**Module 2: Curriculum development and implementation**

*The purpose of the* ***curriculum development and implementation 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.*

**Module 2** outlines three key goals and associated measures that can lead to progress in strengthening this core function of the pre-primary subsector:

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|  | **Goal 1: Define a pre-primary curriculum framework and the content of the curriculum.** *The curriculum framework and 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 expectations 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*. |

The 11 measures listed below reflect progress against these goals. To evaluate whether each measure is being addressed, consider the associated questions. **In cases where not all of the questions are important or relevant in your context, you might decide to focus on only some of them**. Note that questions highlighted in green cover play-based learning aspects, while questions highlighted in turquoise cover equity and inclusion considerations. Content highlighted in yellow is specific to humanitarian considerations. Where there is an overlap between equity and humanitarian considerations, humanitarian information is color-coded turquoise and referred to as an equity consideration.

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|  | **Goal 1: Define a pre-primary curriculum framework and the content of the curriculum**  *The curriculum framework and 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 expectations about the role and responsibilities of ECE programmes in encouraging children’s holistic learning.*  *Because countries differ in whether there is a national curriculum to be followed by all programmes, or broad guidelines with subnational or local adaptations, the questions associated with this goal can be modified to the country context.* |

**Measure 1 – 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, play-based and age-appropriate learning as well as universal design for learning, and achieve a comprehensive set of early learning and development outcomes for children. 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.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is an official national or subnational curriculum framework(s) in place or in development?

**Q2** Was development of the curriculum framework based on early learning and development standards? Is it aligned with universal design for learning principles and comprehensive standards regarding desired outcomes for children – what pre-primary children know and are able to do – so that the curriculum is intended to support those outcomes?[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Q3** Is the framework comprehensive? Does it cover elements of curriculum including the scope, goals, teaching and learning principles/methods, content priorities and guiding principles for implementation? Is it appropriate to children’s ages and developmental characteristics (e.g., promoting a play-based learning approach)? Is it gender sensitive and does it consider the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, internally displaced persons, refugees, etc. such as the provision of psychosocial support?

**Q4** Was the process for developing the curriculum framework consultative and inclusive? Consider the following aspects:

1. consultations with a wide range of key stakeholders[[2]](#footnote-2) and different service providers;
2. consultations with ethnically and linguistically diverse stakeholders and those representing vulnerable and marginalized populations (ethnic, linguistic and racial minorities, immigrants, refugees, internally displace persons), including those serving children with disabilities;
3. engagement of appropriate national institutions, such as a curriculum development body, a higher education consortium or a pre-primary professional association; and
4. endorsement by relevant institutions and service providers.

**Q5** Have key elements of the curriculum been tested and/or piloted with diverse groups to promote ownership and increase effectiveness?

**Measure 2 – The curriculum content is developmentally appropriate, play-based and pedagogically sound, enabling children to reach their full potential.**

*Developmental appropriateness includes attention to differences in children’s ages and developmental levels, individual needs and interests, and cultural contexts. The curriculum 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 development, and social-emotional and cognitive development.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is the content of the curriculum and standards developmentally appropriate and does it support a play-based learning approach? Is the content of the curriculum contextualized to the real-life experiences of young children and their families? Are some aspects of the curriculum not appropriate for pre-primary children? If so, what are they?

**Q2** Does the curriculum reflect holistic goals for children’s development and early learning? This includes a broad range of domains or aspects of development, such as socio-emotional competence, language development and such cognitive abilities as executive functions. Are all areas of development well-represented? If not, where are the gaps?

**Q3** Has the content of the curriculum and standards been developed by child development/ECE experts or staff with relevant background and skills (e.g., those with expertise on play-based learning and pedagogy)? Do the developers include those with relevant experience in the country’s pre-primary service?

**Q4** Did the curriculum development process and content take into consideration children with diverse needs and experiences, including children with special needs/disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, and other vulnerabilities[[3]](#footnote-3) (e.g., refugees, internally displace persons, etc.)? Does the curriculum reflect expectations that all children can make developmental progress, and does it propose appropriate adaptations for children with disabilities or other special needs?

**Measure 3 – The curriculum framework and content encourage flexible adaptations in collaboration with children, educators and parents.**

*An essential factor of successful curricula 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 across settings, culture and contexts.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Does the curriculum framework and/or content encourage educators to engage children in the learning process based on their interests and experiences, e.g., children co-create the learning activities and bring their home experiences into the classroom?

**Q2** Within the curriculum framework, do educators and families have the flexibility and creativity to adapt, tailor and innovate together the learning process and environment while keeping to the curriculum objectives, e.g., families contribute to the design of the learning space? And are they aware of this opportunity to jointly create experiences and learning spaces for children?

**Measure 4 – Pre-primary and primary school curricula are distinctive but aligned and connected in a logical progression.**

*To ensure a unified, coherent approach to promoting early 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 teaching and learning, and supports a coherent continuum and progression of learning across the early years. This means that the content of the pre-primary curriculum is connected with (but not identical to) the curriculum and teaching methods used in other subsectors, including the 0-3 years of early childhood development (ECD) and primary-level education.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are the overarching curriculum goals and values shared across the ECD, pre-primary and primary subsectors? What are the gaps or challenges in agreeing on broad, shared goals, such as a commitment to play as the foundation for early learning and a common belief in the value of family engagement?

**Q2** How is the pre-primary curriculum aligned with curricula in the ECD, pre-primary and primary subsectors? Consider the following approaches to determine which are applicable in your country context:

1. general alignment of curriculum goals and standards, including overall continuity across goals and standards, e.g., using the same domains or aspects of development but with increasing expectations for higher levels of education;
2. explicit connections across curricula content, pedagogy and/or developmental goals, e.g., the pre-primary curriculum anticipates element of the primary curriculum, and the primary curriculum builds on the pre-primary curriculum content;
3. integrated curricula – one single document that covers shared themes, goals and approaches for a broad age span, e.g., 0–8 years old;
4. flexibility of ECD, pre-primary and primary settings to select and implement elements of curricula that are developmentally appropriate and to plan for transitions between settings;
5. use of elements of the curriculum in before- and after-school services to help create continuity of learning; and
6. alignment of curriculum tailored for humanitarian and refugee settings, such as specific curriculum designed to support refugees integrate in host schools and communities if included in or separate from the national curriculum.

**Q3** Are the possible effects of the pre-primary curriculum tracked through monitoring of child outcomes from pre-primary into primary education? Do aspects of learning that are emphasized in later assessments seem consistent with what teachers emphasize in implementing the pre-primary curriculum? For example, if the pre-primary curriculum emphasizes social-emotional learning, later progress in this area should also be monitored.

**Measure 5 – The curriculum is accompanied by effective teaching and learning materials and resources to support active, play-based learning and engagement.**

*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. The questions below should be used per curriculum if multiple curricula exist in a national context, such as a curriculum to support integration of young refugee children in host communities.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is the curriculum accompanied by a suggested list of learning and play materials for the classroom, including books, toys, games, art materials and manipulatives? Do these seem to be consistent with the curriculum’s emphasis and do they support a play-based learning approach?

**Q2** Are the suggested/recommended teaching and learning materials for each classroom:

- age and developmentally appropriate?

- relevant to the local context?

- supportive of interactive and play-based teaching and learning and of day-to-day implementation of the curriculum?

- adequate for the number of learners?

- accessible for children with disabilities and in children’s mother tongue languages?

- gender responsive?

**Q3** Are associated guides and materials available for practitioners to use, e.g., teachers’ guides or a child assessment toolkit? Are they easy to understand, use and adapt as necessary?

**Q4** Have teachers received training in how to create local teaching and learning materials – including involving families and community members – and do teachers develop local teaching and learning materials in ways learned during the training?

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|  | **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*. |

**Measure 6 – A clear strategy is used to disseminate, implement and review the curriculum framework across the subsector, including diverse service 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, play-based approach and content, and the roles of key stakeholders in implementing the curriculum are understood across the subsector – including pre-primary directorate officials, national and subnational officials, inspectors, principals, teachers, teacher-training institutes, humanitarian field or refugee camp staff, and parents and other caregivers.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is it clear – for example, through policies, directives and/or regulations – what the expectations are in terms of implementing the curriculum framework? Consider the following elements:

1. Is there a clear national or subnational curriculum implementation strategy addressing dissemination, implementation, utilization and review?
2. Is it mandatory to follow the curriculum framework, and what adaptations are permitted or encouraged?
3. Which service providers must use the curriculum?
4. What teaching and learning materials are mandated or recommended nationally or subnationally for ECE settings?
5. Which institutions and individuals are responsible for supporting curriculum implementation and what are their responsibilities?
6. In decentralized systems, are roles and responsibilities clearly identified, e.g., at the subnational and local levels?

**Q2** Are different types of service providers – including public, private or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian or refugee actors – using the curriculum in practice to ensure a consistent level of quality? Is the curriculum appropriately adapted to make it meaningful in diverse contexts?

**Q3** What mechanisms are in place to disseminate the curriculum framework (content, goals, standards) and the roles for implementation to all relevant stakeholders across the subsector, including directorate officials, principals, teachers, teacher training institutes and inspectors? Are there gaps in reaching certain stakeholders?

**Q4** Are effective mechanisms in place to ensure that teaching and learning materials are available as needed (including pre-positioning for emergencies) and their refurbishment or replacement? Are new or updated materials available in all areas, including rural locations?

**Measure 7 – The pre-primary curriculum is a core element of the pre-service and/or in-service training for practitioners and subsector managers.**

*To ensure wide and consistent implementation of the curriculum, training and support are provided to pre-primary personnel, including pre-service training that offers opportunities to observe and practise implementing the curriculum. Opportunities for in-service training and mentoring for teachers on effective teaching practices are also in place, and training and orientation for non-public service providers is considered, when appropriate.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Do pre-service and in-service training for practitioners and subsector managers – such as principals, supervisors and inspectors – include a focus on curriculum orientation (such as play-based learning approach) and use? Does this training include use of teaching and learning materials, and the associated resources and assessment tools? What are the gaps in access to such training, e.g., for those in remote areas, humanitarian field staff or refugee camp providers, or those teaching in non-public settings?

**Q2** Are teachers provided with training in appropriate adaptations of the curriculum to address children’s interests, abilities, language and culture, and other individual and developmental needs (i.e. in emergencies or for refugees situated in host communities or camps)? Does the training include strategies for identifying children’s needs (this may include screening for early detection of development problems), assessment and teaching practices?

**Q3** How effective is the available training (either pre- or in-service) in enhancing capacities to implement or support the implementation of the curriculum? Consider the following elements:

- style and provision, e.g., curriculum-related seminars, workshops, on-site coaching, mentoring, hands-on practical exercises;

- training approach, e.g., cascading approach, train-the-trainer, government officers;

- accessibility, e.g., frequency, intensity, availability for non-public service providers; and

- usefulness, e.g., responding to identified capacity gaps in understanding and implementing the curriculum.

**Q4** Are data current, accurate and available nationally and subnationally to identify curriculum-related support needs of practitioners and other relevant personnel – including managers, supervisors and inspectors – across all levels and in times of emergencies or refugee settings? Is there evidence that support needs are not only identified but also responded to?

**Measure 8 – The curriculum implementation strategy encourages staff to work together, interact with experienced mentors or coaches, 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. While founded on knowledge of child development and curricular areas, the implementation of teaching strategies is enhanced through cooperation between pre-primary educators, mentoring, and observation of how the holistic curriculum framework and goals are being applied. These questions may also be applied in humanitarian or refugee settings, however they may be most relevant and able to be examined in protracted crises.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are there opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their teaching practices (including on their play-based pedagogy) as they implement the curriculum?

**Q2** How do practitioners engage in reflective practice? What methods and platforms are in place to encourage reflection on their teaching strategies and pedagogy in order to help improve implementation of the curriculum, e.g., peer exchange, mentoring, observations?

**Q3** Are results from teacher reflections used to improve teaching practices with respect to implementation of the curriculum? How does this happen, if it does?

**Measure 9: – 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, ongoing coaching, and printing and distribution of resources, including learning materials for children and guides for teachers. After curriculum resources are allocated, 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. Additional needs for ensuring dissemination and training in emergency or refugee settings should also be determined and the below questions may be applied to these settings.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are sufficient financial resources budgeted throughout the subsector – at the national to subnational levels – to ensure quality implementation of the curriculum? What are the gaps, if any?

**Q2** Is there a realistic implementation schedule to allow timely distribution of materials to pre-primary programmes and to provide sufficient training and on-site coaching for teaching staff and other key personnel on the use of the curriculum?

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|  | **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.* |

**Measure 10 – 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, including the needs of children from the most vulnerable populations and children with disabilities. While such information can be collected through formal school readiness assessments or internal or external evaluations, 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.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is there an institution or department that is clearly responsible for reviewing curricular content? In some cases, this may be linked to curriculum review in other subsectors, such as the primary grades curriculum.

**Q2** How is information collected to review the content of the curriculum (including the teaching and learning materials) in terms of its effectiveness and relevance to children’s varied needs and developmental outcomes, including its effectiveness in supporting play-based learning? How is information collected to review how teachers have adapted or modified the curriculum? Consider the following tools and assessment methods, with attention to appropriateness in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts:

- formal school readiness assessments;

- internal/external evaluations of the curriculum;

- rapid multi-sectoral or sector assessments in crises and refugee settings;

- informal child assessments, e.g., portfolios with samples of children’s work; and

- feedback from families.

**Q3** Does the review of the curriculum take place on a regular basis? Is the schedule appropriate for timely use of the results?

**Q4** Are the results from the evaluation of the curriculum’s effectiveness used to make changes to improve its content and to make adaptations for diverse contexts?

**Measure 11 – Curriculum implementation is monitored regularly.**

*Data collection, either informal or formal, is conducted according to the pre-primary programme context, the scope of the curriculum, and the extent of implementation. Implementation feedback loops seek to understand if teachers are actually using the intended curriculum and whether there are common roadblocks to consistent implementation, such as insufficient materials or irrelevant training. After collection, these data are used to improve teaching and learning practices. These questions may also be applied in humanitarian or refugee settings, however they may be most relevant and able to be examined in protracted crises.*

**Q1** Are key indicators of successful implementation set in place agreed upon and integrated into a monitoring framework?

**Q2** Are there appropriate curriculum monitoring tools and mechanisms across the subsector levels and for different stakeholders – including teachers, directors and inspectors – to monitor and collect data on curriculum implementation? At these levels, tools might include:

- classroom observations of teachers’ implementation and children’s engagement;

- samples of children’s curriculum-related work; and

- developmental checklists aligned with curriculum goals.

**Q3** Is curriculum implementation monitored on a regular basis? If regular monitoring is in place, are the results of curriculum implementation monitoring used to identify bottlenecks to consistent implementation? Is the person who is monitoring trained in ECE to provide appropriate feedback?

**Q4** Are the results of curriculum implementation monitoring, at various subsector levels, used to improve teaching practices and overall quality? How is this done or how might it be done, (e.g., plans for additional coaching on specific aspects of the curriculum or improvements in training of curriculum trainers)?

**Q5** Are there feedback processes that involve teachers’ and families’ experiences with the curriculum and associated teaching and learning materials and that capture suggestions for improvement in terms of the content and teaching practices (aligned with the curriculum framework)?

1. It is also important to ensure that the pre-primary curriculum is aligned with the curriculum for the early primary grades and that the latter builds on the pre-primary curriculum. See Measure 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As much as possible, families and communities should also be consulted. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Disadvantaged, marginalized and vulnerable young children and families are those that are socially and/or economically excluded in their communities due to vulnerability characteristics such as gender, geographic location (i.e. remoteness), disability status, orphanhood status, household wealth, household arrangements such as single headed households, being from a minority group (i.e. ethnic or linguistic minorities), and/or affected by conflict and crisis (i.e. migrants, immigrants, internally displaced persons, or refugees). This definition is adapted from: [UNICEF 2014](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Measuring-the-Determinants-of-Childhood-Vulnerability_Final-Report-5_8-LR-_172.pdf) and [UNICEF 2017](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2017_06_Adol04.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)