**Module 4: Family and community engagement**

*The purpose of the* ***family and community engagement 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.*

**Module 4** outlines three key goals and associated measures that can lead progress in strengthening this core function of the pre-primary subsector:

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|  | **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 early childhood education, they are empowered to demand quality programmes from policymakers and to 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.* |

The 10 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.** *These questions should also be applied to understanding specific efforts to engage families and communities during emergencies and in refugee settings (camps or host communities).*

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: 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 early childhood education, they are empowered to demand quality programmes from policymakers and to contribute to these programmes.* |

**Measure 1 – Family and community engagement is a priority for the pre-primary subsector.**

*Pre-primary subsector policies and plans treat family and community engagement as a vital, not optional, component of quality pre-primary services. An established arm of the lead government body for pre-primary education – such as the ministry of education, nationally or subnationally – is formally designated with responsibility for this core function.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are there policy directives about family and community engagement, including clear roles, responsibilities and timelines for implementation?

**Q2** Is the importance of family and community engagement well understood and accepted by pre-primary subsector leadership and stakeholders, including pre-primary directorates, directors, managers and teachers? What significant gaps or roadblocks might exist?

**Q3** Is there an identified national directorate or subnational arm of the lead ministry that has the responsibility to ensure stakeholder buy-in and to oversee family and community engagement across the subsector?

**Q4** Is there clear evidence that pre-primary services respect and value families’ diverse beliefs, needs and cultures, such as activities to show that all families and children are welcome? Is this respect for families absent or limited in some areas, e.g., among vulnerable populations, in remote locations or under private delivery of pre-primary services?

**Q5** Do special programmes encourage participation and attendance in pre-primary education for children from hard-to-reach or disadvantaged families[[1]](#footnote-1) (including children with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons, ethnic and linguistic minorities)? Are these programmes well-established and accessible?

**Measure 2 – A mix of strategies is deployed to encourage family participation.**

*Partnerships are created between families and early childhood education 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.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** How are partnerships created between families and ECE programmes to motivate and engage families’ in participation and collaboration? Are such partnerships widely used? If not, where are the gaps or disparities?

**Q2** Can families be involved in ECE programmes in various ways, e.g., as volunteers in the classroom or board members, or through digital/social media and in-person activities/events? Do these opportunities appear to fit with the reality of families’ lives, considering work hours, cultural beliefs about home-school relationships, etc.?

**Measure 3 – Engagement with families and communities is reflected across the pre-primary subsector’s core functions.**

*A family and community emphasis is reflected in other core functions, for example, through family and child-related policies; standards for family and community engagement; teacher training programmes with a focus on communicating and working with families; and tools and mechanisms to monitor participation and engagement.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is family engagement an integral component of pre-primary policies and programmes across the subsector in the following areas:

1. *Curriculum* – Did the framework’s development include family input? Is the pre-primary curriculum well understood and supported by families?
2. *Teacher training* – Do teachers receive professional development on the importance of family partnerships and strategies for engagement?
3. Monitoring and evaluation – Do monitoring tools include ways to assess family participation and support?
4. Quality assurance – Do quality standards include efforts to partner with and engage families?

**Q2** Are standards for family and community engagement in place? This would include, for example:

- requirements or expectations for providers regarding parents’ involvement, such as minimum standards for parent-teacher meetings;

- responsiveness to language and other forms of diversity;

- the establishment of effective parents’ associations; and

**Q3** Are the family and community engagement standards national? Or are they applied only to specific services or programme settings?

**Q4** How are pre-primary services held accountable to meet these standards?

**Measure 4 – Resources in the community are leveraged for pre-primary services.**

*Preschools can be effective platforms for delivering a comprehensive set of services available in the community. For example, health services can be brought into preschools through referrals. Connections between pre-primary services and other community resources can also be made to strengthen holistic and broader support for children. Depending on the context, this might include exploring ways that community centres, libraries, museums, NGOs and businesses can support quality pre-primary education.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are there ways in which communities or municipalities and local authorities are engaged meaningfully in preschool education services? Are these widely practised or limited to a few promising examples?

**Q2** Is there functional coordination between pre-primary centres and various community services, such as health care or social services, to maximize family outreach? For example, do teachers know how to inform families about or refer them to community services?

**Q3** Does community engagement include a broad range of locally appropriate options? Consider, for example:

- identifying and making connections between pre-primary programmes and community health care or social services;

- involving community leaders in planning, developing or adapting family support programmes so that community values are reflected;

- communities taking the role of service providers, such as offering community-based programmes run by local NGOs, faith-based organizations or parents);

- linkages of families with young children with other support services across sectors (e.g. nutrition, health, protection, social protection services) and services and programmes in humanitarian and refugee settings (e.g. psychosocial support, cash transfers, cash for work).

**Q4** If these types of coordination and connection seldom occur, what are the barriers? Lack of local capacity, limited information about such opportunities, lack of attention to local cultural practices?

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|  | **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.* |

**Measure 5 – Initiatives to help families create positive home learning environments are an integral part of the pre-primary subsector.**

*Support to improve learning at home can be provided through home visits, child development workshops, training and other programmes for parents, parent support in the home languages, and public relations outreach and campaigns. This support can be offered through stand-alone or integrated initiatives, strategies and/or programmes.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are there initiatives, strategies and programmes to help families engage with and support their children’s learning and development at home (e.g., promoting playful learning experience at home)? Are these widely implemented or are they limited to specific settings, such as public pre-primary services or wealthier communities?

**Q2** Does the pre-primary subsector know about and coordinate with home learning opportunities that are available through other sectors, such as the health sector? Are there examples of pre-primary programmes working together with other sectors to leverage those opportunities?

**Q3** Do the initiatives, strategies and programmes include a variety of options that fit with diverse family characteristics and preferences? Consider the following examples:

- conducting home visits or targeted interventions for those families who need support (e.g., families of children with disabilities may require specific and targeted support);

- providing culturally responsive and demand-driven support, e.g., strategies for promoting language development, behaviour management and child development workshops;

- providing support and information in ways that are accessible and understandable to families – including the use of home languages;

- using formats and content that build families’ confidence and skills, not just their knowledge or awareness; and

- conducting public relations, outreach and other campaigns to promote family take-up of home learning opportunities.

**Measure 6 – Parent support programmes prioritize reaching the most disadvantaged and vulnerable families.**

*Collaboration with families from low socio-economic and minority groups (as well as immigrants, internally displaced and refugees) is recognized as especially important and effective. In addition, because families with young children who have disabilities may be isolated from their community, relationships with preschool programmes can be particularly beneficial.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Do the family engagement initiatives, strategies and programmes give special attention to families that are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged[[2]](#footnote-2), including refugee families, ethnically marginalized families, and families who have children with disabilities or other special needs? Which groups have been most unlikely to receive or participate in family support services?

**Q2** Are these initiatives flexibly adapted to the characteristics, preferences and needs of the families they aim to reach? What additional adaptations might be needed, for example, use of local languages in programme resources or materials that reflect local contexts?

**Q3** Do the family engagement initiatives, strategies and programmes include building and/or strengthening the capacity of families/communities to support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young children (such as children with disabilities)?

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|  | **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 interaction 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 among families and their children's pre-primary programmes.* |

**Measure 7 –** **Stakeholders in the pre-primary subsector have a clear, shared understanding of family engagement goals and understand their role in supporting these goals.**

*Seminars, meetings and other venues, methods and platforms are used to share and publicize family engagement goals and strategies across the subsector – so that all relevant personnel are aware of their roles and implementation responsibilities. Specific policy directives are disseminated to create shared accountability. These directives describe what content and delivery systems should be implemented.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are all key stakeholders clearly informed about the purpose and importance of family and community engagement, including relevant directives, policies and resources? Depending on the local context, stakeholders would include officials at all levels, service providers, pre-primary managers and other personnel as well as families.

**Q2** Is there sufficient communication and cooperation between the national government and subnational and local authorities in terms of expectations for family and community engagement activities and programmes, including roles and responsibilities for implementation? If there are barriers to communication or cooperation across levels, where are they?

**Measure 8: Pre-primary teachers and other personnel are provided with effective training and ongoing support to engage families and communities.**

*Teachers and key personnel – including managers, school and programme directors, and supervisors – have the requisite expertise and skills to carry out the family and community engagement activities. Stronger pre-primary staff skills are supported by pre-service or in-service training as well as mentoring and supervisor support.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Do pre-primary staff participate in effective training through pre-service or continuing professional development to engage families and communities, and to support families in promoting play-based early learning in their daily routines at home? For example, what is the percentage of pre-primary staff and leaders trained on family engagement and support to promote more play at home?

**Q2** Are pre-primary staff given effective, ongoing support to engage families and communities, and to support families in fostering and enhancing playful learning at home? This could include, for example, mentoring, coaching, supervisor support and the involvement of technical experts at various levels of the subsector.

**Q3** Are training materials and other professional development resources available to build the capacities of pre-primary teachers or other personnel to implement family and community engagement strategies?

**Q4** Are material resources available, such as posters, videos, brochures and learning materials, to support the implementation of family/community engagement activities? Do these materials reflect family and community diversity, including ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity?

**Measure 9 – 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*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are sufficient financial resources allocated throughout the subsector – national to subnational and local – to ensure quality implementation of family and community outreach programmes and activities? For example, are costs estimated and resources available for family outreach materials, family workshop venues, training for teachers and supervisors, and costs for additional staff or expert advisors?

**Q2** Are enough family engagement personnel available and deployed at the right levels? For example, if home visits are expected, are locally based home visitors recruited, trained and assigned? Are ‘master trainers’ available to prepare other personnel for implementation?

**Measure 10 – Family and community engagement practices are continuously evaluated and improved.**

*The pre-primary subsector collects relevant data and information on family and community initiatives, levels of family participation and the effects on home practices, and uses such data to evaluate and improve strategies and programmes.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is there a functional monitoring mechanism and associated tools to evaluate the effectiveness of family and community engagement activities? Are desired results, including effects on families’ understanding and practices related to promotion of early learning, clearly stated and tracked?

**Q2** Are there readily available disaggregated data on pre-primary attendance, broken out by various equity dimensions, including data on whether families from vulnerable groups or in remote locations participate in services? Is there relevant information that is not currently gathered?

**Q3** Are there information and data about family and community engagement activities and practices? For example, what is the percentage of pre-primary institutions that provide parents’/caregivers’ education or involvement opportunities on how they use play at home? Are the information and data about family and community engagement shared with local programmes as well as at the subnational and national levels? If so, are such data used to improve policies and practices going forward?

1. 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-1)
2. The most 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-2)