**Module 5: Quality assurance**

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

**Module 5** outlines four 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: 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 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.*  **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.* |

The 15 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 assure quality 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: 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.* |

**Measure 1 – Standards set forth a country’s expectations and goals for the quality of pre-primary education services.**

*Well-defined and measurable standards specify whether they are intended to serve as a minimum ‘floor of quality’ standard or to set aspirational goals. Countries may have either type of standards; it is important to be clear in communicating which are being developed or implemented.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Do the pre-primary service standards clearly define their purpose? Does the content provide specific details to match and help fulfil the standards’ intentions, e.g., for quality assurance, regulation, accreditation, or minimum requirements for operations, staff, curricula, materials, etc.? Are these standards the same or adapted for emergencies and/or refugee settings, and if different, is the purpose clearly defined?

**Q2** If the service quality standards describe *aspirational goals*, do they provide a system of steps or levels that indicate how a pre-primary programme can advance from its current status to the desired, higher-level quality practices? This system might, for example, have three levels or ‘stars’, with one star representing basic levels of teacher training, provision of some opportunities for children’s play, etc., and more stars given to programmes that meet higher standards, such as a higher proportion of teachers who have formal training or a fully developed and implemented play-based learning curriculum.

**Measure 2 – The quality standards are comprehensive and evidence-based.**

*The standards are based on evidence and reflect current knowledge from the science of child development and learning. The standards also include two aspects of quality: structural factors and process quality.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are national standards on the quality of pre-primary services in place? Are they *minimum standards* – the basics that are essential for adequate quality – or are they *aspirational standards* that detail a desired, higher level of quality? Is this distinction clear (countries may have either type of standards; it is important to be clear in communicating which are being developed or implemented)? Are these standards the same or adapted for emergencies and/or refugee settings, and if different, are they minimum or aspirational standards? Do all service providers in emergencies and/or refugee settings utilize the same standards?

Note that “quality” will be based on national definitions and national quality standards. Play-based learning, for example, could be integrated in these standards.

**Q2** Were the service quality standards developed through an inclusive, participatory process with relevant stakeholders, such as experts in early childhood education, teachers, families, a monitoring body? Were some key stakeholders left out?

**Q3** Are the service quality standards evidence-based, and do they address the essential elements of both structural and process quality? Points to consider include:

1. *Structural quality standards* cover health and hygiene, working conditions and safety, programme duration and hours of operation, financial resource management, and levels of education and training for staff, among other physical and organizational elements. In many countries, structural quality standards are established in government policies.
2. *Process quality standards* encompass teacher-child interactions, teaching practices, play-based learning, gender responsiveness, curriculum implementation, children’s use of materials, parents’ involvement, and other indicators of how teaching and learning take place in pre-primary settings.

**Q4** Are the service quality standards flexible or adaptable to reflect differences across districts, service providers or responsible authorities, cultural contexts and other relevant criteria, including in emergency and refugee settings? For example, some standards may be adapted, contextualized or supplemented by local authorities to respond to local circumstances. In what aspects of the standards may greater, or less, flexibility be needed?

**Measure 3 – The service quality standards are intentionally and clearly aligned with standards for staff and standards for the preschool curriculum.**

*Consistency of content and emphasis is evident across all standards related to pre-primary education. This can include standards for service quality, early learning and development, pre-primary staff competencies and training, and the pre-primary curriculum. Assess the extent to which standards are consistent in emergency and/or refugee settings.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** In countries that have early learning and development standards (ELDS), are they consistently reflected in the pre-primary service quality standards? Or are there gaps and inconsistencies? (One example might be determining whether standards for pre-primary settings follow ELDS guidance that children’s physical development is supported through structural quality standards for outdoor play equipment.)

**Q2** Are the standards for service quality and the standards for competencies and training for pre-primary teachers or other personnel aligned and consistent? For example, if health standards are part of service expectations, are staff expected to be prepared through certification or professional development to promote physical health and to refer children who may have health issues to the appropriate services? Where are the gaps or inconsistencies?

**Q3** Are the standards for service quality and the standards for the pre-primary curriculum aligned and consistent? For example, if service quality standards expect implementation of a specific national curriculum, do the curriculum standards include details about that curriculum? Where are the gaps or inconsistencies?

**Measure 4 – Service standards are designed to facilitate monitoring.**

*The standards are detailed, coherent and feasible for use by teachers, trainers, supervisors, inspectors and others in the pre-primary subsector, connecting with monitoring tools for assessing and improving quality. Assess the extent to which these are feasible in emergency and/or refugee settings.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are the quality standards detailed, coherent and feasible, so that they are easy to understand by teachers, trainers, supervisors, inspectors, standards officers and others in the pre-primary subsector? What areas may need further specification or clarification?

**Q2** Are the quality standards designed and written so they can be easily incorporated into and reflected in monitoring tools for assessing and improving quality? What is the current status of such monitoring tools? Are there different sets of monitoring tools based on different standards for different providers (typically private and non-subsidized providers)?

**Q3** Are the quality standards applicable and enforceable across all service providers, responsible authorities and settings (private, community, public, etc.)? If they are not, is there a common, agreed-upon core of quality features applicable to all services?

**Q4** If service quality standards are not applicable or enforceable across all providers:

1. Are there different sets of standards for different providers, such as the private and non-subsidized providers that are frequently part of the pre-primary context?
2. Are these providers required to provide data on the quality of their services?
3. Are regulations in place to cover providers that are not subject to national service quality standards? For the purpose of overseeing the quality of their operations, this could include regulations for financial reporting, market entry requirements, and penalty mechanisms for non-compliance.
4. Is there a commonly accepted core of quality features that applies to all services, even when specific standards might apply to only some programme auspices?

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|  | **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.* |

**Measure 5 – The primary purpose and goals of the quality assurance system are clearly specified and take account of the country context.**

*Purposes for monitoring quality can include: tracking accountability for government funds; managing and improving performance in pre-primary settings; providing parents with information to choose the best option for their children’s pre-primary education; and informing policy discussions by generating data that reveals strengths and areas for improvement. If multiple quality assurance mechanisms exist, for example in humanitarian or refugee settings, analyse the extent to which these are harmonized and/or integrated with national systems.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** What purpose, scope and crucial policy questions does the country’s pre-primary system need to answer through monitoring? These will include key aspects of the subsector – workforce development, curriculum, access, equity, etc., as described across the other core functions and tool modules.

**Q2** Have decisions been made about what types of data are most essential to collect? Are the types of data to be collected consistent with the scope and goals of the pre-primary system? For example, are data related to teacher practices (ex. play-based pedagogy) being regularly collected and used to inform improvements and policy?

**Q3** Is it clear where data gaps exist? If there are gaps, how would they be resolved?

**Measure 6 – Appropriate tools for external monitoring are in place. External quality assurance mechanisms and procedures are established for monitoring and enforcing the quality standards across all types of providers.**

*Typically, external monitoring includes an accreditation process for pre-primary programmes and for professional development providers as well as inspections or other external reviews that may be a part of the monitoring system. Relevant data collection processes are developed and standardized, ideally through the national Education Management Information System (EMIS) or other established data collection mechanisms. Assess the extent to which ECE components in EMIS are crisis-sensitive. Where multiple mechanisms exist, for example in humanitarian or refugee settings, analyse the extent to which these systems have pre-primary data collection mechanisms and tools developed and utilized based on crisis type and length.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is an external system in place for monitoring service quality through regulations, accreditation, inspection and other external review processes? Such an external monitoring system would be implemented by appropriately qualified personnel and would clearly address:

- the purposes and goals of external monitoring;

- types of data and information to be gathered;

- processes/mechanisms for sharing feedback; and

- frequency and duration of external monitoring.

**Q2** Are there established and appropriate tools/instruments, mechanisms and procedures for monitoring and enforcing service quality standards (checklists, observation tools, inspection tools, etc.)? Consider whether these tools/instruments are:

- user-friendly;

- culturally appropriate;

- consistent with ethical standards; and

- accompanied by appropriate guidance for their use.

**Q3** Are there standardized data collection processes for monitoring/enforcing quality standards? This can happen, for example, through the national EMIS or other established data collection mechanisms. Standardized data collection helps ensure that the information collected across sites is captured in similar ways and will have similar meanings to inform national, regional and local improvements.

**Measure 7 – Internal quality assurance mechanisms and tools are established and implemented.**

*Relevant mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring, e.g., programme and staff self-evaluations, are established and standardized, with the purpose of helping staff and administrators document and critically reflect on their practice and the service’s overall functioning. Analyse the extent to which these mechanisms and tools are developed and utilized in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length or identify if additional, parallel internal mechanisms and tools are utilized in these settings.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is there an internal service quality monitoring system in place to measure and facilitate quality improvements in local contexts? Are there inconsistencies in the settings or auspices that implement internal monitoring?

**Q2** Are standardized mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring in effect? These include, for example, guidelines for internal monitoring and self-assessment tools, such as surveys, portfolios, journals and checklists.

**Q3** Are the internal monitoring mechanisms clear and easy to use by programme personnel? Are they well-aligned with the service quality standards and with other related standards as described in the other core functions, such as curriculum standards or teacher competence standards?

**Q4** How do the mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring help staff and administrators document and reflect on their practice and the overall functioning of the setting? Is there evidence that they are used for these purposes?

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|  | **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.* |

**Measure 8 – Roles and responsibilities for monitoring quality across levels are clearly outlined and address all aspects of quality assurance and improvement.**

*An effective monitoring system identifies what body or bodies, from national to local levels – including provincial, district, zone, school and community – are responsible for managing and carrying out monitoring and quality assurance activities. Analyse the extent to which these roles and responsibilities are relevant in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length or identify if alternative monitoring roles and responsibilities are available.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Have policy directives been issued/developed specific to monitoring, roles, timelines etc.? Are gaps or lack of shared knowledge evident within existing policies?

**Q2** Is there a shared understanding among monitoring and quality assurance stakeholders of the broader monitoring plan and how specific data collection efforts – such as preschool inspections or the involvement of standards officers – work to support policy questions and decisions?

**Q3** Is there a single, recognized institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?

**Q4** Are the roles and accountability structures for monitoring and regulating pre-primary services and providers clear from national to subnational and local levels? In many countries, there has been considerable decentralization or devolution of responsibilities for various functions – including monitoring – from the central/national level to greater involvement at the provincial, district, zone, school or community levels. The extent of decentralization is therefore an important consideration in monitoring and regulating pre-primary services.

**Q5** Do monitoring tools exist for each level of monitoring? Are there gaps in availability or access to these tools?

**Measure 9 –** **Sufficient staff are deployed and have participated in training to support effective monitoring.**

*All relevant staff who may be involved with data collection, monitoring and other elements of quality assurance have requisite expertise and skills to monitor service standards and regulations, and to enact other components of a quality assurance system. Analyse the extent to which there are sufficient staff deployed for training and monitoring pre-primary services and service providers in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are there enough inspectors, supervisors and other staff to carry out inspections and assessments of compliance with service quality standards? Are new staff roles required, so that the system can effectively monitor quality and use data? Are inspectors, supervisor and other staff trained in early childhood education?

**Q2** Is there attention to the range of distinctive roles involved in quality assurance – including inspectors, teachers, principals, supervisors as well as regulatory agencies? Are the skills needed specifically for pre-primary education data collection, analysis, use and reflection considered? For example, inspectors need training on understanding early childhood education, play-based learning and pedagogy, pre-primary quality inspection, and teachers need preparation to accurately complete classroom observation records.

**Q3** Are all staff who are involved in monitoring and quality assurance provided with training and supported to carry out their respective roles and responsibilities? What are the current gaps in training and support?

**Q4** Is there guidance for pre-primary providers on what data should be collected, how it should be collected, and the potential uses of data to support quality improvement? Is there evidence that pre-primary providers understand and follow this guidance?

**Q5** Have priority targets and gradual, interim steps been identified to build the capacities of those responsible for monitoring in the country?

**Measure 10 – Sufficient financial resources are allocated for quality assurance activities.**

*Adequate financial resources are allocated across the subsector to support staff training and ongoing development, particularly on changes or new requirements. This includes, for example, training for on-site inspectors in collecting data and data collection and quality assurance needs in emergencies and for refugee settings (i.e. host communities). Local administrators need training and support on completing forms and databases, and on how to help service providers address their quality improvement needs.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Does the pre-primary plan’s financial framework include allocations and projections for quality assurance at all levels? Are there gaps? If so, in what specific areas, e.g., needs for investment at the local level?

**Q2** Are there financial resources for training and professional development of staff involved in monitoring and quality assurance – including on-site inspectors and local administrators?

**Q3** Are financial resources for routine monitoring and supervision activities sufficient across the subsector? This includes, for example, funds to cover staff salaries, materials required for monitoring, e.g., inspection checklists, staff travel to different pre-primary settings, and production of data analysis reports. Are financial resources available for quality assurance staff (such as supervisors and inspectors) to provide support to teachers and other staff (e.g., help them create quality improvement plans)?

**Measure 11– Monitoring activities are coordinated across levels and monitoring targets.**

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

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and the flow of data across all levels of government and across actors, including national and international humanitarian and refugee coordination entities? Are there aspects that are not currently well coordinated?

**Q2** Do coordination mechanisms include all stakeholders involved in monitoring and quality assurance, so that their feedback and contributions are taken into account? How does coordination take place – in person, online, by written communication?

**Q3** Does the sharing of information about quality include the full scope of monitoring targets to provide a broad, coordinated picture? For example, are data shared about overall service quality, staff performance, child outcomes, etc.?

**Q4** Are the current data systems for pre-primary indicators aligned with school data systems and humanitarian and/or refugee systems, so that data may be shared and collaboratively examined?

**Q5** Is there a clear mapping of existing data collection efforts – such as the EMIS, household surveys, emergency assessments or research studies – across the subsector and all indicators being captured?

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|  | **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.* |

**Measure 12 – Monitoring produces relevant information at the local, regional and/or national levels to support continuing improvement in pre-primary policies and practices.**

*Information and data collected are relevant for subsector development in pursuit of higher quality 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.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are the results from monitoring – including annual reviews and/or evaluation and humanitarian and/or refugee review processes – used to inform improvement in policy and practice for the subsector (for example, do pre-primary teachers and other staff use the results from monitoring to improve their practice)? If not, where are the barriers?

**Q2** Are the data reviewed regularly across levels of government to ensure their relevance and effectiveness with respect to policy and programme improvements?

**Q3** Can links be made between the collected indicators related to programmes, staff, supply/demand and child outcomes? For example, data on differences in service quality indicators, such as disparities in access to staff training, may be associated with differences in child outcomes, such as school readiness indicators. In this example, the information might suggest a need for greater attention to access to training on specific kinds of teaching competences.

**Q4** Are there methods to aggregate or disaggregate the information in a way that helps local pre-primary providers address deficits in quality teaching practices? For example, is it possible for providers to see patterns of strength and weakness in teachers’ implementation of specific aspects of a new curriculum?

**Q5** Are data on the implementation and impact of service quality standards collected and examined to identify need for changes in standards or their implementation? For example, the data may show that standards are not well-implemented in rural areas, which also may lack local capacities to coach or mentor teachers.

**Measure 13 – Data are accessible to all levels of decision makers within the pre-primary subsector.**

*Transparency is ensured by sharing data and monitoring results with the public and by making data accessible to and easily understood by key stakeholders – for example, sharing ‘report cards’ on preschool quality or sharing the results of formal quality reviews. Barriers to the flow of data across all levels of government should be removed.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Are the collected data presented and communicated to all stakeholders who are involved in monitoring activities – inspectors, monitoring departments, etc. – in a user-friendly way? Is there a need to build capacities among those people conducting quality reviews, including skills in communicating with a variety of stakeholders?

**Q2** Are the collected data accessible to all stakeholders and the public through various platforms, e.g., an open source website?

**Q3** Are the national data updated and made available regularly?

**Measure 14 – Tools and processes are established to facilitate quality improvement.**

*Effective quality assurance focuses on performance, and it needs to provide standardized processes for giving feedback and acknowledging and/or rewarding quality achievements and improvements. Feedback loops promote opportunities for reflection and discussion among staff and set in motion quality improvement plans for low-performing service providers. Analyse the extent to which these are established in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is there a process for providing feedback,[[1]](#footnote-1) acknowledging and/or rewarding quality achievements and improvements? For example, quality achievements may be acknowledged through a ‘star’ system linked to levels of compliance, or public recognition of notable improvements in individual programmes or districts.

**Q2** Are the processes for acknowledgement and reward of quality achievements and improvements applicable to all pre-primary providers, regardless of settings? Is there attention to the importance of recognizing progress by programmes serving vulnerable populations or working under other challenging conditions?

**Q3** Are pre-primary programmes offered structural or financial incentives to follow the standards, such as certification, capitation grants, official accreditation or financial support? Are resources also available to promote improvements in lower-performing programmes, such as funds for additional training or for teaching-learning materials?

**Measure 15 – System-wide, practical, collaborative supports for quality improvement efforts are explored and strengthened.**

*Various types of connections, including collaboration between ministries of education and teacher-training institutions, and links to other professional development opportunities, are used to help address the balance between monitoring for control and accountability, and monitoring for development and improvement. Analyse the extent to which these are available in emergencies and/or refugee settings based on crisis type and length.*

**Questions:**

**Q1** Is there a system-wide approach to continuous quality improvement that integrates training, mentoring and other professional development opportunities? For example:

1. Are pre-primary staff trained and supported by teacher training institutions to make improvements in their pedagogic practices and to implement internal quality assurance mechanisms, such as self-evaluation and peer mentoring?
2. Are ministries of education collaborating with teacher training institutions to ensure that pre-primary staff qualifications and competences are addressed?

**Q2** Is practical support available at the provincial/county, district, zone, school and community subnational levels to strengthen quality service delivery for diverse service providers and different auspices, such as private providers, religious institutions, humanitarian field or refugee camp staff, or full-day vs. part-day programmes?

1. For example, how do inspectors/supervisors provide feedback to teachers/pre-primary providers about areas of strengths and weaknesses? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)