

SUMMARY

BUILD TO LAST

A framework in support of universal quality
pre-primary education

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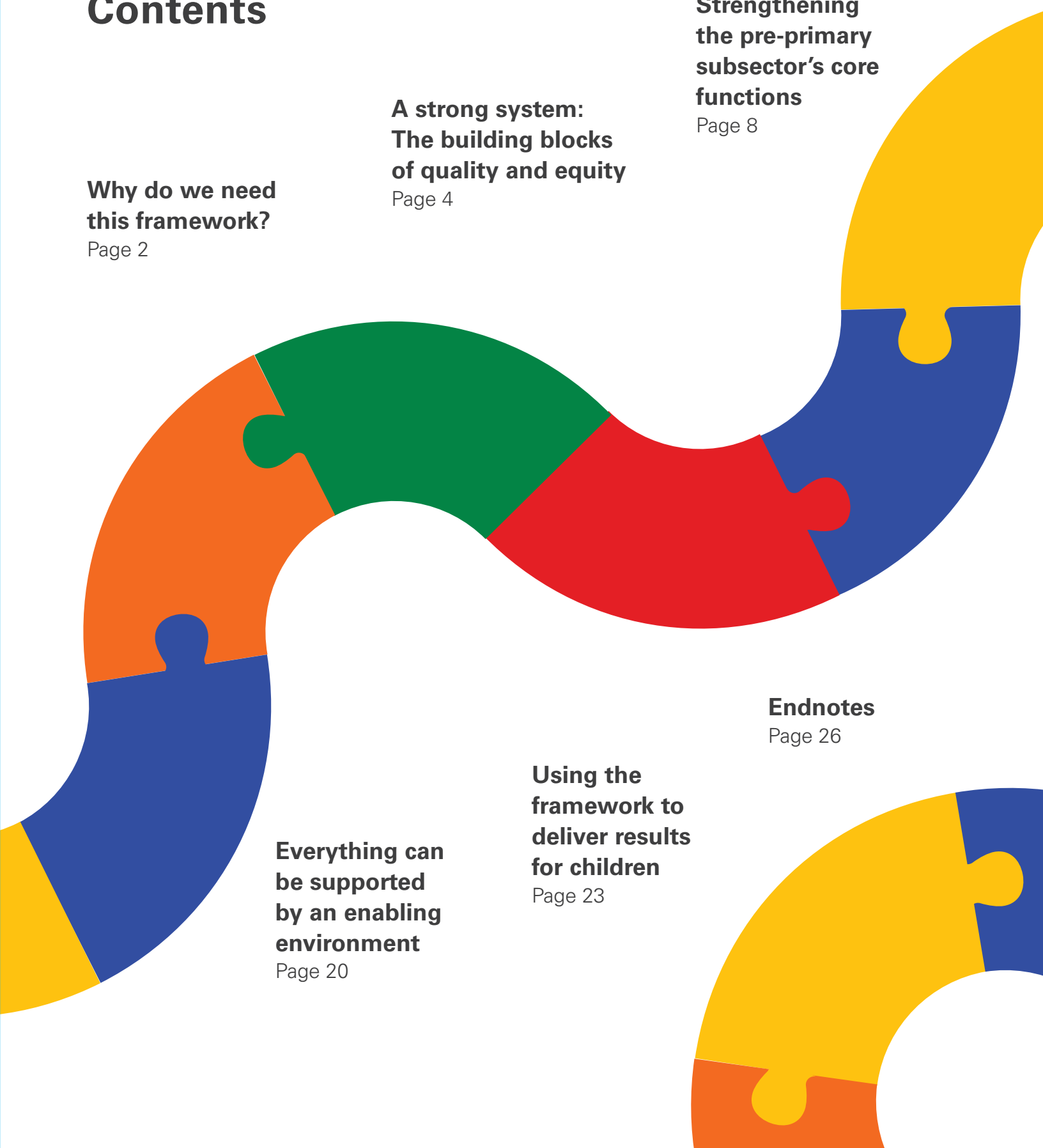
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Why do we need this framework?

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. As they continue into the secondary level, their opportunities to attain these and more advanced skills are hampered by inequitable education systems.¹ This global learning crisis has its roots in children’s earliest years, when failure to invest in quality pre-primary education, also known as early childhood education (ECE), results in children starting school already behind in a host of vital skills they need to succeed in primary school, and beyond.²

Investing in the foundations of learning during the child’s early years benefits children,³ families, education systems and societies at large. 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.

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; and**
- **have higher earning potential as they grow up.**

Strengthening a pre-primary system requires a systems-strengthening approach that engages all layers of the education system, from national (central) to subnational (regional, provincial, state, district) and local (subdistrict, municipal, community). It calls for looking not only at each part of the system but also at the sum of these parts and how they connect to one another.

The *Build to Last* framework was developed to facilitate these efforts and help long-term sustainability. It is also meant to complement other international frameworks and resources by addressing some of the gaps that appear in those documents when it comes to specific guidance for pre-primary education.⁴

Strengthening a pre-primary system requires a systems-strengthening approach that engages all layers of the education system.

Drawing on research and international experience, the framework:

- ✓ identifies the essential, interrelated features of an effective pre-primary subsector that helps ensure children's optimal learning and development in ECE programmes;
- ✓ promotes a systems approach⁵ to planning and improving access to quality ECE; and
- ✓ supports national and global efforts to advance the achievement of universal access to equitable, high-quality pre-primary education.

When used as a guide for planning and collaboration between governments, their partners and other key stakeholders, 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 pre-primary education.

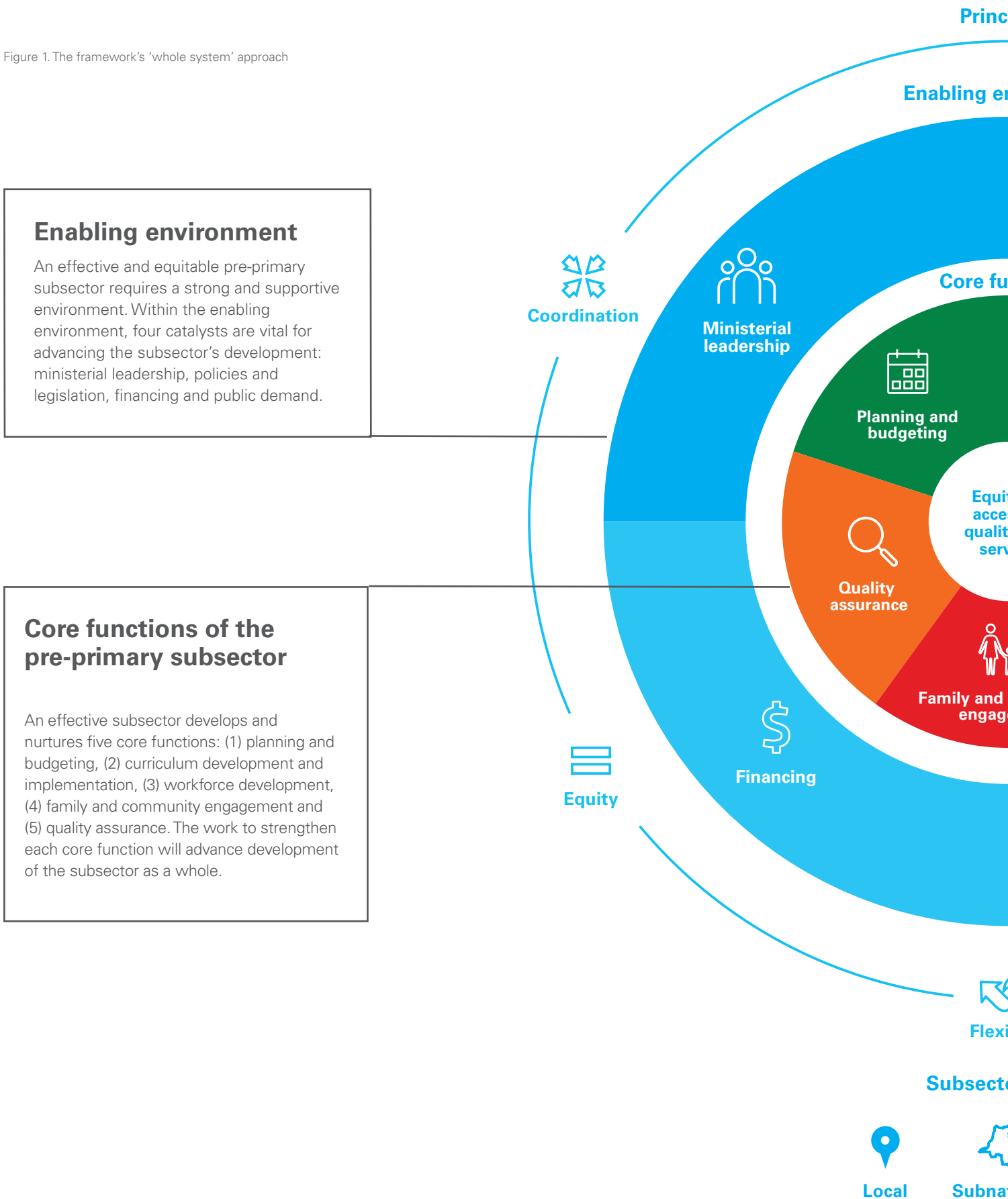
A strong system: The building blocks of quality and equity

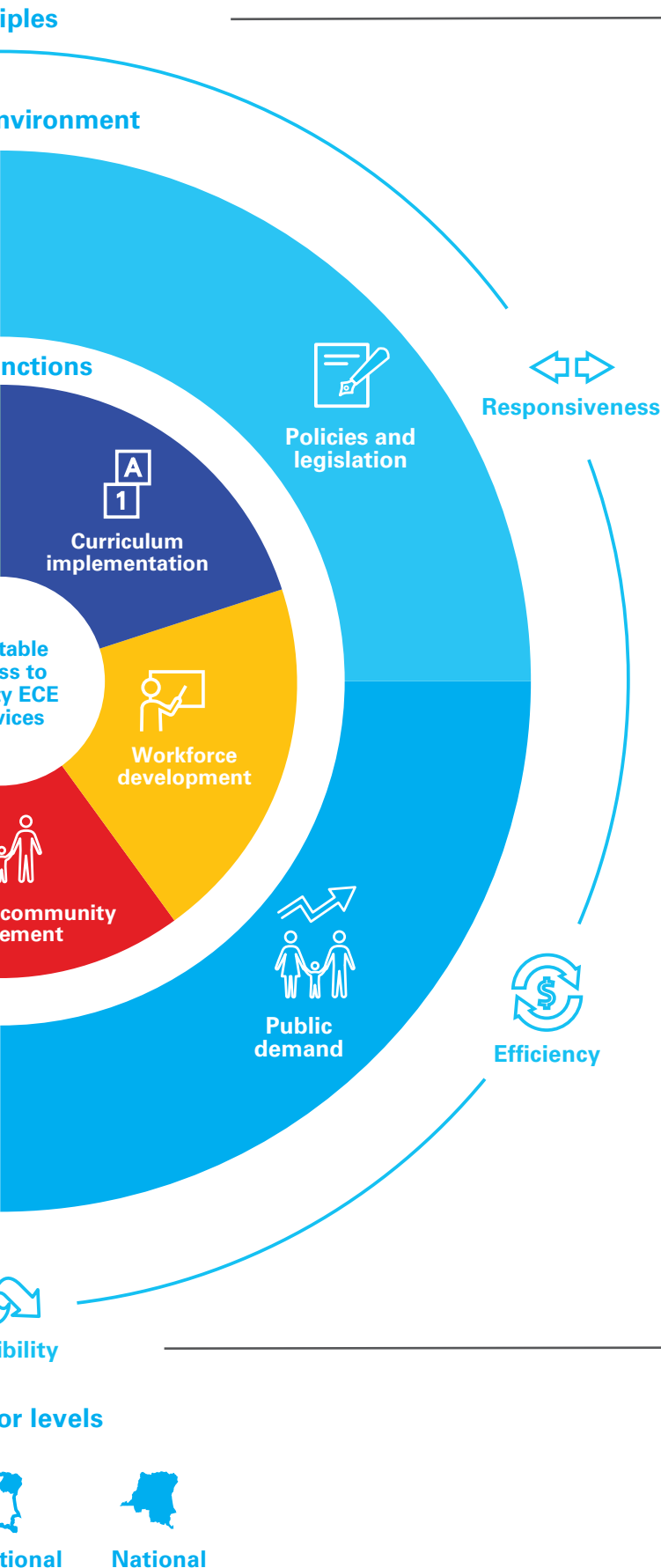
As governments and their partners seek to scale up quality pre-primary education, it is critical for these efforts to be guided by a strong, comprehensive and systemic vision. A strong pre-primary system places children's learning and development outcomes at the core of its work. These desirable outcomes include, but are not limited to, children's physical well-being, social and emotional competence, and cognitive and communication abilities, as well as their overall curiosity and motivation to learn, often referred to as school readiness skills.⁶ 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.⁷

The structure of this framework is based on the holistic requirements for an effective ECE system, as illustrated in Figure 1. It is composed of a set of guiding principles, five core functions of the subsector, the enabling environment and a systems-strengthening approach across all levels of government.



Figure 1. The framework's 'whole system' approach





Principles

When a country is building or strengthening its pre-primary education subsector, applying a set of guiding principles will increase the likelihood that this work will endure over time, despite shifting conditions or crises. The framework recommends 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 takes the likely changes in national and local contexts, cultures and needs into account.
- **Coordination.** The process reflects dynamic, ongoing interactions between sectors beyond education (health, nutrition, social welfare, child protection) as well as the pre-primary subsector and other education subsectors.
- **Flexibility.** While anchored in the authority of a central government ministry, the framework recognizes the full range of programme approaches and engages with the multiple providers (public, private, faith-based, not-for-profit and for-profit service delivery) that compose the pre-primary subsector's landscape. Countries, contexts and cultures differ greatly, so the framework does not recommend a rigid sequence of steps that should be followed. Rather, it is meant to be adapted, added to or prioritized in ways that make sense in a specific context.

Subsector levels

Though 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 relationship 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 level affect what happens at the local level, but the reverse as well (*see Box 1*).

Strengthening the pre-primary subsector’s core functions

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 evidence suggests that a successful pre-primary subsector is effective in several concrete areas, or core functions.⁸ The framework underscores five mutually reinforcing core functions, each of which needs to be developed through targeted plans and focused efforts:



Core Function 1 Planning and budgeting



Core Function 2 Curriculum development and implementation



Core Function 3 Workforce development



Core Function 4 Family and community engagement



Core Function 5 Quality assurance

For each of the five core functions, the framework outlines associated goals, measures of progress and key considerations as starting points, to be modified as appropriate for each country’s pre-primary system. When reviewing the core functions, it is helpful to consider the following points:

- **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 neglected or are 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.
- **Coherence across the five core functions is vital.** The core functions are discussed one by one, but they are all interconnected – and each is essential to delivering quality pre-primary services and to ensuring children’s optimal learning and development.

All of the core functions need to receive balanced attention and resources, establishing coordination and coherence within and between them. For example, if a government makes significant investments in curriculum development and standards (Core Function 2) but fails to invest in regular monitoring and professional development to help teachers implement the curriculum (Core Function 3), these efforts will have limited impact on programme quality and child outcomes. Thinking about these connections will help governments plan and take action that moves the subsector forward without fragmentation or missed opportunities.

The framework takes a deep dive into the details for examining the core functions, with an eye towards analysis and, ultimately, creating an action plan for the subsector. As a brief summary, the rest of this section highlights the purpose and goals of the five core functions.





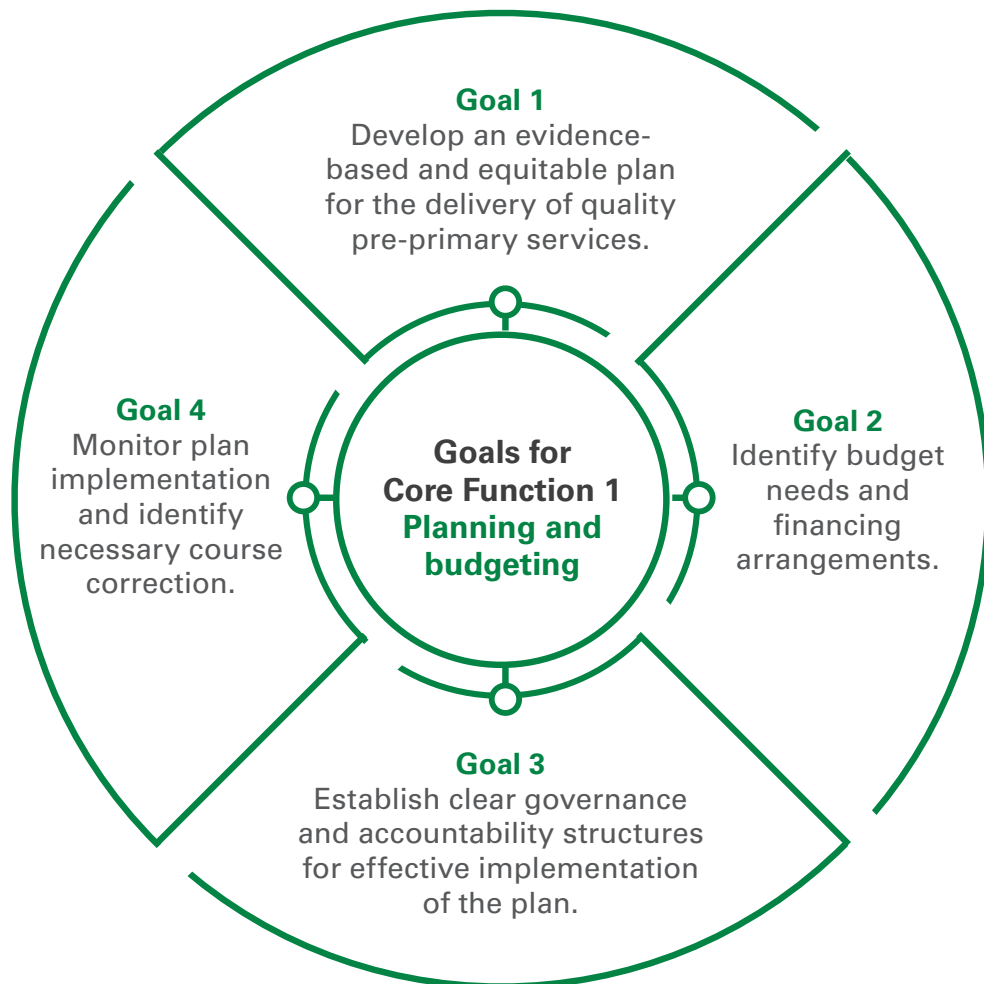
Core Function 1

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.

As a growing number of countries expand their provision of pre-primary education to achieve universal access, planning and budgeting form the backbone of an effective subsector. Consensus in the field indicates that plans are most successful 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.⁹

Four goals are associated with planning and budgeting:





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.



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.



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.



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.

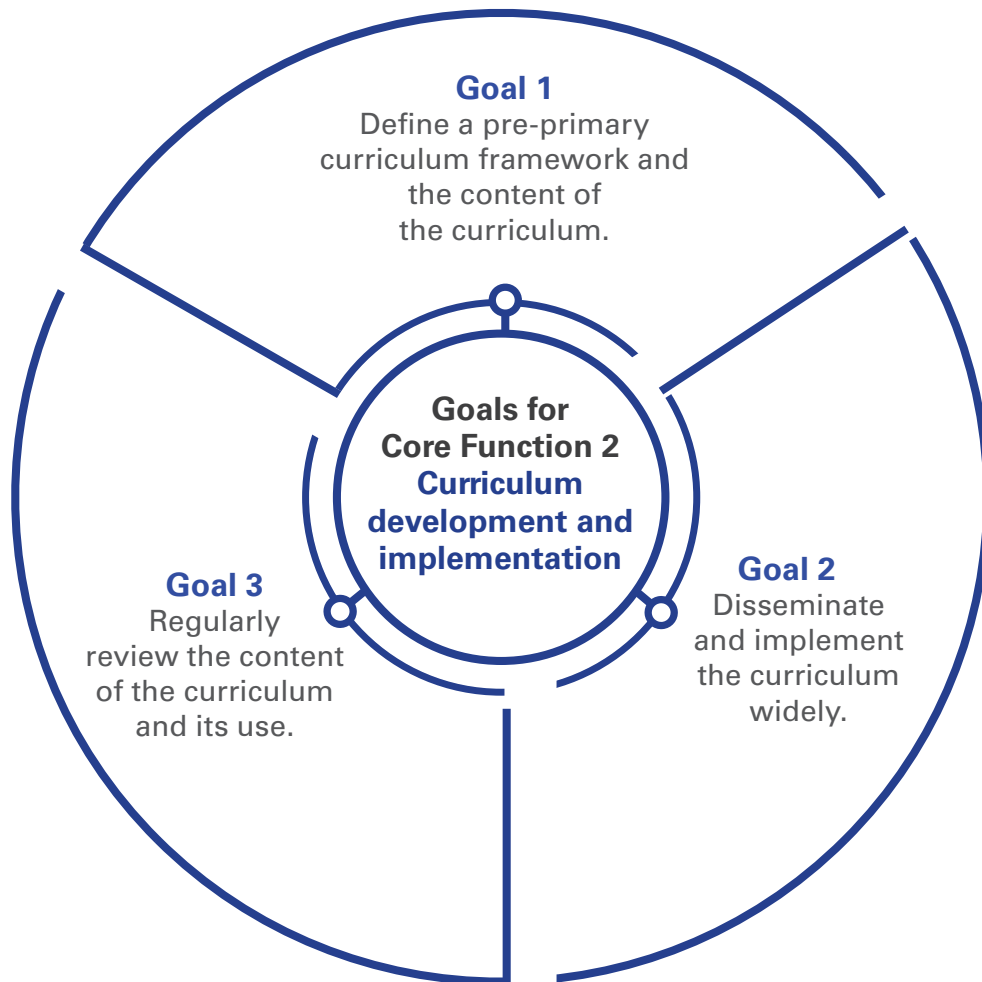


Core Function 2 Curriculum development and implementation

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.

There is consensus among researchers and policymakers that the development of ECE curricula is a powerful tool to improve the pedagogic quality of services.¹⁰ 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,¹¹ it is always important to review the content on a regular basis, ensuring that it can be adapted to changing contexts and conditions.

Three goals are associated with curriculum development and implementation.





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.



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.



Goal 3 Regularly review 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.



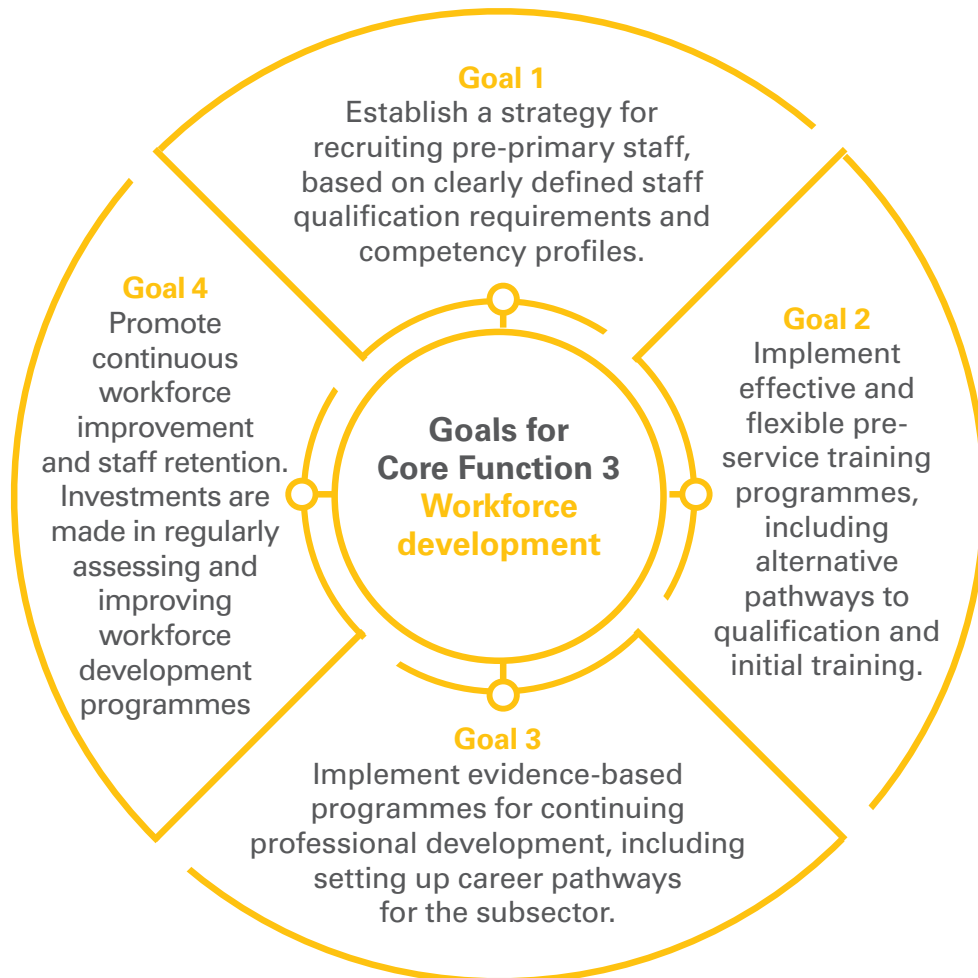
Core Function 3

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.

A well-prepared workforce is essential to delivering high-quality pre-primary services¹² and, at its best, shares a commitment to supporting young children’s learning, growth and well-being. Dedicated, competent teachers, principals, support staff such as paraprofessionals and disability specialists, inspectors and supervisors, and providers of ECE pre- and in-service professional development are all vital to the subsector’s success. Whatever their role, the members of this workforce should have overall pre-primary competencies as well as the skills necessary for their specific responsibilities.

Four goals are associated with workforce development:





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.



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.



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.



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.

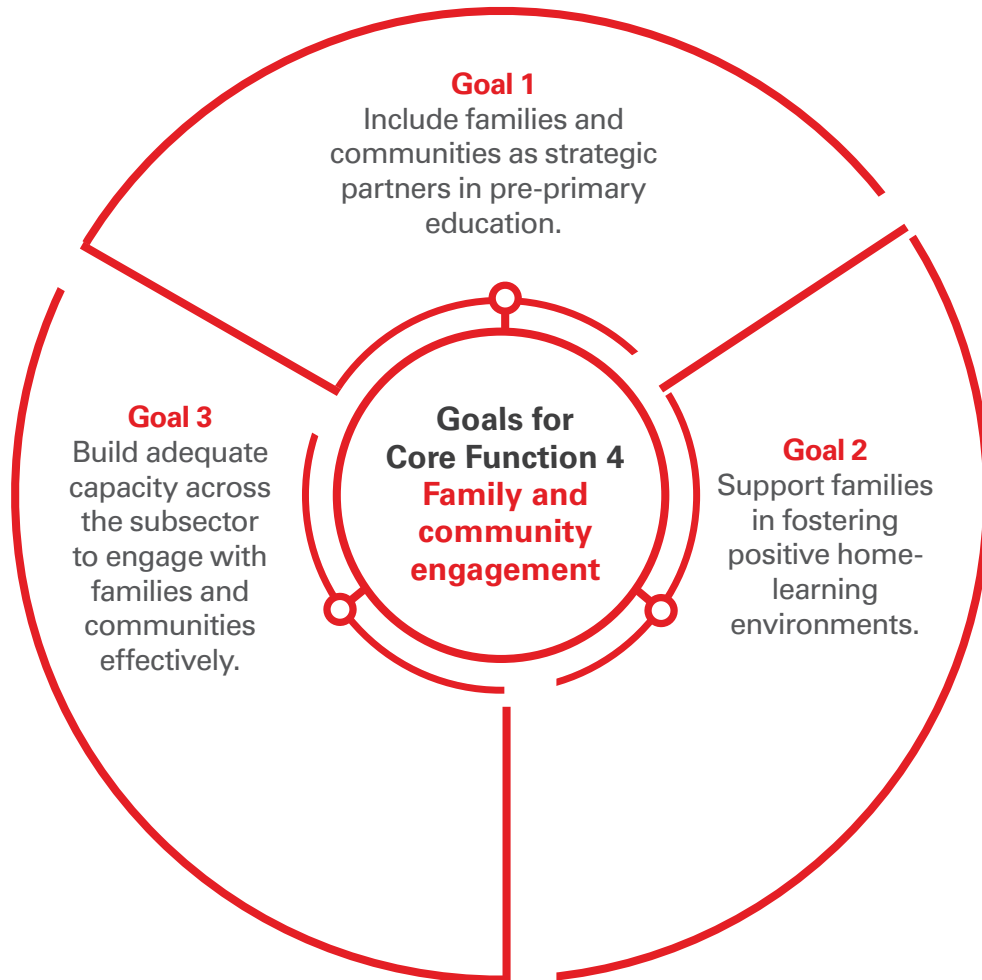


Core Function 4 Family and community engagement

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.

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. A strong relationship between families and pre-primary programmes creates a better transition between a child’s learning at home and experience at preschool. 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.

Three goals are associated with family and community engagement:





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.



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.



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.



Core Function 5

Quality assurance

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.

The quality of pre-primary education is the key ingredient in ensuring gains for children.¹³ 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. Quality assurance fosters accountability, good management and improved performance within the subsector.¹⁴ For governments, a quality assurance system enables the crucial function of analysing and using data to inform policies and future investments to enhance the provision of services.

Four goals are associated with quality assurance:





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.



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.



Goal 2 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.



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.

Everything can be supported by an enabling environment

The enabling environment¹⁵ refers to a broad set of interrelated factors that deeply affect the development of a robust and effective pre-primary subsector, including the ability to achieve intended programme goals. This framework focuses on four key factors, or catalysts, that can be leveraged to establish the foundations of a strong pre-primary subsector.



Ministerial leadership anchors ECE provision within a lead ministry and ensures political will, relevant expertise and coordination across levels of government

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. While the ministry of education typically has authority for the subsector, it should also 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.



Public policies and legislation set the framework for prioritizing pre-primary education in plans and budgets and for the enforcement of relevant quality standards.

They include a variety of official documents that directly establish pre-primary education within government oversight and articulate the government's vision and commitment to providing quality pre-primary services. Public policies and legislation not only set the mandate for the subsector but also support the implementation of relevant programmes at the national and subnational levels, ensuring that services will reach diverse locations and that these efforts will be sustained even when leadership changes over time.¹⁶



Financing ensures adequate investment in the subsector, leveraging a dynamic range of funds from national, subnational and international resources.

Advancing the pre-primary subsector often requires coordinating public investments with private and international funding sources. When investment in pre-primary education is limited, countries experience shortages of quality programmes and inequitable provision.¹⁷ It is therefore vital to secure public funding for essential components of the subsector such as teachers' training, programme planning, monitoring and quality assurance.¹⁸



Public demand generates support for early learning services and improves the accountability of leaders for the delivery and quality of these services.

'Public' includes national officials, subnational governments, civil society, media champions, education and health-related institutions and – importantly – the families and caregivers who need or use such services. This catalyst is most powerful 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.

Figure 2. Establishing a foundation for the pre-primary subsector





The pre-primary and other subsectors: Distinctive yet connected

While the framework focuses on pre-primary systems, it can offer valuable suggestions for expanding quality programmes for children aged 0–3 and for enhancing 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 that address policies and services for infants and toddlers, 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: ensuring children enter school ready to succeed, and 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 early care and education subsector, which offers a holistic perspective and highlights responsiveness to and engagement with families.²⁰

Using the framework to deliver results for children

Creating a comprehensive set of priorities for the pre-primary subsector, and taking action to strengthen the associated functions, is central to building equitable education systems that will place millions of children today on the path to fulfilling their potential.

The *Build to Last* framework offers a basic blueprint for systematic government engagement from which a tailored, coherent plan for pre-primary education can emerge, and is designed to support systems-strengthening in subsectors at all different stages of development. If the pre-primary system is weak or not yet established, governments might wish to use the framework simply as a way to prompt reflection and discussion among their partners and a wide range of stakeholders. This could be a first step towards building an accurate picture of the pre-primary system and defining what is needed to develop a more effective subsector.

Other countries may already have a well-established pre-primary subsector and could use the framework to gain a fuller understanding of areas that need even more attention or would benefit from a fresh approach. This could include deeper discussion and planning on how to link and coordinate the higher education system with local pre-primary training initiatives, or on ideas for strengthening feedback loops so monitoring data can be used to make ongoing improvements.

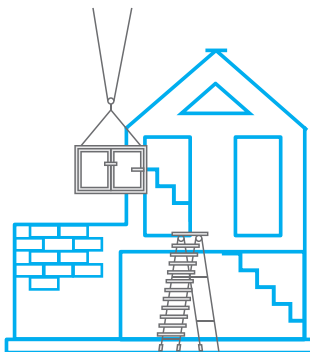
Countries affected by emergencies, armed conflict and other humanitarian crises will also find elements of this framework helpful in informing ECE action plans or in developing transition strategies for the subsector. The points raised throughout can often be adapted to contexts where the aim is to reach children who are refugees or have been internally displaced.

Figure 3. 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 tips are offered for governments and partners to consider:

- ✔ **This framework is designed to be given meaning by each country and each group of users.** The core functions, goals and measures of progress it describes have often proved to be relevant and useful across countries – but they need to be adapted and prioritized for each country's context and the specific ways its pre-primary system functions.
- ✔ **The framework is not intended to dictate the content or structures of a country's pre-primary subsector, how services should be delivered or which improvements are essential priorities.** Because countries, contexts and cultures differ so greatly, the steps it outlines for establishing or enhancing pre-primary services are a starting point.
- ✔ **The framework maintains a systems-strengthening perspective and a long-term view for delivering quality services.** The fundamental purpose of establishing, improving or expanding the pre-primary subsector is to support better outcomes and futures for children, especially those living in poverty and other challenging conditions. Success is more likely if the 'big picture' perspective is applied. During complex or difficult discussions, it is always good to ask: *How will this help children and their families?*

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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