary subsector





Principles

When a country is building or strengthening its pre-primary education subsector, applying a set of basic principles will increase the likelihood that this work will endure over time, despite shifting conditions or crises. The framework recommends the use of five overarching principles:

- **Equity.** Decisions about pre-primary services ensure fair access for all children.
- **Efficiency.** Thoughtful, evidence-based decisions consider how to create the greatest benefits within the available resources.
- **Responsiveness.** The design of pre-primary systems and services take the likely changes in national and local contexts, cultures and needs into account.
- **Coordination.** The process reflects dynamic, ongoing interactions between sectors beyond education, as well as the pre-primary subsector and other education subsectors.
- **Flexibility.** While anchored in the authority of a central government ministry, the pre-primary subsector recognizes the full range of programme approaches and engages with multiple providers, including public, private, not-for-profit and for-profit service delivery.

Subsector levels

Although discussions of systems-building often concentrate on the national level, a strong pre-primary subsector is only as strong as its district- or local-level implementation. This framework considers the dynamic relationships between different levels of government as they influence each other. It is important to consider, for example, not only how policies at the national or subnational levels affect what happens at the local level, but the reverse as well.

Subsector levels



Section 2

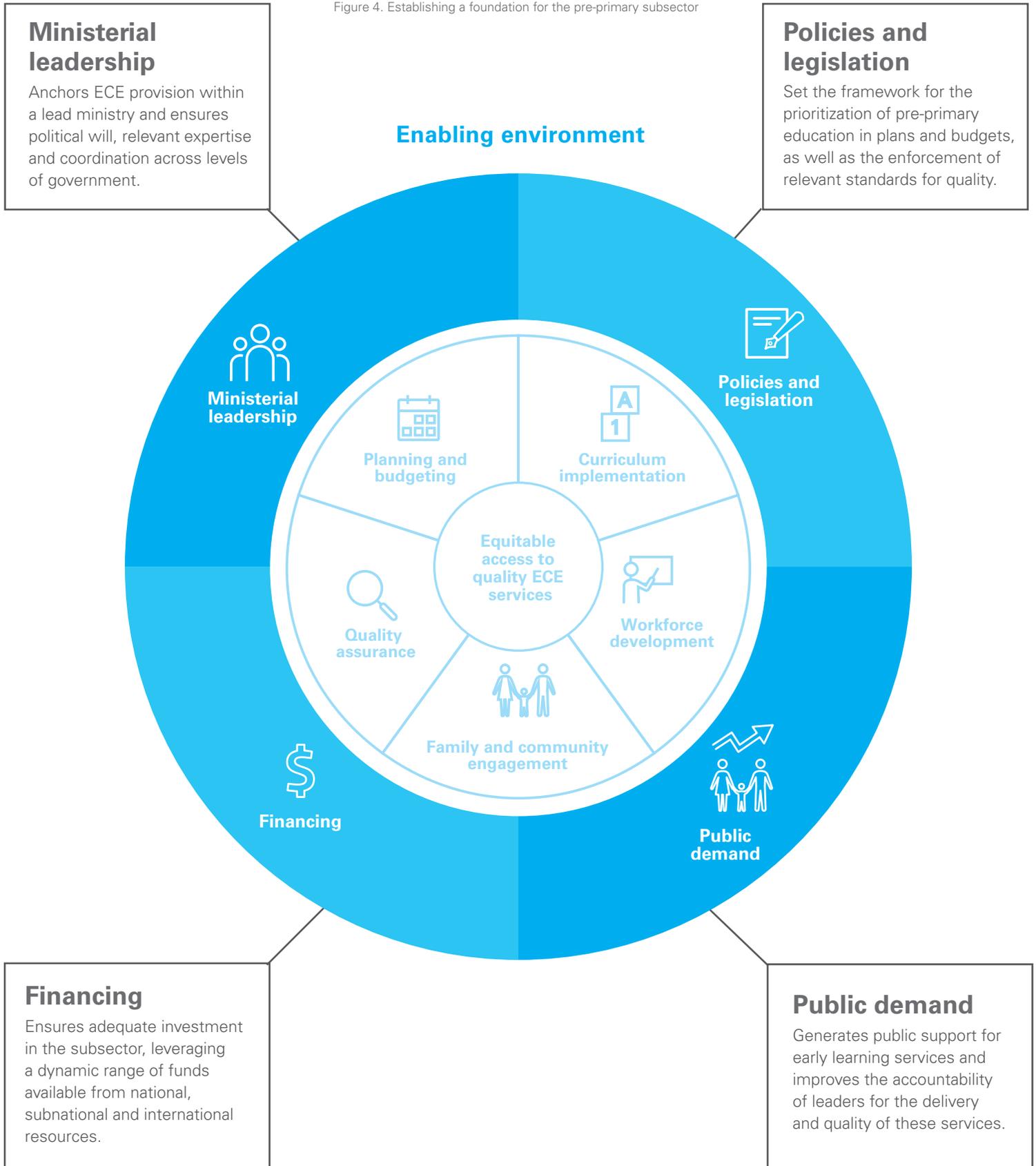
The enabling environment: Catalyst for subsector development



The enabling environment refers to a broad set of interrelated factors that deeply affect the development of an effective and robust pre-primary subsector, including the ability to achieve intended programme goals. Figure 4 highlights the four key factors that are the focus of this framework in relationship to the enabling environment: **ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, financing** and **public demand**.²⁴

This section describes how these factors can be leveraged to establish the foundations of a strong pre-primary subsector.

Figure 4. Establishing a foundation for the pre-primary subsector





Ministerial leadership

Advancing the pre-primary subsector requires ministerial leadership accompanied by early childhood education expertise and staff within relevant government bodies and government-related agencies.

Why is ministerial leadership important?

Leadership in this subsector guides the vision, development and prioritization of pre-primary services and gives a voice and political support to ECE.²⁵ Conversely, a lack of high-level political support will almost certainly pose a barrier to building an effective and durable system because few resources will be devoted to its development.

Leadership for the subsector may be exemplified in several ways: through the administration, management and quality control of pre-primary services by a central governing entity; by shared responsibility between national ministries; or by a division of responsibilities among central and local administrative entities, as in the case of decentralized systems. In the context of decentralization, the assignment of significant leadership responsibilities to the subnational and municipal levels is likely to enhance responsiveness as pre-primary services are planned and put into practice.²⁶

Typically, the ministry of education has jurisdiction over and provides leadership for pre-primary education.²⁷ In the case of a different lead ministry, or where there is shared responsibility between multiple ministries, it is vital that well-designed connections to the education sector are established and maintained in order to tap into its established structures, processes and expertise in the core functions that compose the pre-primary subsector.²⁸

Assignment of pre-primary responsibilities within a ministry is not sufficient. Leadership within a ministry also requires that appropriate and competent staff are hired to support the overall vision and implement relevant policies.

Technical capacity in ECE is critical to developing sustainable plans at both the central and local levels. Thus, ministerial leadership is not only reflected in the observed responsibility and oversight over the subsector but also in the lead ministry's ECE expertise and ability to forge a broad but realistic vision for pre-primary education which all relevant authorities can subscribe to and embrace, most importantly the lead minister.

▶ Linkages with other related ministries are important in support of pre-primary education.²⁹ Ministries of education can and should provide platforms for collaboration with other ministries in the development of pre-primary-focused policies and in the provision of essential services such as health check-ups or deworming in preschool settings.³⁰

Measures of progress for promoting ministerial leadership



A lead ministry, or 'ministerial anchor', is identified as accountable for pre-primary education, setting the subsector vision and ensuring its prioritization in relevant national plans. This lead ministry is responsible for results in the subsector, while linking with other relevant ministries, providers and stakeholders as needed.



Sufficient staff with early childhood education expertise are present within the lead ministry and relevant government bodies, including a strong pre-primary directorate, to support subsector policy development and implementation.



Appropriate governance structures and leadership coordination are established between national and subnational levels of government within the lead ministry, and policymakers at these levels are collectively responsible for pre-primary success.



The subsector draws on expertise in ECE by linking to resources and know-how in institutions such as local universities, civil society, professional associations and unions, and research institutes.



Policies and legislation

Advancing the pre-primary subsector requires policies and legislation that are specific to this subsector and are comprehensive, well-coordinated and linked to implementation.

Why are policies and legislation important?

Public policies and legislation include a variety of official documents that directly establish pre-primary education within government oversight and articulate the government's overall vision and commitment to providing quality ECE services. They not only set the mandate for the subsector but also support the implementation of relevant programmes at the national and subnational levels, ensuring that pre-primary services will reach diverse locations, and that these efforts will be sustained even if leadership changes over time.³¹ The absence of specific pre-primary policies or directives makes it less likely that human and financial resources will be mobilized and directed towards this subsector.³²

The format, specificity and authority of legislation on ECE may vary by country. Some countries opt for focused legislation (i.e. a legislative act making pre-primary education free and/or a part of the basic education cycle). Others seek to develop a policy for the subsector, in support of a wider education law that encompasses pre-primary education. In many cases, a broader ECE law or policy can be accompanied by a series of more targeted policy directives focused on specific subsector issues - such as teacher qualifications.

Relevant policies and legislation might also include multisectoral policies, for example, a mandate on holistic early childhood development that contains a component on pre-primary education. Legislation or policies that are specific to pre-primary education are generally more effective in driving action and results in this subsector than broader early childhood development policies. For example, countries with a policy in place for free or compulsory pre-primary education report a significantly higher pre-primary gross enrolment ratio,³³ on average, compared with countries that have no such policies, controlling for the country's income level and other variables.³⁴ But despite the evidence in support of pre-primary education, only 39 countries have ratified laws making pre-primary education both compulsory and free for one year.³⁵

Legislation and policies for early childhood education: Definitions

ECE legislation refers to a law or set of laws, including acts, decrees, orders or regulations, and typically providing clarity about mandates for ECE. Legislation can be used to promote enforceability, facilitate public scrutiny, and mobilize resources and establish new structures for policy delivery.³⁶ Laws can be specific to the pre-primary subsector or apply generally to the entire education system with, for example, a section on pre-primary education.

ECE policies provide a general framework for operational planning, including the vision, goals, objectives and strategies desired for a country. Strategies may also be detailed separately through a strategic plan.³⁷ The policy can cover a broad mandate for pre-primary education or focus on a specific aspect, e.g., a policy for curriculum implementation. Policy documents on ECE are often supplemented by a directive that provides high-level internal direction and guidance.³⁸

Measures of progress for developing policies and legislation

-  Policies and/or legislation are in place within the ministry of education (or other lead ministry) to establish the provision of at least one year of quality pre-primary education as a priority. In the context of national multisectoral policies and frameworks for early childhood development, clear policy statements or directives also assert pre-primary education as a core component area of focus.
-  Pre-primary policies and related directives articulate a long-term vision for pre-primary education, including comprehensive national goals and commitments for the subsector and clear policy targets, informed by evidence and costs.
-  Policy and/or legislation formulation is coordinated between national, subnational and municipal levels of government, and is understood and owned by key sector officials at these levels.
-  Policies and laws specific to pre-primary education are accompanied by costed action plans that guide implementation, budgeting and accountability across levels of government.
-  The development of pre-primary policies and/or legislation is based on consultations with multiple stakeholders, including non-government providers, teachers and parents.

The multiple delivery systems for pre-primary services, the diverse number of service providers, and the varying nature of pre-primary interventions are all important factors that affect how policies are to be developed and implemented. While the scope and span might vary, effective policies for ECE will respond to these questions:³⁹

- 1. What – What types of services, of what quality, and what content and approaches to teaching and learning should be provided?**
- 2. For whom – Who should benefit from these services?**
- 3. By whom – Who should pay for these services (the government, the private sector, parents) and through what mechanisms?**
- 4. How much – What should the scale of provision and investment of resources be?**
- 5. How – How should the services be structured, organized and delivered?**



Financing

Advancing the pre-primary subsector requires adequate public investment, coordinated with other available private and international funding sources.

Why is targeted financing important?

Although financing of pre-primary services may be shared by multiple funding sources – including public, private and parents – it is clear that public investment by national, regional and local governments is absolutely key to support a sustainable system of quality and accessible services.⁴⁰ In many cases, some government financing is available, but typically it is not sufficient or informed by actual needs.

When investment in pre-primary education is limited, countries experience shortages of quality programmes and inequitable provision.⁴¹ It is therefore vital to secure national and subnational public funding for essential components of the subsector such as teachers' training, programme planning, monitoring and quality assurance (the core functions).⁴²

While public financing by national and local governments forms the major source of support for the subsector, governments can take a dynamic approach to securing funds for pre-primary education services. Public resources can be supplemented through a range of different strategies, such as private sources, international aid, public-private partnerships, and pooling of resources and cost-sharing across ministries, social partners and local communities.⁴³ Publicly provided pre-primary education is traditionally financed by national and local government budgets. Many governments are also exploring the financing or subsidizing of privately-provided but publicly regulated models of ECE.⁴⁴

Securing adequate funding for the subsector, including ongoing public investment in the infrastructure and quality inputs (such as in-service training, monitoring, learning and play materials) begins with a clear idea of the costs for delivering quality services. A practical way of looking at financing is to ask, *what is the average investment per child in a quality ECE programme?* This information can provide a concrete benchmark for governments and ECE managers on which to base budget and finance decisions.

Carving out space for a pre-primary subsector often means competing for limited education resources with other subsectors. In the absence of additional funding, it can entail redistributing or reallocating available funds in education budgets in a more efficient manner to allow for pre-primary provision.⁴⁵

Finding the funds for quality pre-primary education

Funds for quality pre-primary education may be generated from many different sources, including those listed below, with public resources most often forming the core of the funding envelope.

Public sources:

- Central government budgets
- District and municipal government budgets
- Ministry of finance

Other sources:

- Civil society/community groups, including faith-based organizations
- Private enterprises
- Foundations

International aid:

- International financing agencies (loans or grants)
- Bilateral agencies (grants)
- International NGOs (grants)

Measures of progress for securing adequate financing

-  Adequate public funds are allocated to support progress towards universal quality pre-primary education, taking into consideration its importance in relation to other education subsectors. Within the overall education sector budget, pre-primary education is treated as a significant priority.⁴⁶
-  The funding provided for pre-primary education is sufficient to meet national policy goals and commitments for the subsector. Pre-primary targets, such as expansion plans and quality assurance, are costed and matched to available budgets, taking into account all potential resources.
-  Multiple sources of pre-primary funding and collaborative arrangements are explored, including complementary funds from ministries beyond the ministry of education, international agencies, private funds, and corporate and business sector funding as relevant.
-  Funds are used effectively in the subsector to advance progress on key ECE policy goals. This includes having well-designed and effective pre-primary programmes funded to achieve policy objectives.
-  Funds are allocated and used efficiently in the subsector, avoiding delays in allocation, incorporating plans for unspent funds, and establishing mechanisms to prevent funds from being misused or misdirected.
-  Public resources/funds are equitably reaching or supporting all regions, or all parts of society. For example, vulnerable populations are not left out of service provision, and funds for teachers or materials are reaching all parts of the country.
-  Accountability for funds allocation to ECE from central to local level is secured through transparent mechanisms and policies. Access to information on government funding to pre-primary education is available for all appropriate stakeholders.



Public demand

Advancing the pre-primary subsector requires a broad national understanding of the importance of early childhood education and shared acknowledgment of these services as a public good.

Why is demand for pre-primary education important?

Demand for pre-primary services refers to the extent of public interest in early learning services. 'Public' includes national officials, subnational governments, civil society, media champions, education and health-related institutions and – importantly – the caregivers and families who typically need or use such services. Without demand and public support for pre-primary education, potential leaders are unlikely to be mobilized to push for policies, legislation and funds for this subsector.

Even if services are established by central or local governments, take-up by an unaware or uninterested public will be limited, and the services are likely to be unsustainable.⁴⁷ Therefore, for the pre-primary subsector to develop, there needs to be a concerted effort to strengthen demand for quality ECE and ensure families are actively seeking the creation and/or further development of pre-primary services in their communities.

Public demand and support for early learning programmes is motivated by a number of factors, such as families recognizing the importance of school readiness for their children, or economic and social changes such as both parents needing or wanting to work. Local, subnational and national organizations often play an important part in advocating for greater access and improved quality of pre-primary services, which draws in additional supporters.

This lever is most powerful and catalytic to the subsector when it includes outreach to marginalized and vulnerable communities as well as to more advantaged groups, culminating in widespread recognition that, just as with primary and secondary education, pre-primary education is a public good.

Developing the pre-primary subsector within the education sector

The overall strengths or potential weaknesses of the education sector as a whole form a major underlying factor in the enabling environment. A well-functioning education sector that is equitable, efficient and responsive can provide fertile and supportive grounds for the development of the pre-primary subsector.⁴⁸

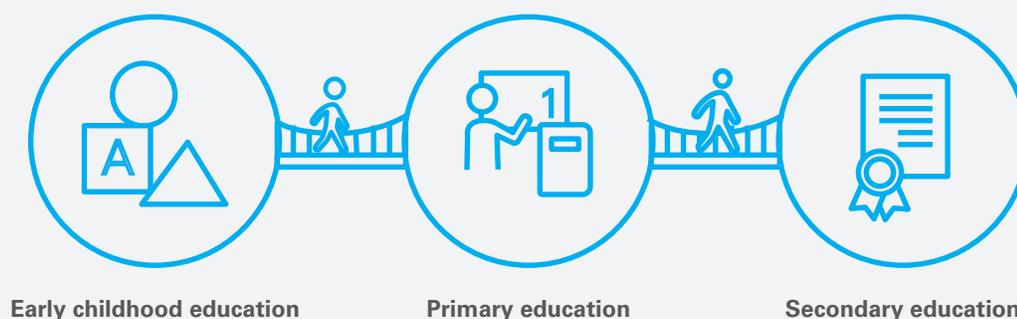
When developing a realistic plan for pre-primary expansion and implementation, sector-wide

challenges should be taken into account, including lack of financing and gaps in institutional capacity, high rates of out-of-school children, low learning levels and inequities in provision across other levels of education. Evidence confirms that a strong pre-primary subsector can have a lasting impact on the broader education system's efficiency;⁴⁹ therefore, it should be seen as a potentially effective approach to addressing challenges in the primary subsector.

Measures of progress for encouraging public demand

- ✓ Pre-primary education is upheld as a public good, similar to convictions regarding the value of primary and higher levels of education. Pre-primary education is viewed as a vital element of children's overall development, success and well-being, especially among parents of young children.
- ✓ Subsector policy goals and plans are informed by ongoing demand for ECE services and include a dimension of demand generation.
- ✓ A broad range of individuals, groups and civil society organizations are actively engaged in advocacy for quality early education services nationally, subnationally and in the community, through shared and explicit understanding of objectives and collaboration.
- ✓ Quality pre-primary education is a regular topic covered by media and communication channels (including radio, TV) at national and subnational level.
- ✓ Social policies and resources are in place to respond to the specific needs of families and communities, including those who are marginalized, ensuring affordability of pre-primary education services.

Figure 5. Pre-primary education within the education sector



Section 3

The core functions of the pre-primary education subsector: Building blocks for quality and equity



Evidence related to successful ECE systems suggests that a pre-primary subsector cannot ensure positive outcomes in terms of children’s learning and development unless it is effective in several concrete areas, referred to as core functions in this framework.⁵⁰ **Quality is not a stand-alone entity of education for young children in this framework: It is the sum of many interlinked components.** This includes teachers, families and communities, planning and use of resources, monitoring to assure quality, and a curriculum designed to help children learn and grow to their full potential.

The framework underscores five mutually reinforcing core functions within the subsector, each of which needs to be developed through targeted plans and focused efforts. At the same time, the work across the core functions needs to be coordinated in the interest of quality services and positive outcomes for children.

This section describes the purpose of each function, explains how it is vital for the development of the subsector and the ability to deliver results for children, and suggests key goals that governments can focus on to develop or strengthen the core functions.

By focusing on these core functions, and giving each area equal attention and adequate resources, governments can build a pre-primary subsector that delivers quality programmes at scale – and, in turn, enhances development and learning outcomes for children.

▶ This section is structured as follows: Each of the five core functions is defined, followed by a listing of the goals associated with the function. These goals are elaborated upon, using measures of progress for each. This is rounded off with a list of key considerations for the core function.

The following points may be considered when reviewing the core functions:

- **The core functions are discussed one by one, but they are all interconnected.** For example, attention to monitoring and quality assurance will contribute to better curriculum implementation. Thinking about these connections will help governments plan actions that move the subsector forward without fragmentation or missed opportunities.
- **Governments will find it crucial to evaluate each core function in the context of developing targeted plans that set realistic priorities.** Some core functions may require immediate support because they have been either neglected or missing altogether. Other elements of the subsector may already have a good foundation and need only be enhanced.
- **Initial development or enhancement of the core functions generally involves coordination across directorates or departments within one ministry and often requires coordination across several ministries.** Engaging families and communities, for example, might begin with the ministry of education and extend to the ministries of health and social welfare. Strengthening the core functions might also involve cooperation between national, subnational and local government, in conjunction with related agencies and organizations.

Figure 6: Five core functions in pre-primary education





Core Function 1

Planning and budgeting

The purpose of this core function is to develop strong and responsive subsector plans, across levels of government, for equitable provision of quality pre-primary education, making efficient use of available financial, human and physical resources.

How is this core function crucial for the development of the subsector?

Planning and budgeting are the backbone of an effective ECE system/subsector, particularly as a growing number of countries are expanding their provision of pre-primary education to achieve universal access.

There is consensus in the field that plans are most effective when developed through an inclusive, transparent process guided by a theory of change and by contextual evidence to ensure they are responsive to needs in the national and local context.⁵¹

► Funding arrangements and accountability for the ECE subsector

Funding for pre-primary education is often provided through a mix of central, regional and local sources. The share of public funding originating from each level varies significantly from country to country. The ministry of finance may also provide education funding directly to regional or local entities, which then decide how to allocate funding to or within the pre-primary subsector. In some cases, the generation of funding is decentralized.

Without clear responsibilities and accountability mechanisms, lower levels of government may be unable to effectively follow through on their commitments and responsibilities. Because local governments have varied assets and levels of ability to raise funds for pre-primary education, additional support from central government authorities is essential. This means that the coordination of national and subnational budgets, as well as the development of strong accountability mechanisms, is crucial.

Four goals associated with core function 1 are outlined below.





Goal 1 Develop an evidence-based and equitable plan for the delivery of quality pre-primary services.

A national and/ or accompanying subnational plan is evidence-based, strategic and feasible, identifying ways to effectively mobilize existing human, physical and financial resources to reach desired targets and ensure equitable provision.

Measures of progress for the development of an equitable plan



The plan is data- and evidence-based.

Data are used to determine the conditions and scope of current service availability and gaps in access and quality. A comprehensive plan is based on solid evidence and assessment of the effectiveness of existing services in terms of results for children.



The plan is sound and strategic.

The plan is developed with a view towards system capacities (or capacity-building needed) and the availability of resources. It builds on existing provision (government, private and civil society) and directs investments towards achieving high-quality teaching and learning practices, rather than simply creating more 'slots' for pre-primary services. It sets realistic targets and timelines, and identifies viable avenues for strengthening existing financial, human and physical resources.



The plan is efficient and equitable.

The plan considers key equity dimensions and identifies strategies for reaching marginalized and at-risk children. Equitable distribution of resources is reflected in the plan and issues of efficiency are addressed in relation to access, quality and developmental outcomes, with priority needs identified according to the principles of fairness and equity. There is evidence that strategies reflect efficient deployment of resources for public, private and external partners, relative to impact.



Priorities and objectives outlined in the plan are aligned with national policy goals for the subsector.

Broader policy goals are translated into strategic objectives and interventions to strengthen capacities at all levels and efficiently allocate financial, human and physical resources. The plan includes a coherent set of strategies across all five core functions of the subsector, with strong and coherent links between the planned activities and expected impact.

Key questions in planning for equitable access

The development of plans aimed to secure equitable access to pre-primary education will benefit from considering the following related questions.⁵² Many of these questions also relate to how specific policies are formulated for the subsector.

Conditions of access

- Is participation in pre-primary education obligatory/compulsory?
- Is access to pre-primary programmes free? If a fee is required, is it affordable for all parents?
- Is access governed by eligibility criteria? Are children from low-income homes subsidized in fee-paying services?
- Do vulnerable children including those with disabilities receive first call on services and additional resources?

Scope of access

- Is provision convenient for families, including families in rural areas?
- Are programmes available for a full day or just a few hours? Year-round, or seasonal?

Appropriateness and quality of access

- Is programming appropriate for young children? Or is it a part of the primary school system with conditions and pedagogy more suitable for older children?
- Are the basic quality indicators – child-staff ratios, teacher qualifications and certification, quality of materials and the learning environment – respected for all children in the services to which access is offered?
- Are services flexible and suited to the needs of young children, including children with disabilities and those affected by disasters and/or armed conflict?

Incorporating mixed service-provision models in the subsector plan

To meet the needs of different populations when planning for expansion in a pre-primary subsector, it can be useful to consider a mix of programme models. In remote areas, for example, half-day programmes during the school year or accelerated summer school-readiness programmes may provide alternatives that are more efficient and effective than full-day programmes. A pre-primary plan can also be strengthened by gathering and analysing data on private pre-primary provision patterns and opportunities.



Goal 2 Identify budget needs and financing arrangements.

Subsector plans need to be costed well, to advocate for public resources and to ensure that budget allocations are based on actual costs.⁵³ Financing modalities need to account for factors such as patterns of family income, parents' employment status, needs of children with disabilities, and ethnic/language backgrounds. A well-costed plan serves as a strong advocacy tool for further investment by external partners and donors.

Measures of progress for budgeting

-  **The subsector plan is comprehensively costed and based on data-driven projections and estimates that cover enrolment, quality inputs as well as human and physical resources.**

Policy goals and objectives are translated into well-costed strategies and activities in the subsector. Longer-term scale-up plans are backed up with clear budget projections and costs covering teachers, curriculum, family engagement, quality and regulation, among other factors.
-  **Resources have been identified against costs.**

Thoughtful examination of existing financial resources and practices – domestic and international – helps determine the potential sources and optimum financing structures to ensure the equitable and efficient allocation of available resources. Possible budget gaps are articulated (often in the context of broader education sector budgeting), and a strategy for filling these if a shortfall is identified.
-  **The financial framework of the plan is realistic.**

Financing formulas reflect the greater investments that are needed to reach the communities where children are the most vulnerable as well investments needed to build capacity across relevant parts of the ECE system. Resource allocations to decentralized levels are adequate in relation to their role in implementing the planned interventions. The plan outlines mechanisms to monitor funding levels across relevant levels of government.



Goal 3 Establish clear governance and accountability structures for effective implementation of the plan.

There are strategies in place to improve and/or establish good governance practices and management across the pre-primary system that can enable effective plan implementation. Central and local authorities have a shared understanding of the subsector's aims, and their accountability in terms of ECE plan implementation.

Measures of progress for governance



Accountability for implementation and financing of ECE is defined and well-communicated.

Implementing institutions and individuals across the subsector – at all levels – know precisely what they are expected to do and feel a sense of ownership and accountability in their role in fulfilling the goals of the pre-primary action plan. Policy directives that specify authority, accountability, funding and roles for management of the subsector can be especially helpful.



Ownership is reflected in the plan.

Mutual ownership of and accountability to the pre-primary subsector plan can be achieved through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the early development of the plan, provision of feedback, participation in decision-making and recognition of contributions to the plan's success.



The national (macro-level) plan and subnational (micro-level) plans are coordinated and complementary in order to meet policy goals.

This includes alignment of targets and timelines. There is a robust communication strategy between central and local levels to help stakeholders align objectives, strategies and activities within the pre-primary system. Investments in management staff and planning specialists at the subnational levels help ensure the coherence and quality of the pre-primary subsector.



The plan identifies and addresses capacity constraints that could affect implementation.

Specialized pre-primary capacity is available across key institutions within the education system responsible for plan development and implementation. A capacity development plan included in the budget is one helpful tool for determining the personnel and skill development needs in central and decentralized administrations.



Goal 4 Monitor plan implementation and identify necessary course correction.

A strong monitoring and evaluation framework in the context of a subsector plan enables course corrections during implementation, and allows for making modifications in governance and roles, as needed.

Measures of progress for monitoring milestones



Data on service provision, quality, effectiveness and financial expenditure are available on a regular basis.

The systematic collection and aggregation of subsector programmatic and financial data are established as a vital part of informing ongoing planning and budgeting. Monitoring subsector expenditure is ideally a part of the overall education expenditure review.



Progress against the plan is regularly reviewed.

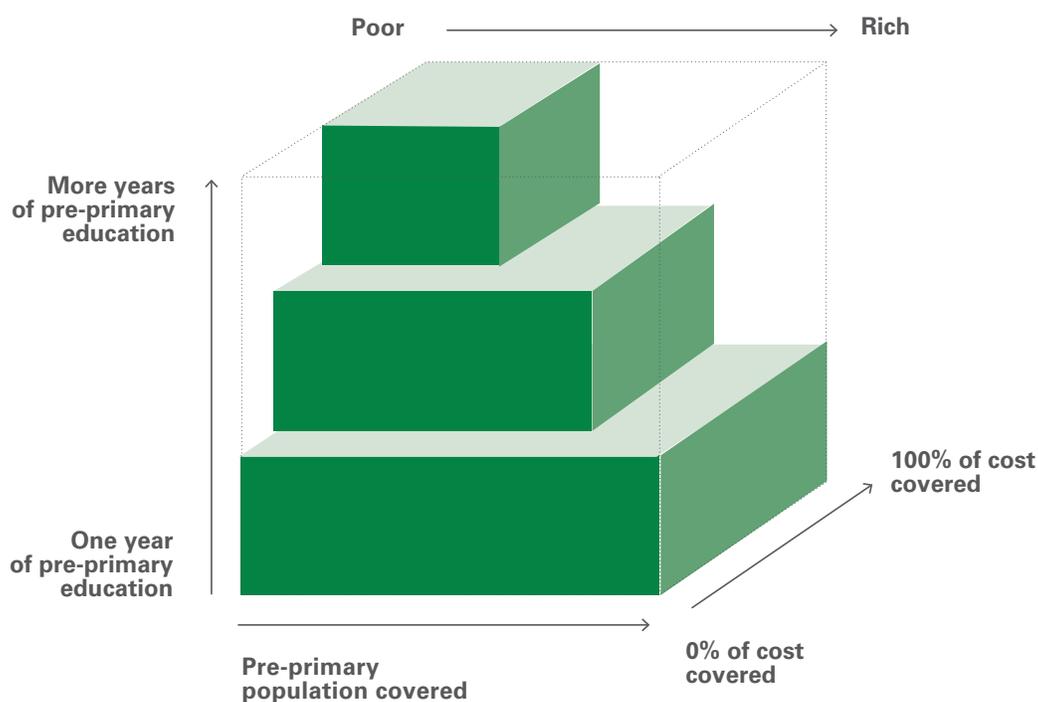
Because a significant amount of planning and policy formulation also takes place during implementation, regular feedback is needed on the results achieved, ongoing challenges and relevant administrative and implementation processes that may require reassessment.



Reporting, feedback and consultation mechanisms are transparent and maintain broad ownership during implementation.

There are transparent arrangements and processes for ECE stakeholders to review and validate the subsector results and performances. The plan also seeks to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries, for example, providing a set of service delivery standards to be monitored.

Figure 7. Taking a progressive universalist approach to improve access



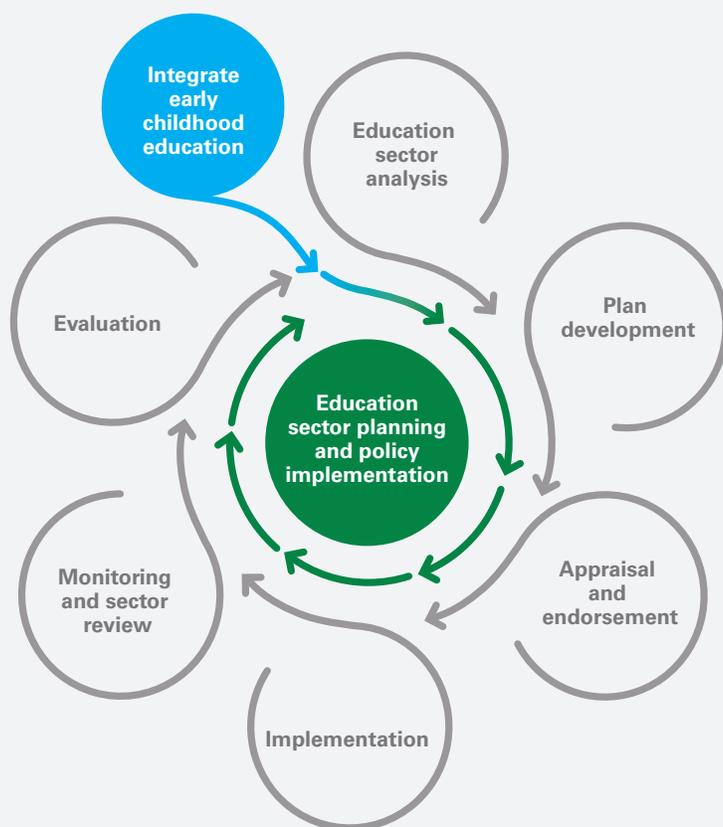
Source: United Nations Children's Fund, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education – Global report*, UNICEF, April 2019, p. 118.

The pre-primary action plan is ideally guided by a vision that aims towards universal access, but leverages existing provision to make the most equitable and efficient use of resources, with priority given to the most vulnerable young children and communities.

Progressive universalism suggests gradually expanding the provision of quality education for everyone, while also prioritizing the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.⁵⁴ As illustrated in Figure 7, translating this concept to the pre-primary education subsector is a twofold process: First, governments can aim to use public resources to provide a minimum package of a one-year free quality pre-primary services for all children. As more funding is made available, the priority should be to direct public resources first to disadvantaged children and ensure they are the ones benefiting first from extended services. Where even a minimum package of free services is not feasible for all, an effort should be made to reduce or remove the financial burden of fees for the poorest families first.



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For countries that are in the early stages of subsector development, the timing of the development of implementation plans should be sensitive to, and aligned with, development of the broader education sector plan. Preparatory work might be needed so that the pre-primary subsector is well-positioned to be integrated into the larger education sector plan. This work may require substantial tasks, such as the gathering and generation of evidence, and the mapping and costing of the scale-up of pre-primary models of service provision.⁵⁵

Figure 8. Alignment with the education sector plan

Key considerations related to

Core Function 1 – Planning and budgeting

- **System-level ECE capacity.** In many countries, there has been a focus on expanding access to pre-primary education without necessarily developing durable structures and capacity for long-term planning and quality enhancement.
- **Institutional technical capacity is ideally progressively developed to support implementation of the subsector plan.** Examples include a robust pre-primary directorate, a training and curriculum authority, independent monitoring and evaluation agencies, a body of advisers (coaches or inspectors) and a monitoring and/or statistical unit with expertise on ECE. Many of these structures are already present in education systems and can be adapted to incorporate specific expertise in early childhood education.
- **Adequate assessment and deployment of human resources.** A strong pre-primary subsector plan identifies national, subnational and local needs for the teachers, supervisors and other ECE personnel who deliver pre-primary services, and assigns these personnel to areas with the greatest need. Credible information about the current and future workforce is crucial as this affects funding requirements as well as planning for workforce development (Core Function 3). Data on current and projected staff turnover, for example, will help establish the need for recruiting, training and retraining, as well as strategies to prevent or mitigate high rates of turnover.
- **Effective use of physical resources.** Infrastructure to house pre-primary services – including buildings, classrooms, water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and playgrounds – is often costly and requires significant public investment. Equity is always an important consideration, as the poorest areas in a country generally have the most unsafe or unhealthy physical environments for young children. A strong plan is based on a good mapping of existing facilities that can be either repurposed, expanded or improved for pre-primary services. This exercise should take into account the young children’s developmental and educational needs; for example, room to move around freely and spaces for small-group as well as whole-class activities.
- **Responsiveness of the plan.** Because the pre-primary subsector is rapidly growing and changing in many countries, the flexibility and responsiveness of the system to improve service delivery and programme practices is important. This makes it crucial, for example, to gather and analyse data on overall service coverage, changes in supply and demand, and regular identification of areas with the greatest needs.



Core Function 2

Curriculum development and implementation

The purpose of this core function is to ensure that children across early learning settings benefit from a developmentally appropriate curriculum and have access to learning and play materials that stimulate their development.

How is this core function crucial for the development of the subsector?

A curriculum helps educators answer the question of what to teach and how to teach it. There is consensus among researchers and policymakers that the development of ECE curricula is a powerful tool to improve the pedagogic quality of services.⁵⁶ Evidence indicates that children benefit from content and pedagogic approaches that foster curiosity and self-guided inquiry. The presence of an explicit curriculum that outlines the approaches and goals for education and care of young children can significantly support the role of practitioners in creating effective learning environments and nurturing children's holistic development.⁵⁷

The content of a curriculum is influenced by many factors, including education standards, research evidence, community and family expectations, social values, culture and language. While there is no single best approach to developing and implementing a curriculum,⁵⁸ it is always important to review the content on a regular basis, ensuring that it can be adapted to changing contexts and conditions.

A consistently implemented, developmentally appropriate curriculum will guide and support pre-primary staff, facilitate communication between teachers and families, and ensure continuity between pre-primary and primary school levels.

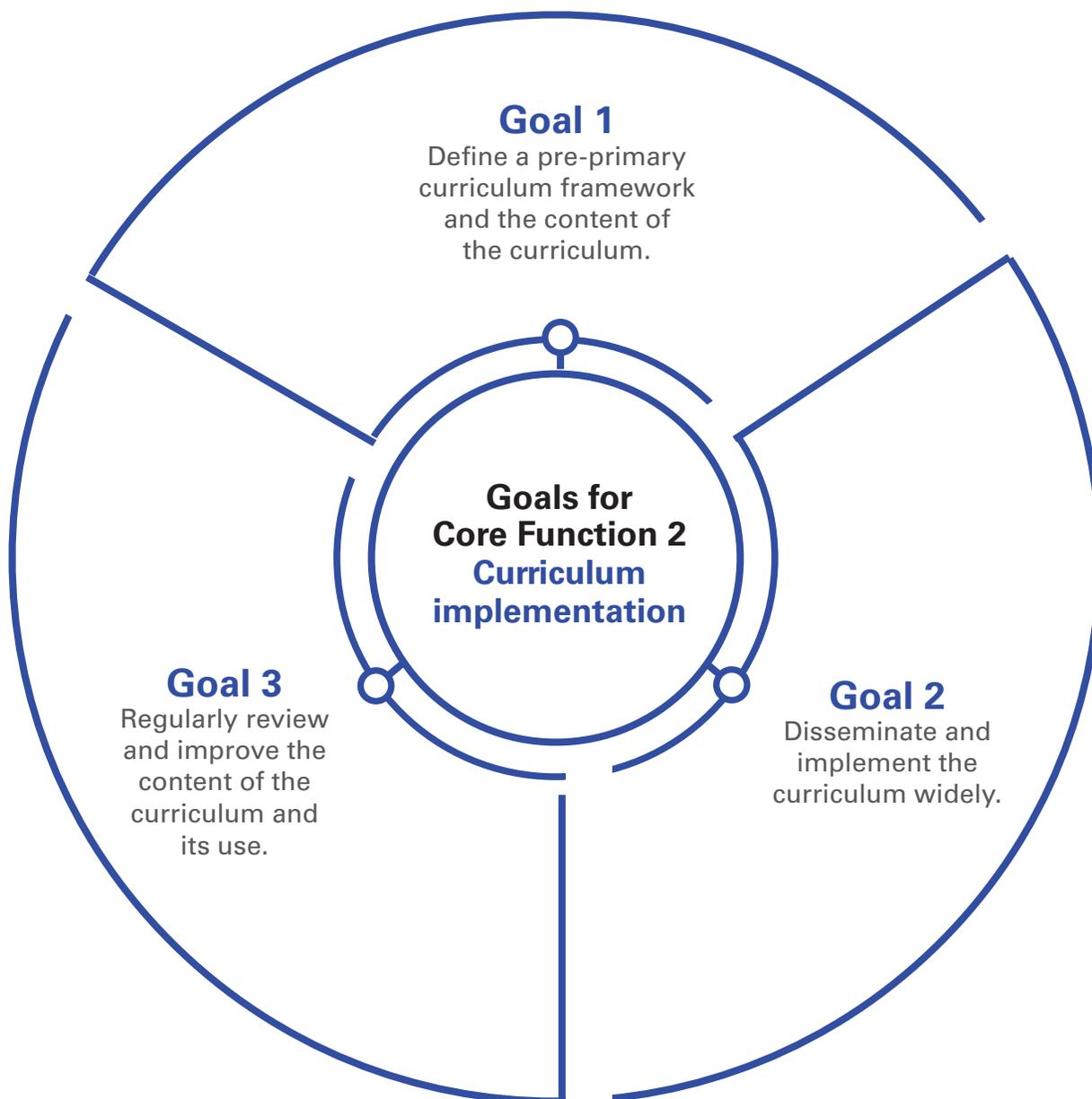
▶ Developing a framework for curriculum content

A curriculum framework sets out the principles and pedagogic approach for fostering children's development through ECE programmes and provides general guidance on how children's learning processes can be supported in order to achieve curricular goals.

Curriculum content usually sets explicit goals for the holistic development of children across broad learning areas or developmental domains, e.g., social and emotional development, literacy, numeracy, arts/music and physical development.

Teaching and learning materials support the implementation of the pre-primary curriculum and enable it to come to life in the classroom. Young children learn most effectively through hands-on, concrete experiences, using tools and materials that invite sensory exploration, play and self-initiated investigation. Thus, toys, books and manipulatives (such as puzzles, beads and pegboards) – as well as teachers' guides – are a crucial part of the learning materials.

Three goals associated with core function 2 are outlined below.





Goal 1 Define a pre-primary curriculum framework and the content of the curriculum.

The curriculum framework and curriculum content are officially recognized by the government and agreed upon by a broad range of stakeholders. The curriculum establishes common goals, values and pedagogic approaches for young children, which reflect society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECE programmes in encouraging children's holistic learning.

Measures of progress for defining curriculum content



A curriculum framework establishes the scope, goals, teaching and learning principles/methods, and content priorities of the curriculum.

This framework illuminates a shared vision to promote child-centred and age-appropriate learning and achieve a comprehensive set of early learning and development outcomes for children.⁵⁹ At the system level, the curriculum framework can guide the work of all ECE settings and contexts, while providing flexibility or openness, and can be used and adapted by diverse service providers, keeping key principles intact.



The curriculum content is developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sound, enabling children to reach their full potential.

Children's experiences and outcomes in a pre-primary environment are enhanced when programmes implement evidence-based curricula. Curriculum content fully supports the vision set in the framework and also acknowledges and addresses the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic manner. A well-balanced combination of education, care and socialization promotes children's well-being, positive self-image, physical, social and cognitive development.



The curriculum framework and content foster collaboration between children, educators and parents.

An essential factor of a successful curriculum is fostering an open framework for implementation. This leaves space for practitioners to work with children's interests and experiences, and to adapt, experiment, innovate and partner with colleagues and families to create effective learning environments.



Pre-primary and primary school curricula are distinct but aligned.

To ensure coherence in learning and development, the most effective pre-primary curricula are aligned with the education system's primary school curriculum. A strong early learning framework is based on shared values for child-centred learning and teaching, and supports a coherent continuum and progression of learning across the early years.



The curriculum is accompanied by effective teaching and learning materials and resources.

Books, toys, games, manipulatives (e.g., pegboards, puzzles, beads) and other materials are used in conjunction with the curriculum to promote active, play-based learning and engagement. Teachers' guides and appropriate assessment tools support practices in the classroom.



Keeping the unique characteristics of pre-primary children in mind

Pre-primary education is not simply preparation for primary school. An effective pre-primary system considers how a curriculum designed for children aged 3–6 will fit within the context of later expectations. Competencies that will be emphasized at the higher levels of education may be addressed in the pre-primary curriculum content that is well suited to younger children’s interests and ways of learning. Conversely, the holistic and active learning aspects of pre-primary education should carry over in many ways to the primary learning experience.⁶⁰

A developmentally appropriate pre-primary curriculum reflects a child-centred, inclusive approach that supports positive outcomes in all areas of children’s development and promotes balanced, child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, and connects children’s learning at school with their lived experiences in the home or in the community. The curriculum and learning materials should also provide opportunities for guided exploration and play, and for children’s active participation in decision-making, self-determination and agency. Activities and interactions are ideally designed to encourage positive social and emotional development; be adaptable to children’s specific cultural, linguistic and developmental characteristics and needs; and promote emergent language, literacy and mathematics skills.



Goal 2 Disseminate and implement the curriculum widely.

Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in a curriculum dissemination and implementation plan. Any gaps in the capacities needed for effective implementation of the curriculum are identified, and capacity is then strengthened throughout the pre-primary subsector, from national to subnational levels, to ensure curriculum implementation is successful.

Measures of progress for implementing the curriculum



The curriculum framework is disseminated, and owned widely by the subsector, including across providers.

Building ownership and commitment across key stakeholders during the curriculum development stage is a first step towards successful implementation. Mechanisms are in place to communicate the curriculum's goals and content, as well as the roles of key stakeholders across the subsector – including pre-primary directorate officials, national and subnational officials, inspectors, principals, teachers, teacher-training institutes, and parents and other caregivers.



The pre-primary curriculum is a core element of the pre-service and/or in-service training for practitioners and managers.

To ensure wide and consistent implementation of an ECE curriculum, training and support are provided to pre-primary personnel, including pre-service training that offers opportunities to observe and practise implementing aspects of the curriculum. Opportunities for in-service training and mentoring for teachers should be considered, as well as training and orientation for non-public service providers, when appropriate.



The curriculum implementation strategy encourages staff to work together and continually assess their practice in order to improve.

It is widely acknowledged that practitioners improve their teaching practices with young children by being reflective.⁶¹ The implementation of teaching strategies is ideally enhanced through cooperation between pre-primary educators, mentoring and observation of how the holistic curriculum framework and goals are being applied.



Sufficient financial resources are allocated for curriculum implementation, along with realistic timelines.

Implementation plans for a new or revised curriculum require specific budget allocations for associated activities, e.g., information-sharing, training, and printing and distribution of resources, including learning materials for children and guides for teachers. Implementation schedules are built to allow timely distribution of materials to pre-primary programmes and to provide sufficient training for teaching staff and other key personnel on using the curriculum.



Goal 3 Regularly review and improve the content of the curriculum and its use.

Information on the consistency and adequacy of curriculum implementation is periodically collected to ensure that children engage with the content as intended. These data are used to help the pre-primary system determine whether changes are needed in curriculum content, materials provision, teacher training or other elements of the system.

Measures of progress for improving curriculum content and use

- ✓ **Curriculum content is reviewed in terms of its effectiveness in promoting the desired pedagogic practices and supporting the goals for children.**

Appropriate data collection and assessment methods are used to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness and ongoing relevance to children's needs and skills. While such data can be collected through more formal school-readiness assessments, internal or external evaluations as well as informal or 'naturalistic' assessments (e.g., portfolios with samples of children's work) can also be used to determine whether the goals of the curriculum are translating into benefits for children's development.

- ✓ **Curriculum implementation is monitored regularly.**

Data regarding the extent of curriculum implementation, either informal or formal, is available. Implementation feedback loops seek to understand if teachers are actually using the intended curriculum and whether there are common roadblocks to consistent implementation. After collection, these data are used to improve teaching and learning practices.

▶ Continuous improvement of the curriculum

Review and improvements of the curriculum are needed not only at the national level but also at the local level. Populations of children served may change over time, new priorities may arise. With adequate professional development, pre-primary directors/principals and classroom teachers can use simple methods to observe, document and assess children's engagement and progress, making adaptations based on that information for the programme or class as a whole, or for individual children.

Key considerations related to Core Function 2 – Curriculum development and implementation

- Participatory curriculum development and review.** The development of relevant, effective pre-primary curricula (or the revision of existing curricula) is ideally accompanied by a broad process of participation across all levels of government and across key stakeholders, including families and communities, to achieve consensus and agree on the curriculum's desired goals for young children. Many countries experience challenges in gaining support when a new or revised pre-primary curriculum is rolled out. Parents need to be informed about the curriculum's basic guidelines to be able to hold pre-primary service providers accountable. This is also an opportunity to create greater awareness of the value and objectives of pre-primary education in the community and increase parents' incentives to send their children to preschool.

In some countries, piloting the curriculum on a small scale is useful, both to gain feedback for improvements and to begin to familiarize teachers with new approaches and materials. As expanded roll-out approaches, widespread communication becomes essential, reaching all relevant personnel: government officials, training providers, supervisors, teachers and others, including families and community members. Special attention is needed to ensure that stakeholders in remote areas are not left out of the dissemination and feedback processes.
- Building appropriate technical capacity across the subsector.** Along with teachers, curriculum implementation relies on other personnel who understand the curriculum content. This includes government officials, especially at subnational and local levels, supervisors, programme managers, in-service trainers, pre-service teacher educators and current teachers, as well as those preparing to be teachers.

Because many different personnel will be part of the capacity-building, training should be designed for different types of personnel. For example, supervisors and inspectors will need orientation to the curriculum, while teachers and trainers will need more in-depth support. In all cases, it is important that orientation is offered so that expectations are clear.
- Supporting curriculum implementation in remote or impoverished locations.** Budgeting for teacher training or the provision of age-appropriate books, play materials and other resources is essential if the curriculum is to be implemented consistently for all children, but it is especially important in remote or very poor areas, where local governments may lack sufficient funds to ensure effective implementation of activities. Under these conditions, motivation to implement is often low and the quality of early learning activities may be compromised. Overcoming these challenges requires taking a tailored and localized approach to curriculum implementation, ensuring targeted support for hard to reach areas.
- Policy directives/policy alignment.** Curriculum implementation is more likely to be effective if there are clear policy directives from appropriate institutions to ensure that roles and responsibilities are defined – and that they align with the established governance structures. These might include directives about the categories, content and intensity of training needed for future curriculum implementers, or directives that ensure resource allocation for implementation.



Core Function 3

Workforce development

The purpose of this core function is to support the recruitment, development, and retention of a sufficient number of pre-primary teachers and other key personnel into the subsector, ensuring that they have the essential competencies, training and support required to promote children's positive development and early learning.⁶²

How is this core function crucial for the development of the subsector?

Research is clear that a well-prepared workforce is essential to delivering high-quality pre-primary services.⁶³ Committed, competent teachers who can create an engaging learning environment through sensitive and stimulating interactions with young children make a fundamental difference in children's learning and development.⁶⁴ It is therefore crucial that pre-primary teachers are valued and supported within the ECE subsector.⁶⁵

In addition to teachers, other personnel are vital to the subsector's success. They include principals, inspectors and supervisors, providers of ECE pre- and in-service professional development, and support staff such as paraprofessionals and disability specialists. At the local level, they provide the enabling environment for pre-primary teachers to deliver quality education in the classroom.

At its best, the pre-primary workforce shares a dedication to supporting the development and learning of young children. Whatever their role, the members of this workforce share distinctive pre-primary competencies as well as the competencies necessary to their specific responsibilities.

Developing a strong workforce includes effective teacher recruitment; adequate pre-service teacher training for all relevant staff; qualifications and career development opportunities; equitable access to quality, ongoing professional support for all personnel; and monitoring how these components impact the teaching-learning process in order to be responsive to the local context.

These elements of the ECE workforce strategy typically fall within the purview of a directorate within the ministry of education. In some cases, a directorate oversees all issues related to the teaching workforce, including primary and secondary education; in other cases, there may be one or more bodies specifically focused on the early childhood or pre-primary workforce, with coordination needed. In all instances, the need to integrate theory and practice into how ECE staff are trained and supported is paramount.⁶⁶

Four goals associated with core function 3 are outlined below.





Career pathways

Chronic shortages of pre-primary staff are common, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas, and in systems where pre-primary education is just starting up.⁶⁷ But differentiated job roles and pathways can be designed to bring potential teachers into the pre-primary field. Frequently, there are motivated individuals who may lack minimum 'teacher' qualifications. In these contexts, the teaching role can be supplemented by assistant teachers, aides or a variety of specialist roles, which may have different entry-level qualifications yet set staff on pathways toward greater responsibility and compensation. Another recruitment mechanism is offering opportunities for career development and advancement, progression and mobility. For example, experienced or well-performing workers may be offered opportunities to become mentors, trainers and supervisors.



Goal 1 Establish a strategy for recruiting pre-primary staff, based on clearly defined staff qualification requirements and competency profiles.

A vision for the entire pre-primary workforce is defined, including delineation of appropriate competency profiles and staff qualifications, as well as strategies to attract a diverse and motivated workforce.

Measures of progress for recruiting pre-primary staff



A robust recruitment strategy for the pre-primary subsector is in place.

A comprehensive strategy outlines the specific needs for early childhood educators and other personnel (e.g., pre-primary inspectors), including underlying rationales, taking policy targets into account as well as the realities of teacher scheduling and work hours into consideration. Clear policies and programmes to attract new talent into the ECE profession are in place. Recruitment strategies also include determining competitive remuneration and status of the ECE profession. Setting remuneration for the subsector equal to other professions in education, such as primary or secondary teachers, is a strong but rarely implemented incentive.



The core set of professional competencies and standards for ECE professionals is clearly defined.

Whatever their roles, the work of all pre-primary personnel is directed by shared core competencies and standards that respond to the developmental characteristics and needs of young children. Specialized professional competencies and more detailed qualification requirements flow from this common core for particular roles (i.e., educators versus support staff).



Initial qualification requirements for pre-primary educators are defined.

The lead ministry specifies qualifications for the pre-primary workforce, considering policy goals, feasibility and opportunities, while retaining the long-term goal of a highly qualified professional workforce.



Goal 2 Implement effective and flexible pre-service training programmes, including alternative pathways to qualification and initial training.

Before entering the profession, teachers and other pre-primary personnel receive high-quality preparation that integrates theory with practice and that responds to the diverse landscape of pre-primary services provision.

Measures of progress for pre-service training programmes

- ✓ **Pre-service training programmes and relevant providers specific to pre-primary education are in place.**

Pre-service programmes, linked with the higher education system and formal degrees, prepare educators to meet qualifications and enter the profession. These programmes offer multiple options for high-quality training that builds the qualifications and practical skills of pre-primary educators and across all levels of staff. A wide range of providers may be engaged in offering these programmes, including higher education institutions, other training institutions and professional associations at the national and subnational levels.
- ✓ **Content and methods of pre-service training programmes are appropriate for achieving established competency profiles and standards.**

Along with explicit alignment between core competencies and pre-service training, the content of the training and the methods adopted for its delivery enhance the development of key competencies. This is achieved by blending theory and practice, and offering pre-service training with sufficient intensity and duration to prepare new staff for successful engagement in their work.
- ✓ **A system for recognition and accreditation (licensing) of pre-service programmes has been developed.**

This includes identification of a body that assesses such programmes, approves or accredits, and recommends improvement strategies. A variety of evaluation approaches helps ensure pre-service programmes support participants' achievement of their goals for professional competency. The presence of an accreditation or recognition system for initial and continuous professional development (CPD) training providers (such as higher education institutions and other training centres) helps assure consistent quality and adherence to professional and training standards.
- ✓ **Non-qualified staff have opportunities to develop the same levels of competency as qualified practitioners.**

While keeping the acquisition of a full university degree as a long-term goal, interim strategies such as part-time, short-term certificate programmes, 'bridging courses', distance learning and/or intensive CPD are used to support the professional advancement of currently non-qualified teachers and other pre-primary personnel.



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Characteristics of ECE pre-service training

Pre-service training increases the likelihood that practitioners will be effective in promoting young children's holistic development. Attention is needed to establish key elements in the course of training, giving equal weight to theory and practice.

Pre-service training is usually provided by institutions of higher education, with curricula that align with expected competencies and that focus on practical skills, not just abstract knowledge. This aligns with current best practice and offers multiple opportunities for guided practice of teaching competencies. Participants will benefit from visiting pre-primary schools to observe and practise the essential skills they have learned in a real-life setting, and to reflect on good practice with their peers.



Goal 3 Implement evidence-based programmes for continuing professional development, including setting up career pathways for the subsector.

The ECE workforce is respected and recognized as a group of highly qualified professionals. This is reflected in the provision of CPD opportunities as a key incentive for staff to enhance their qualifications and update their skills, including through in-service training, reflective practice and on-site coaching, among other initiatives offered in pre-primary settings.

Measures of progress for CPD programmes



CPD programmes are evidence-based and effective in providing ongoing professionalization of staff.

The positive impact of professional development depends on the content and delivery mode of the training.⁶⁸ CPD programmes are evidence-based, utilize the right training and support strategies to help pre-primary staff apply new knowledge and skills in their work.⁶⁹ In addition, they actively involve practitioners in designing content for the training by addressing issues that arise in everyday practices.⁷⁰



CPD programmes emphasize reflective practice.

Reflective practice is a continuous process that involves pre-primary professionals analysing their work to identify which behaviours and practices promote children's learning and development.⁷¹ Examples of relevant CPD opportunities include professional networks and learning communities that encourage critical reflection; and mentors or coaches who provide resources, skills and guidance to develop the habits of reflective practice.⁷²



Ongoing opportunities for CPD are flexible and accessible to all pre-primary personnel.

CPD programmes offer teachers and other personnel equitable and flexible access to training that is responsive to cultural and contextual diversity. This includes formal support provided to all pre-primary staff and opportunities for reflection on their practice.



CPD is provided to non-teaching personnel in the pre-primary system.

Ongoing training and support are viewed and implemented as essential not only for teachers but also for other pre-primary personnel, including supervisors, programme directors and inspectors, who are essential to teacher effectiveness and programme quality. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECE context helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.



Training providers have adequate capacity and technical skills.

Once training providers with the proper capabilities are identified and secured, CPD programmes take place under multiple auspices – including higher education institutions along with national and subnational professional associations, community groups, government training institutions, NGOs and pre-primary programme managers and supervisors.



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Support for training providers

Institutions and faculty who provide CPD training for pre-primary staff need to have access to their own CPD and practical resources. With this kind of support the entities responsible for providing training will have a deeper, research-based understanding of the competencies the workforce needs to develop and can link theory with practice in their initial training programmes. They will also know how to identify and supervise quality practical experience in local pre-primary schools and how to support newly trained staff as they enter the workforce. The presence of an accreditation or recognition system for initial training programmes helps to assure consistent quality, whether the programmes are directly under a higher education institution or another body.



Goal 4 Promote continuous workforce improvement and staff retention.

Investments are made in regularly assessing and improving workforce development programmes, including their impacts on teachers' effectiveness and relevant outcomes for children. Working conditions are monitored and prioritized in the subsector.

Measures of progress for coordinating and monitoring workforce development



Training and support opportunities for ECE staff are well-coordinated across the subsector.

The complexity and diversity of professional learning provision in the pre-primary subsector is fully considered, for example, when assessing whether core competencies and qualifications are being addressed consistently to meet the needs of all personnel, during both pre-service and in-service training.



Mechanisms are in place to monitor working conditions and ensure they are favourable and supportive.

Workplace conditions, including progress in teachers' salaries and other incentives, are monitored. For example, providing data that informs decisions on raising staff salary levels, providing non-financial benefits and increasing the staff-child ratio in pre-primary settings.



Data specific to teacher supply, as well as to training and support programmes are collected and used to inform the ongoing improvement of the pre-primary workforce.

This includes a coordinated system to monitor and evaluate staff performance, and to monitor and evaluate training and support programmes, including the competence of training providers. Data are also helpful with respect to the fidelity of training to expected content and methods.

Setting conditions to create a supportive working environment

Good working conditions benefit the pre-primary workforce, help build staff morale and enhance teacher retention.⁷³ Even in remote and low-resource areas of a country, certain essentials help establish and maintain a supportive environment for pre-primary staff to do their work. This begins with the setting's physical environment and extends to setting working hours and wage levels that can help make employment in subsector an attractive option, as well as professional development, collaborative team learning and adequate provision of essential teaching-learning materials.

Key considerations related to Core Function 3 – Workforce development

- **The broad foundation, coherence and continuity in professional development.** Given that different institutions and agencies may be responsible for pre-service, in-service and mentoring/supervision activities, it is important to make sure that key competencies are well-defined and reinforced across professional development opportunities. Regular reviews of the workforce's strengths and areas for development can support coherence and continuity of training, as well as timely responsiveness to the needs and gaps in the skills of the pre-primary workforce. All forms of professional development should emphasize relevance, collaboration and a focus on instructional improvement.⁷⁴ Additionally, CPD recognizes the importance of a shared understanding by teachers, managers, policymakers and others that quality CPD is an essential element of the pre-primary subsector.
- **Implementing robust workforce development programmes.** Sufficient budget allocation is key for the range of activities that are essential to building a pre-primary effective workforce. Among other elements, resources are needed to build the technical capacity of current training entities – such as professional development for trainers, and development of new training materials aligned with new teacher competencies – and to incentivize the recruitment of potential teachers and sustain their participation in the workforce when they are hired. Further, directives from national to subnational levels might also help ensure resource allocations for teachers' professional development, and for expected priorities or targets for workforce recruitment in underserved areas, including those with large numbers of vulnerable and marginalized children.
- **Recognition of diverse contexts.** Workforce development programmes should be tailored to local realities, which may include large numbers of teachers living in remote areas with very limited access to training institutions or individual training providers. In-service training can be provided by an external source such as training institutes or colleges, or through staff meetings, workshops, conferences, field-based consultation training and supervised practice. To supplement face-to-face CPD – or provide access to CPD in remote locations – it can be helpful to consider such options as blended learning models and online resources (e.g., 'good practice' videos) and the use of free social media applications, such as a mobile texting app used by trainers and colleagues to share ideas and challenges.
- **Interim strategies to strengthen the workforce.** Many countries have wide gaps between the current level of workforce education and training, and what is desired or mandated by policies. As an example, while keeping the acquisition of a full university degree as a long-term goal, interim strategies such as short-term certificate programmes, bridging courses, distance learning and intensive CPD can support the professional advancement of these pre-primary personnel. Such strategies require strong alignment with national professional competency profiles. Directives about recognition of teachers' prior learning; and realistic timelines for phasing in expected competencies required for different job categories can help support interim arrangements.



Core Function 4

Family and community engagement

The purpose of this core function is to ensure that families and communities are active participants and partners in supporting children's learning and development across early learning settings.

How is this core function crucial for the development of the subsector?

Whether they are enrolled in pre-primary programmes or not, young children spend most of their time at home during their early years, interacting with parents, siblings, extended family members and neighbours. These interactions and relationships have a significant influence over how children understand and experience the world around them and how they learn and develop. When family members encourage learning at home and connect with staff in their children's pre-primary programmes, children's development and early learning is enhanced, and stronger connections between home and school environments are created.

The benefits of family engagement and of providing regular opportunities for parents to interact with their children's pre-primary teachers are well documented in the research literature.⁷⁵ A strong relationship between families and pre-primary programmes creates a better transition between a child's learning at home and experience at preschool. It also establishes interaction patterns that can continue throughout the child's educational experience, significantly improving overall academic achievements.⁷⁶

Additionally, partnerships with families give teachers deeper knowledge about their young students, helping them to be more responsive to the needs of children and their families. Finally, parents not only can help build a strong transition between home and school, but they also shape demand for services and quality. Engaging with families as partners in scaling up pre-primary education is, therefore, a vital element of securing universal access.

Family and community engagement includes the wide variety of ways in which young children's caregivers and the broader community in which they live become connected with pre-primary services. The scope of 'community' includes, for example, neighbourhoods, NGOs, faith-based organizations and other services focusing on child development, such as social welfare and health care. This type of engagement takes many forms, both formal or informal, and will vary for different families and in different settings.⁷⁷ Because communities are children's immediate contact with the outside world, community engagement is increasingly highlighted as an important aspect to consider when developing or strengthening pre-primary education.⁷⁸

Consistent with the principle of efficiency, communities can provide additional assets for the pre-primary subsector, for example, by offering spaces for preschool programmes, or providing referrals and expanded services in health and nutrition that can serve children in conjunction with early childhood education. An engaged community can also serve as a social network to support parents in reducing stress, creating social cohesion and helping families making informed choices, especially for disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable families.⁷⁹

Three goals associated with core function 4 are outlined below.





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The role of this core function in the subsector

The diversity of ECE services providers means that parents and families have a much stronger role in choosing a preschool and in generating demand for ECE. Making family engagement a priority throughout the pre-primary subsector can have very positive repercussions for children. Once parents are engaged, for example, they are much more likely to stay engaged and support their children's learning through primary school and beyond.

However, family and community engagement is usually one of the weakest points in the ECE subsector. For many education systems that are new to ECE, families and communities are not a core target audience, and engagement with families is not set in the system's core mandate. Family engagement is not necessarily part of the overall education sector plan, so it tends to be underdeveloped. Yet, at the preschool level, this is crucial, because it is the first time children are transitioning out of their homes, and learning still happens nearly equally (if not more) between the home and the preschool programme.



Goal 1 Include families and communities as strategic partners in pre-primary education.

Families and communities play a vital role as strong advocates for and supporters of quality pre-primary education. Equipped with the knowledge and understanding of what 'quality' entails in ECE, they are empowered to demand quality programmes from policymakers and contribute to these programmes.

Measures of progress for strategic partnerships with families and communities

✓ Family and community engagement is included as a priority in the pre-primary subsector policy or plan.

Pre-primary subsector policies and plans treat family and community engagement as a critical, not optional, component of quality pre-primary services and scale up strategies. An established arm of the ministry of education, nationally or subnationally, is formally tasked with responsibility for this core function.

✓ A mix of strategies is deployed to encourage family and community participation

Partnerships are created between families and ECE programmes; parents are engaged not only as 'users' of pre-primary education services, but in a variety of ways – for example, as volunteers, decision makers and advisory or management partners (see Table 1).

✓ Engagement with families and communities is considered across other core functions of the subsector.

For example, community engagement is considered under planning and budgeting, leveraging available resources at community level; standards for family and community engagement are developed and included in teacher training programmes with a focus on communicating and working with families.

✓ Resources in the community are leveraged to provide comprehensive pre-primary services.

Preschools can be effective platforms for delivering a comprehensive set of services available in the community, for example, through referrals, health services that can be brought into preschools, and other community structures and services that can be leveraged to strengthen holistic and broader support for children. Depending on the context, mechanisms for leveraging community resources could include exploring and using community centres, libraries, museums, NGOs and businesses to support quality pre-primary education.



Goal 2 Support families in fostering positive home-learning environments.

The pre-primary subsector can serve as a platform for promoting children’s learning and development in the home, offering parent support programmes, where relevant, connecting families with other services outside the education system, and inspiring families to offer rich learning experiences and opportunities to children in informal everyday routines.

Measures of progress for fostering positive home learning environments



Initiatives to help families create positive home-learning environments are a part of the pre-primary subsector.

Support to improve learning at home can be provided through home visits in collaboration with other sectors; child development workshops; training and other programmes for parents; parent support in the home languages and public relations outreach and campaigns.



Parent support programmes prioritize reaching the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families.

Collaboration with families from low socio-economic and minority groups is recognized as especially crucial with respect to support needed by families. In addition, families of young children with disabilities may be more likely to be isolated from the community and relationships with preschool programmes may be particularly beneficial.

Table 1: Examples of strategies for including families and communities in pre-primary education

Encourage volunteering	Recruit and organize parents and other members of the community to help and support ECE programmes. They can make valuable contributions, for example, by helping to plan and run aspects of the ECE centre's programmes and fundraising, donating their time to improve facilities, or sharing their skills and expertise.
Engage parents and others in decision-making	Include parents and other community members in decisions about the pre-primary centre or programme, and develop parent councils/associations and teacher organizations.
Collaborate with the community	Identify and make connections between pre-primary programmes and community services such as health care or social services to strengthen programmes and children's holistic learning and development. Involve community leaders in the planning, development or adaptation of family support programmes so that community values are reflected and supported. In some instances, communities can take the role of service providers, not only supporting existing services but offering community-based programmes run by local NGOs, faith-based organizations or parents.

Table 2: Examples of strategies for improving home-learning environments

Facilitate communication with families	Design effective forms of programme-to-home and home-to-programme communication about curriculum, pedagogic goals and children's progress.
Improve support for parents to encourage children's learning	Help families establish home environments to support children as learners, for example, by offering parenting classes. Provide information and ideas to families about how to help children at home with stimulating children's development. And create platforms where parents can share ideas with teachers on what works well with their children's learning at home.
Facilitate cross-sectoral coordination and links to other family support services	Parenting support and home enrichment can also be provided through other sectors and platforms, such as social protection services for children with disabilities. The pre-primary subsector can facilitate links with such services to promote a coordinated approach to supporting child development and learning at home and maximize support available to vulnerable families.



Goal 3 Build adequate capacity across the subsector to engage with families and communities effectively.

Pre-primary staff and management personnel receive training on how to promote community involvement and interactions between families and ECE settings. A range of communication channels is available to link the levels of government, pre-primary personnel and families – creating widespread understanding of the shared goals between families and their children’s pre-primary programmes.

Measures of progress for effective implementation



Stakeholders in the ECE system have a clear and shared understanding of family engagement goals and understand their role in supporting these goals.

Seminars, meetings and other venues and mechanisms are used to share and disseminate family engagement goals and specific strategies across the subsector, so that all relevant personnel are aware of their roles and implementation tasks. Specific policy directives addressing the expected content and delivery systems help create common accountability.



Pre-primary teachers and other personnel are effectively trained and supported to engage families and communities.

Teachers and key personnel, including school directors and supervisors have the requisite expertise and skills to carry out the family and community engagement activities.



Adequate resources are allocated for family support and outreach.

Appropriate financial resources are allocated across the subsector, from national to local levels, for effective implementation of outreach programmes. The budget allocations cover costs for such items as family outreach materials, family workshop venues, and training for teachers and supervisors, as well as additional costs for support or expert advisory staff that may be needed at the start of a family support programme.



Family and community engagement practices are continuously evaluated and improved.

The subsector collects relevant data and information on family and community initiatives and levels of family participation, and uses such data to evaluate and improve strategies and programmes.

Key considerations related to

Core Function 4 – Family and community engagement

- **Developing an overall strategy.** Family and community issues are typically in the scope of work of multiple ministries: for example, the ministries of social welfare and health, as well as the ministry of education. Setting goals and developing an overall strategy needs to be an inclusive and coordinated process, encompassing the relevant ministries and with special attention to the opportunities available to reach families through the pre-primary subsector. Involving stakeholders at all levels (national, subnational and local) when developing a vision for family engagement also makes it more likely that the planned approaches and activities will be relevant and responsive to family and community contexts.
- **Support and incentives.** Pre-primary staff should be given enough time within their responsibilities to participate in the necessary training and to engage in family support activities. It is important for pre-primary staff to be able to communicate well with families about programme goals, as well as the developmental progress of their children and the best way to collaborate with families to achieve these. Families and communities are likely to be more engaged if the system provides some incentives, such as the ability to make decisions or have a say in the services children are receiving.
- **Diversity of families and communities.** Engagement is an important aspect of generating demand for pre-primary education, and strategies for family and community engagement are most successful when there is explicit attention and responsiveness to the diversity of knowledge, beliefs, needs and cultural characteristics in a specific community. To ensure that all families and children feel welcome, it is important to connect with the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families, who often experience barriers to engagement due to socio-economic inequities and cultural and linguistic differences. To fully enhance the learning environment at home and at school, it is also vital for pre-primary programmes to incorporate and build on the ‘funds of knowledge’ that every family possesses with regard to their children.⁸⁰



Core Function 5

Quality assurance of services

The purpose of this core function is to ensure that a coherent framework for monitoring and quality assurance of pre-primary education is in place and that quality monitoring is used to support continuing improvements in both policy and practice.

How is this core function crucial for the development of the subsector?

Even when children's access to ECE increases, evidence shows that their outcomes do not always improve: The quality of pre-primary education is the key ingredient in ensuring gains for children.⁸¹ Robust quality assurance processes are therefore crucial to ensuring that the pre-primary subsector performs well and delivers high-quality services.

Quality assurance serves a number of purposes, including accountability, managing and improving performance within the subsector, informing parents' choices regarding pre-primary options, and strengthening policies to ensure they are responsive to the needs of national and local contexts.⁸² Quality assurance is an ongoing process that begins with a clear definition of quality and progresses to the establishment of quality standards, followed by a careful review of existing monitoring mechanisms, tools and resources that are designed to help improve pre-primary provision.⁸³ Together, these elements play a strong role in achieving equity in access to pre-primary services for all children.

For governments, the quality assurance system fulfils the crucial function of enabling analysis and use of data: Data from monitoring can and should be used to inform policies and future investments to improve the provision of services. In addition, a well-functioning system provides knowledge to the broad range of stakeholders about the status and quality of pre-primary services and about progress towards the agreed quality objectives.

What are quality standards and assurance mechanisms?

Quality standards and assurance mechanisms are complementary elements of a well-functioning pre-primary subsystem. If standards define what the goals and expectations for pre-primary education are, quality assurance mechanisms help governments promote service quality and encourage improvements.⁸⁴

Although the terms 'quality assurance' and 'quality monitoring' are frequently used interchangeably, quality monitoring generally focuses on data collection for compliance with standards or requirements, whereas quality assurance also involves incentives for ongoing improvements.⁸⁵ With clear, comprehensive and measurable standards, quality assurance systems can avoid focusing on elements that are easily observable but not necessarily the most important for young children. For pre-primary education, quality assurance typically includes components such as programme quality standards, monitoring systems, observations of classroom practice, data-driven support for quality improvement, and management of the overall quality assurance system.⁸⁶

Four goals associated with core function 5 are outlined below.



Quality standards are central to quality assurance. Clear, comprehensive and measurable standards help focus quality assurance systems on the elements that are most important for young children.

Key questions for building an effective quality assurance system

- What standards and/or regulations exist or are needed to ensure quality of ECE services in your country?
- Aside from public/government programmes, who are the other providers in your context? Will all of them be covered by the quality assurance system?
- What is the primary goal of the ECE quality assurance system (i.e. accountability, improving performance, regulation etc)?
- How will ECE settings be monitored? Who will take responsibility for quality assurance and improvement, and what capacities and tools do they need to ensure these mechanisms are effective?
- How will monitoring facilitate quality improvements, both within programmes and at the system level? How will monitoring data be used?



Goal 1 Establish comprehensive standards for service quality.

The broad scope of these standards is set by key stakeholders in the subsector and form the basis of quality assurance. Standards are clear, comprehensive and measurable, and embrace a holistic view of child development to cover multiple dimensions of early learning environments.

Measures of progress for quality standards



Quality standards set forth a country's aspirations for quality.

Well-defined and measurable service quality standards clarify whether they are intended to serve as a minimum floor standard or will set aspirational goals. In the latter case, a 'step' system to form a bridge between existing and desired practice can be helpful, depending on the context.



The quality standards are comprehensive and evidence-based.

The standards account for both structural factors and process quality. Structural aspects include such elements as staff-child ratios, safety regulations, physical space and hygiene, teachers' qualifications and availability of materials. Process quality encompasses teacher-child interactions, the use of the curriculum, children's use of materials, and other indicators of how learning and teaching takes place.



The quality standards are aligned with standards for staff and the ECE curriculum.

For example, if quality standards include a reference to teacher-child interactions, pre-service training in pedagogy is a component of the staff standards. Similarly, the curricular standards emphasize teacher-child interactions as well as outlining expectations for the topics to be covered.



Standards are designed with monitoring in mind.

Service quality standards are only useful if they are actually applied and can be monitored effectively. If standards are vague it can be difficult for teachers, trainers, supervisors or inspectors to use them to assess and improve quality. Identifying the purposes of monitoring (e.g., accountability, improvement) as standards are being developed can help ensure that the resulting standards are used in the manner intended. Ideally, those working on standards and monitoring will work together to build a coherent and feasible approach.

Development and agreement on quality standards and their use is a prime opportunity for aligning the expectations of all key stakeholders in the ECE subsector with respect to how quality will be defined and assured across service providers.



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Quality standards across service providers

It is ideal that standards can be applied across providers, and used in all types of settings, including public, private, community and faith-based programmes. Along with financial and/or non-financial incentives to encourage providers to meet the standards, some countries consider enforcing negative consequences for preschools that fail to meet the standards within a reasonable time frame, as well as processes to reward services that demonstrate achievements in improving quality or performance.⁸⁷



Goal 2 Establish functional quality assurance mechanisms, based on the overarching goals.

Decisions about what to monitor should align with the overall pre-primary vision and its desired outcomes, i.e., measuring what matters most. A coherent approach to quality assurance balances external and internal monitoring mechanisms and establishes a process for acknowledging and rewarding quality achievements or improvements. Standardized data collection processes and appropriate tools are in place to encourage improvements across providers and settings.

Measures of progress for quality assurance mechanisms

-  **The primary purpose and goals of the quality assurance system are well-articulated.**

Purposes for monitoring quality can include accountability for government funds, managing and improving performance in pre-primary settings, informing parental choice and informing policy discussions by generating data that can identify strengths and areas for improvement.
-  **External quality assurance mechanisms and tools are in place.**

This might require setting up an accreditation or registration process for service providers, as well as inspections or other external reviews that may be a part of the monitoring on a regular basis through the ministry of education. Relevant data collection processes are ideally standardized, through the national Educational Management Information System (EMIS) or other established data collection mechanisms, such as school visits.
-  **Internal quality assurance mechanisms and tools are established.**

Relevant mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring, e.g., self-evaluations, are in place. To support internal quality monitoring, self-assessment tools, such as surveys, portfolios and checklists, are considered to help staff and administrators document and critically reflect on their practice and the overall functioning of the setting.
-  **Internal and external quality assurance mechanisms are balanced and accompanied by a system for incentivizing and rewarding quality achievements or improvements.⁸⁸**

A reward system that offers incentives for pre-primary staff and service providers can support the broader effectiveness and buy into quality assurance. The goal is to motivate all stakeholders – teachers, administrators, local government and others – to participate in monitoring pre-primary services and engage in continuous quality improvement.

Aligning the purpose and goals of the quality assurance system

Determining the primary purpose and standards of the quality assurance system will have a strong impact on how the system is designed, including who should conduct the monitoring, what type of data is required, and who uses the data. It is important to ensure that the aims of the quality assurance system are aligned with the expectations of all key stakeholders within the system. Here are examples of quality assurance systems:⁸⁹

- **Accountability-based systems.** These focus on identifying providers who do not meet basic levels of quality and issuing warnings, violations or fines.
- **Improvement-based systems.** These offer incentives or other ways of encouraging ECE providers to improve the quality of provision. Improvement and accountability goals can be combined within the same system.
- **Parental choice systems.** These rest on the assumption that parents will choose facilities that show greater effectiveness, either by reporting data on quality or on children's outcomes. This type of quality assurance ECE system is appropriate when families can choose among a range of providers and may be especially relevant to systems with a higher number of private pre-primary education facilities.

Goals are not mutually exclusive, and it is common for countries to monitor quality to serve a variety of purposes. However, when a quality assurance system has a combination of goals, there may be tensions between monitoring for accountability, which often entails consequences for staff and services, and monitoring for performance management, which rests on open reflection on areas of weakness.⁹⁰ It is therefore important for countries to balance the need for quality assurance systems to exert control through external monitoring with the desire to support participation and cooperation of service providers through monitoring processes.



Goal 3 Strengthen capacity across the subsector to monitor quality.

Quality is systematically monitored across key areas of the subsector, and capacity for monitoring is built from national to local levels, together with clear roles and responsibilities to maximize data coverage and data quality.

Measures of progress for capacities related to monitoring

- ✔ **Roles and responsibilities for monitoring quality across levels of government are clearly outlined.**

An effective monitoring system identifies what body – or bodies – are responsible for managing and carrying out monitoring and quality assurance activities at the national, subnational and local levels. Relevant monitoring tools exist for each level of monitoring.⁹¹
- ✔ **Sufficient staff are allocated and deployed for subsector monitoring and they receive appropriate training and support.**

All relevant staff who may be involved with external or internal data collection and monitoring have requisite expertise and skills to monitor service standards and regulations and to enact other components of a quality assurance system.
- ✔ **Sufficient financial resources are allocated for quality assurance.**

Adequate financial resources are allocated across the subsector to support adequate staff training and ongoing development, particularly on changes or new requirements – i.e., training for on-site inspectors for collecting data, training and support for local administrators for completing forms and databases and training on how to support service providers in addressing quality improvement needs.
- ✔ **Monitoring activities are coordinated.**

The system outlines specific plans to ensure coordination of all monitoring activities, and of the flow of data across all levels (national, regional, local) and across all targets (e.g., service quality, staff performance, children’s outcomes), ensuring that information gathered at one level is shared with those responsible for quality improvement at other levels.

► **Maintaining quality across different settings**

Quality ECE is ideally assured across all types of ECE settings. But when covering many types of providers, it can be challenging to bring a diverse and possibly unregulated or under-regulated sector under the quality assurance umbrella without strong incentives and/or enforcement mechanisms, including enough staff to monitor private providers. It is vital to have procedures for coordinated and consistent data collection that work across these different contexts, and when possible, leverage resources and reduce duplication of oversight methods. Additional costing and financing exercises will help the lead ministry determine how to allocate an adequate budget for this inclusive type of quality assurance system.⁹²



Goal 4 Ensure that quality monitoring facilitates quality improvements.

Data collected through monitoring are used for multiple purposes, including to: revise or develop subsector policy, make or adjust funding decisions for pre-primary education, revise or better implement the pre-primary curriculum or teacher training, identify corrective actions or sanctions with regard to providers and settings and determine the needs for staff professional development, mentoring and technical assistance.

Measures of progress for facilitating improvements

-  **Monitoring produces relevant information at the local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvement in policy and practice.**

Information and data collected is relevant for subsector development in pursuit of higher quality and child outcomes at all levels in the system. The relevance and effectiveness of data with respect to policy and programme improvements are reviewed regularly across levels of government.
-  **Data are accessible to relevant decision makers within the pre-primary subsector.**

Transparency is ensured by sharing data and monitoring results with the public and by making relevant data accessible and easily understood by key stakeholders (e.g., sharing 'report cards' on preschool quality or sharing results of formal quality reviews). Barriers to the flow of data across all levels of government should be removed.
-  **Tools and processes are established to facilitate quality improvement.**

Effective quality assurance relies on standardized processes for acknowledging and/or rewarding achievements and improvements such as providing practitioners or service providers with detailed feedback after monitoring/inspections. Such feedback loops also promote opportunities for reflection among preschool staff, and set in motion quality improvement plans for low-performing service providers.
-  **Systemwide, practical supports for quality improvement are in place.**

Connections between ECE settings, technical specialists and higher education institutions, and collaboration between ministries of education and teacher training institutions, are some of the ways to support quality improvement and integrate training, mentoring and other professional development opportunities. Where quality assurance systems focus on both accountability and improvement, participants need to feel comfortable in reflecting on areas for improvement without fearing negative consequences.

Key considerations related to Core Function 5 – Quality assurance of services

- **Quality standards are not an end in themselves.** While quality standards are at the heart of the system, they are not a stand-alone product. To serve their purpose, they need to be founded in clear quality assurance goals, and established mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and quality improvement.
- **Securing sufficient human resources for quality assurance of the subsector.** All staff who may be involved with data collection, monitoring and other elements of quality assurance need to have the requisite expertise and skills to monitor ECE service quality. These relevant personnel include inspectors, teachers, principals/supervisors, coaches and members of regulatory or accrediting bodies; the skills they require will vary but may include data collection, data analysis, data use and reflection, and design of improvement plans specific to pre-primary education.
- **If pre-primary inspectors are part of the education system, it is important to make sure that:**
 - there is a sufficient number of inspectors to visit all programmes on a reasonably frequent schedule;
 - Inspectors have received training on the unique aspects of early childhood learning and
 - barriers to visiting programmes are addressed, particularly in rural and remote areas, where a differentiated response may help tailor and target resources according to need.
- **Data to be collected.** Different ECE subsector stakeholders need different types of data and information to make appropriate decisions around questions of policy and practice in the subsector.

For example:

- At the micro (local) level, data inform operational decisions on pre-primary activities, often at the district and programme levels, e.g., local decisions on the use of resources with intermediate reach.
 - At the intermediate (subregional) level, data inform management decisions on the allocation and control of resources and, subsequently, feed into central/national decisions.
 - At the macro (central/national) level, data inform strategic planning decisions, such as the vision for pre-primary services, medium- and long-term policy objectives and standards.⁹³
- One way to help achieve standardization of data collection processes is to coordinate and integrate pre-primary monitoring and quality assurance within existing data platforms and sources, most notably the broader EMIS. To provide a national picture of the quality of the pre-primary subsector, a subset of indicators can be established and regularly submitted into existing data collection systems such as the EMIS.⁹⁴ This can be used as a foundation for making improvements at all levels.
- **Quality assurance strategy and vision.** The development and implementation of a quality assurance system takes time and resources, as well as systematic and sustained engagement. This is possible when the quality assurance system is institutionalized within the government system as a core practice. The quality assurance units of the ministry of education, national quality agencies/councils and accreditation bodies are well-positioned to support the tasks of the quality assurance system. Some countries may also have dedicated central ECE agencies or councils that can participate in the mandate of quality assurance.⁹⁵

Section 4

Ensuring results for children through system coherence

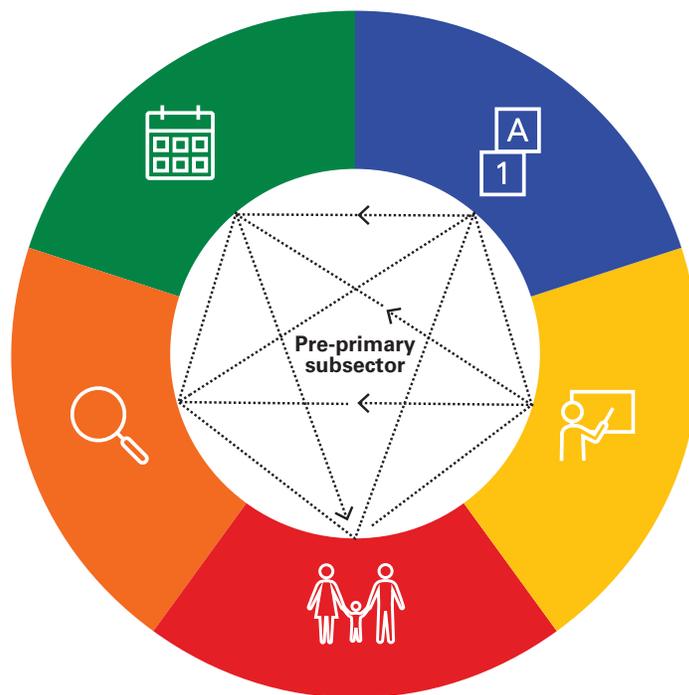


Coherence across the five core functions of the subsector

Each of the five core functions presented in this framework is essential to delivering quality pre-primary services and ultimately to ensuring optimal learning and development of children. All of these functions need to receive balanced attention and resources – establishing coordination and coherence within and between them (see Figure 9).

Coordination of all five core functions is important, and reforms or improvements in one area of the subsector should be considered in conjunction with how it affects the other areas. For example, if a government makes significant investment in curriculum development and standards (Core Function 2) but fails to invest in updated professional development to help teachers implement the curriculum (Core Function 3), these efforts will have limited impact on programme quality and child outcomes.

Figure 9. Five interlinked core functions of the pre-primary subsector



Delivering results at all levels

Although it is vital to have a national ministry of education with sufficient capacities at the central level to set a vision, plan and deliver quality pre-primary education, roadblocks to successful planning and implementation take place at all levels of government. Ultimately, a strong pre-primary subsector is only as strong as its district-level or local-level implementation. Sustainable and long-term planning and ECE expansion requires alignment and coordination in policies, funding, capacity and quality assurance between all levels of government.

Ultimately, a strong pre-primary subsector is only as strong as its district-level or local-level implementation.

There are many examples of how lack of coordination between central and local level fails to support equitable and positive outcomes for children. A country’s pre-primary curriculum guidelines may be conceptually well-designed but may fail to be used well at the local level because professional development for teachers is not included in the local budget. Or central budget allocations might not reach pre-primary services because funds are redirected to other district priorities or expenditures are not tracked through transparent accountability systems.

Such roadblocks might be the result of poor coordination within a single ministry and across key education authorities responsible for different aspects of the subsector. For example, while the national ministry of education may lead on pre-primary education, a textbook board may support the development of ECE learning materials, while a teacher training directorate may oversee pre-service professional development. In addition, regional-level authorities and local government offices might both be administering in-service professional development. The complex nature of the sector as a whole, and the subsector more specifically, necessitates robust coordination and joint planning, as well as an open line of communication between levels of government.

Conversely, strong coordination across levels of government can strengthen practice as positive developments at the local level can influence what happens at the national/subnational level. Innovative teaching practices being applied at the local level, for example, may have a positive influence on national policy regarding the pre-primary curriculum framework and best practices.

Figure 10. Subsector levels



Implementation outcomes and desired results for children

While ECE system improvements are pursued through strengthening the enabling environment and supporting all core areas of the subsector, the impact on children is most powerfully made at the level of implementation. The tangible outcomes of an effective pre-primary subsector will be seen both in terms of improvements in equitable access to pre-primary services and in the most significant outcome: enhanced learning and development among children. These outcomes are a direct reflection of how consistently and effectively the framework's broad principles of equity, efficiency, responsiveness, coordination and flexibility are applied.

A child's positive experiences and early learning depend on the quality of services and care available in her or his daily environment. When it comes to pre-primary programmes, it is important from the start that the desired outcomes for children drive all planning and action in the subsector, as well as the implementation at the local level.

As governments increase public spending on ECE, pressure will also increase to show evidence of policy impacts, i.e., better school readiness and early learning outcomes. Assessing child outcomes as a function of an improved pre-primary system is a challenging task but worth considering as a lever for policy change. In the context of a country's strategy for the scale-up or improvement of ECE provision, monitoring child outcomes through national surveys such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) or Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) on a regular basis can provide a helpful snapshot of progress over time and a good way to evaluate key policy goals in the subsector. MICS allows for a nationally representative sample and helps identify patterns of inequity with respect to both ECE provision and developmental outcomes. Gathering these data make it possible to find out whether improved outcomes are evident across groups of children, and whether subsector improvements over the long term are narrowing the gaps in school achievement.

Momentum is building in this area as countries begin to report on progress with respect to SDG target 4.2 and UNICEF seeks to release in 2020 a revised Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) module in support of national monitoring of child learning and development outcomes.

Outcome



Improved children's learning and development

Figure 11. Positive outcomes for children as the subsector gets stronger



Section 5

Using the framework to advance access to pre-primary education



How is the framework meant to be used?

As governments and their partners seek to scale up quality pre-primary education, it is critical that these efforts be guided by a strong, comprehensive and systemic vision. *Build to last* presents a flexible framework in support of governments' efforts to strengthen their vision and plan for pre-primary education with a goal towards building a subsector that can deliver equitable and quality ECE. The framework highlights system-level issues in the enabling environment as well as a comprehensive set of priorities to consider across five core functions of the ECE subsector.

Build to Last offers a basic blueprint to enable systematic government engagement from which a tailored, coherent plan for pre-primary education can emerge. It is designed to help systems at all different stages of development reflect on what can be enhanced (see Figure 12). There are many ways for using this framework.

Some governments may wish to use it simply to prompt reflection and discussion, build a basic understanding of their pre-primary system, and get an idea of what is

needed to begin to develop an effective subsector. This can include using the framework to stimulate dialogue between stakeholders, for example, focusing on the range of perspectives regarding teachers' qualifications held by the various types of pre-primary service providers.

Other countries may already have a well-established pre-primary subsector and will find the framework helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of the remaining gaps that might need more attention or that might benefit from reform. This could include, for example, deeper discussion and planning for how to link and coordinate the higher education system with local training initiatives, or strengthening the feedback loops needed to use monitoring data for continuous improvement of services.

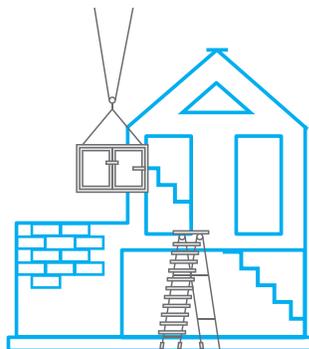
Even countries affected by emergencies may find elements of this framework helpful in informing ECE action plans or in developing transition strategies for the subsector across the humanitarian-development continuum.

Figure 12. Continuum of subsector development

Weak pre-primary subsector



Initiating pre-primary subsector progress



Established pre-primary subsector



Keeping the framework's intentions in view, the following reminders and tips are offered for governments and partners to consider:

- **This framework is intended to be given meaning by each country and each group of users.** Every country's pre-primary system will and should look and function differently to correspond to local context. To that end, the framework describes core functions and priority areas of work, goals and measures of progress that have often proven to be relevant and useful across countries. These goals and measures of progress need to be adapted and prioritized in ways that make sense within each country context.
- **The framework is not designed to prescribe or dictate exactly how any country's pre-primary subsector organization and services should look, how services should be delivered, or what improvements are essential.** Because countries, contexts, and cultures differ so greatly, it also does not recommend a rigid sequence of steps to be followed when establishing or enhancing pre-primary services.
- **The framework maintains a systems-strengthening perspective and a long-term view for pre-primary services.** Success in developing or expanding a pre-primary system is more likely if the big picture perspective is applied when actions are proposed and considered. The ultimate purpose of establishing or improving a pre-primary subsector is to support better outcomes and futures for children, especially those living in poverty and other challenging conditions. During complex or difficult discussions with respect to prioritization of subsector issues, it is always good to ask: How will this help children and their families?

The core functions and related goals described in the framework are starting points. These goals and associated measures of progress need to be adapted and prioritized in ways that make sense within each country's context.

Additional resources

Setting a comprehensive set of priorities for the ECE subsector and acting on these often begins with a strong reflection and diagnostic process. This kind of systematic analysis can be translated into a subsector action plan. To complement *Build to last*, UNICEF has developed the *Pre-primary Subsector Analysis Tool* and associated *Users' Guide*, which are designed to put this framework to use and prompt national reflection, discussion and planning for action based on a subsector's strengths and needs.

The Pre-primary Subsector Analysis Tool

This tool was developed to complement the framework and is designed to help countries organize and streamline this process.

By using this tool, national stakeholders can systematically and collaboratively assess the strengths and weaknesses of their country's pre-primary system, with the view of informing better planning and programming for ECE. Rather than providing benchmarks, the tool helps to systematize issues and gaps, guide reflection and build capacity in key areas, and assist countries in choosing the priority aspects of the subsector where changes can be made, and processes can be strengthened.

The tool is envisioned to be used in a consultative manner, through national workshops, involving stakeholders across the education sector and core partners. It is designed to maximize participant engagement, with the goal of promoting ownership in the process of systematic pre-primary subsector analysis and planning. Workshop templates are also available for adaptation to different purposes. These will be forthcoming and made available online.

With these suggestions and resources at hand, we hope that everyone who is committed to quality pre-primary services for all children will find valuable ideas within this framework and in the associated tools. We invite you to use these materials in ways that will be of the most help to you, within your specific context, now and in the future.



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