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A photograph of a classroom where several young children are sitting on a green carpeted floor, engaged in a game with small red circular tokens. A teacher or adult is sitting with them, observing and interacting. In the background, there are wooden shelves filled with various toys and a child in a red shirt standing near a play structure. The room has bright green walls and a wooden playhouse-like structure.

QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

An Investment in the
Community Future

Toolkit for Municipalities



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Output of the project “Developing a Comprehensive Framework for the Monitoring and
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Dear local representatives,

We recognize that your mission, your greatest priority and your daily commitment is the well-being of your community's residents. A key factor in ensuring their satisfaction and long-term engagement in the community is maintaining a high quality of life, which makes the provision of high-quality early childhood education and care services for youngest children an important element of your municipality's strategic planning. Early childhood education and care has both immediate and long-term benefits for community development, supporting the stability of the local population and drawing in young families. From the earliest age, it nurtures children's sense of belonging to the place where they live and builds strong connections with the people around them.

In your effort to cultivate a thriving, resilient community, it is essential to start with a solid foundation in early childhood education and care.

To support you in this effort, we have created this toolkit where you can find:

- A summary of reasons for promoting early childhood education and care in your community;
- An overview of the legal obligations applying to municipalities in the area of early childhood education and care;
- Practical materials and tools to help you improve the availability and quality of early childhood education and care services;
- Best practices and inspiration from other municipalities;

We understand that no two municipalities are alike, and every municipality requires its own tailored approach and strategy. This toolkit is designed to support you along your way. We hope it will be valuable for you.

***Thank you for helping ensure every child
receives a fair and strong start in life!***

Table of Contents

The Importance of Early Childhood Education and Care for Your Municipality and Children	5
Legal Obligations of Municipalities in the Area of ECEC	7
Enhancing Access to and Quality of ECEC	11
Practical Information, Materials, and Tools	11
Planning and capacity building	12
Quality and its improvement	14
Supporting vulnerable children	16
Strategic planning and coordination of services	21
Experience and Inspiration from Other Municipalities	24
The Town of Kácov	24
Establishing a children's group	25
Recommendations for establishing a children's group	26
Prague 7 City District	32
Ensuring capacities	32
Care for children in need of additional support	34
Supporting role of the City District	37
Summary of key takeaways related to the municipal examples	38
References	40
ANNEXES Materials and Tools	41
Annex 1: Overseeing Quality in ECEC – Visual Guide	42
Annex 2: Mapping ECEC services at the municipal level	49
Annex 3: Action Plan for Coordination	55
Annex 4: Quality Practices in ECEC Systems	58



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THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE FOR YOUR MUNICIPALITY AND CHILDREN

What does early childhood education and care stand for?

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) refers to all **childcare services for children under the age of 6** that offer a nurturing environment and provide opportunities for children's proper development. The primary formal¹ ECEC services in the Czech system are **children's groups**, which are associated with education and care, and **kindergartens**, which are established as institutions providing preschool education. There are also a variety of informal services – preschool and adaptation clubs in family centres or social services, centres for preschool children in Centres for children and youth, private facilities run on the basis of business license, etc².

¹ Formally provided for in the Children's Groups Act or the Schools Act

² The European Council recommendations of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems define ECEC as follows: Early childhood education and care as understood in this Recommendation should be understood as referring to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to the compulsory primary school age — regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content — and includes centre and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision

Why is high-quality ECEC important for the community?

✓ A hallmark of a thriving society and the heart of a strong community

By providing quality ECEC services, the municipality demonstrates its commitment to its citizens, from young children to their parents. Such a municipality comes across as strong and responsible, attracting new residents. A kindergarten or a children's group is also a space where community bonds and solidarity are nurtured, helping children socialize and newly arrived families integrate, while fostering a sense of emotional connection to the community and promoting collaboration among families, schools, and the broader community.

✓ A key investment in the community's future

Ensuring quality ECEC services also contributes to the economic stability of municipalities, while supporting the retention and satisfaction of local residents. Well-functioning facilities³ help parents better balance their family and work life, attracting young families, improving their quality of life and deepening their loyalty to the community. All of this benefits the municipality both financially and in terms of the trust of its citizens.

Why is high-quality ECEC important for children?

✓ A Foundation for a Quality Life

In kindergartens and children's groups, children acquire important social-emotional and cognitive skills that are essential for their personal growth, as well as for meaningful participation in their families and communities. This is why quality ECEC services play an essential role in the child's development – they are the cornerstone of their further education success.

✓ Equal Opportunities and a Fair Start in Life

ECEC is crucial to ensure equal opportunities for all children – regardless of their background, origin or language. It promotes diversity, early talent development, and the timely identification and prevention of potential challenges.

3 In this document, the term "facilities" refers to different types of services and institutions: children's groups, kindergartens, adaptation and preschool clubs at family centres and NGOs, other informal services, etc.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS OF MUNICIPALITIES IN THE AREA OF ECEC



Legislation



KINDERGARTEN

[Schools Act](#) and [Early Childhood Education Decree](#)

Purpose of ECEC:

- **Section 33** – Preschool education promotes the development of a preschool child's personality, contribute to the child's healthy emotional, mental and physical development and acquisition of basic rules of behaviour, values and interpersonal skills.

Organization of ECEC:

- **Section 34** – Preschool education for children aged 2 to 6 years (usually). Children under the age of 3 are not legally entitled to enrol in kindergarten. Preschool education is compulsory from the beginning of the school year following the day on which the child reaches the age of five until the child starts compulsory schooling.

Obligation of the municipality:

- **Section 179** – The municipality is obliged to ensure conditions for preschool education of children who are prioritized for admission under Section 34 (3). To this end, the municipality shall
 - (a) Establish a kindergarten; or
 - (b) Provide preschool education in a kindergarten established by another municipality or an association of municipalities.



[Children's Groups Act](#) and [Children's Groups Decree](#)

The aim of the childcare service in the children's group:

- **Section 2** – it is provided outside the child's home in a group of children and is aimed at ensuring the child's needs, upbringing and development, including cultural, hygienic and social habits.

Organization:

- **Section 2** – non-profit activity consisting in the regular care of a child from the age of 6 months until the start of compulsory schooling.
- Neighbourhood children's group = a childcare service in a children's group provided by a provider who is also a caregiver.

Obligation of the municipality:

- **Section 13b** – At the request of a parent, the municipality is obliged to ensure conditions for early childhood education of children for whom the municipality is obliged to ensure conditions for early childhood education under Section 179 of the Schools Act, from the day the child reaches the age of 3 until the date of the obligation arises under Section 179 of the Schools Act.

Obligation of the municipality to provide early childhood education / care for the child

- The municipality's obligation to provide a place in a kindergarten or children's group arises on the basis of a request from a parent/guardian.
- The age of the child and other conditions on the part of the child/guardian:
 - The municipality is obliged to provide early childhood education for a child who has reached the age of 3 before the beginning of the given school year (i.e. a 3-year-old child by 31 August of the given year).
 - Starting from 1 January 2026, there will be an obligation to ensure a place for a child from their third birthday (inclusive).
 - Under the amendment to the Children's Groups Act, a child's admission to a children's group is subject to certain requirements, including vaccinations and conditions on the part of the parent.
- The child's permanent residence/place of residence in the given school district:
 - The municipality is obliged to define (through a generally binding decree) school districts for catchment kindergartens covering the entire territory of the municipality (if the municipality fails to fulfil this obligation, the school district will be defined by the regional authority).
- The spot for the child can be provided in:
 - A kindergarten established by the municipality itself or by an association of municipalities;

- A kindergarten established by another municipality / association of municipalities;
 - A children's group according to the amendment to the Children's Groups Act (Section 13b).
- The municipality can fulfil the obligation to ensure conditions for early childhood care (effective from 1 January 2026) by:
- Offering a contract between the guardian and the children's group within the child's designated school district;
 - The municipality may run the children's group directly, through a contributory organization or in cooperation with an NGO. A children's group can also be established as part of a kindergarten;
 - Based on an agreement between the guardian and the municipality, it is possible to ensure a spot in another school district beyond the catchment area, not only in a children's group but also in a kindergarten.
 - Alternatively, the parents/guardians may be reimbursed for the above services for the duration of the municipality's obligation (i.e. from the child's third birthday to 1 September following the child's birthday, when the child is admitted to the catchment kindergarten on the basis of priority entitlement).



Monitoring & evaluation

- As part of their delegated competence, municipalities are obliged to provide the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) with statistical data. They do so within the program of statistical surveys for a given year. Kindergartens established by a municipality or an association of municipalities submit reports to the Department of Education of the relevant municipality with extended competence (in Prague, this is the Department of Education, Youth and Sport of the Prague City Hall).⁴
- If the municipality provides childcare services directly in a children's group, it is obliged to provide the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) with anonymized data valid as of 30 September of the given calendar year by 15 October via an electronic application.⁵
- In general terms, the Schools Act requires municipalities to ensure that the development of education and school services is consistent with the interests of the citizens of the municipality and the region, with the needs of the labour market, with the demographic and territorial trends, and that education and school services are available based on local conditions (Section 177 (2)). This primarily involves continuous monitoring of demographic trends in the municipality, along with forecasting future trends and tracking demand for ECEC services.

4 Current methodology for Kindergarten Reports: <https://matrika.msmt.cz/matrikas/HELPY/VYSVETLIVKY.PDF>

5 Section 20n of the Children's Groups Act provides for a list of data that the provider is obliged to submit to the Ministry.

- In the case of kindergartens, a key role in monitoring and providing support is played by the Czech Schools Inspectorate (CSI). In addition to the [quality of education](#), the CSI monitors compliance with legal regulations and the use of allocated funds from the state budget.⁶ CSI inspections are conducted regularly according to the CSI's schedule and, on occasion, in response to a registered complaint.
- Beyond the scope of cooperation with the CSI, the municipality, as the founder, may also conduct its own evaluation of kindergartens. The School Act does not define the evaluation itself, but it does state that the evaluation criteria must be published in advance.⁷
- Inspections in children's groups are carried out by the Labour Office according to the Quality Standards⁸. The obligation to comply with the Quality Standards is embedded in Section 5d of the Children's Groups Act. The Labour Office also checks the fulfilment of all other legal obligations by the provider, and the use of the subsidy for the operation of the children's group.
- Similar to kindergartens, if the municipality is the service provider of a children's group, it is obliged to address any deficiencies identified during the inspection within the specified time period. Beyond cooperation in monitoring, the law does not impose any obligation on the service provider to monitor and evaluate the children's groups it has established.

6 The current CSI evaluation criteria can be found on the CSI's website: <https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni/Kriteria-hodnoceni-podminek-prubehu-a-vysledk-9>

7 Self-evaluation and external evaluation tools that can inform evaluation criteria can be found on the Quality School portal: <https://www.kvalitniskola.cz/>

8 The Quality Standards Guide can be found on the MoLSA website: <https://www.mpsv.cz/metodicke-materialy>

I WANT TO KNOW AND DO MORE

Details and further information:



On children's groups
– on the MoLSA website:

[Children's groups | MoLSA](#)



On kindergartens and school
legislation – on the edu.cz website:

[School legislation -edu.gov.cz](#)





ENHANCING ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF ECEC

Practical Information, Materials, and Tools

More information to assist you with:

Planning and capacity
building of ECEC services;

Developing quality
ECEC services;

Setting up support for
vulnerable children;

Coordinating services in
your community.

In addition to the basic information, we offer you easy-to-use materials and tools or links for more detailed information.



LINKS



TOOLS



EASY-TO-USE MATERIALS/DOCUMENTS

Planning and capacity building

Kindergartens play a vital role as institutions offering ECEC services and providing qualified teaching staff. It is also in kindergartens that children complete the year of compulsory preschool education.

Children's groups play an increasingly important role in the system. The advantages of establishing children's groups for municipalities include the speed of their setup compared to kindergartens (especially for smaller groups of children, with a typical capacity of 6 to 12 children) and greater flexibility, e.g. in cases when there are not enough children in the municipality to open a new kindergarten class. Children's groups are also crucial in cases where parents want to secure ECEC for children under 3 years old, but the catchment kindergarten does not have the capacity to accommodate them.

Children's groups may be established by various entities. If a children's group is linked to a municipality, it may be established:

- Directly by the municipality (or by an association of municipalities, similar to kindergartens);
- By a municipal contributory organization;
- In cooperation with an NGO.

As a good model for capacity building and quality assurance is to establish a children's group within a kindergarten; ([examples of good practices](#) can be found in Kácov and Prague 7).

Kindergartens:

Information on the establishment of a new kindergarten: [Information on the procedure for establishing a new school, MoEYS](#) 

Essential methodological support for municipalities and their schools is provided by [the Mid-level Support Centre](#) 

Its role is, among other things, to promote effective communication between schools and their founders.

Funding: [Funding of ECEC and schooling](#) 

Children's groups:

Information on the establishment of a children's group: The updated "Support Material for Municipalities on Establishing a Children's Group in the Municipality" and other materials are available on the MoLSA website. [For municipalities | MoLSA](#) 

Funding: [Funding of children's groups | MoLSA](#) 



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Capacity planning

In capacity planning, the current supply and demand need to be taken into account; you will need this data:

- Demographic data and trends, birth rates, and information about the child population in your municipality to project future enrolment needs.
- The individual cohorts need to be divided by age groups – this will give you an idea of capacity requirements and allow you to factor them into your planning.
- It is advisable to assess parental interest too, for example, through a simple questionnaire.
- Data on existing ECEC facilities (children's groups, kindergartens, etc.), their location, capacity, current number of children enrolled and current number of staff.
- It is valuable to have data on children who may require additional support — such as those from low socio-economic backgrounds, with developmental delays or disabilities, or from asylum-seeking, refugee, or migrant families — to ensure their equal participation, learning, and development.
- It is also helpful to track data on children not admitted (waiting lists) and children who remain completely out of ECEC facilities. If there are multiple facilities in the municipality, to monitor the occupancy rate of each, as well as identify any weak spots (where services are either overloaded or underutilized).

Mini tool – supply and demand⁹: To track supply and demand, you can use this simple tool in the form of an excel spreadsheet: [Supply and Demand Mini Tool.xlsx](#) 

In addition to the basic analysis, the tool includes tips on questions to ask when planning for ECEC capacity in your community, as well as questions that can be collected from individual facilities through a simple questionnaire (e.g., Google Form).

⁹ Developed by a UNICEF expert, this tool builds on UNICEF Build to Last diagnostic framework and analytical work produced within this project to support local planning of ECEC services. It helps municipalities assess supply and demand by analyzing data on ECEC facilities, including their capacities, enrolment, staffing, and demographics. A built-in gap analysis compares projected needs with available resources, identifying shortages or surpluses and guiding decisions on expansion. Regular updates ensure responsive, data-driven planning for accessible, high-quality ECEC at the local level.

Quality and its improvement

As mentioned above, municipalities are legally required to ensure access to ECEC. However, practice has shown that if we want ECEC services and institutions to actually serve children and families and have a positive impact, accessibility is not enough. We also need to focus on their quality and ensure that all children meaningfully participate, learn and are able to fully develop their capabilities. Although ensuring quality is typically not a legal obligation for municipalities, we believe that they can play a key role in quality development due to their close proximity to citizens and local facilities.

The quality of ECEC services is determined by a set of standards that outline the conditions and methods under which these services are provided.

ECEC facilities and institutions in the Czech Republic are regulated by the following standards:

- Kindergartens: [Czech Schools Inspectorate – Evaluation Criteria](#) 
- Children's groups: [Quality Standards](#) 

What steps can you take as a local representative to support quality development?

- **1** Familiarize yourself with the relevant **standards** and **learn** how they are applied in practice in the facilities operating in your community.
- **2** For those of you who have no experience in this area, we have prepared a **visual guide** to show you what the different aspects of quality look like in practice and what you can focus on - ([Annex 1](#)) 
- **3** Regularly assess how quality is perceived by **staff, parents, and even children** — whether through interviews, discussions, or surveys.
- **4** Ensure that ECEC is accessible **for all children** in your community and help set up conditions to ensure that vulnerable children benefit from quality opportunities for learning and development (see chapter on [Supporting vulnerable children](#)).

- **5** Provide **space for professional development** – organize joint meetings and training sessions for staff from different facilities, help organize visits and knowledge exchange (whether within your community or beyond it), support staff in further training, provide them with supervision or necessary equipment.
- **6** **Promote cooperation** between individual facilities, but also with other social or health services in your community or neighbourhood (see chapter [Strategic planning and coordination of services](#))
- **7** Take inspiration from other municipalities – start with [these examples](#) from Kácov or Prague 7.

I WANT TO KNOW AND DO MORE



For those who wish to explore the topic further, a new **ECEC Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** is available.



The Framework establishes a systematic and continuous approach to collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to improve quality and ensure equitable access to ECEC services.

It articulates a shared vision for the entire Czech ECEC system (different sectors and types of facilities), defines **quality standards across five areas identified by the EU:**



The Framework introduces **indicators to assess system capacity, service availability and quality of processes**, including interactions with staff and children's wellbeing. It provides a guidance for all stakeholders involved in the quality of ECEC services, including local representatives.

Supporting vulnerable children

Why and how does ECEC help?

ECEC is essential for children's further development and, ultimately, for society as a whole, as evidenced by numerous professional and economic studies. Children who attend ECEC high quality facilities¹⁰ tend to achieve better educational outcomes later in life, are healthier, and perform better in both professional and personal lives. ECEC is also fundamental for vulnerable children – children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, children with a different mother tongue and children with special educational needs. For these children participation in high quality ECEC is essential to maximise their development and learning, helping to prepare them effectively for their future career and life.

Below are examples of activities and services that have proven successful in supporting vulnerable children and families. Naturally, the choice of the most suitable type of support and interventions will depend on the children's individual needs, the local context, and the availability of other services. Municipalities are not always able to provide these services on their own, but they can ensure their provision by other entities (e.g. health and social services or NGOs), or in cooperation with them. It is therefore important for municipal leaders to be informed about the significance, structure and effectiveness of these interventions.

In certain cases, this support can be coordinated and delivered by a social educator who is familiar with the services available and can facilitate access to them for parents. The use of social educators in ECEC facilities and the role of the municipality is described in [an example of good practice from Prague 7](#).

¹⁰ There is substantial evidence that institutional care is beneficial for most children from an early age (one year), as long as the time spent in care is not excessive and the child can continue to spend sufficient time with the mother. The positive effects are present only if ECEC is of high quality.



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Children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds

Families from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face a number of serious problems (typically housing distress, insufficient means for livelihood, unstable family conditions, addictions) that constrain their resources to provide optimal conditions for their children's development. At the same time, the parents are often unaware of the importance of ECEC for their child and may view their child's attendance at kindergarten or other ECEC facility as unnecessary or even undesirable. One of the reasons is that they are concerned about their children and, in many cases, lack trust in official institutions in general. This is often the case with Romani parents, who fear that they and their children may face rejection or discrimination due to their ethnicity. For many parents, the costs associated with early childhood education, typically public transport fares, meals, payments for services or activities, are also a major barrier. To provide quality ECEC for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, it is essential to focus not only on their integration into the facility but also on supporting the entire family. Providing such comprehensive care may be challenging, particularly in areas with a high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged residents; however, if managed well, it is the most effective way to prevent later school failure and other negative outcomes.

Tips on best practices and steps:



Identification of children with need for support

For some children, it is beneficial to start providing supportive care from an early age within the family. Family-based services are provided by NGOs that specialize in early care. However, to effectively provide care and support, it is crucial to first identify the need for support. In early childhood, children most often come into contact with a pediatrician only, and it is highly beneficial if cooperation with pediatricians is established, so they can identify the need for support in socially disadvantaged children and refer the family to appropriate support.



Support for families

Proper family-based childcare cannot be provided in a situation where the family is facing serious existential problems. In such cases, families need to be provided with support that will also benefit the child. Typically, this involves assistance in cases of material need, debt relief, or housing distress. Enrolling the child in ECEC could be very beneficial in such cases, as it can provide a vital source of support — ensuring the child is in a safe and nurturing environment with access to nutritious food, stimulation, and care, while work with the family continues to address other challenges.



Engaging families in supporting the participation of their children in ECEC

Overcoming parental mistrust and reluctance to involve children in ECEC is usually not easy and requires proactive and supportive approach. Appropriate methods depend on the local context. In some cases, staff from NGOs or family centres, social workers or social educators can act as intermediaries, while in other cases, even ECEC staff — such as teaching assistants or teachers — can reach out to families directly.



Low-threshold environment of ECEC facilities

To ensure regular attendance, a welcoming environment must be created and any barriers that may hinder children's attendance and meaningful participation in the curriculum and all activities taking place in the kindergarten must be eliminated. This means relieving families from payments they are unable to afford whenever possible. Often, certain benevolence is also required in terms of attendance rules — typically the arrival times, mandatory equipment. However, first and foremost, it is necessary to create an environment where families feel welcomed and perceive a positive attitude towards their children.



Reducing segregation

Ensuring early inclusion of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in ECEC is essential, but it is equally important to avoid their long-term concentration in specific facilities. Research shows that these children thrive best in diverse and inclusive groups, which support their learning, well-being, and development. In some cases, starting in a preschool club run by an NGO may be helpful, as these settings often provide a safe, welcoming environment and involve the whole family. However, the main aim should be to support a smooth and timely transition of the child into mainstream kindergarten or a children's group.

Municipalities can also play a key role in ensuring that children's rights are respected in all ECEC settings and that their experiences are safe, supportive, and developmentally enriching. To achieve this, staff need training and support to engage with families in a respectful, culturally responsive way that builds trust and includes parents as equal partners. It is also essential to address and reduce negative stereotypes and biases, so that all children feel welcome and valued. A number of other interventions and measures to support children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are available on the website desegregation.cz  including procedures aimed at preventing the creation of segregated classes and schools or desegregation



Children with a different mother tongue

Some children with a different mother tongue may be living in precarious socio-economic situation and for them the above recommendations apply to them as well. For all children with a different mother tongue, it is important to provide a welcoming environment where both the children and their families feel safe. Inclusion in high-quality ECEC facilities is vital for these children in order to learn the Czech language, a skill which their families may not be able to teach them, yet which is key to their future educational success.

In the case of foreign nationals, it is essential to prioritize the availability and clarity of information about the education system, including details about ECEC services. The families are often unfamiliar with the Czech system and face a range of other challenges in the new environment, making it difficult for them to dedicate time and energy to seeking out information. They often lack the social connections that could help them bridge the information gaps. It is highly beneficial if both the municipality and individual ECEC facilities can provide information about the available ECEC options in the area in a way that is accessible for them - for example in a language that they speak. See, for example, the META website: <https://doskolyspolecne.cz/tipy-k-tematu-ms/> 



Children with special educational needs

High-quality ECEC also benefits children with special educational needs — such as those with physical or mental disabilities, developmental delays, or health-related disadvantages — as well as their peers. However, these children do not always receive sufficient support within the system.

This is particularly true in children's groups, where the staff are typically not trained to assist children with special educational needs. Children's groups are also not entitled to state-funded support, e.g. such as funding for assistants.

Additional guidance on supporting children with special needs:

- [Methodology for children's groups – increased individualized support for children](#) 
- [Methodology for working with children with special educational needs in preschool education](#) 

I WANT TO KNOW AND DO MORE



Assessing the Inclusivity of ECEC Services

If you are interested in finding out how inclusive the ECEC facilities in your community are, whether they create a safe and inspiring environment for all children and families, including those who are more likely to face exclusion or discrimination, you can use the **Diversity+** self-assessment **questionnaire**.

This self-assessment questionnaire was developed within the [Erasmus+ project](#) involving the Czech organization Schola Empirica, and all materials are therefore adapted to the Czech context and available in Czech. The questionnaire is intended primarily for formal ECEC facilities (kindergartens and children's groups), but can also be used by informal educators and local representatives.

The questionnaire takes 10 to 15 minutes to complete and is available online, including all detailed instructions and information: [Diversity + Footprint Assessment Tool](#) 



Strategic planning and coordination of services

It is crucial for municipalities to approach ECEC with a clear **long-term plan or strategy**, one that enjoys broad political support. This will help ensure continuity, provide clear direction, and guarantee stable funding and predictability, benefiting not only the service providers but, most importantly, the families.

Current situation mapping and plan development

Especially for larger municipalities with multiple ECEC facilities, we recommend a **mapping exercise** to create a comprehensive overview and gather information on the current situation. This will allow you to identify strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and needs, which can then inform the development of an action plan or strategy. However, mapping exercises should also be carried out in small municipalities in order to identify the needs of the population and the possibilities of developing ECEC services, either in your municipality or in its surroundings.

To conduct the mapping exercise, you can use the **Mapping ECEC Services at Municipal Level** tool provided in [Annex 2](#) to organize a workshop or series of meetings, including a suggested process, questions and stakeholders and institutions involved. 

You can then use the **Action Plan for Coordination** tool provided in [Annex 3](#) to set goals and priorities for the area of ECEC and develop a simple action plan. 

Coordination of services for young children

In order to provide **high-quality care for young children and their families**, effective cooperation and coordination of social, health, educational and other services must be ensured at the local level. This is particularly important for vulnerable children, where the use of multidisciplinary teams proves to be highly effective. Their regular meetings facilitate the exchange of information, practices, and experiences, thus fostering mutual support.

A multidisciplinary coordination team for young children should consist of:

- A local representative – department of education, social affairs and health, or other;
- The heads of the education, social (including the body for the social and legal protection of children) and health departments, or other relevant departments and divisions;
- The leadership of kindergartens (or primary schools), children's groups, family centres, preschool clubs and other ECEC facilities;

- Social educators working in ECEC facilities and in primary schools;
- A representative of early childhood intervention services, school counselling centres and/or pedagogical-psychological counselling centres;
- Local stakeholders active in the area of social work, health, leisure activities, services for families, representatives of the non-profit sector;
- Involving paediatricians in the process would be ideal, as they play a crucial role in the early identification of vulnerable children and their consistent support, while also addressing other challenges during schooling, such as absenteeism.
- Other relevant cooperating entities such as Labour Offices, Police (municipal and state), representatives of the Agency for Social Inclusion, etc.

Information exchange does not need to be limited to regular working meetings; joint workshops and seminars are effective alternatives.¹¹

To evaluate the quality of childcare services for the youngest children in your municipality, including their interconnection, coordination and integration, you can use the simple checklist **Quality Practices in ECEC Systems** provided in [Annex 4](#). 

To establish effective cooperation and create a local support system for young children, existing methodologies can be applied, such as the Primokiz methodology¹², which can be implemented with the help of licensed NGOs.

Community engagement and communication

Parents, both current and prospective, are key partners in advancing quality ECEC services, and it is therefore vital to engage them in open communication, involve them in planning, and include them in the evaluation and continuous improvement of service accessibility and quality. High-quality, welcoming and accessible kindergartens and children's groups are not only a service to children and parents, but represent the heart of a cohesive community.

¹¹ <https://desegregace.cz/katalog-intervenci/seminare-debaty-osvetove-aktivity-poradenstvi-v-otazce-vzdelavani-v-uzemi/>
¹² The Primokiz tool aims to promote coordination and cooperation between different sectors in the provision of ECEC services for children in the critical 0–7 age group. The program provides municipalities with expert advice and methodological support in developing an integrated ECEC policy, based on proven international approaches. The Primokiz tool is owned by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and has already been implemented in Switzerland, Germany, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. In the Czech Republic, it is provided by the Early Childhood Development Platform – more information: <https://vcasnapece.cz/2025/06/12/primokiz-evropsky-nastroj-pro-koordinaci-pecce-o-deti-v-ceske-republice/>

	Here are some tips to help you engage parents and communities:
	✓ Make sure you have information on all available ECEC services and that you know how to reach different communities in your area. The cultural context should be taken into account, and language adapted accordingly. Linguistic and cultural differences can also be addressed by establishing cooperation with the community representatives.
	✓ Map the main challenges related to ECEC in your community (e.g. lack of capacity, lack of attendance of children from certain groups, high concentration of foreign children), and focus on them – look for solutions together with the representatives of the communities and individual facilities.
	✓ Social media polls, interview surveys and public debates can serve as effective tools for greater engagement of parents and the local community in general. It is also important to make use of informal meetings, such as family events, etc.
	✓ Promote interesting events, share positive stories and highlight the importance of ECEC on municipal websites and social media channels. Feature the efforts in your municipality and demonstrate how you prioritize the quality of the services offered.
	✓ You can use information brochures and leaflets for parents to inform them about the available options and the benefits of ECEC services. Distribute these materials in relevant locations, such as libraries, shops, paediatricians' offices or places where activities for parents and children take place (toddler classes, family centres, children's clubs, etc.).
	✓ You can organize open days at ECEC facilities to introduce activities, staff and overall approach.
	✓ Involve ECEC staff – organize meetings for them to meet, share and discuss issues or challenges they are facing, and engage also the non-pedagogical and administrative staff (cooks, cleaners, etc.).
	✓ Promote collaboration with local businesses, NGOs, other services, and educational initiatives.
	✓ Collaborate with other municipalities, as well as with different national ECEC initiatives, which can provide you with useful materials and inspiration.

EXPERIENCE AND INSPIRATION FROM OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Finally, we present examples from two municipalities, **Kácov** and **Prague 7**, which offer a valuable inspiration for enhancing the accessibility and quality of ECEC services. We believe that the experience of other municipalities will help inform and guide your approach to establishing and improving these services in your own community.

Both municipalities have established children's groups and kindergartens. Below, you will find more details about their motivations, experience, future plans, and ideas for the optimal functioning of ECEC services within the community. This perspective has been provided not only by the municipal leadership but also other key stakeholders. In Kácov, these were the mayor, the kindergarten's head teacher, an educator from the children's group, and the principal of the kindergarten and primary school. In Prague 7, they were the education councillor, a coordinator for children and the youth, a director of an NGO, a social worker, and the principal of one of the kindergartens. The experiences of the two municipalities vary, as each operates within its own context and the local stakeholders face different challenges in each case. The text has been authorized by the stakeholders.

The Town of Kácov

The reasons that may lead a community to establish and run a children's group can vary. In Kácov, the municipal leadership strongly believes that high-quality, accessible, and financially affordable early education is essential, not only for the children and their prospects, but also for the well-being of their parents. Kácov is a town situated at the border of the Benešov and Kutná Hora districts, with Kutná Hora being the relevant municipality with extended competence. According to the 2021 census, Kácov and its sub-municipalities had 796 permanent residents, including 58 children aged 0 to 4 and 45 children aged 5 to 9. According to the Czech Statistical Office, as of 1 January 2024, Kácov and its sub-municipalities of Račíněves, Zderadiny, Zderadinky and Zliv had 794 permanent residents.

Kácov has long strived to provide essential services for its residents, including civic amenities, and support continuous development through new construction in both the town and its surrounding areas. When the Czech Post closed its branch in Kácov, the municipality took it over and runs it as a Partner Post Office. The municipality has founded both a primary school and a kindergarten, which is located in the same building, occupying a single classroom due to space limitations. The municipality also joined the Eduzměna Kutnohorského project, that was active from 2020 to 2024, and since its completion, it has co-funded the continued provision of essential services, such as mental health teams.¹³ Renamed as Kutnohorského Education Support Centre, the project still continues, drawing on the support of the stakeholder municipalities.

¹³ Mental health teams, with permanent workplaces at Zruč nad Sázavou Primary School and Kamenná Stezka Primary School in Kutná Hora, provide consultations and interventions across the Kutná Hora municipality as needed. More information at: <https://cpv-kh.cz/tymy-dusevniho-zdravi/>.



Establishing a children's group

The kindergarten in Kácv is an exception in terms of capacity (28 children). After the change in the schooling legislation (amendment to the Schools Act No. 101/2017 Coll.) and the introduction of compulsory preschool education, kindergartens have seen a shift in perception; now, they are viewed more as educational institutions, which has also led to increased demands on their capacity. The information about the mother's employment is no longer included in the application form. There has been a growing interest among families in enrolling older children in preschool education, even when the mother is on parental leave with a younger child.

Children are admitted to the kindergarten based on the criteria of age and permanent residence in Kácv or in surrounding municipalities, including the municipality of Čestín. For children of compulsory preschool age, the kindergarten admits all eligible children, regardless of their permanent residence, prioritizing the needs of the families and the children's smooth transition to primary school.

Due to the law prioritizing older children, there have been cases where 3- and 4-year-olds could not attend kindergarten because of its limited capacity, despite their legal right to use ECEC services. A turning point in the decision to increase ECEC capacity came when only 5-year-olds, the children of compulsory preschool age, were admitted to kindergarten.

The main driving force behind the effort to increase the capacity was the insufficient number of available spots. Another key factor was that a one-class kindergarten, even if it could admit all the children registered by the parents, would include children of a very wide age range. In principle, the age gap between the oldest and the youngest child could be up to 5 years, which makes it extremely challenging to ensure appropriate care for each child in such a large group.

The initial solution was to establish an additional kindergarten class, which appeared to be a more practical and appropriate solution. However, the stricter regulations for establishing a kindergarten soon became a decisive factor, making the children's group a more flexible, faster, and cost-effective solution. While a new kindergarten would have required constructing a new building, for the children's group, the municipality was able to repurpose existing spaces, making it a more feasible option.

The children's group was established as a temporary solution until the municipality manages to build premises for a second kindergarten class. If there are more children in the future, the children's group can serve as a supplement to the two kindergarten classes.

Municipalities are aware of the growing economic pressure on families to have two incomes as early as possible, due to rising living costs. At the same time, local job opportunities typically do not provide high enough wages to allow the parents to pay higher fees for ECEC. Therefore, despite the need to co-fund the operation of the children's group, the municipality has decided to set the fees at CZK 850 per month for both the kindergarten and the children's group.



Recommendations for establishing a children's group

Cooperation and consultation with other founders of children's groups proved to be essential. There are two main strategies for children's groups in the area: corporate and non-municipal groups tend to offer greater flexibility, but carry higher fees, while municipal children's groups, primarily established as a service for residents, prioritize reliability and financial accessibility. Children's groups established by the municipality are similar to kindergartens in their nature; they typically prioritize grouping children of similar ages and often tend to reject very young children, even when the capacity would allow it. It is assumed that children will attend the children's group year-round, within the school year. On 24 October 2018, the nearby municipality of Čestín registered a children's group for 12 children, which is still in operation. This children's group accepts children from 3 years old and works with them in a similar way to a kindergarten.

In Kácov, the children's group is also structured similarly to a kindergarten, with the age limit of 2 years. The fee for the children's group matches that of the kindergarten, ensuring that it remains affordable for all potential applicants. The children's group serves both mothers who wish or need to return to work, and those who stay at home with a younger sibling but recognize that their older child needs social interactions and new stimuli. It also allows them to focus more closely on the youngest child.



Provision of service

The municipality actively searched for premises to establish the children's group and was eventually able to renovate a building owned by a supportive landlord, located at the sports field, adjacent to the primary school and the kindergarten. Thanks to this, the municipality was able to fund the reconstruction project entirely from its own resources, without any subsidy.

Before the renovation project was started, the hygiene department was consulted to see if the building was suitable for the new purpose. The reconstruction took nine months. New wiring system, water connection and other systems were installed for fire safety reasons.

The municipality's leadership was also involved in recruiting educators, aiming to find composed, calm, and dedicated individuals with genuine affection for children. Both selected educators completed a comprehensive course in childcare for children's groups, including practical training. The children's group opened in April 2023. Initially, the head teacher of Kácov kindergarten supervised the children's group, and on her initiative, the routine in the group mirrored that of the kindergarten.

Both educators in the children's group appreciated the support they received not only in caring for the children but also in guiding them towards independence in a gradual and natural manner. The direct assistance of the kindergarten's head teacher was discontinued in June 2023.

The aim is to tailor the children's group primarily for 2- and 3-year-olds, while for 4- and 5-year-olds, the municipality clearly prefers kindergarten, as it is better equipped to



"We consider it an investment in the youth, in the future."

handle a larger group of children and able to provide pedagogical guidance. There is no demand for institutional care for children under the age of two in the municipality.



Organization of enrolment and operation

The enrolment procedure for the children's group only starts after the enrolment in the kindergarten has been completed. The kindergarten only accepts as many children to replace those leaving for primary school in September, up to a total of 28 children¹⁴.

Kindergartens follow the same catchment area rules as primary schools; in addition to the requirement of permanent residence in the catchment municipalities, the child's age is a key criterion for enrolment.

Children's groups with a capacity of 12 children follow the same logic – they enrol the number of children based on the number of those who have entered the kindergarten. The only difference is that the children's group only accepts children residing in Kácov. This provides a significant advantage for the operation of the children's group, as new children are already familiar with their peers and see them regularly even outside the group.

The children's group accepts children for the entire school year and for a full-day program. The monthly cost is set at CZK 850 per month, the same as for kindergarten. The municipality applies for a subsidy from the MoLSA based on the actual attendance rate, and it funds the children's group itself during months with higher absence rates. Both educators attend the children's group full-time, even when the number of children is lower. The municipality considers a stable group of children with year-round attendance at this age crucial for their consistent development.

Meals, i.e. snacks and lunches, are provided by the canteen at the kindergarten and the primary school.



Quality assurance

In addition to the above-mentioned initial supervision of the children's group performed by the head teacher of the kindergarten, the staff of the children's group and the kindergarten regularly exchange experience and engage in further training.

The kindergarten took active part in the Eduzměna Kutnohorsko project and used the recommendations for courses related to the Start Together program. For instance, the kindergarten teaching staff regularly participates in events and seminars focused on increasing children's engagement. Further training is very practically oriented. It includes methodology, problem-solving and development of hands-on strategies. The primary school is also part of the children's engagement project, with the first-grade teacher involved.

The educators in the children's group face challenges in further education, as their working hours do not include time for indirect pedagogical activities,¹⁵ and they are

¹⁴ MoEYS's note: Kindergartens accept children according to the number of spots registered in the school register. Classes are limited to a maximum of 24 children (with an exception allowing up to 28); the number may be reduced if a child under three or a child with additional support needs is enrolled. The number of spots available is determined by the number of children leaving the facility, e.g. those transitioning to primary school, moving, etc. Children may also be admitted in the course of the school year to fill in any available spots.

¹⁵ MoLSA's note: In legal terms, there is no obstacle, as the employer may set the conditions itself. The educators may take turns and may have no-contact activities in their job description.



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unable to alternate shifts, which limits their opportunities for in-person training or preparation outside of working hours. They use online courses provided by the MoLSA. They were not involved in the Eduzměna project.

A key factor in assessing quality is the well-being and proper development of children, alongside the satisfaction of parents. The mayor regularly visits the children's group. The educators in the children's group visited the kindergarten.



How do the stakeholders cooperate?

The cooperation is based on trust, a certain degree of autonomy and exchange of experience. Networking and further training is encouraged according to the time availability and preferences of the kindergarten staff and the caregivers in the children's group.

Initially, the children's group and the kindergarten shared experiences and knowledge about the children in informal ways, for example during meetings or walks. Recently, the kindergarten has introduced a form for children transitioning from the children's group, which includes notes on the child's skills, independence and the type of assistance needed; the kindergarten will use this information to actively support the child's development.

The kindergarten focuses on continuous guidance of children. However, the challenge here is that due to limited capacity or family preferences, some children only attend the kindergarten during the compulsory preschool year. The kindergarten benefits from the fact that some children had already attended a children's group before enrolling, either in Kácov or in nearby Čestín, which helps them adapt more easily to the new environment and new caregivers. On the other hand, the kindergarten has limited opportunities to

work consistently with individual children due to the high number of children in the class. The kindergarten has been collecting children's portfolios for three years now and expects to adopt a more systematic approach when the curriculum is revised. At the end of the school year, parents of children in their penultimate year of ECEC are provided with a report about their child's progress. Before enrolling in primary school, the kindergarten organizes meetings with the parents of preschool children and providing now also a summary report on each child. Both reports include an overview of the child's strengths and needs and recommendations for further development. They are also provided to the first-grade teachers who use them to guide their work with the children.

The kindergarten currently places significant emphasis on school readiness in its communication with parents. Since this is an important topic for many families, staff often need to discuss it in depth. In the future, reducing the number of deferred enrolments could make these conversations easier. Parents usually try to avoid deferring their child's school entry to prevent them from losing friends they have made in kindergarten. However, in some cases, they may struggle to understand the importance of their child's socio-emotional development.

The kindergarten employs a modified diagnostic tool evaluating the fulfilment of the expected outcomes based on the applicable educational framework program.

It regularly assesses its procedures and is open to changes or improvements as needed.

The kindergarten obtained approval and support from the school leadership to join the Start Together program. The kindergarten premises have also been newly equipped to allow for a structured space and corners for different activities. The primary school did not join the Start Together program. They consider success of their graduates a key criterion for the quality of the system. The school leadership makes an effort to engage everyone in various events and team-building activities.

They do not rely on external inspections of the facilities. The feedback from the Czech Schools Inspectorate is of limited use because the inspectors' visits are only brief and they still have to assess not only the pedagogical process and procedural quality, but also the structural quality, including compliance with legislative requirements. Their pedagogical recommendations also change over time. So far, the children's group has not been subject to any external inspection and has not received any external feedback.



Broader collaboration and networking

The children's group has not yet engaged in broader cooperation beyond the municipality, while the kindergarten continues to collaborate with the children's group in Čestín, from which it admits children for compulsory preschool education. Given their different founders, these entities collaborate only in informal events such as children's shows (spectacles) and carnivals. The children's group in Čestín is even more similar in its nature to a kindergarten due to its age composition, as it only accepts children over the age of 3. On its website, the children's group in Čestín informs that its daily program includes artistic, musical and physical activities. However, the cooperation between this children's group and the kindergarten in Kácov does not involve any exchange of information about the children.

For the third consecutive year, the kindergarten has participated in the Start Together

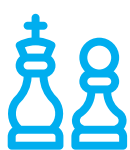
program, which is also supported by the Eduzměna project. The dedication of different corners of the classroom to different activities has proven effective, offering all children, including those with special educational needs, more freedom, choice, and the option for privacy when needed. Thanks to the involvement in the relevant programs, the kindergarten can draw on methodological guidance – a mentor for the Start Together program. The kindergarten staff have completed the Start Together courses, which were paid for within a pre-approved scheme. With the mentor's assistance, the staff can consult their work and upcoming changes, such as the implementation of portfolios, for which they have developed a plan outlining the desired outcomes. During the mentor's visits, the teaching staff also receives direct feedback, reassurance, and motivation for further work.

The kindergarten also benefits from the mental health team established through the Eduzměna project and co-funded by municipalities within the Kutná Hora district, including Kácov; a special educator from this team provided assistance to one of the children until a professional assistant could be assigned. For instance, the kindergarten staff consulted a speech therapist from the mental health team to assess the children's school readiness, and later they also engaged a primary school teacher who conducts speech therapy.

"It is very helpful to have someone to consult who share their insights with us."

The kindergarten has also collaborated with a special education centre (SEC), but, in this particular case, the cooperation was much easier, because the child concerned (pupil using a hearing aid) was already supported by the SEC. A representative of the SEC visited the child every year to provide feedback on his involvement in activities and to highlight the specific considerations for working with him.

For ECEC facilities, services and processes, it is crucial that experts visit the staff on-site to provide feedback in the specific context.



Structural difficulties in smaller municipalities

It is worth noting that the stakeholders we spoke with in Kácov perceive childcare as a complex service. The standards and frameworks that should apply to children's groups and kindergartens are seen as largely similar. The process of enrolling children in both children's groups and kindergartens was often referred to as an 'admission process', which mirrors the situation where, despite the efforts of all involved, not all children are able to get a spot in the facility their parents preferred.

For sustainable operation of the children's group, the municipality would benefit from funding based on the number of children admitted for full-time attendance, rather than on the actual attendance of each child during a given month. If the municipality aims to offer a predictable service for parents, it also requires predictable and adequate state funding. Although the additional operating costs of the children's group in Kácov are minimal, the municipality funds its operation itself to ensure that the service remains accessible and affordable.

Another challenge is that, in Kácov and the surrounding municipalities, there is no clear contractual or financial agreement regarding the enrolment of children from outside the designated catchment area. The priorities of municipal leaders often differ, and there is no societal consensus on support for early childhood education. More proactive municipalities are unwilling to fund services for parents and children from other areas.

The kindergarten's services and care quality would be greatly enhanced if it could have two classes, with the number of children per class reduced to around 20, allowing for more individualized care. However, this increase in ECEC capacity may not be necessary in the next few years due to the expected decline in the number of newborn children in Kácov and surrounding municipalities. The same applies to the children's group, which could primarily serve the youngest children up to 3 years old, as originally intended, but it must remain financially sustainable for the municipality.

For the long-term sustainability of any expanded ECEC capacity, it would be beneficial if surrounding municipalities were involved in the development, financing, and utilization of the ECEC resources in Kácov. Collaboration between municipalities is also essential for the development and availability of other support services, including early diagnosis and collaboration with experts. Kácov's kindergarten and primary school currently only have a school counsellor on-site. Mental health teams, which combine multiple areas of expertise and can provide on-site counselling when needed, are seen as an ideal solution, with the added benefit of offering support not only to children but also to staff members. The ultimate goal is for these teams to be more systematically integrated and serve children's groups as part of the broader ECEC system in the Czech Republic.

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Lastly, the long-term retention of ECEC staff within the system remains a significant challenge. In Kácov, attempts are made to balance the working conditions for the educators in the children's group and teachers in the kindergarten, within the available resources.

The Kácov case study aligns with the findings of the IDEA study by Klára Kalíšková, Daniel Münich, and Jiří Slabý, which highlights that the immediate investment costs required to increase kindergarten capacities represent a major obstacle for most small to medium-sized municipalities, despite the fact that the investment costs per kindergarten spot, when distributed over an extended period, are relatively low. The reason for this is that the chances of securing subsidies are relatively low, and the possibilities for loan financing of municipal construction are limited, given that the municipality leadership consists of elected representatives. A fundamental structural issue is that, although greater participation of mothers in the labour market, facilitated by accessible preschool education, generates significant financial benefits, these benefits predominantly remain within the central budget and do not return back to the municipalities that made the investments. The authors included only direct revenues in their calculations, i.e. income from taxes and social and health insurance contributions paid by parents who are able to work as a result, as well as savings on social welfare expenses for families whose income has increased due to mothers returning to the labour market (Kalíšková, Münich, Slabý, 2024).

Prague 7 City District

As of 31 December 2024, the Prague 7 City District had a population of 49,338 (including 1,603 residents in the Prague-Trója neighbourhood).¹⁶ ECEC is provided by seven kindergartens in Prague 7 and one kindergarten in Prague-Troja neighbourhood. Additionally, there is one church-run kindergarten, four private kindergartens, and one community kindergarten associated with a democratic school. One public and one private kindergarten also operate as outdoor schools. As of 31 March 2025, the register of children's groups included 17 groups, of which 5 (four groups with 12 children each and one group with 15 children) are operated by Prague 7 City District.

The Councillor for Education considers ECEC to be of a great importance and believes it generally receives insufficient attention, noting that the period when a child first encounters an institution (and vice versa) has the potential to significantly impact their future educational path. The importance of ECEC is reflected in the Prague 7 City District's comprehensive approach, which focuses not only on capacity but also on ensuring quality and providing support to vulnerable groups.



Ensuring capacities

Current situation

The Prague 7 City District has managed to secure ECEC capacity for 3-year-old children with permanent residence in the area and is now working to meet the demand for spots for 2-year-olds. Due to limited space options

16 <https://csu.gov.cz/pha/casove-rady-za-mestske-casti-prahy>

that comply with the requirements for running a kindergarten, the city district has opted for children's groups, where the requirements are more flexible. These groups, however, operate under kindergartens (with the kindergarten principal serving as the statutory representative of the children's group) to ensure professional, qualified care. The city district runs six kindergartens, five of which host children's groups, including four with 12 children each and one with 15. A space is currently being prepared for a group of 24 children, and two more are under development. The kindergarten without a children's group offers one class for 2- and 3-year-olds.

The caregivers for the children's groups are selected by the kindergarten principals and work under the guidance and supervision of the kindergarten teachers and principals, who also ensure their further professional development. The caregivers in the children's groups are integrated into the kindergarten staff. Children from the children's groups take part in joint activities with the kindergarten children, such as trips, cultural events, and project-based activities.

Admission criteria are set uniformly. For the kindergartens, the child's permanent residence and age are decisive for admission, while for the children's groups, at least one parent must have permanent residence in the area. The kindergartens operate from 6:15 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and children's groups from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The City District primarily focuses on ensuring the quality of care provided in children's groups, with the aim not being to provide a qualitatively different type of care, but to expand the care offered by kindergartens.

Outlook for the future

The City District anticipates that the demand for spots for 2-year-old children will continue to rise, and that the number of children's groups will need to be increased, which would place an excessive burden on kindergarten principals. For this reason, the City District representatives are considering the establishment of a contributory organization which would oversee the children's groups, providing them with methodological guidance, while collaborating closely with the kindergarten staff. The City District expects that, in the future, municipalities will be obliged to provide spots in kindergartens for 2-year-old children. This requirement seems justified due to the two-year guarantee of the same job position, and the City District expects to be able to adapt to this. Work is underway or planned to prepare premises that will meet requirements for kindergartens.

As mentioned earlier, the City District is responsible for ensuring ECEC for children over 2 years old, while facilities for younger children are also considered necessary, but not a top priority. The deputy mayor believes that these facilities should not be run under kindergartens, as they provide a different type of care, which should be managed by specialized educators and possibly nurses. The kindergarten principal who participated in our survey fully supports this view.

Neighbourhood children's groups are seen as a community activity that can somewhat help increase capacity, but their primary benefit lies elsewhere, in neighbourly assistance and solidarity. The City District's approach to this type of care is quite different from the

one it applies to its own children's groups, where it takes on a firm commitment for quality. In the case of neighbourhood children's groups, the issue of quality assurance does not seem relevant, as the provider is a different entity, and the municipality cannot guarantee the quality of the service.

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of a children's group within a kindergarten

For kindergarten principals, managing children's groups is a certain burden. They had to equip the premises, hire educators, provide training, and ensure supervision. In principle, they run two different organizations (kindergartens and children's groups) where different rules apply. The City District has provided effective support in establishing the children's groups and continues to assist with their operation. Nevertheless, for operational and other reasons, it might seem more effective to operate a department for children aged 2 to 3 years within the kindergarten rather than a separate children's group, with a schedule adjusted to meet the needs of this age group (fewer children per department).

One of the problems with the current setup is the difficulty in providing support for children with special educational needs in the children's groups. Pedagogical-psychological counselling centres are reluctant to assess children in these groups because they do not attend formal school facility. Also, it is not possible to assign an assistant for these children. The care provided in children's groups is thus less specialized and less professional, causing complications in running the group. In Prague 7, the assistance of the pedagogical-psychological consulting centre for these children can only be achieved through considerable efforts, thanks to the support of social educators and the municipality.

Another challenge is the insufficient qualification of educators in the children's groups, along with the related disparities in working conditions. Some children are not receiving adequate specialized care because the educators – trained as childminders –, do not have sufficient knowledge regarding the specific needs of children. Moreover, they are paid less than kindergarten teachers for the same level of responsibility and have shorter vacation time, which seems unfair.¹⁷

The staff backup system in children's groups is also challenging, as when one educator falls ill, a kindergarten teacher must step in, because a single educator cannot manage such a highly diverse age group of children with varying needs. This can also be complicated by the specific conditions of certain children's groups, such as one in Prague 7, which is located on a main street where strollers cannot be parked and there is no garden. Educators often find it challenging to take children to the playground.

Care for children in need of additional support



Social educators

The population in the City District is very heterogeneous. In addition to a high proportion of the upper middle class, there is also a significant number of foreign residents. The City District also has an above-average share of citizens facing debt enforcement. This means that, in addition to children with special educational needs, there is also a large group of children with a

17 MoLSA's note: Again, this depends on the employer.

different mother tongue and those facing socio-economic disadvantages.

In order to identify children who need support as early as possible and provide them with appropriate care, the City District employs social educators, who work in kindergartens and children's groups (one social educator per three kindergartens).¹⁸ The social educators respond to instigations from teachers, principals, or educators, as well as from parents. Since they are not directly involved in teaching, they have the time to thoroughly map existing issues and recommend or arrange the necessary care and support. They most often act as case managers but also provide practical help (e.g., organizing examinations by specialists and accompanying parents and children) or consultations, not only for parents but also for kindergarten and children's group staff (on how to work with children). The social educators also facilitate the transition from kindergarten to primary school for children in need of support. They can also arrange financial assistance for families, for example, the City District has a lunch fund and covers the attendance fee for a few children.

The social educators also contact families of children with high absence rates and try to motivate them to attend kindergarten regularly. To a certain extent, the social educators substitute for the services provided by school counselling offices established in primary schools, which is missing in kindergartens. However, they cannot fully replace all the expertise provided by a school counselling office, particularly the role of special educators, which, according to the stakeholders, are still needed. A shared school counselling office for the kindergartens in the City District could be the solution.

Social educators working in kindergartens and children's groups collaborate with social educators working in primary schools (each primary school run by the City District employs its own social educator) and follow the same methodological guidance provided by the City District. Social educators are employed in the Unit of Social Pedagogy Support in the Department of Education and Project Management¹⁹ at the City District, which guarantees the professional level of their services and a seamless transition between preschool and school facilities.

Low-threshold facility

The Prague 7 City District collaborates with Tosara, z.s., an organization which took over the preschool club in Prague 7 previously led by Člověk v tísni. Tosara provides tutoring in families' homes, operates a leisure club, and also runs a children's group called Tosárka for 12 children aged 3 to 5, half of whom come from mainstream families,

¹⁸ The social educators work part-time jobs at the City District and part-time jobs at the kindergartens they assist.

¹⁹ The Department of Education and Project Management, <https://www.praha7.cz/radnice/organizacni-struktura/odbor-vzdelavani-a-projektoveho-rizeni/>) manages the entire agenda related to development and education in the Prague 7 City District, and coordinates the work of the following sub-departments:

The Project Management Unit performs the function of the project office of the Prague 7 City District, providing support in the implementation of projects under various subsidy programs.

The Strategic Management Unit provides strategic management and related support to the Authority within the applicable strategic documents.

The Education Unit provides methodological support and assistance to the principals of schools and school facilities established by the Prague 7 City District and the Prague-Troja neighbourhood, performs both independent and delegated responsibilities in the field of education and coordinates activities related to the enrolment of children in school facilities (early childhood and primary education).

The Unit of Social Pedagogy Support prepares, updates and implements current concepts concerning the development of social pedagogy in primary schools and kindergarten established by the Prague 7 City District and works closely with the church and private institutions to link their concepts and strategies for school facilities (kindergartens and primary schools).

while the other half come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Parents of these children do not pay any fees for attending the children's group, as Tosara funds it through donations. These are families that would otherwise be unable to secure ECEC for their children, typically because they are not permanent residents of Prague 7. The impossibility of placing a child without permanent residence in a local kindergarten also means that many children do not transition to kindergarten and remain in Tosárka even at an age when kindergarten would be a more suitable solution for them. Children from the local shelter and those referred by the body for the social and legal protection of children or NGOs also attend the children's group. Some families come on their own on the recommendation of neighbours. Tosara does not advertise its services on its own, as it has long faced an excessive demand.

It organizes tutoring for school and shelter children, which in some cases includes preschool children. Social educators typically arrange tutoring for children, with the demand for this service generally being very high.

Within the children's group, Tosara staff provide counselling for parents to support their parental competences and address other challenges the families may face.

Tosara's director envisions strengthening some of their activities in Prague 7 (e.g., parental counselling or care for younger children), but such steps would require a more thorough mapping of the needs of the target groups. This mapping exercise is expected to begin within a short timeframe (see below), and Tosara will actively participate in the process.

Mapping of needs – Primokiz methodology

The City District is preparing, in collaboration with the Platform for Early Intervention, a project focused on implementing the Primokiz methodology. This methodology involves systematically setting up processes for early care for children up to the age of 7. Under the guidance of an experienced facilitator provided by the Platform for Early Intervention, the project will map the needs and create a plan for providing early care.

The project is planned to last one year and has a highly participatory nature. In the first phase, a local action team will be formed, consisting of stakeholders working with children under 7 years of age in the area. Usually, these are representatives of the education, healthcare, social services sectors, NGOs, as well as representatives of parents, vulnerable groups, and the City District Authority. The project will be coordinated by the Organizational Department of the Mayor and Secretary Office.

Next, the situation in Prague 7 will be mapped, identifying the needs of various groups and evaluating how well these needs are being met. To ensure maximum participation, meetings with the action team and other relevant stakeholders will take place.

The use of Primokiz methodology is seen as highly desirable by all involved stakeholders, as it is clear that there are families within the municipality in need of support which have not been properly identified, and their needs have not been mapped. This methodology aims to help identify these groups, for example, with the help of paediatricians, and in addition to providing early care directly within families, it will help address ECEC for children living in Prague 7, but without permanent residence in the municipality. Furthermore, it could provide insights regarding children who only join the ECEC system in their compulsory preschool year.



Supporting role of the City District

The role of the City District in fostering cooperation between individual stakeholders is of crucial importance. The City District employs a part-time coordinator for the youth and child support in the Organizational Department of the Mayor's Office, whose task is to facilitate cooperation between stakeholders from the social, educational, and healthcare sectors, particularly in terms of supporting vulnerable groups, and to refer clients to them.

This employee coordinates regular meetings (every two months) of the Support Network for Children and the Youth, which are regularly attended by social educators from kindergartens and primary schools, other staff from school counselling offices, representatives from the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre, low-threshold clubs, shelters, social activation services, NGOs (e.g., Tosara, Centre for Mental Health, YMCA), child welfare services, and employees from relevant departments of the City District, such as the Social Inclusion Department responsible for the integration of foreigners. Occasionally, other organizations are invited as well. Once a year, an extended meeting (the 'large network') is held, bringing together other stakeholders, usually primary school and kindergarten principals, police officers, paediatricians. The aim of the meetings is for the stakeholders to get acquainted, share their experiences, and identify their needs, while providing an opportunity for participants to engage in individual conversations and discover how they can support one another. These meetings were considered very useful by all respondents.

The networking does not yet include ECEC facilities that are not established by the City District. Information about private kindergartens can be found on a website. Information about private children's groups and independent childminders is not provided by the City District. According to the deputy mayor, the situation with children's groups is too dynamic, as they are created and dissolved based on the needs of the mothers who run them, and childminder services are not widely used in the City District.

The role of the coordinator for the youth and child support also involves connecting specialists with those in need, with professionals such as special educators often seeking the coordinator's assistance to arrange services for their clients (e.g., speech therapist for a student with a different mother tongue, tutoring, psychological support, etc.).

All stakeholders appreciate the support provided by the City District, including the personalized assistance (e.g., a new principal of a kindergarten was assigned a mentor, there is an opportunity of supervision, etc.), financial and organizational help, and mechanisms fostering collaboration, such as networking and off-site meetings. Also, the initiative of the City District in engaging social educators is highly appreciated.

Summary of key takeaways related to the municipal examples

Key points

- ✓ **Children's groups as a flexible solution** Children's groups can serve as a quick and flexible alternative where there is a lack of capacity in kindergartens. They can be set up in premises that are easier to build, acquire or adapt than kindergarten premises.
- ✓ **Close cooperation between children's groups and kindergartens** Children's groups can be guided by kindergartens and the staff can participate in further training alongside the kindergarten staff, thus naturally aligning the care standards across both types of facilities.
- ✓ **Inspiration for expanding kindergartens to accommodate younger children** The experience of children's groups helps kindergartens understand the needs of children under the age of 3 and get a better picture of how they could expand their services.
- ✓ **Gradual transition from children's groups to kindergartens** Children usually transition from children's groups to kindergartens at ages 3-4, but parents sometimes prefer to keep them in the children's groups due to the lower number of children.
- ✓ **Experience in care for children with special educational needs** Children's groups are not schools, making it difficult for them to provide specialized support for children with special educational needs. Municipalities like Prague 7 and Kácov are looking for their own solutions (e.g. social educators, shared mental health teams).
- ✓ **Fair and equal conditions** In Kácov, for example, they have introduced the same fee for the children's group and the kindergarten. The municipal authority subsidizes the children's group to make the conditions as equal as possible.

Challenges and future needs for support

- ✓ **Lack of space and capacity** In many localities there are not enough spots for younger children in existing kindergartens. The solution is either a children's group or a unit for (a lower number of) younger children newly established in existing kindergartens.
- ✓ **Promoting systematic identification of children in need of additional support for learning and development** School principals are introducing their own methods of assessing the children's development, which is challenging. A uniform and comprehensible, developmentally approved approach and methodology are required to ensure accurate identification of children in need of additional support and appropriate follow-up.
- ✓ **Unequal access to services** Children of the same age experience different conditions in various facilities, which creates a need for greater consistency and coordination from the government.

- ✓ **Staff requirements and organizational complexity** Kindergarten principals managing children's groups face the challenge of overseeing two different types of facilities; it would be better to merge them under one organization with uniform rules and qualifications.
- ✓ **Lack of support services** There is a need for specialized staff who will be available directly in kindergartens and children's groups, or possibly through shared services within the municipality or region.

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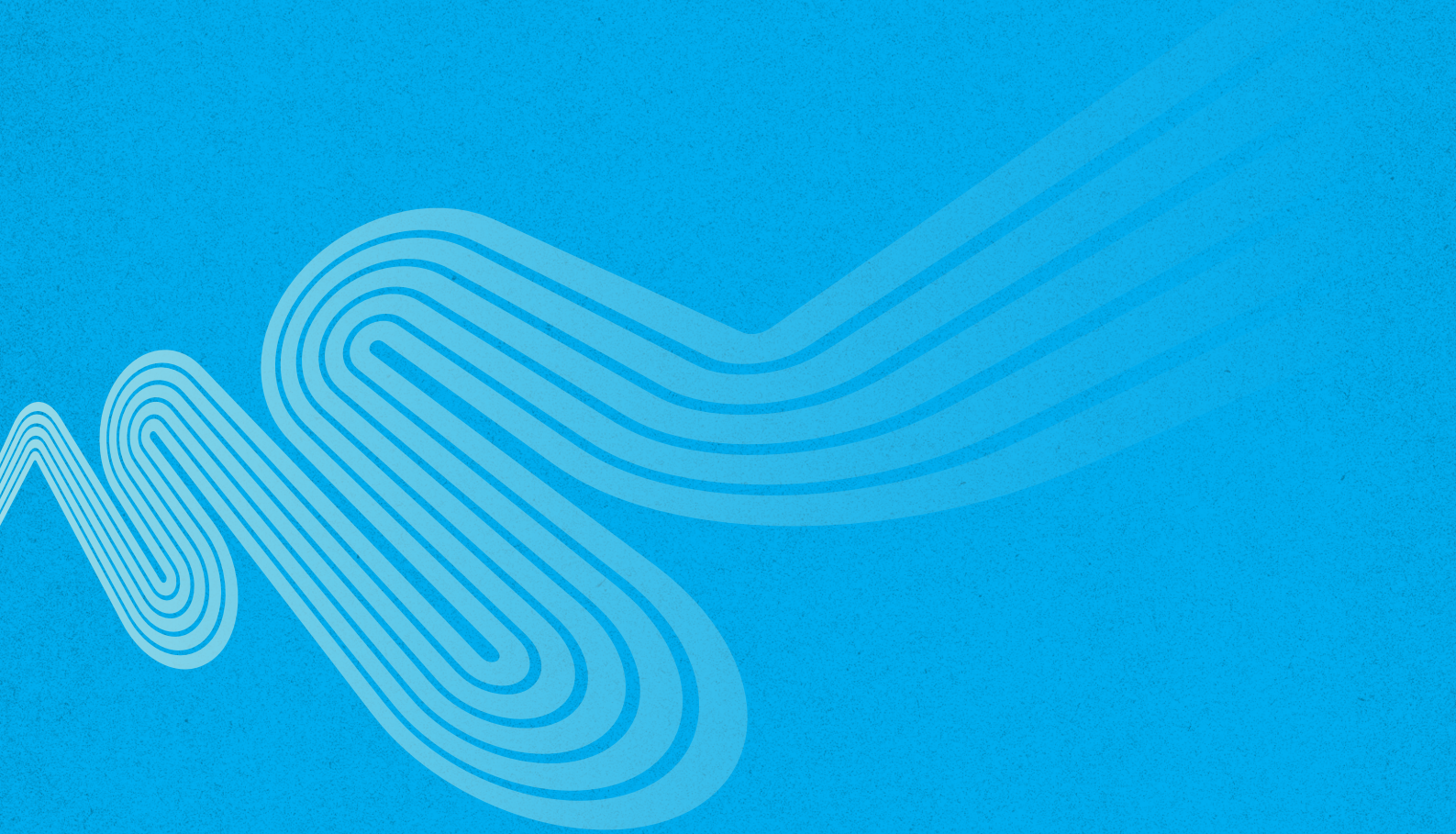
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ANNEXES

Materials and Tools



ANNEX 1: OVERSEEING QUALITY IN ECEC – VISUAL GUIDE

This tool illustrates how quality may appear or manifest in an ECEC setting. It is not an official standard or evaluation tool, but rather a guide to help you recognize the basic characteristics of quality. It should be used to build understanding of what to focus on when working with ECEC settings, even for those less familiar with ECEC theory. This tool was developed specifically within this project and is intended to be accessible, including for those with no prior experience.

Recommendations for use:

→ Allocate time to visit the facility, and plan for discussions with staff and ideally also with parents and children.

→ Maintain an open mindset and treat your visit as an opportunity to learn about how the facility operates, rather than as an inspection.

→ Allow sufficient time for observation (at least 30 minutes) and focus on the aspects mentioned below – especially the interactions among children, between children and adults, and among adults themselves, as well as the procedures being followed.

→ Prepare questions in advance for both staff and parents; again, the tool can serve as a guide in this process. Use open-ended questions, such as: “How do you deal with situations where a child’s behavior is challenging?”

→ Record your notes and observations or points you want to raise.

→ Validate your observations and conclusions with staff and parents, and consult with experts if necessary.



1. SAFE AND CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Description	Examples of what to look for
The physical environment should be safe, clean, structurally appropriate, and stimulating. It should be clearly age appropriate without any obvious hazards.	→ A secure space where the entrances are monitored but feel welcoming and cheerful. → The setting has bright, well-lit rooms with child-friendly décor (e.g., artwork at eye level). → There are outdoor play areas which are fenced with soft surfaces (e.g., grass, rubber mats), and some natural and shaded areas. → Floors clear of tripping hazards (e.g., no loose rugs/toys). → Fire exits are marked and unblocked and staff practice evacuation drills. → Cleaning supplies and hazardous materials are stored out of reach of children. → First aid kits are accessible, and staff trained to use them. → There are child-sized toilets, and handwashing stations with soap. → There is sufficient space for different sections, for children to move around and play, and it doesn't feel overcrowded.



2. WARM AND RESPONSIVE, WELL-TRAINED STAFF

Description	Examples of what to look for
The staff members are suitable trained and are able to practice respectful, playful, child-centered ECEC, while still managing behavior in a positive and caring way.	→ Staff kneel/sit at children's eye level when engaging with them and ensure that all children are involved (e.g. involving shy children, involving children with disabilities, children with a different home language.) → Staff are moving around the class, responding to children's activities and needs in a dynamic way. → Staff are not behind desks → The Staff comfort upset children gently, demonstrating techniques for emotional management (e.g., "Let's take deep breaths together"). → Staff are able to redirect negative behavior (e.g., "Let's build with blocks instead of throwing them"). → Staff use open-ended questions with children to engage their thinking and agency (e.g., "What do you think will happen?"). → Staff are positive and praise efforts (e.g., "You shared the crayons—great job!") as well as outcomes. → The staff to child ratio is in line with the legal statutes for the age group. → The staff engage with each other in a positive way, sharing information about the children, communicating well and planning and reflecting together. → The staff makes modifications, adaptations or applies specific strategies to facilitate the participation and learning of children in need of additional support, including disabilities, developmental delays, children with limited knowledge of the language of instruction.

3. ENGAGING LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Description	Examples of what to look for
The class has different play areas and a range of materials to allow for and which demonstrate active learning. As well as inside space, there are outdoor areas accessible for learning and play.	→ The class is set up to have different sections or corners, such as book corner, art station, sensory play (e.g., sand/water table), fantasy play corner. → There is evidence of hands-on activities that demonstrate active learning. (e.g., planting seeds, experiments, mixing paint colors). → Activities are available at child height for their own selections and use at times. → Natural and recycled materials are being used as part of teaching and learning (e.g., leaves for counting, sticks, pinecones). → Songs and stories are integrated into routines (e.g., cleanup song). → Outdoor area has space for gross motor skills development, such as climbing structures. → Outdoor area also has shaded areas and areas for exploration with nature (e.g. plant beds, trees, sandboxes).

4. CHILD-CENTERED APPROACH

Description	Examples of what to look for
The methodology used by the staff promotes choice and flexibility, and the staff are responsive to children's interests.	→ There are times in the day when children choose their own activities (e.g., free play vs. group time). → The room and staff make allowances for different needs and moods of children, (e.g. quiet corner with cushions for overwhelmed children) → Staff adapt activities to interests (e.g., if there is a circus in town, teachers adapt activities to respond to this. If a child voices an interest in dinosaurs, an activity is adapted to be dinosaur themed.) → Children's work and activities are on display, with the child's name to promote a sense of pride.



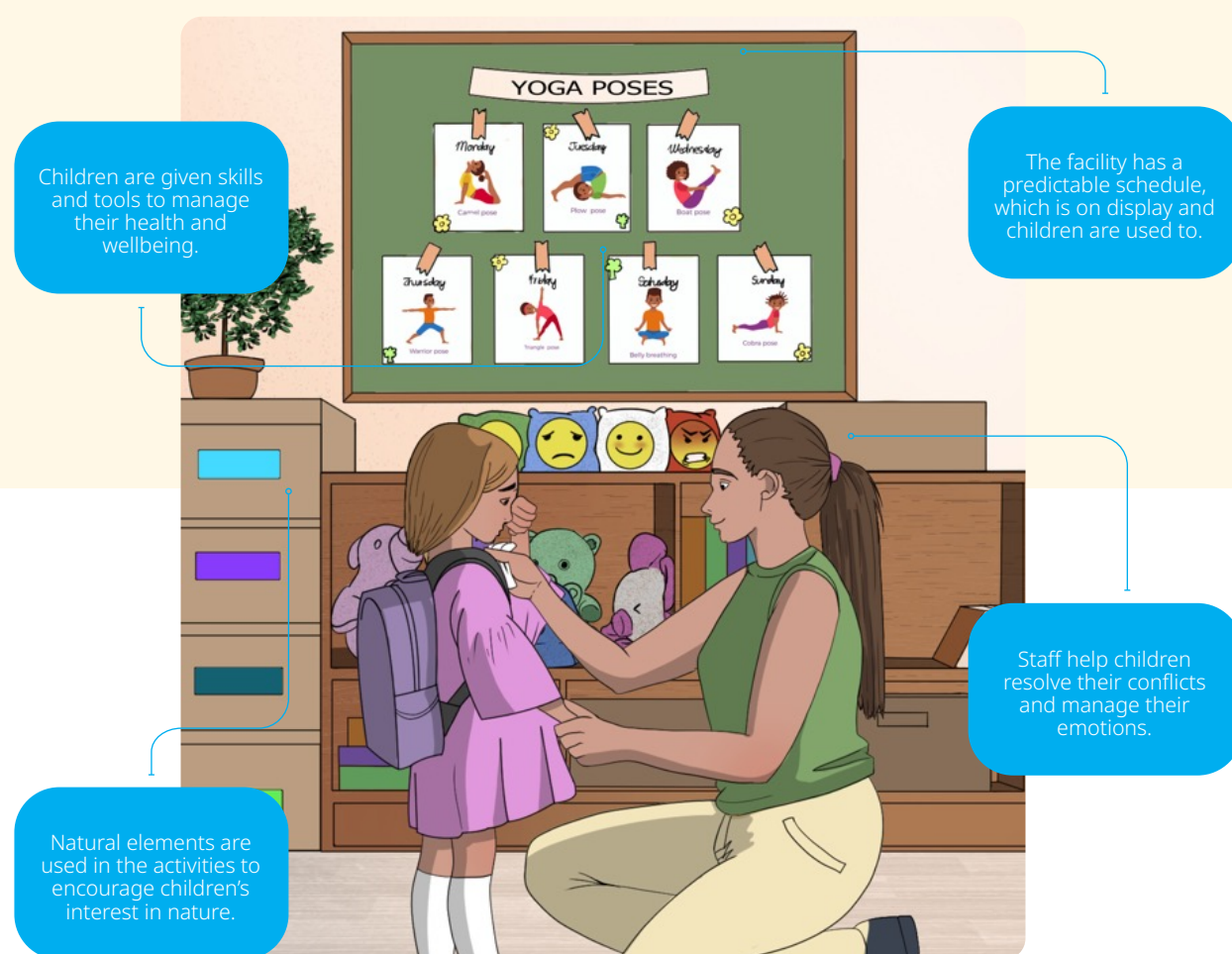
5. STRONG FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Description	Examples of what to look for
The ECEC center creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere with parents, and a link between home and ECEC	→ Staff offer warm greetings at drop-off/pick-up (e.g., "Hi, Ms. Kim! Leo loved the puzzle today.") and show that they are aware of parent's names and situations. (e.g. "I understand it's your auntie Laura getting you today because Dad has to work late"). → Staff keep parenting involved through sharing updates, letters, children's activities physically or electronically. → Regular parent-teacher meetings are held, both formally and informally. → Families are also involved in events and activities (e.g. Christmas party, farewell to preschoolers, Children's Day, etc.).



6. INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Description	Examples of what to look for
The facility fosters inclusion and diversity. It is respectful to children of all backgrounds and abilities.	→ The books, toys and activities reflect diverse cultures and abilities. → The staff use phrases in a child's home language (e.g., greeting parents or children with a "Hello" in Ukrainian). → Adaptive tools and materials are available (e.g., chunky crayons). → The setting and materials are accessible to children with disabilities. → Inclusive language is used (e.g., "All families are special!"). → Cultural traditions are celebrated, nationally and those of children attending from other cultures. (e.g. when a child from India is in the class, the class learns about Diwali) → Children are actively learning about other countries and cultures.



7. ROUTINES AND BEHAVIOR

Description	Examples of what to look for
There is a consistency in routine to help manage the day and facilitated positive behavior. Transitions and changes are managed and supported.	→ The facility has a predictable schedule, which is on display and children are used to. (e.g., free play on arrival, followed by circle time, followed snack time, then outdoor time.) → The staff assist children to engage with the routine and prepare when in moment when routine has to change. → Conflict resolution is manifested by the staff, with children being assisted to manage emotions and difficult conversations. (e.g., "Ask Liam if you can share his truck"). → Children are supported into transition phases, such as another ECEC class or into Grade 1 of the elementary school (e.g. teacher takes children to visit their next class.)

ANNEX 2: MAPPING ECEC SERVICES AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Note: This tool was adopted from the [UNICEF Build to Last](#) diagnostic framework and adapted for use at municipal level.

Brief overview of the Tool:

- This tool is designed to assess the current status of ECEC at the local level and to ensure a common understanding between relevant stakeholders of strengths, challenges and needs and to inform further planning.
- It can serve as a solid foundation for developing an ECEC action plan or strategy, and help all stakeholders involved understand the different areas of ECEC. Therefore, it is a good basis for approaching the development of early childhood education and care.
- The tool is built around 5 core areas¹ of the ECEC system and the supportive environment:
 - Planning and budgeting
 - Curriculum development and implementation
 - ECEC staff professional development
 - Family and community engagement
 - Quality assurance

¹ The areas covered by the Build to Last tool differ slightly from the areas of high-quality ECEC as defined by the European Union. Nevertheless, we believe that they are well-suited for the municipal level since they include family and community engagement as well as the broader supportive environment, where municipalities play a crucial role



Source: [UNICEF Build to Last](#)

How to use the Tool:

- The tool is designed to map the ECEC system through **a workshop or series of meetings** with ECEC stakeholders.

- All stakeholders involved in ECEC in the community (representatives and staff from relevant authorities, individual facilities (kindergartens, children's groups, informal facilities, NGOs), social and health services, leisure activities, parents and others) should be invited to participate in the discussions.

- The workshop can take different forms, depending on the objectives and the scope of the mapping, as well as on the availability of individual participants, resources and meeting spaces, etc.

- The preferred workshop form is either a multi-day meeting (e.g. retreat) or a series of one-day meetings. If resources allow, we recommend involving a qualified external **facilitator** to lead the workshop or individual sessions.

- The tool will guide you through the different areas of the ECEC system defined above.

-
- **Goals** (column 2) and **benchmarks/indicators of success**, which can be used to monitor achievement of these goals (column 3), are set for each area. Make these goals and indicators for each area available to the group – preferably in advance so that they can reflect on each area.
-
- There is a **set of questions** to guide discussions about the current status of ECEC at the municipal level and the needs (column 4).
-
- Based on the discussion and response, there is then a set of questions to guide the development of actions to capture in a strategic planning document (column 5).

Please note that this tool is not intended for benchmarking or grading individual areas or ECEC facilities, but rather should be introduced as part of a shared commitment to improving access to and the quality of ECEC services. The aim is therefore to address key questions **jointly**, to better understand the needs and challenges, identify potential gaps and find ways to improve individual areas and processes that can be changed at municipal level.

At the end of the process, all participants should leave with:

- A solid understanding of the status of ECEC in their municipality (in each area);
- A plan for what is needed and feasible to strengthen ECEC support;
- A clear understanding of their role in the process.

Component	Goals of the workshop/session	Measures of success	Guiding questions – Assessment of current state	Guiding questions – Proposed policies and strategic planning
1. Planning and budgeting	Note: Funding distribution mechanisms for kindergartens and children's groups are relatively well-defined. However, municipalities have other ways of securing funds, often funding informal facilities, etc., which must be taken into account in the discussion. Equitable resource allocation – Ensure funding reaches all facilities and communities within the municipality. It is advisable to ensure sufficient funding, especially for facilities working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with additional needs. Sustainable funding – Ensure stable, long-term financial support for ECEC services. Data-driven decision-making – Use local data on ECEC to guide budget and policy decisions.	This refers to the share of the municipal budget allocated to the ECEC system, with a particular emphasis on facilities and services supporting children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Volume of external funding sources (grants, donations, partnerships with other entities). Data on supply and demand for ECEC services, as well as its availability (financial, geographical) and children's attendance/ participation.	• Are local ECEC resources distributed equitably? • How much of the local budget is allocated to ECEC? Are the needs of facilities working with disadvantaged children reflected? • Are there any external funding sources (grants, donations, other partnerships) to support ECEC services? Which recourses are these? • What data on ECEC in the municipality is available and what data is missing? How is data collected and aggregated? How is it used in general and for decision-making in particular? • What policies exist to ensure the long-term sustainability of ECEC funding in the municipality?	• What budget adjustments are needed to ensure equitable funding for ECEC? • What partnerships can be established and which grants can be applied for to secure additional funding? • How can data collection be improved to provide a better picture of ECEC services and the impact of municipal funding on supply, quality and potential gaps? • How can the municipality and its representatives advocate for national funding allocations for ECEC?
2. Curriculum development and implementation	Note: The process of taking care of and educating children in children's groups is guided by an education and care plan. Kindergartens develop their own curriculum based on the current Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education. Informal facilities have no curriculum requirements. The term 'Curriculum' is intentionally used in a broad sense to highlight the link between care and education and to support the quality development of children across all types of facilities. While municipalities do not have the authority to directly intervene in the educational process, they have various opportunities to support the improvement of education and care processes. Promoting high-quality education and care in all types of facilities in the community – Sharing inspiration and opportunities to enhance the curriculum Supporting staff – Provide professional development opportunities for effective curriculum delivery. Monitoring implementation – Assess how well local ECEC facilities apply the curriculum and identify challenges.	Percentage of local ECEC facilities that comply with relevant curriculum implementation standards. Proportion of ECEC staff participating in professional development programs.	• What challenges do local staff report in implementing the curriculum? • What support is required for facilities that do not follow the curriculum or other legally mandated standards? • Are there sufficient opportunities for staff professional development aimed at improving curricula? • Does the sharing and exchange of experience and good practice between facilities in the community work smoothly? • Are there any mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the quality of curricula?	• What professional development programs can be introduced or expanded to support staff in curriculum improvement? • How can the municipality facilitate collaboration among ECEC facilities to share best practices and experience? • What feedback mechanisms and tools can be used to collect insights from staff and families on the quality of ECEC curricula? • How can the municipality advocate for curriculum improvements at the national level?

3. ECEC staff professional development	Ensuring quality and qualified ECEC staff in all types of facilities. Support for continuing education and professional development. Creating appropriate working conditions and environment, ensuring relevant and fair remuneration.	Percentage of ECEC staff meeting professional qualification standards. Number of professional development opportunities offered locally. Turnover rates and staff satisfaction surveys for ECEC facilities.	• What percentage of ECEC staff meet the required qualification standards (this applies mainly to kindergartens and informal services; in children's groups, all staff members must meet the qualification requirements)? • What kinds of professional training and qualifications does the staff have in each facility (focus on the field of training, types of programs completed)? • Are there any training programs for unqualified or underqualified staff? • How does the recruitment process and support of new ECEC staff work? • How can the municipality help create better working conditions, adequate remuneration or benefits? • Are local ECEC staff members satisfied with their career progression opportunities?	• What training programs can be introduced or expanded to upskill ECEC staff (joint training of staff across facilities, exchange of experience, financial support for staff to upgrade their skills, etc.)? • What opportunities and incentives (financial and other) can the municipality create for facilities that are experiencing staff shortages? • In what ways can the municipality contribute to shaping the national remuneration system for ECEC staff?
4. Family and community engagement	Encouraging family involvement – Supporting activities and measures that help families engage in ECEC. Raising awareness – Provide workshops and campaigns on the importance of ECEC. Building Strong Partnerships – Strengthen connections between ECEC facilities, parents, and local organizations.	Percentage of families actively engaged in ECEC services (in any type of facility). Number of meetings or events held on the topic of ECEC. Frequency and outcomes of feedback from parents on ECEC services.	• How often do families use local ECEC services and what are the barriers to their greater involvement and attendance? • What meetings, events or campaigns does the municipality organize or run on the topic of ECEC? • Are there any mechanisms for families to provide feedback on ECEC services? • How can the municipality support cooperation between local organizations (family centers, NGOs, social and health services, leisure activities, etc.) and ECEC facilities? • What initiatives are in place to enhance parenting skills?	• How to ensure that all families are well informed about ECEC services? • How to increase attendance and involvement of families who do not use these services? • What types of partnerships can be established with local organizations to encourage children to attend ECEC facilities? • How can the municipality support parents in developing parenting skills and caring for children at an early age? • What tools (digital platforms, space for face-to-face meetings, etc.) can be developed to enable all families to share their feedback on ECEC services and participate in shaping them at the community level?

5. Quality assurance	Tracking ECEC program effectiveness – Local-level monitoring. Supporting continuous quality improvement – Using data to set better policies and conditions. Ensuring compliance with legislation and standards – cooperating with the relevant authorities to ensure quality of services.	Existence of monitoring tools to track program quality and effectiveness. Number of quality assessments conducted at the local level. Percentage of ECEC facilities that meet compliance standards.	• What systems exist to monitor ECEC program effectiveness and child development outcomes? • How is data on ECEC enrolment, attendance, and quality collected and analyzed? • Are there tools and opportunities available for staff, parents and other representatives of the local community to share feedback? • How does the municipality cooperate with other authorities (Czech Schools Inspectorate, Labor Office, Regional Public Health Stations, etc.) to address issues related to the quality of ECEC services? • What actions are taken when local ECEC programs are found to be underperforming?	• What new monitoring mechanisms or digital tools can be introduced to track ECEC performance more effectively? • How can data collection be improved to provide real-time insights into children's attendance, availability of services, as well as their quality or issues? • What partnerships can be established between the municipality and other entities (including universities and research institutions) to conduct regular assessments of local ECEC quality? • How can the municipality strengthen prompt reporting and resolution of issues related to the quality of ECEC services?
6. Enabling environment	Create a supporting environment through excellent leadership, the establishment of adequate conditions and the promotion of public demand for quality ECEC services. Promote actions and policies that will lead to the prioritization of ECEC in community leadership and local governance. Mobilize public awareness and demand for high-quality ECEC services.	Presence of local actions and policies that prioritize ECEC in local governance. Public support and engagement in advocating for ECEC improvements. Introduction of ECEC priorities in the public statements of municipal representatives, their governance and the municipal budget planning.	• How does the municipal leadership prioritize ECEC in its public statements, governance, and municipal budgeting? • Are there any policies and actions in place that advocate for the long-term sustainability of ECEC services? • How does the municipality engage and motivate the public in supporting the need for quality ECEC services? • Are there clear advocacy strategies or campaigns to increase public demand for better ECEC access and quality?	• What can the municipality do to raise public awareness about the importance of quality ECEC? • How can local leadership align its governance and establishment of conditions and policies with the needs of children and families to make ECEC a higher priority? • What actions can be taken to mobilize public support and demand for better ECEC services? • How can the municipality collaborate with NGOs, media, and other stakeholders to create a sustained campaign that pushes for ECEC to be prioritized at the local level?

ANNEX 3: ACTION PLAN FOR COORDINATION

Note: This tool was adapted from [UNICEF's ECD Toolbox](#) for communities and local governments. Specifically, it corresponds to Tool 11 in Building Block 1 – Action plan for improving coordination in the local early childhood system.

Brief overview of the Tool:

- Achieving functional and effective coordination of the ECEC system at the local level requires a series of well-targeted and strategically planned measures. To ensure success, it is essential to engage a wide range of stakeholders (community representatives, service providers, professionals) in the planning process.
- Effective coordination of the whole process—from mapping and planning to implementing the plan—with all stakeholders involved is essential for achieving better results for children and families, especially the most vulnerable ones.
- The tool emphasizes the importance of having an articulated plan that all relevant stakeholders should contribute to in order to support and sustain processes that ensure high-level coordination.
- This tool will help your community to:
 - Develop goals and priorities for ECEC, considering other services for young children and their families;
 - Set up and ensure effective coordination across different areas and services;
 - Adopt the necessary policies and support, including the involvement of local government and other organizations.
- The tool provides a sample action plan, defining individual action areas that are considered key to ECEC systems, aiming to:
 - Strengthen the understanding of the importance of mutual coordination;
 - Ensure appropriate conditions and support from the community leadership for better cooperation;
 - Improve the capacity of local stakeholders to act in a coordinated manner;
 - Strengthen communication between the stakeholders;
 - And make efficient use of available resources.
- All areas contribute equally to the creation of a collaborative culture, joint decisions, and effective coordination.

How to use the Tool:

- It is advisable to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development of the coordination action plan: the municipal leaderships, or leaderships and representatives of the individual departments (education, social, health, social and legal protection of children, culture, economic and others), representatives of service providers and leaderships of individual facilities (kindergartens, children's groups, informal facilities), NGOs, social and health services, leisure activities and parents.
- Developing an action plan requires time and good facilitation. Engaging an external facilitator is recommended where the funding allows this.
- The plan may be developed through a workshop, a single working meeting or a series of meetings – depending on its scope and number of stakeholders involved.
- We recommend outlining individual activities for each action area and identifying their specific outcomes to help assess whether the goals are being achieved. Be sure to appoint a representative responsible for the implementation of each area or activity (preferably a specific person or organization), identify all stakeholders involved, and set a time schedule along with the required resources.
 - Under Action Area 3 (Setting up new procedures and coordination mechanisms at different levels), for example, meetings can be organized with different groups of staff from different facilities and services, e.g. social workers and social educators from the bodies for social and legal protection of children, social services, family centers, kindergartens and primary schools. During these meetings, participants can suggest and agree on ways to improve coordination in their work with children and families in their jurisdiction or area. It is also possible to work with headteachers/ leadership of kindergartens and children's groups, or with representatives of different local communities.
 - Under Action Area 4 (Leadership and the processes and structures needed for effective cross-sector collaboration), a meeting can be held with the leadership of each service/sector to agree on steps, procedures and processes needed for effective collaboration among the health, social and education and other sectors, while also sharing information on the services provided to children and families in the community. The processes and procedures should help all stakeholders collaborate and share responsibility for the development and implementation of a local ECEC strategy. The goal is to ensure that all children and families have access to these services, avoid gaps in service delivery, secure sufficient resources, and prevent overlaps or inefficiencies.
- Mark in the Action Plan the milestones for each of the seven areas of action. Each area of action might need a detailed plan/time schedule, but the General Action Plan should reflect the convergence of actions towards achieving the defined goals.

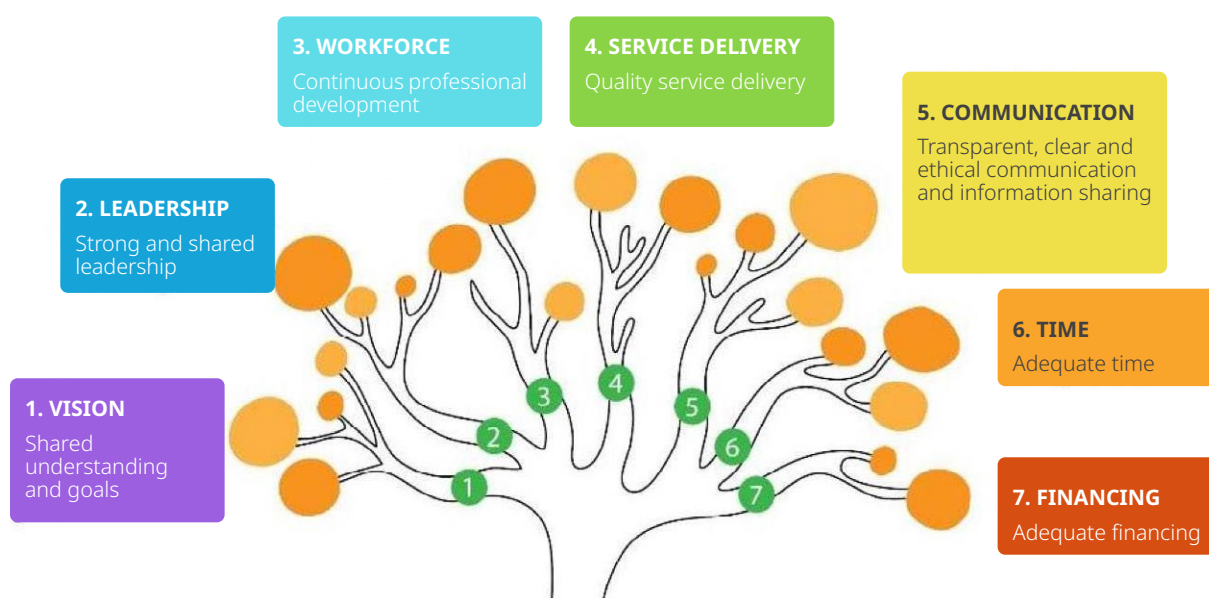
Action area	Activities planned	Who is responsible?	Who is involved?	Timetable	Resources needed (financial, human, other)	Expected outcomes
1. Creating a shared vision and community engagement						
2. Setting up actions and policies for effective coordination at the community level						
3. Setting up new procedures and coordination mechanisms at different levels → Facility staff → Facility management → Local government → Community						
4. Leadership and the processes and structures needed for effective cross-sector collaboration.						
5. High-level coordination in service delivery → Joint planning → Joint delivery → Joint monitoring and assessment						
6. Communication and information sharing among stakeholders						
7. Allocation of resources (time, human, material, financial)						
8. Monitoring and evaluating outcomes for children and families → Baseline evaluation → Continuous monitoring → Final evaluation						

ANNEX 4: QUALITY PRACTICES IN ECEC SYSTEMS

Note: This tool was adapted from [UNICEF's ECD Toolbox](#) for communities and local governments. Specifically, it corresponds to Tool 12 in Building Block 1 – Quality practices in integrated local early childhood systems.

Brief overview of the Tool:

- This tool to support evaluation of the quality of services for young children and their families in your community, their interconnectedness, coordination and integration within a cohesive system.
- It consists of a straightforward checklist, organized into seven thematic areas, each representing a key component that contributes to effective coordination across different sectors and services for young children (such as health, social services/child protection, early childhood education and care, etc.). These areas were established through an extensive review of the literature and mapping of best practices across European countries¹ – see figure:



Source of original picture: [UNICEF's ECD Toolbox](#)

¹ Drawing on a literature review and a synthesis of experiences from Europe and beyond (e.g. Australia and North America), a reference framework for integrated services for young children was developed under the Erasmus+ funded project titled "Supporting vulnerable children through integrated services" (2016–2018). This framework outlines key factors that enhance effective coordination of services, along with supporting practices that contribute to their implementation. Read more here: [INTESYS Toolkit: Towards Integrated Early Childhood Education and Care Systems – Building the Foundations](#) | ISSA

- For each area, specific procedures have been identified that facilitate and enhance the effective and high-quality coordination of services.
- Reflecting on each area and assessing which approaches are already functioning well in your municipality and which still need development or implementation can significantly improve the availability, quality, and coordination of services for young children and their families.

How to use the Tool:

- This tool can be used to assess and enhance the existing coordination between local services, or serve as a basis for the development of an action plan.
- The term “services” is used to refer to any health and social services, early childhood education and care services (ECEC), as well as services and activities provided by family centres and other NGOs, leisure activities, parenting programs and other services for young children and their families. “Facilities” refer to the organizations and institutions where ECEC services are provided. “Staff/workforce” includes both employees and volunteers working within these services and facilities (nurses, pediatricians, midwives, social workers, social educators, teachers, caregivers, teaching assistants, psychologists, speech therapists, educators, etc.).
 - The tool can be used in several ways:
 - As a simple checklist for assessing services and their coordination at the community level;
 - As a basis for collecting data from individual services and stakeholders (including parents), e.g. in the form of questionnaires;
 - As a set of discussion topics for group sessions in larger communities to establish the view of service representatives and providers.
- Based on the results (analyzed by area and by specific procedures), you can identify the policies and actions needed to ensure effective coordination between ECEC service providers and other professionals working in related services.

Areas	Procedures that have a positive impact and contribute to the effective and high-quality coordination of services	In the given service/community, this procedure is		
		non-existent	emerging	existing
1. VISION	In all early childhood services, the values, practices and relationships are guided by the principle of child and family centrality in daily decisions and work.			
	The inner diversity of each professional and the diversity within and among children and families are seen as intrinsic values to quality provision.			
	Positive and trustful relationships among professionals, managers, parents and community members are established.			
	The leadership culture recognizes the child and family centrality in the service design and delivery and in joint planning and delivery.			
	The policy and regulations of various institutions working with young children and their families are aligned around the principle of child and family centrality in service delivery.			
	The protocols for collaboration among services are grounded in collectively meeting the specific needs of each child and family.			
2. LEADERSHIP	The leadership culture is built on values of cooperation, participation, mutual respect, respect for diversity and solidarity in service design and delivery.			
	The community leadership has initiatives that contribute to building a culture of collaboration among service providers, staff, families, communities, decision-makers and policy makers.			
	The governance structures encourage shared leadership among managers of services, staff, families and communities.			
	The governance structures encourage the co-creation of tailored community/family-rooted solutions.			
	The governing practices motivate all staff, create the conditions for cooperation among staff. Staff, families and the community participate in evaluating the outcomes and searching for solutions that lead to continuous improvement of the quality of services and higher efficiency..			
	Staff, parents and community representatives feel empowered to contribute to positive change in their communities.			
	The leadership practices encourage and support team/joint planning, team/joint service delivery and team/joint monitoring.			
	The management standards and regulations create the conditions for open and transparent communication among the leadership and the staff team.			
3. WORKFORCE	Staff members engage in ongoing professional development to enhance their skills and better respond to the needs of children, families, and the community.			
	Service staff and managers understand the benefits of peer review, peer-learning, peer support and collaboration and routinely implement these activities.			
	Common professional development activities (such as training, discussions, or supervision) among staff from various facilities/services are provided on a regular basis for enhancing the competencies of partnering organizations and encouraging group-reflection and learning.			

Areas	Procedures that have a positive impact and contribute to the effective and high-quality coordination of services	In the given service/community, this procedure is		
		non-existent	emerging	existing
4. SERVICE DELIVERY	All staff members in the service/s (regardless of their function and role) share and firmly follow the belief that each individual child and each individual family stays at the center of all decisions.			
	Regardless of the sector, service or age group of children targeted, staff members build their relationships on trust, empowerment and respect and demonstrate the same in their work with children and families.			
	The service delivery provides diverse tailored community/family-rooted solutions co-created with families and communities.			
	In addressing the issue of services for young children, the local governance structures encourage shared leadership among services, families, and communities.			
	Interactions among professionals from different services are non-hierarchical and encourage a reflexive and evidence-based attitude towards addressing each child and family situation.			
	Through inter-institutional work, tailored joint services are created for outreaching the most vulnerable groups of children and families, ensuring their accessibility to all.			
5. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING	Communication and information sharing among professionals within a service and among services respect deontological codes and act upon the best interests of children and families.			
	There are clear, transparent, accessible, and agreed-upon channels of communication among services for properly addressing the specific situations and needs of each child and family.			
	All service providers have access to accurate and complete information about the child and the family, based on the family's consent. In this case, a secure electronic information system is an ideal solution.			
	Communication and information sharing among services is based on clear and transparent protocols for data protection, data uploads, and data access, ensuring children's and families' rights to privacy and safety.			
	Communication and information-sharing procedures support collaboration within and among services.			
6. TIME	There is no-contact paid time allocated for teachers, caregivers, and other staff. During this time, they join team meetings, or analyze and plan individual support for each child and family using ongoing documentation and both individual and group reflection.			
	There is no-contact paid time allocated for staff to focus on their professional development, including interdisciplinary topics and areas.			
	Within teams and among services, there is specifically allocated time for joint planning and assessment.			
7. FINANCING	Funds are specifically allocated for cross-sectoral coordination (joint mapping, joint data collection, joint planning, joint implementation of measures, etc.).			
	Coordination among services ensures that funding is efficient, without any duplications or overlaps, any gaps or needs are promptly identified.			

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