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Assessment of Current Monitoring and Evaluation Practice in the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in the Czech Republic

For the project *"Developing a Comprehensive Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic"*

Assessment of Current Monitoring and Evaluation Practice in the Early Childhood Education and Care Sector in the Czech Republic



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List of Acronyms

ASM	Additional support measure
CCY	Centre for children and youth
CPC	Centre for preschool children
CSI	Czech School Inspectorate
CZSO	Czech Statistical Office
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
EU	European Union
FC	Forest club
FEP	Framework educational programme
FEP PE	Framework educational programme for preschool education
FKG	Forest kindergarten
IHIS CR	Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic
InspIS	Czech School Inspectorate information system
MER	Municipalities with extended responsibilities
MoEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MoIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NPI CR	National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic
RILSA	Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs
SEN	Special educational needs
SEP	School educational programme
TSI	Technical Support Instrument
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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1. Introduction

This report was produced as part of a project to create a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for early childhood education and care in the Czech Republic, led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) and implemented by UNICEF in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. The project is funded by the European Union through the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by UNICEF in cooperation with the European Commission.

The chief objective of this project is to support the Czech Republic in improving the quality of and equal access to early childhood education and care, particularly for children in the 0–3 age group. This will be achieved by developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation system and by providing technical support to municipalities in expanding access to ECEC services and increasing their quality, including those for the most vulnerable children (for more information see the TSI project brief: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/32756/file/TSI%20Brief%20for%20Czech%20Republic.pdf>).

The report is the second output of the project. The aim of this report is to carry out an analysis of the monitoring and evaluation of the ECEC sector in the Czech Republic. We take the term “monitoring” to mean a continuous and systematic collection of quantitative and qualitative data which enables a periodic evaluation of the quality of the system. It is based on quality standards, criteria and indicators which are agreed upon in advance and periodically reviewed and updated. We take the term “evaluation” to mean the systematic assessment of the effectiveness of a system, programme or an education policy in the ECEC sector.

Both monitoring and evaluation can be undertaken internally by ECEC service providers through self-evaluation, or externally as part of an inspection or supervision activity or on the basis of statistical data analysis. Monitoring and evaluation processes make use of a number of methods and tools such as documentation and facility inspections, class observation, assessment of children's health and well-being or educational outcomes, and surveys and interviews with those working in ECEC services, children and parents (European Commission, 2022).

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to ensure a high level of quality of ECEC services and its further development through the identification of strengths which can be built upon and weaknesses which need to be removed. Monitoring and evaluation are aimed at various system levels: individual facilities, the local level and the ECEC system as a whole.

Two main dimensions of quality are often emphasised in the ECEC context: structural and process quality (European Commission, EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

Structural quality is assessed through the inspection of adherence of the conditions in individual facilities to the regulations applicable to the ECEC sector, particularly in the following areas:



health and safety



staff qualifications



**group size or the
children-to-staff ratio**

In some cases, the education plan is also assessed to ensure that it is compliant with the standards set at the national level.

Process quality refers to how the educational process is supported. The main criteria for this area are generally:

- ✦ the quality of the implementation of educational programmes (quality and variety of activities)
- ✦ the quality of the interactions and relationships between the staff and the children (how the carers support the children's development)
- ✦ the quality of the interactions among children.

Both the structural and process quality are necessary for the creation of high-quality services and the development of effective ECEC systems.

This report first describes monitoring and evaluation at the level of the individual facilities, then at the municipal level, and lastly monitoring and evaluation at the regional and national levels. The Chapter 5 describes the international indicators to which the Czech Republic contributes its data. The Chapter 6 identifies the key challenges of the system; Chapter 7 offers the conclusions of this analytical undertaking.

One of the tasks of this report was to carry out the analysis based on the analytical tools developed on the basis of the UNICEF Built to Last Framework. Annex 2 presents the analysis according to the tool for ECEC system assessment (this tool can be found in Annex 3) developed on the basis of the UNICEF Built to Last Framework. Module 5 of this tool (Quality Assurance) was used for this task; it has the following goals: 1. establish comprehensive standards for service quality; 2. establish functional quality assurance mechanisms based on the overarching goals; 3. strengthen capacity across the subsector to monitor quality; 4. ensure that quality monitoring facilitates quality improvements.

In some cases, this report uses masculine terms for the roles of educators, teachers, teaching assistants, etc., mainly when they are referred to as such in the legislation or where the use of both gendered terms could lead to reduced comprehensibility of the text. In all other cases, the effort has been made to use gender neutral language – neutral expressions or the use of both of the gendered terms.

2. Monitoring and evaluation at the level of the individual facilities

This chapter provides information on monitoring and evaluation at the level of the individual ECEC facilities. Chapter 2.1 provides information on facilities that are a standard part of the education system, i.e. kindergartens and primary school preparatory classes (hereinafter referred to as preparatory classes); Chapter 2.2 focuses on children's groups. For each type of facility, we provide an overview of the legislative measures that regulate monitoring and evaluation, and detailed information on the available data sources for mapping structural and process quality. Chapter 2.3 provides brief information on data sources for other ECEC facilities. Chapter 2.4 reflects on the form of standards for evaluating process quality and poses the question whether some aspects of quality are not omitted in the current evaluation and monitoring. As a reference framework, we use the evaluation standards of NGOs operating in ECEC settings and the findings from the qualitative research conducted previously and reported in the first of the project reports – *Report on Mapping of Supply and Demand for Formal and Non-formal ECEC Services*¹.

2.1 Kindergartens and preparatory classes

2.1.1 Overview of legislative measures regulating the quality of preschool education and care and its monitoring

The assessment of kindergartens is carried out in the form of the school's internal assessment and assessment by the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI). Inspections by CSI are carried out once in 3 to 9 years depending on the needs of the school, the findings of the last inspection and the number of complaints filed. The assessment of a school or a school facility may also be carried out by its founder according to criteria which it publishes in advance.

The main outcome of the external assessment by the CSI is an inspection report, which contains an assessment of the conditions, processes and results of the education taking place. The school inspectors discuss the contents of the inspection report with the school's principal. Comments on the contents of the inspection report may be submitted by the school's principal to the Czech School Inspectorate within 14 days of its receipt. The inspection report, together with the comments of the school management and the Czech School Inspectorate's opinion on their contents, is sent by the Czech School Inspectorate to the school's founder. The inspection report, including comments, is public and is stored for 10 years in that school and at the relevant Czech School Inspectorate office.

¹ Qualitative research was carried out as part of the project with the aim of filling in missing information. Several dozen respondents were interviewed (mainly mothers of preschool children and ECEC service providers). The data collected were processed through open coding. Detailed information on that research is included in the first report output of this project: *Report on Mapping of Supply and Demand for ECEC Services*.



In assessing the conditions, progress and results of education, the Czech School Inspectorate bases its principles and objectives on those set out in the Education Act², with the primary criterion assessed being the effectiveness of supporting the development of the child's personality and achieving the objectives of education. The CSI evaluation criteria are submitted to the MoEYS for approval; the approved evaluation criteria are published by the MoEYS. A list of criteria for the 2023/2024 school year is provided in Chapter 2.1.2.

The Czech School Inspectorate further prepares the conceptual plans of the inspection activity and the systems for evaluating the education system. The CSI Conceptual Plans is a document of a strategic (conceptual) character, which sets out the CSI's vision, goals and measures in the areas connected to carrying out the inspection activity agenda in the medium term (CSI, 2021).

In relation to the evaluation of educational staff, the Education Act provides that educational staff have the right to an objective evaluation of their teaching activities when performing those activities. Act No. 563/2004 Coll., on teaching staff and on amendments to certain acts, provides that within the career system, the career level is determined by the description of activities, professional qualifications or other qualification prerequisites and the system of evaluation that the teaching staff must fulfil in order to carry out these activities. The conditions for the classification of a teaching staff member into a career level and the system of evaluation are determined by Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., on further education of teaching staff, the Accreditation Commission and the career system of teaching staff. However, the Decree describes no system of evaluation of teaching staff members; the Decree only sets out the list of activities that justify classification into the relevant career level (see Table 1).

2 The operations of the CSI are governed by a number of other legislative documents as well: Decree No. 17/2005 Coll., on more detailed conditions of the organisation of the Czech School Inspectorate and the conducting of inspection activity; Act No. 255/2012 Coll., on inspection (the Inspection Rules); Act No. 320/2001 Coll., on financial inspection in public administration (the Financial Inspection Act); Act No. 500/2004 Coll., the Code of Administrative Procedure; Act No. 106/1991 Coll., on free access to information; Act No. 85/1990 Coll., on petition rights; Act No. 110/2019 Coll., on personal data processing; Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

Table 1: Annex 1 to Decree No. 317/2005 Coll.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Career level	Core activity	Specialised activity or specialisation	Professional qualification	Other qualification requirements
1	Creation of educational and training activities aimed at acquiring the knowledge, skills and habits of children in kindergarten according to the educational programme (8 th pay grade)	No	Section 6 of Act 563/2004 Coll.	No
2	Creation of the educational programme of a kindergarten class. Application of educational methods, including possible individual work with children with special educational needs (9 th pay grade)	No	Section 6 of Act 563/2004 Coll.	One year of professional experience
3	Creation of the educational programme of a kindergarten class. Application of educational methods, including possible individual work with children with special educational needs (9 th pay grade)	Yes	Section 6 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.	Section 9 of Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., 1 year of professional experience
4	Creation and coordination of the school educational programme of the kindergarten or creation of educational programmes for children with special educational needs and individual educational plans (10 th pay grade)	Yes	Section 6 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.	Section 9 of Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., 3 years of professional experience
5	Determination of the development strategy of the school educational programmes in kindergartens, including their coordination in the region (11 th grade)	Yes	Section 6 of Act No. 563/2004 Coll.	Sections 7 and 9 of Decree No. 317/2005 Coll., 3 years of professional experience

2.1.2 Available data sources for monitoring and evaluation

Rudimentary information about the individual kindergartens, primary schools with preparatory classes and special primary schools with a preparatory level, their founders and their capacity is accessible to the public through the electronic Register of Schools and School Facilities (rejstriky.MoEYS.cz/rejskol), which is administered by the MoEYS.

Aggregated data on the number of enrolled children, the number of classes, the number of applications for admission submitted and rejected as well as data on teachers are published on the MoEYS website (<https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/statistika-skolstvi/statisticke-Outputs-a-analyzy>). The MoEYS provides a database with data related to the individual schools on request. Similar data, supplemented by its own analysis, are also published annually by the Czech Statistical Office in the *Schools and School Facilities* publication. The state of preschool education in institutions under the responsibility of the MoEYS is also presented annually in the Czech School Inspectorate's *Annual Report* and the *Annual Report on the State and Development of Education* in the Czech Republic by the MoEYS.

Kindergartens (including kindergartens for children with SEN)

Structural quality areas monitored in kindergartens

Kindergartens keep school documentation and a register of children – the school records, the data from which are transmitted in an aggregated form through the founder to the MoEYS regularly twice a year (with status as at 31 May and 30 September). School documentation (according to Section 28 of the Education Act) includes, for example, decisions on the enrolment in the school records, documentation of the enrolment of children and the School Educational Programme and School Rules as well as records of any inspections carried out and inspection reports. The school records contain the child's identification data and data on the beginning, course and completion of their education in the relevant kindergarten or on their special educational needs. Kindergartens are required to submit the following reports on enrolment in the kindergarten and the number of children attending the kindergarten by 30 September: S1-01 (Report on a kindergarten), S 51-01 (Report on enrolment for preschool education in a kindergarten) and S 4-01 (Report on a kindergarten / elementary school at a medical facility). Finally, kindergartens are required to keep documentation related to their economic activity and transfers of funds.

Reports are completed for the individual separate facilities of the kindergarten where the enrolment took place. The number of women/girls is reported in all indicators related to persons. Classes established separately pursuant to Section 16 (9) of the Education Act (pertaining to educating children with SEN) are referred to as “special classes” for reporting purposes. The other classes are referred to as “regular classes”. A school composed exclusively of special classes is referred to as a “special school”. A “regular school” is a school with at least one regular class. If a kindergarten with more than one facility is registered, each site is distinguished through a unique serial number.

The school sends its report in electronic form to a server specified by the instructions of the MoEYS and then sends a physical data extract confirmed by the school principal to the processing site. The regional government's Department of Education is the processing site for schools established by the region, registered churches and religious societies, or another legal or natural person. For schools established by a municipality or by a union of municipalities, the Department of Education of the municipality with extended responsibilities is the processing site. For schools established by the Ministry of Education the processing site is the Ministry of Education directly. The data from these reports for the individual schools are available on request to all analysts.

In addition to these reports, the CSI conducts public administrative inspections of the use of state budget funds. Municipalities conduct financial inspections as defined in Act No. 320/2001 Coll., on financial inspection in public administration and on amendments to certain acts (the Financial Inspection Act). The data obtained from both the CSI and municipalities can also serve as indicators of structural quality.

Below is a list of the reports and the areas which are monitored in them. A detailed specification of the collected data is given in Annex 1.

S 1-01 – Report on a kindergarten, status as at 30 September

- Kindergarten details
- Children with special educational needs
- Classes and children
- Children in special classes by type of disability diagnosed by a school counselling facility
- Children by citizenship, foreigners by residence regime
- Children's ages
- Applications for enrolment in the kindergarten

S 51-01 – Report on enrolment in a kindergarten, status as at 31 May

- Number of enrolments by application result and by age

S 4-01 – Report on a kindergarten at a medical facility

- Average number of children and pupils in the previous school year
- Classes, children and pupils as at 30 September
- Children/pupils by citizenship, foreigners by residence regime as at 30 September

R 13-01 – Report on school management, status as at 30 September

- Number of independent sites
- Teaching staff performing specialised, methodical or methodological activities
- Total number of teachers
- Senior managers
- Other educational staff in schools
- Computer equipment in schools
- Other ICT equipment in schools

Some structural aspects are monitored as part of the inspection activities (see the following chapter for more details). An assessment of the school capacity and material, financial and staffing conditions is part of the criteria assessed by the CSI.

Process quality areas monitored in kindergartens

The process quality in kindergartens is monitored primarily by the CSI according to the School of Good Quality criteria. These are divided into six areas: the School's Concept and Framework, the School's Educational Leadership, Teaching Staff, Education, Educational Outcomes, and Support of Children in Education (Equal Opportunities). Below is a list of criteria for the 2023/24 school year (CSI, 2023a)³. Each criterion is described and explained in detail. We do not provide descriptions to save space, but the full text is available on the CSI website: <https://www.csicr.cz/cz/cz/DOKUMENTY/Kriteria-hodnoceni>.

Inspection activities take place at an interval of 3 to 9 years depending on the school's needs, the findings of the last inspection activity and the number of complaints. The school is usually informed about the planned inspection in advance. A team of inspectors usually spends several days in the kindergarten, carrying out observation activities in classrooms, talking to the school's management and staff, administering surveys and questionnaires, and checking school documents and fiscal management as well as safety and school meals.

The inspection tools are CSI's internal documents and are not publicly available. However, the CSI offers a number of tools for self-evaluation to schools (<https://www.kvalitniskola.cz/Nastroje-pro-vlastni-hodnoceni>). These are intended primarily for primary and secondary schools, but can also serve as inspiration for kindergartens. The page dedicated to self-evaluation also includes links to examples of inspirational practice. The examples are sorted by individual criteria and thus serve as a demonstration of their quality fulfilment. There is a number of examples from kindergartens in these inspirational practice case studies.

School of Good Quality – assessment criteria; preschool education modification

1 The school's concept and framework

A school of good quality knows where it wants to go and is successfully working towards that goal.

- 1.1 The kindergarten has a clearly formulated vision and a realistic development strategy, which educators share and implement.
- 1.2 The kindergarten has an educational programme (SEP) that is based on the school's vision and development strategy and is in line with the curricular documents (FEP); its objectives are comprehensible to educators and parents.
- 1.3 The kindergarten operates according to clear rules allowing for constructive communication of all actors (management, educators, parents) and their participation in the running of the school.
- 1.4 The kindergarten is a welcoming and safe place for children and their parents and educators.
- 1.5 The kindergarten cooperates with external partners.

3 Criteria for the 2023/24 school year can be found at: [https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni/Kriteria-hodnoceni-podminek,-prubehu-a-vysledk-\(8\)](https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni/Kriteria-hodnoceni-podminek,-prubehu-a-vysledk-(8))

2 The school's educational leadership

The principal of a school of good quality is the leader of the educational process.

- 2.1 The school management actively manages and regularly monitors and evaluates the school's work and takes effective measures.
- 2.2 The school management actively creates a healthy school climate by nurturing the relationships between educators and children as well as the mutual relationships between educators and children and their parents, and the mutual cooperation of all actors.
- 2.3 The school management takes extra care to meet the relevant needs of each educator and their professional development, creates the conditions for exchanging teaching experience with other schools and supports beginning educators effectively.
- 2.4 The school management strives for optimal material learning conditions and cares for their effective use.
- 2.5 The school management puts the emphasis on its own professional development.

3 Teaching staff

A school of good quality is created by high-quality educators.

- 3.1 The educators are qualified and proficient in their work and approach their work professionally.
- 3.2 The educators consistently apply a supportive, respectful approach when communicating with children, parents and colleagues.
- 3.3 The educators cooperate actively and provide each other with support and feedback.
- 3.4 The educators foster the development of democratic values and civic engagement.
- 3.5 The educators cooperate actively in their professional development.

4 Education

High-quality education aimed at good educational outcomes for all children is the basis of a school of good quality.

- 4.1 The educators systematically think and prepare education in accordance with the knowledge, skills and attitude objectives defined in the school's curricular documents and children's individual needs.
- 4.2 The educators use a wide range of educational strategies to meet the set objectives.
- 4.3 The educators systematically monitor each child's educational progress and take into account children's individual needs when planning and implementing education.
- 4.4 The educators focus in their work on children's social and personal development.

5 Educational outcomes

A school of good quality allows each child to develop as much as possible relative to their abilities.

- 5.1 A kindergarten systematically collects information about improvements in each child's performance in all educational areas and responds to them with appropriate educational measures.
- 5.2 Children's educational outcomes correspond to the expected outcomes according to educational programmes.
- 5.3 A kindergarten monitors and evaluates children's success during and at the end of preschool education and, where possible, in further education, and works actively with outcomes to improve education.

6 Support for children in education (equal opportunities)

A school of good quality monitors each child's educational progress and provides targeted support to those with specific needs.

- 6.1 The kindergarten creates equal opportunities for each child and their family to receive education, regardless of their gender, age, ethnicity, culture, native language, religion, family background, economic status or the need for support measures.
- 6.2 The kindergarten provides effective support to all children with the need for support measures.
- 6.3 The kindergarten pays due attention to the personal development of children, develops openness, tolerance and respect for otherness, and ensures that no child is excluded from the group.

Preparatory classes, preparatory grades of special primary schools

Structural quality areas monitored in preparatory classes and preparatory grades

The documentation on preparatory classes and preparatory grades of special primary schools that is kept and transmitted to the relevant authorities is similar to that of kindergartens (see above). Data on these are reported as part of the data on the primary school to which they belong. In addition, the data are included in the S 4c-01 report (Report on the preparatory class of a primary school and on the preparatory grade of a special primary school). The areas that are surveyed in the report are indicated below; detailed information on the actual data that are collected is given in Annex 1.

S 4c-01 – Report on the preparatory class of a primary school and on the preparatory grade of a special primary school, status as at 30 September

- Children with special educational needs
- Classes and children
- Children in preparatory grade classes according to the type of disability
- Children by citizenship, foreigners according to the regime of residence
- Children's ages

Process quality areas monitored in preparatory classes and preparatory grades

Process quality is monitored as part of the inspection activity in primary schools, which includes preparatory classes and preparatory grades.

The inspection activity takes place once every 3 to 9 years. The school is evaluated according to the School of Good Quality criteria for primary schools. The criteria are similar to those mentioned above for kindergartens. The inspection focuses on the whole school; preparatory classes and preparatory grades are evaluated according to the criteria for preschool education.

2.1.3 Strengths and weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation in kindergartens and preparatory classes

Monitoring and evaluation of structural quality

Kindergartens' and preparatory classes' statistical data are collected systematically; a large amount of information is collected on children and their teachers, making it possible to systematically monitor and evaluate a number of aspects of structural quality. However, data collection can be further improved so that even more aspects of ECEC can be monitored and evaluated in a higher quality. It would also be useful to ensure the public availability of the reporting data for further analytical use, with appropriate documentation.

A shortcoming of the data on kindergartens is an inconsistency between the data on the capacity and the number of children in certain kindergartens, which is likely to indicate a lack of data updates concerning the capacities of the individual kindergartens. Another

shortcoming is the fact that when the process of enrolment of children in kindergartens is being documented, the number of applications is recorded, rather than the number of children, making the information on the excess of demand over supply highly inaccurate. At the same time, kindergartens do not report the attendance of the individual children (even though they record it), i.e. there is no information on the time children enrolled in a kindergarten actually spend in the establishment. There is also a lack of standardised data on the fees associated with kindergarten attendance and the services provided by kindergartens (typically activities to support preschool children, speech therapy, English lessons, recorder lessons, art classes) and the amount charged for these services.

It is also important to clarify the way children are reported in the category of children with “disadvantages related to different cultural environments or the child’s other living conditions that hinder the fulfilment of their educational opportunities on an equal basis with others”. Experience shows that this category is understood very differently by each school and the data are highly unreliable, which hampers the monitoring and evaluation of the support received by such children in the system. This shortcoming relates to the reports on both kindergartens and preparatory classes of primary schools.

Monitoring and evaluation of process quality

Inspections are carried out on a regular basis according to well-thought-out criteria that are regularly updated. The criteria include a number of important aspects of process quality. However, the voices of children and their parents are not sufficiently represented in the assessment. Furthermore, the implementation of inspections in individual schools at an interval of 3 to 9 years does not allow the generalisation of the evaluation of procedural quality to smaller units during ad hoc selection; it would be advisable to include schools in the inspection programme systematically so that generalisation is possible.

Kindergartens are required by law to carry out their own internal assessment, but unlike primary schools, they are not required to draw up an annual report which should be based on their internal assessment. The Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education requires kindergartens to create their own self-evaluation system within the school education programme. Specifically, it is a requirement that they should specify: the subject of the evaluation (which specific phenomena the kindergarten will focus on); the methods and techniques used for the evaluation (forms, method of evaluation); the timetable (specific dates or frequency of the evaluation); the responsibility of teachers and other staff (who will be responsible for what). Self-evaluation can be carried out by the principal, the staff and each teacher. On the basis of individual findings, the principal should evaluate educational outcomes, the individual staff members and the kindergarten as a whole and take concrete measures. However, the system does not contain any mechanism to support kindergartens’ self-evaluation activities and there is no record of whether and how kindergartens actually carry out such activities.

Although one area of the evaluation is specifically aimed at equal opportunities, the inspection evaluation does not seem to sufficiently capture the segregation tendencies in the system or the insufficient ability of certain kindergartens to provide quality care for children with different cultural backgrounds (typically children of Ukrainian refugees or Roma children).

2.2 Children's groups

2.2.1 Overview of legislative measures regulating the quality of care and its monitoring

The monitoring of compliance with legal conditions and obligations in the provision of care in children's groups is carried out by the State Office of Labour Inspection and the Regional Labour Inspectorates, established under the Labour Inspection Act.

The aim of an inspection is to verify how the person being inspected fulfils the obligations that arise primarily from the Provision of Childcare Services in Children's Groups Act. It follows the rules contained in Act No. 255/2012 Coll., on inspection (the Inspection Rules).

For example, it checks the following facts:

- the entity's name (making sure that the name of CGs created after the amendment to the Act in 2021 contains the phrase "children's group")
- compliance with the conditions for the provision of childcare services – the provider's clean criminal record, clean criminal record of the carer in an employment relationship, the carer's professional competence, the carer's medical competence, the carer's age and full legal capacity
- system of the criteria for determining the amount of reimbursement of costs (if the parents participate) – capped kindergarten fees
- compliance with the maximum number of children in a children's group
- determination of the necessary number of carers (1 to 3) depending on the size of the children's group
- drafting and compliance with internal rules
- drafting and compliance with the education and care plan
- keeping records of the children
- conclusion of a written contract on the provision of the service with the parent before the start of the provision of the service, with the content as required by law, including annexes

Issues related to catering, space and operation fall under the competence of the Regional Public Health Authorities, established under the Protection of Public Health Act.

Monitoring and evaluation is governed by Act No. 247/2014 Coll., on the provision of childcare services in children's groups and on amendments to certain acts. It lays down the standards of quality of care (Table 2) which are used to verify the quality of childcare services. Providers must comply with these standards. Standards of quality of care are a set of criteria through which the level of quality of the provision of childcare services in children's groups is assessed in the area of childcare and the fulfilment of the child's needs and the staff and operational security. The fulfilment of quality standards of care is evaluated by a system of points. The inspection of adherence to the standards of quality care by providers and the financing of provision of childcare services in a children's group is conducted by the MoLSA.

Decree No. 350/2021 Coll., on the implementation of certain provisions of the Provision of the Childcare Service in a Children's Group Act and on amendments to certain acts, sets

out the details of the point assessment of the fulfilment of quality standards of care. Each criterion gets a score of two points if it is fulfilled excellently, one point if it is fulfilled well and no points if it is not fulfilled. Quality standards of care are considered fulfilled if at least one point is awarded for each criterion.

2.2.2 Available data sources for monitoring and evaluation

Structural quality areas monitored in CGs

All the registered children's groups are recorded in the electronic Register of Children's Groups (evidence.mpsv.cz/eEDS) on the basis of requests for authorisation to provide childcare in a children's group / notice of change in the Register of Providers of Childcare Services in a Children's Group and the obligatory annexes contained in those documents⁴.

The electronic register provides information about the total number of children's groups of one provider and their capacity, legal form and address. Such data are freely accessible to the public.

Information on the number of children who actually attend children's groups could theoretically be obtained from applications for operational cost subsidies for children's groups. The application for a subsidy is submitted on a monthly basis⁵. It is based on contracts concluded with the children's parents, which contain information about the child's date of birth and the schedule of their attendance of the children's group. In theory, information could thus be gleaned from the applications for subsidies not only about the participation of children of different ages in ECEC, but also about the amount of time they spend in the facility. Such information is only approximate, as the absence of a child need not be reported unless another child replaces them in the children's group. However, according to the information provided by the MoLSA staff, such data is not available for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Funding is also covered from various sources, i.e. only a part of the providers apply to the MoLSA. There is no central register of subsidy applications. In addition, some children's groups do not apply for operational cost subsidies, to avoid a rather complicated administrative process.

The Ministry of Health keeps records of providers according to Section 7 (1) of Act No. 258/2000 Coll., on the protection of public health for the purposes of health safety inspections: Section 7 (1) of Act No. 258/2000, on the protection of public health, defines the establishments that are subject to health safety requirements. Operators of facilities subject to the law must be registered; the registration is often done automatically by the construction authority in a situation where there are modifications made to the facility building. As such, the

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- 4 The following documents are presented with the request:
proof of ownership or other right to the building or premises demonstrating the authorisation to use the object or premises to provide childcare services in a children's group;
a document proving compliance with fire protection requirements processed by a person who has been granted a building fire safety authorisation under a different piece of legislation;
a binding opinion of the regional public health authority on the fulfilment of health safety requirements for meals, premises and operations in which the childcare service in the children's group will be provided, provided for by this Act or another piece of legislation;
a liability insurance policy or a confirmation of taking out liability insurance issued by the insurance company;
proof of clean criminal record of a natural person referred to in Section 5, fourth sentence (i.e. a foreigner);
a general description of the assets and financing securing the provision of childcare services in a children's group.
 - 5 https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/225508/D%C4%9Btsk%C3%A9_skupiny_manu%C3%A1l_v1_7.pdf/e2187165-4a00-abd6-4d65-0697bd19ab7e

Ministry of Health register contains information on entities above and beyond the scope of the MoEYS and MoLSA registers, which contain only information on kindergartens and preparatory classes and children's groups. However, only facilities which offer meals are subject to obligatory reporting, so even there the list is not complete. As at 9 January 2024, the regional public health authorities register included 147 facilities for children under 3 years of age.



Process quality areas monitored in CGs

The full content of the criteria of quality is provided in Annex 1 to Decree No. 350/2021 Coll. The criteria are divided into three areas therein. A list of the criteria is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Criteria for evaluating the quality of care in a children's group

A. Childcare and fulfilment of the child's needs	
<i>Criterion 1</i> Quality of the education and care plan	The education and care plan shall take into account the age structure of the children and each child's individual needs that reflect their health and mental condition, set the appropriate psychosocial conditions for educational care in a children's group and be based on educational values and approaches enabling the children to reach their full potential, in particular cognitive, social, emotional, physical and linguistic abilities and skills. The education and care plan shall regulate the conditions and modalities of care provision in the event of admission of a child with specific needs. Part of the day shall be reserved for staying outdoors.
<i>Criterion 2</i> Procedure for adapting a child to stay in a children's group	The provider shall prepare a written description of the process of the child joining the children's group and shall follow those rules. The provider shall take into account the child's individual needs. The provider shall familiarise the child's parents with the rules of procedure for adapting a child to stay in a children's group and, where possible, shall actively involve them in the adaptation process.
<i>Criterion 3</i> Monitoring the child's development	The provider shall set up the observation and evaluation processes in the child's development.
<i>Criterion 4</i> Communication with the child's parents on the child's needs and development	Carers shall consult the parents on an ongoing and regular basis on the child's needs and development.
B. Areas of staff provision	
<i>Criterion 1</i> Care for staff	The provider shall clearly define the rights and obligations within the individual activities of the staff involved in the provision of a childcare service in a children's group. The provider shall provide support to such staff members, in particular by means of evaluation, reflection, collective feedback, mental hygiene or supervision.
<i>Criterion 2</i> Quality of professional development for carers	The provider shall identify the carers' needs in the field of professional development, taking into account the composition of the group of children. Carers shall engage in education which aims at respecting children's needs and responds to current topics in the field of child education and care.
C. Area of operational security	
<i>Criterion 1</i> Compliance with internal rules	The provider shall ensure compliance with internal rules and, on the basis of these, shall ensure that parents and the public are fully informed about the way childcare is provided.
<i>Criterion 2</i> Ensuring the safety of children	The provider shall adequately ensure a safe environment from the point of view of preventing injuries to children and carers. The provider shall take into account the children's ages and the number of carers to ensure a safe environment, especially at mealtimes.
<i>Criterion 3</i> Dealing with emergencies	The provider shall prepare a written description of the basic risk and emergency situations that may arise in connection with the provision of the service and shall demonstrably inform all the employees about the procedures for dealing with them.

Information on the process of quality evaluation of CGs is not available and the results of inspections are not accessible to the public. Inspections of adherence to the standards of quality of care for children in children's groups take place both on the basis of the requests received and through a random selection of children's groups. The inspections are conducted by the MoLSA employees. Considering the growing number of children's groups, the inspection staff capacity of the MoLSA is insufficient. This task will require strengthening in the future.

2.2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation in children's groups

Monitoring and evaluation of structural quality

Only data on the capacities of children's groups are publicly available, not on the children who actually attend them. Detailed data on the children who attend children's groups are collected for those children's groups which apply for a care subsidy. Such data would provide a picture not only of the children's ages, but also of the length of stay in the facility. However, such data are not centrally collected or used for the monitoring and evaluation of the system. Therefore, the monitoring and evaluation of structural quality does not take place.

Monitoring and evaluation of process quality

Criteria for evaluating the process quality of children's groups have been created. The staffing capacity for inspections at the MoLSA is woefully insufficient. Inspections are ongoing (both inspections on request and random inspections), but they are not conducted systematically and are fewer than needed.

The qualitative investigation showed that some children's groups carry out diverse and valuable self-evaluation activities based on their own quality criteria. These criteria usually also take into account evaluation by parents. Some umbrella organisations are creating self-evaluation tools for use in all member organisations.

Monitoring and evaluation in children's groups is complicated by the fact that a number of different entities are involved in the process, i.e. the Labour Inspection Authority in addition to the Ministry of Labour and the Regional Public Health Authorities.

2.3 Other facilities

Day and week care centres

Data on the capacities of day and week care centres providing care for children who have reduced self-sufficiency as a result of disability and whose situation requires regular assistance from another person is the MoLSA's responsibility. The registration decision contains data on the capacity of the social services provided. The implementation of capacities also depends on the amount of the subsidy being provided.

The quality of the services provided is assessed through inspections of social services provision carried out by the MoLSA. The inspection activities are governed by Sections 97 to 99 of Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, as amended. The quality of the social services provided is assessed primarily through evaluating the degree to which the Standards of

Quality of Social Services are being fulfilled. According to Section 88 (h) of the Social Services Act, the providers of social services must adhere to said standards. These standards can be found in Annex 2 to Decree No. 505/2006 Coll., implementing certain provisions of the Social Services Act, as amended.

Day rehabilitation centres

Data on the capacities and use of rehabilitation centres are available in the Institute of Health Statistics and Information of the Czech Republic. Data on these are reported in the report A (MZ) 1-01 once a year. The number and qualifications of employees, data on the facilities' activities, and data on the number of clients and their diagnoses are reported there. Children are divided into the age categories from 0 to 2 years and from 3 to 14 years for the purposes of this report, making it impossible to determine exactly how many children of preschool age are in these facilities (IHIS, 2020). According to the Health Yearbook of the Czech Republic, 27 such facilities were registered in 2020 (IHIS, 2021).

Centres for preschool children

The CCYs in which the preschool children's centres are located are listed as school facilities in the Register of Schools and School Facilities and are subject to regular reporting (Report Z 15-1 on Leisure Centres). That Report contains information on preschool children regularly attending a leisure centre, but there is no information specifically on centres for preschool children (CPCs). As at 31 October 2023, 45,585 preschool children were regularly attending CCYs. It would certainly be useful to find out what proportion of these children attends a programme which fulfils the function of a kindergarten, but this cannot be done from the reported data.

Forest clubs

The Association of Forest Kindergartens (AFKG) associates forest kindergartens which are registered in the School Register (and therefore are recorded in the Ministry of Education's register and are included in the S 1-01 report under code A15) and forest clubs which are not registered elsewhere. The AFKG regularly collects a large amount of both structural and process data from its member organisations. The collected data cover the following areas: number of classes, number of children, number of children under 3 years of age, number of children with deferred compulsory school attendance, number of days of operation per week, frequency of attendance, length of stay in nature, length of free play, preschool preparation, visit to cultural events, gardening, the teaching concept and its implementation, the way they are managed, work with children with SEN and their inclusion in the FKG/FC team, the number of adults in the FKG/FC team (employees, volunteers) and their qualifications, FKG/FC facilities (rest area, drinking water, toilets), insurance and accidents, the provision of morning and afternoon snacks and lunches, how the operation of FKG/FC is paid for, staff members' wages, communication with authorities, and support for further education. However, such data are not representative of all children's clubs, as some clubs are not AFKG members. The collected data are used for the monitoring and evaluation of the individual facilities as well as the Association's activities by the Association's management.

Family centres

As there is no association register of family centres nor an obligation to report a centre to the state authorities, precise information on how many such centres are currently in operation in the Czech Republic is not available. However, many centres are members of an umbrella organisation, the largest of which is the Network for Family (Síť pro rodinu z. s.), which had 253 member organisations in 2022. Other organisations (the Union of Centres for Family and Community, Family Union of the Czech Republic) generally have dozens of members, while there are active centres that are not members of any umbrella association. Umbrella associations generally do not have any comprehensive information about how many of their member centres run adaptation classes for preschool children or how many children attend them and how old they are. There is also no information on whether any quality assessment, internal or external, takes place in adaptation classes.

Preschool clubs operated by social services

As there is no association register of preschool clubs nor any obligation to report a preschool club to the state authorities, no precise information is available on how many preschool clubs are currently in operation in the Czech Republic.

Childcare provided by holders of a trade licence

No data are collected about establishments operating on the basis of trade licences outside the individual records of business entities in the Trade Register (www.rzp.cz). These, however, reflect only how many trade licences have been issued (and possibly revoked), but not whether the licensed entity is currently active and what form its activities take. The numbers of free trades are not monitored. An expert estimate carried out as part of the Analysis of the Availability of Early Childhood Care Facilities (Zykanová & Janhubová, 2020) reported that 20–291 establishments with a maximum possible combined capacity of 4,600 children were being operated on the basis of the licensed trade “Caring for a child up to 3 years of age in a daily regime” as at the end of 2018. The research carried out as part of this analysis also shows that the vast majority of establishments registered on the basis of trade licences are simultaneously registered as a children’s group or kindergarten and therefore part of the relevant register.

2.4 Proposals for supplemental criteria for process quality evaluation

Chapters 2.1 and 2.2 described the existing standards of formal early childhood education and care. In terms of the assessment of the process quality of care, the most important ones include the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* and the *Criteria for Evaluation of the Conditions, Progress and Outcomes of Education*, according to which the Czech School Inspectorate assesses the facilities. In the case of children’s groups, the *Criteria for the Assessment of the Quality of Care in a Children’s Group* is the core standard.

There are, however, a number of other standards and principles that characterise the elements of quality work of preschool educators and institutions providing early childhood education and care. Annex 4 lists some of these standards that are widely used in the Czech Republic or that we find inspirational. For reasons of conciseness, we list only the

main categories, not the whole standards, which can be found in the reference list. These standards demonstrate that there is advanced thinking in the ECEC system about the characteristics of high-quality ECEC which can be benefited from when updating the existing criteria for the assessment of the process quality of ECEC.

An important aspect of these standards is the emphasis placed on the individual care for individual children and on systematic monitoring of their development. Great attention is also paid to communication with parents. Detailed elaboration of these quality aspects is missing from the official criteria for the assessment of process quality currently in use. This is especially notable as the qualitative survey conducted as part of the previous project report has produced convincing evidence that the lack of ability to adapt care to the individual needs of individual children and the ability of teachers to communicate with parents about their children and to provide them with information effectively is seen by parents as the greatest weakness of kindergartens. Annex 5 presents the findings of the qualitative survey which show which aspects of care should be more accentuated in the quality standards of care. This would probably mean that the monitoring should involve the parents of children and, if possible, the children themselves, which is not usually the case in the formal system of early childhood education and care in the country.

3. Monitoring and evaluation at the municipal level

Municipalities are the founders of most kindergartens. Unlike primary schools, kindergartens are not obligated by the Education Act to draw up an annual report and send it to the founder, so the founder does not have a factual obligation (or a formal opportunity) to perform regular evaluation of a kindergarten it establishes. However, Section 121 (5) of the Education Act does enable the founder to conduct the evaluation of a school or a school facility according to the criteria previously published. The CSI sends the founder inspection reports from the evaluations it carries out at 3-to-9-year intervals.



4. Monitoring and evaluation at the national and regional levels

The main aim of this chapter is to look at how long-term strategic goals in the ECEC sector are evaluated. We discuss the main strategic documents of both ministries (MoEYS and MoLSA) which set out the goals with regard to ECEC and attempt to document their monitoring.

4.1 MoEYS sector

In regard to kindergartens, the objectives set out in the strategic and implementation documents of the education policy should be strategically monitored. These documents include in particular:

- Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic to 2030+ (MoEYS, 2020);
- 2023–2027 Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic (MoEYS, 2023).

4.1.1 Education Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic to 2030+

The strategy mentions preschool education in *Strategic Objective 2: Reduce inequalities in access to high-quality education and allow maximum development of the potential of children, pupils and students* as a distinctive education, which is important for achieving good results in follow-up education. It also points out the importance of educating the parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It sets out specific objectives for preschool education in two cards.

The Promoting Preschool Education Card

The main objective of the measure is to continuously improve the quality of preschool education and to involve more and more children in it. The way to improve quality will be to change the content of education with an emphasis on key competences, support for educators and individualised work with children.

To achieve these objectives, the Strategy 2030+ sets out the following measures and key activities:

Measure 1 Increasing children's participation in preschool education

- ✎ Key Activity 1.1 Analysis of causes and design of measures
- ✎ Key Activity 1.2 Interministerial cooperation to promote communication with natural guardians
- ✎ Key Activity 1.3 Ensuring the necessary capacities

Measure 2 Updating the FEP PE and increasing the quality of preschool education

- ✎ Key Activity 2.1 Updating the FEP PE
- ✎ Key Activity 2.2 Supporting the implementation of the FEP PE
- ✎ Key Activity 2.3 Supporting educational diagnosis

Measure 3 Supporting educators and school leadership

- ✎ Key activity 3.1 Increasing the quality of preparatory education
- ✎ Key activity 3.2 Strengthening the management competencies of senior staff
- ✎ Key activity 3.3 Supporting continuing education

Measure 4 Parametrising the funding and cost of the kindergarten

- ✎ Key activity 4.1 Reducing the number of children per teacher
- ✎ Key activity 4.2 Streamlining financial flows

The Raising the Quality of Education in Structurally Affected Regions Card

The main objective of the measure is to increase the quality of education in structurally affected regions with an emphasis on increasing the participation of children in preschool education and methodological support for schools educating a high proportion of socially disadvantaged pupils and their promoters.

Measure 1: Comprehensive support for schools in municipalities with a higher proportion of children and pupils at risk of social exclusion in the Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem Regions

- ✎ Key activity 1.1 Strengthening professional capacity and competences for working with diverse groups of children and pupils

Measure 2: Reducing segregation tendencies in primary education

- ✎ Key activity 2.1 Methodological support for founders in the area of catchment regulation

Measure 3: Increasing participation of children in preschool education in the Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem Regions

- Key activity 3.1 Removing objective financial barriers to access to education
- Key activity 3.2 Promoting family and school cooperation

Measure 4: Targeted financial support for the entry of recent graduates into teaching practice in schools in the Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem Regions

- Key activity 4.1 Financial motivation for recent graduates to enter schools in the Karlovy Vary and Ústí nad Labem Regions

For individual key activities, the outputs are described in more detail, but they do not include any indicators.

The *Monitoring Framework for the State and Development of the Czech Education System* (MoEYS, 2024) was issued in 2022 and updated in 2024; it complements the implementation of the *Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic to 2030+* ("S2030+"). This framework is primarily intended to monitor the development of a wide range of available indicators on the state of the education system of the Czech Republic in a comparable time series using data from national and international surveys. The key data that should serve for the primary evaluation of the impacts of the education policy of the Czech Republic in relation to the S2030+ objectives is designated as Indicators ("S2030+ Indicator Set") in the Monitoring Framework. The indicator system contains 44 indicators, five of which relate to the area of early childhood education and care.

The system establishes the connection to the Strategy 2030+, the body responsible for the data, the frequency of data collection, the baseline value, the current value and the intended trend. However, the target status of the indicator is not determined.

These indicators are as follows:

1

Proportion of the number of children aged 3 to 5 years attending primary school to the total number of 3-to-5-year-olds in the population

Data administrator: MoEYS

Frequency of collection: every year

Baseline value for the Czech Republic (2020): 88.33%

Current value for the Czech Republic (2022): 90.49%

Intended trend: rising

Appropriate data on the numbers of children aged 3 to 5 years from the S01 performance report on kindergartens as at 30 September of the relevant year and data on the number of children aged 3 to 5 years in the population from age structure data in the regions from the Czech Statistical Office recounted to be accurate as at 31 August of the year used.

2 Proportion of children aged 6 and older attending primary school, a primary school preparatory class or a preparatory grade in a special primary school to the number of all 6-year-olds

Data administrator: MoEYS

Frequency of collection: every year

Baseline value for the Czech Republic (2020): 22.18%

Current value for the Czech Republic (2022): 23.26%

Intended trend: declining

The relevant date is 31 August (i.e. the number of children of the relevant age born between 1 September in the previous year and 31 August in the relevant year) for both the numerator and denominator.

3 Average age of teachers in primary school (public schools)

Data administrator: MoEYS

Frequency of collection: every year

Baseline value for the Czech Republic (2020): 44.56

Current value for the Czech Republic (2022): 44.35

Intended trend: declining

Data from the Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic from the IS Information System on salaries were used. A public school can be established by the state administration in education (the MoEYS), a municipality, other central governmental authority.

4 Share of unqualified teachers

Data administrator: MoEYS

Frequency of collection: every year

Baseline value for the Czech Republic (2020): 6.95%

Current value for the Czech Republic (2023): 8.06%

Intended trend: decreasing

Unqualified teachers are teachers who do not meet the required educational standard in accordance with Act No. 563/2004 Coll., on teaching staff, as amended, and are not covered by any of the exceptions (Section 22 (4) and (5), Section 32 (1), Section 8 (4), Section 9 (9), Section 10 (2), Section 11 (5) and (6)).

5 Share of unqualified teachers in kindergartens

Data administrator: MoEYS

Frequency of collection: every year

Baseline value for the Czech Republic (2020): 6.14%

Current value for the Czech Republic (2023): 5.91%

Intended trend: decreasing

Unqualified teachers are teachers who do not meet the required educational standard in accordance with Act No. 563/2004 Coll., on teaching staff, as amended, and are not covered by any of the exceptions (Section 22 (4) and (5), Section 32 (1), Section 8 (4), Section 9 (9), Section 10 (2), Section 11 (5) and (6)).

The selected indicators therefore address the proportion of children who should and should not be in preschool education and the teachers' average age and qualifications. Thus, indicators for early childhood education only relate in a limited way to the two main strategic objectives of the Strategy 2030+ – to focus education on the competences needed for active life and to reduce inequalities in access to high-quality education. They are aimed exclusively at structural quality.

4.1.2 2023–2027 Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic

The evaluation of the previous period is presented by the 2023–2027 Long-Term Plan in the annex *Internal Evaluation of the Strategy 2030+ for the First Implementation Period*. It reiterates the main objective – the continuous process of increasing the quality of pre-school education and involving more children and changing the scope of education with an emphasis on key competences, support for educators and individualised work with children.

A set of measures and key activities of the previous 2019–2023 Long-Term Plan (MoEYS, 2019) is presented below.

Measure 1: Increasing the participation of children in preschool education

- Analysis of causes and proposed measures
- Interministerial cooperation to support communication with natural guardians
- Ensuring the necessary capacities

Measure 2: Adjustment of FEP PE and increasing the quality of preschool education

- Adjustment of FEP PE
- Support for the implementation of the FEP PE
- Support for educational diagnostics

Measure 3: Support for educators and school management

- Increasing the quality of preschool education
- Strengthening the management competences of senior staff
- Supporting continuing education

Measure 4: Parametrising the funding and cost of kindergartens

- Reducing the number of children per teacher
- Streamlining financial flows

The evaluation report briefly summarises the objectives and the state of implementation of the individual measures, noting that the card is being implemented according to the timetable, but is missing the values of the individual indicators in the annex.

The objectives of preschool education and care for the 2024–2027 period are addressed in *Action Card A. High-Quality and Accessible Preschool Education*. The main objective is to in-

crease the quality and accessibility of preschool education and to involve as many children as possible, starting at the age of 3. The card also mentions children's groups (CGs) as providers of childcare from the age of 6 months, which can contribute to a smooth transition to preschool education. The preschool card contains three main measures:

1. ensuring the implementation of the updated FEP PE,
2. making preschool education available in accordance with the legal entitlement from the age of 3,
3. reducing the number of compulsory school deferrals.

Each measure is developed into several key activities and criteria for the fulfilment of their objectives are set out. An overview of these measures is given in Annex 6. The overview of measures shows that the proposed measures largely cover the measures from the respective *Strategy for the Education Policy 2030+* cards; however, they are listed in a different order and with modified wording, which complicates orientation in the measures as well as their monitoring and evaluation. Compared to the S2030+, the criteria for assessing the fulfilment of the objectives of the individual key activities are described in much more detail; however, the indicators relating to the focus of education on competences for active life and the reduction of inequalities in education are not further specified.

4.1.3 Periodic monitoring of strategic objectives

Periodic monitoring is carried out mainly through annual reports:

- *Annual Report on the State and Development of Education in the Czech Republic*; the last published report is from 2022 (MoEYS, 2022);
- *Annual Report of the Czech School Inspectorate*; the last report is *Quality of Education in the Czech Republic in the 2022/2023 School Year* (CSI, 2023b).

The evaluation of the education system at the national and regional levels is carried out annually in the *Annual Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic*, which is prepared by the MoEYS and submitted to the government, and in the annual reports on the state and development of the education system in regions, which are prepared by the regional authorities and submitted to the regional council and the Ministry. The annual reports contain a chapter devoted to preschool education, which provides in particular quantitative information obtained from statistical data relating to the structural quality of ECEC. The *Annual Report on the State and Development of Education in the Czech Republic in 2022* provides statistical data on the number of applications received and rejected, the number of children by age and gender in kindergartens, preparatory classes and preparatory grades, and their development over time. Special attention is also paid to Ukrainian children starting in 2022. Furthermore, data on the number of teachers are published, including information on the proportion of male teachers. Information on the teachers' age and qualifications is missing.

The CSI also publishes annual reports. This annual report includes a summary of the findings from inspection activities conducted in the given calendar year and provides information on the structural and process quality of preschool education.

The last annual report of the CSI, for the 2022/2023 school year (CSI, 2023b), summarises the findings of the inspection surveys in the given calendar year. It also provides statistical overviews on kindergartens, children and educators in preschool education and the finan-

cing of preschool education. It also evaluates the following aspects of preschool education:

- Conditions of preschool education
- School design and management
- Quality of the teaching staff
- Course of preschool education
- Organisation of education, methods and forms
- Education of children with special educational needs – the process of inclusive education
- Prevention of risky behaviour in children
- Pre-primary educational outcomes
- Children's overall educational outcomes

In the section devoted to educational outcomes, the annual report focuses in particular on the transition to compulsory education and the methods for assessing children's outcomes applied by the individual schools.

In addition to the annual reports, monitoring also takes place through the CIS's thematic reports. In the last five years, the following thematic reports concerning preschool education have been published:

- The use of digital technologies in kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and vocational schools (4 September 2017)
- Inclusive education in the 2016/2017 school year (18 October 2017)
- Quality of school meals (26 October 2017)
- Education of children and pupils with hearing disabilities (9 November 2017)
- Selected aspects of the implementation of inclusive education (12 March 2018)
- Impacts of compulsory preschool education (3 June 2018)
- Applications for school and school facility principals (5 September 2018)
- Education in kindergartens in emergency periods (14 May 2020)
- Interim report on the integration and education of Ukrainian children and pupils (23 May 2022)
- Integration and education of children and pupils with insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction (18 May 2023).

It follows from the above that the strategic documents set out a number of objectives in the field of preschool education. The objectives set out in the long-term plan correspond in principle to those set out in the Strategy 2030+, but have a somewhat different concept. The annual reports allow the evaluation of some, but not all, of the objectives set. Monitoring and evaluation is not carried out systematically.

4.2 MoLSA sector

Strategic documents of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs setting targets in the area of preschool childcare include in particular

- *2024–2030 Strategy for Family Policy* (MoLSA, 2023a);
- *Preschool Care Concept Proposal 2025+⁶*.

4.2.1 2024–2030 Strategy for Family Policy

The 2024–2030 Family Policy Strategy sets a partial objective 3.1. Promote quality and affordable preschool education and childcare in the Main Objective 3: Promote reconciliation of family and work. This objective includes two partial objectives: 3.1.1 Establish a long-term conceptual framework for the development of quality and affordable preschool care and education and 3.1.2 Increase the availability of childcare services and continuously evaluate and compare the quality and availability of the individual types of childcare services and educational facilities.

4.2.2 Preschool Care Concept Proposal 2025+

The main objective of the proposal is to achieve harmonisation between the area of early childhood education and care, administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), and preschool education, for which the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) is responsible. By harmonising these, it aims to achieve optimal integration of these two segments, respect the different regional needs, ensure a safe environment for children, and continuously increase the quality of the services provided. It also aims to eliminate potential duplication of public support.

Concept 2025+ sets the following specific objectives:

- Ensure fair and affordable access to these services
- Guarantee high quality of education and care
- Strengthen municipal control over the provision of children's group services
- Develop the competencies of educational staff and improve their availability on the labour market.

Concept 2025+ is designed as a flexible and adaptable solution that responds to the ever-changing conditions in the different regions of the Czech Republic. Through the precise prediction and planning of new children's groups where capacity building is most needed, and the optimal use of the existing capacities where the needs of children aged from 3 to 6 are met, the MoLSA wants to respond effectively to the uneven needs in different parts of the country in response to the demographic and migratory trends.

The emphasis is on linking the efforts of different ministries at the national level and on close coordination with municipalities, regions, the private sector and non-profit organisations.

The *Preschool Care Concept Proposal 2025+* features the following themes and strategic objectives:

1. **Equal access to education and care:** We will ensure that all children have access to ECEC services that are affordable and equitable.
2. **Quality:** We will offer high-quality services for the early development of preschool children in children's groups.
3. **Sustainability:** We will ensure sustainable funding for the provision of high-quality comprehensive services for children's development through cooperation with families, service providers and institutions at the local level.
4. **Capacities:** We will monitor demographic trends and ensure stable funding in the medium-term outlook of the state budget.

5. **Municipalities as key guarantor of available preschool capacities:** We will support the development of the capacity of children's groups as service providers for families with children in cooperation with municipalities.
6. **Legislation:** We will develop policies and regulations to support the uptake of innovative early development services and interventions based on examples of good practice and evidence-based approaches.
7. **Monitoring and evaluation:** We will develop a system to monitor and evaluate preschool services and interventions.

Support for children's groups is also mentioned in the *2030 Strategic Framework for Employment Policy*.

4.2.3 Monitoring of strategic objectives

Indicators are set for the two objectives related to early childhood education and care set out in the *2024–2030 Strategy for Family Policy* (the creation of a conceptual framework and an increase in accessibility). For the first objective, the indicator is the conceptual framework development; for the second objective, the introduction of an evaluation tool and the number of places in collective care facilities (baseline in 2022: 6%, target: 12%).

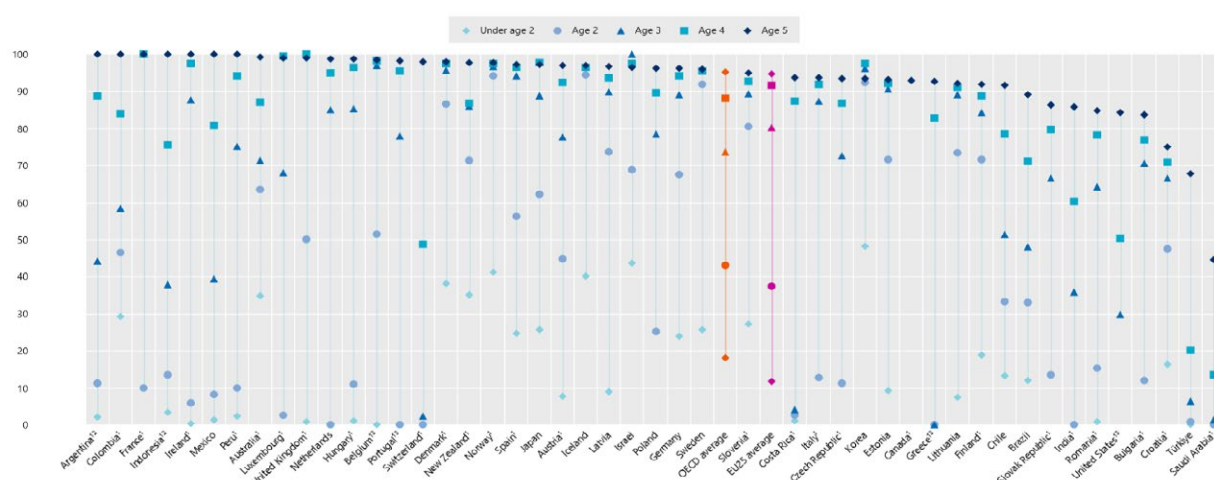
The *Preschool Care Concept Proposal 2025+* states that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) will continue to carry out analyses and its own research in cooperation with the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA) in order to gain a better understanding of the combined effects of the various dimensions of the quality of preschool education and care. The aim is to identify effective ways of improving the quality of services and to take into account the children's and families' unique needs. No specific indicators are set at the moment.

The description of strategic monitoring and evaluation in both departments suggests that both departments share the objective of increasing the availability of preschool education and care, but the other objectives are in somewhat different discourses. While the MoEYS leans toward formulating strategic objectives (competencies for life and equal opportunities), the MoLSA formulates strategies on how to achieve its main strategic objective (accessibility).

5. International monitoring

The proportion of children aged 2, 3, 4 and 5 attending ECEC facilities is regularly evaluated in OECD (*Education at a Glance*) statistics. The latest available data are from the 2021 school year (OECD, 2023)⁷. Graph 1 shows that the Czech Republic ranks among the average when the participation of 4- and 5-year-olds is compared, falling further behind in the participation of 2- and 3-year-olds.

Graph 1: Enrolment rates of young children in ECEC, by age. Source: OECD



Education at a Glance 2023 provides a number of items of additional information related to early childhood education. In addition to a clear comparison of ECEC systems in the Member States, it compares, for example, the carers' age, the proportion of male carers, the number of children per carer, the carers' salaries and the financing of ECEC.

EUROSTAT evaluates indicators within the framework of the sustainable development indicators. The indicator related to early childhood education and care is defined as the proportion of children aged 3 and older in ECEC. Here, the Czech Republic ranks below the EU average, with 85.4% (the available data are from 2021)⁸.

A major limitation of the above comparisons is the fact that only children attending kindergartens are counted in the indicators, so the participation is probably somewhat undervalued.

Information on ECEC in international comparison is provided by Eurydice publications, which contain several interesting structural indicators. The latest publication is from the 2022/2023 school year and points, for example, to the gap between the end of maternity leave and the right to be placed in a kindergarten (see Simonová et al., 2024). It also deals with the qualifications of carers for children of different ages (Eurydice, 2023)⁹.

The Czech Republic has not taken advantage of the opportunity to participate in the currently ongoing OECD research on ECEC Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018¹⁰.

⁷ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/e13bef63-en.pdf?expires=1715110289&id=id&accname=guest&-checksum=B74731A8D5B667549AD5FADB641F79D4>

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_31/default/table?lang=en

⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/faa62d85-932d-11ee-8aa6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/oecd-starting-strong-teaching-and-learning-international-survey.htm>

6. Identification of key challenges in the monitoring and evaluation system

6.1 Common key challenges for the monitoring and evaluation system

Fragmented competence and coordination

Each ministry has its own ways of collecting data and policies, leading to a variety of approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation are regulated by different laws that dictate the quality and conditions of education for different types of facilities. Differences in legislation can complicate data comparability and the overall effectiveness of monitoring. Establishing a common platform or coordination team could improve communication and the setup of data collection.

Standardisation of data collection and analysis

Different approaches to defining the data collected, resulting in different data collection frequencies and different indicators under the responsibility of both ministries, complicate monitoring and evaluation. Standardisation of data collection and the methodology of analysis across all types of facilities would help ensure the comparability and reliability of information.

Using data to improve quality

A large amount of data is collected in the ECEC system. However, collection alone is not enough; it is important that the data collected are used effectively to improve the quality of education and care. Attention therefore needs to be paid to processes that ensure that the monitoring data are analysed and used to improve the ECEC practice and policies continuously.

Integrating informal facilities into the system

The existence of facilities that are not formally part of the system, typically centres for preschool children, adaptation classes or preschool clubs, poses a challenge to the completeness and accuracy of data collection. Consideration needs to be given to how to integrate such facilities into the official monitoring and evaluation system so that data can be extracted from them in a way that would not impose a significant administrative burden.

Common quality standards

When facilities are regulated by different authorities, it is difficult to maintain consistent quality standards across the facilities of different regulators. Creating uniform quality standards for all types of facilities could help to ensure a higher standard of the whole early childhood education and care system.

A question related to this is how the educational programme for children in the 0–3 category should be designed, including whether it should be included in the FEP PE. According to the current version of the Education Act, preschool education is organised for children from the age of 2, which is explicitly mentioned in the 2021 version of the FEP PE.

The working version of the revised FEP PE as at March 2024 recommends educational activities to be implemented through experience-based, cooperative, situational and social learning, which also opens up the possibility of greater unification of the education and care system. Furthermore, the working version of the FEP PE states with more emphasis than the currently valid version that achieving the expected learning outcomes is not mandatory for a child; it depends on their individual needs and possibilities (NPI CR, 2024: 7). The expected learning outcomes are intended to provide teachers in the first year of primary education with “an idea of what children in preschool education are led to and what they have usually accomplished upon entering primary education” (NPI CR, 2024: 5). The following are considered in the document as prerequisites for a smooth transition of children from preschool education to primary education: autonomy in self-care; the ability to ask for help; the ability to wait and be patient; completion of commenced activities; respecting the fact that the child’s turn does not always come (NPI CR, 2024: 5).

A potentially problematic feature of the forthcoming revision of the FEP PE is the large number of the expected learning outcomes, which are only listed, not described in more detail as at March 2024. This makes it impossible to assess the compliance of the general parts, which emphasise the abilities and individuality of each child, with the descriptions of learning outcomes. Moreover, some of these outcomes seem more as an effort to develop literacy and competences at all educational levels to ensure greater continuity of curricular documents than as outcomes corresponding to preschool children’s abilities and needs¹¹. According to the authors of the FEP PE, the essential prerequisite for its fulfilment is the teachers’ and school management’s professional competence. Teachers should adapt the goals and methods and forms of work applied to the children and their needs. They should work with each child so that children reach their personal maximum at the end of preschool. The update of the FEP and the forthcoming methodological support aims to shift the emphasis from the child’s readiness to the teacher’s readiness for each child. However, the large number of expected outcomes – as well as the absence of intermediate targets/outcomes – reduces the potential usefulness of the revised FEP PE for working with children aged 0 to 3 and, in general, for other ECEC providers.

11 The common denominator of all FEPs “will be key competences and basic literacy across all levels of education” (see <https://revisions.FEP.cz/revisions-FEP>). For example, the outcome “understand why it is important to protect your and your loved ones’ privacy and safety online” (digital competencies) or “use the information and communication means commonly encountered” (communication competencies) seems difficult to reach. The working version of the FEP PE also does not address the issue of the gradual acquisition of learning areas, literacy and competences. However, a more detailed breakdown should be included in the methodological support.

Stakeholder involvement

It is important that the monitoring and evaluation system includes not only the ministries and organisations under their responsibility, but also parents and, to an appropriate extent, children. Their feedback can help to identify areas for improvement that remain in the background from the perspective of other actors and thus accelerate improvements in areas that are important to them.

Financial and human resources

Effective monitoring and evaluation requires sufficient financial and human resources. Securing these resources, especially in a context of divided governance and accountability, can be complicated, but is essential for a successful implementation and sustainability of the system.

6.2 Key challenges at the level of monitoring and evaluation of the individual establishments

The collection of statistical data for kindergartens and preparatory classes takes place on a regular and systematic basis and allows the monitoring and evaluation of a number of aspects of structural quality. Nevertheless, several measures could improve the quality and informative potential of the data obtained for kindergartens.

Typically, these measures are:

- ✚ updating data on facility capacity
- ✚ distinguishing between the number of applications and the number of children applying for kindergarten admission in order to monitor supply and demand more accurately
- ✚ using data on children's actual attendance at kindergartens and preparatory classes, i.e. not only information on the number of children enrolled
- ✚ refining the indicator on children in the category of SEN DCE – special educational needs as a result of a different cultural environment and other living conditions
- ✚ collecting data on the price of meals and kindergarten fees
- ✚ collecting data on the additional services provided and the payment for these services.

In the case of children's groups, it is necessary to set up regular and systematic data collection for the monitoring and evaluation of structural quality analogous to the collection taking place in the facilities under the responsibility of the MoEYS.

In the case of other facilities, it is necessary to consider whether, and, if so, how, they should be incorporated into the formal ECEC system and to decide on the system for their registration and documentation.

The assessment of the individual kindergartens is carried out regularly by the Czech School Inspectorate according to a standardised procedure and clearly defined criteria. Inspection reports summarising the findings are publicly available. In principle, the system setup is sufficient, but some room for improvement can be seen in the addition to the criteria that take into account aspects that have not been given sufficient attention. This is particularly

the case of communication with parents and individual care and the attention given to individual children. On the basis of the findings of the qualitative survey, we also believe that the inspection should draw more attention to segregation tendencies in the kindergarten system than before.

However, the CSI's growing tendency to fulfil a supporting role in addition to its supervisory role can be considered a positive. For example, the CSI places the kindergartens in which it has identified shortcomings in a shorter inspection cycle, provides them with methodological support from KOMPAS (methodological assistance to schools, following up on the School of Good Quality evaluation criteria, support specifically focused on a particular school and its needs or weaknesses), and, newly, monitors more systematically the adoption of measures by the school principal.

In the case of children's groups, it is necessary to create capacity for the monitoring and evaluation of process quality. This can be done in the existing model by strengthening the MoLSA's capacities or using the existing CSI's structure. Along with this, it is necessary to consider interconnecting or unifying the criteria for the evaluation of process quality of both types of facilities.

The monitoring and evaluation of process quality should also be considered in relation to other ECEC providers.

In the case of all ECEC facilities, it is necessary to think further about how to stimulate self-evaluation activities.

6.3 Key challenges at the municipal level

In the Czech Republic, it is not usual for individual municipalities to set and evaluate specific strategies for the field of education; the objectives for the field of education are usually part of more general strategic development documents. These documents are not monitored at the state level; their compliance with the state strategy documents depends on the impetus for their creation, their creators' approach and the quality of the comment procedure. Their focus and consistency with the Strategy 2030+ would require a specific analysis that goes beyond the scope of this study.

Partial surveys (e.g. MEDIAN, 2023) showed that municipalities consider kindergartens to be the main type of facilities for ECEC provision. Children's groups are seen as a complementary form of ECEC, especially for parents planning an early return to the labour market, and municipalities do not feel responsible for providing their services.

However, opinions are not entirely uniform – while some representatives of municipalities considered CGs as an acceptable alternative to kindergartens mainly because of their possible specific focus, others did not see them as a suitable alternative because of their limited educational function. Representatives of the participating municipalities were aware of the functioning of the CGs in their territory but did not have any detailed information about them. Focus groups also pointed to problems with capacity for 3-year-olds in kindergartens in the case of smaller municipalities. At the same time, funding the expansion or establishment of new school facilities is a major challenge, especially for smaller municipalities. Representatives of municipalities also pointed to the outdated practice of preparing and approving municipal zoning plans, which disregard the expected demographic changes and where the practice of the contributions by developers to the development of public facilities is lacking (MEDIAN, 2023).

Municipalities can access CSI reports; however, because of the 3-to-9-year interval between inspections they do not provide up-to-date information on process quality. It is important to make sure that the system for choosing the schools to be inspected in a given year is systematically organised in order to give annual information not only at the level of the system as a whole but also at the local level, typically for municipalities with extended responsibilities.

6.4 Key challenges at the national and regional levels

At the national level, the monitoring system of the Strategy 2030+ is described in detail and serves to continuously evaluate the progress of the realization of the implementation plan. The monitoring system consists of internal and external evaluations. The internal evaluation includes continuous monitoring of the fulfilment of the timetable of the action cards and regular reporting to the Minister of Education in accordance with the setting of the early risk prevention system and proposals for solutions. The external evaluation is to use two main tools: carrying out a comprehensive independent external evaluation of the Strategy 2030+ at the mid-term point of its effectiveness with a deadline at the end of 2026, and continuous cooperation with experts, in particular the members of an external expert group. The monitoring system also includes regular reporting to the government in periods corresponding to the above defined implementation phases (2024, 2028, 2032). The evaluation of the first period (2020–2023) will be submitted independently of the evaluation of the implementation of the Long-Term Plan; the subsequent evaluations will be submitted together with the evaluation of the Long-Term Plan.

Although the Strategy 2030+ sets six relevant targets with regard to preschool education (increasing the participation in preschool education of children of all age groups, adjusting the content of the FEP PE and updating the content of education in kindergartens, systematically monitoring the development and personal educational progress of individual children, limiting the number of children with school deferrals, supporting the quality of educational leadership in kindergartens, and supporting the education of an increasing number of children with a different first language in kindergartens), the main indicators monitored are limited to tracking attendance, deferrals, average age and teachers' competence. These indicators do not say enough about the quality of preschool education; their formulation should receive more attention and be brought in line with the targets set.

Of the six objectives set out in the Strategy 2030+ by means of the **Quality and Accessible Preschool Education** card, the 2023–2027 Long-Term Plan elaborates three objectives in more detail: the implementation of the updated FEP PE, the availability of preschool education in accordance with the legal entitlement from 3 years of age of the child, and a reduction of the number of deferrals of compulsory school attendance. The other two objectives (monitoring the progress of each child and increasing the competencies of teaching staff in kindergartens to educate children from different socio-cultural backgrounds) are included under the goal dedicated to reducing the number of deferrals of compulsory school attendance. The structure of the Long-Term Plan should be modified so that the structure of the action card corresponds to the goals of the Strategy 2030+. This would make it easier to monitor the fulfilment of the goals of the Strategy 2030+. The Long-Term Plans of the individual regions are in the process of development at the time of the writing of this report, so it has been impossible to evaluate how they work with the goals and indicators of the Strategy 2030+.

The annual report on the state and development of education in the Czech Republic in 2022 does not provide a structured statement on the priorities set out in the Strategy 2030+. The data section provides a plethora of data; however, the data are not presented in a structure that would allow a user-friendly monitoring of the development of indicators set out in the *S2030+ Indicator Set* or the *Monitoring Framework for the State and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic*. In contrast, the CSI's annual report contains a section devoted to the fulfilment of the Strategy 2030+ and the 2019–2023 Long-Term Plan, although not structured according to the *S2030+ Indicator Set*.

The most significant key challenge at the national level consists therefore in the fact that the goals and indicators set by the overarching strategic national document – the Strategy 2030+ – are not reflected in the strategic and monitoring documents at the lower levels in a consistent and stable form. The evaluation of the relevant programmes and measures lacks systematic processing in relation to the set goals.

The monitoring is also problematic in the case of the MoLSA strategic documents. *The Strategy for Family Policy* only has an indicator of the availability of care. The *Preschool Care Concept Proposal 2025+* does not provide any indicators at all.

Even ignoring the fact that the monitoring is not systematic, it only includes some of the objectives set out in the strategic documents. Furthermore, some aspects of preschool education which are proving problematic are not included in the strategic documents.

The strategic documents emphasise ensuring equal access to education and supporting preschool education for disadvantaged groups. A number of problematic aspects of the system were identified during the qualitative survey conducted among natural guardians of preschool children, typically a persistent segregation tendency, where it is difficult for Roma parents to place children in a mainstream kindergarten and where some kindergartens use sophisticated methods to get rid of children who are somehow outside the mainstream population, typically Roma or Ukrainian children. The inclusive approach is also undermined by the fact that such parents find it difficult to obtain information on how to proceed when trying to place a child and have to seek the help of diverse NGOs. Greater attention should also be paid to the differences in the services provided by the individual kindergartens, especially if they fall under the same management or the same founder.

Interviews with mothers, but also information from various online forums, show that important and at the same time problematic aspects of early childhood education and care are communication with parents and the ability of the facilities to take into account each child's individual needs. These aspects are not given the necessary attention in the current monitoring mechanisms.

The use of the existing data is an important aspect of monitoring and evaluation at the national and regional levels. It is commendable that the CSI endeavours to publish the data obtained for further analyses. However, more attention should be paid to data documentation and the construction of data files to allow for more sophisticated analyses involving the interconnection of data from individual files.

International indicators (Eurostat, OECD, UNESCO) should be systematically used to monitor the general characteristics of the ECEC system. Data from international research on knowledge and skills (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA, and PIAAC) can also be used to monitor and evaluate some aspects related to ECEC.



7. Conclusions and recommendations

- The monitoring and evaluation system is quite complex and fragmented, setting a number of objectives, indicators and monitoring mechanisms on many levels. The goals and indicators in relation to education and social policy are not interconnected. The goals, indicators and monitoring mechanisms at the level of individual strategy documents also lack sufficient interconnectedness. There is a considerable effort in the MoEYS sector to link the goals and indicators at different levels, but considerable room for fine-tuning the system still remain.
- The system needs to be simplified, clarified and modified so that all the important aspects of the structural and procedural quality of ECEC which are included in the short-term and long-term objectives can be systematically monitored and it is easy to see to what extent the objectives are being achieved.
- An important prerequisite for the adjustments of the monitoring and evaluation system is the establishment of a common framework defining the areas in which monitoring should take place and for which standards and indicators should be set (e.g. meaning, values and principles, accessibility, participation, staffing, children's knowledge and skills, the curriculum and its relevance, administration, funding, equality).
- In the MoLSA sector, the existing system of monitoring and evaluation needs to be intensively developed. Typically, systematic monitoring of the development of the situation of parents of children under 3 and 6 years of age in the area of employability and employment should be included.
- Monitoring and evaluation in the system of children's groups needs to be addressed urgently. It is necessary to create financial and staffing capacities for this purpose and to decide on the degree and form of unification with the system of monitoring and evaluation of facilities under the responsibility of the MoEYS.
- When considering unification of the MoLSA and MoEYS systems, it is necessary to focus in particular on overcoming stereotypes according to which education is the exclusive domain of kindergartens and other ECEC facilities serve primarily as childcare facilities.
- The outstanding issue is the definition of school readiness and its evaluation. The definition of school readiness is not included in the March 2024 version of the FEP PE, although the need for its inclusion in the FEP for basic school education (FEP BE) was mentioned in the Guidelines of the revision of the FEP BE (MoEYS, 2023b: 12). One of the reasons is the effort to shift the emphasis from the child's readiness to the teacher's readiness for each child. Children with a mother tongue other than Czech are mentioned only marginally in the document., Only a brief new document of the NPI CR, *How you can help your child before entering primary*

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Annex 1

Reports

S 1-01 – Reports on kindergartens as of 30 September

- If a kindergarten with more than one site is registered, the data for each site shall be reported
- whether the school/site has only special classes or whether it also has regular classes
- type of operation of the school/site: all-day, half-day, boarding school
- unspecified kindergarten, on-site kindergarten in a company, forest kindergarten or school with facilities for institutional or protective education
- average time of operation of the school/site in hours per day with two decimal places; a kindergarten with more types of operation (e.g. a kindergarten with all-day operation, which also has classes with half-day operation) shall fill in the corresponding average time of operation in classes with this type of operation for each of them

Section II – Children with special educational needs

The number of children with special educational needs who are provided with support measures and gifted children in accordance with Decree No. 27/2016 Coll.; it is irrelevant whether the child has been examined by a school counselling facility or whether the school itself provides support measures in the first degree of support; the child shall be reported for all the applicable types of causes of their special educational needs.

- The number of children with disabilities in whom special educational needs have been identified on the basis of a special educational examination or psychological examination by a school counselling facility.
- The number of children whose special educational needs result from a health disadvantage not mentioned in Section 16 (9) of the Education Act and who need the provision of support measures.
- The number of children with disadvantages related to different cultural environments or other living conditions of the child that hinder the fulfilment of their educational opportunities on an equal basis with others. These children will be further divided as follows:
 - the number of children whose special educational needs result mainly from a different cultural environment in the child's family, low knowledge of the Czech society's culture or limited knowledge of the language of instruction, including the use of a language other than the language of instruction in the child's family;
 - the number of children whose special educational needs result mainly from other living conditions in the child's family, usually long-standing living circumstances such as social exclusion, severe poverty or others;

- the number of children whose special educational needs result from a combination of several factors (e.g. members of ethnic minorities if the language of instruction is not spoken in the family, different cultural rules apply and the family is socially excluded).
- The number of exceptionally gifted children whose talents have been confirmed on the basis of a school counselling centre examination.
- The number of children receiving support measures with an NFD13 code in the reporting school (as recommended by the school counselling facility), regardless of whether or not funding is required for these support measures.

Section III – Classes and children

The numbers of children who have been enrolled in the kindergarten by 30 September at the latest shall be indicated. All children included in the number that has been registered are listed, i.e. even children temporarily placed in a kindergarten at a health facility. This includes children reported in Sections VIII and IX.

- The number of classes by type of operation and the number of children enrolled in these classes. Classes in kindergartens for children with disabilities who are provided with accommodation and educational activities following the educational activities of the kindergarten boarding school are not listed as classes with boarding operation, but as classes with full-day or half-day operation. Similarly, classes in kindergartens at educational establishments for the performance of institutional or protective education are not reported as boarding classes.
- The number of children educated in the remaining period according to Section 34 (10) of the Education Act.
- The number of children fulfilling the obligation of preschool education by the individual education of the child, which takes place without regular daily attendance of the child at the kindergarten according to Section 34a (5)(a) of the Education Act; these children are not included in the capacity of the school, so they can be accepted even beyond the capacity of the kindergarten.

The numbers of children with a period of attendance equivalent to half-day operation of a kindergarten shall be indicated, irrespective of the type of operation of the classroom in which they are placed. Such children, for whom the school stay does not exceed 6.5 hours per day, are identified for reporting purposes as receiving “half-day education”.

Section VIII – Children in special classes by type of disability diagnosed by a school counselling facility

All special kindergartens and regular kindergartens in which special classes are set up are to fill in this section. Disabled children placed in a classroom set up for a different kind or degree of disability are also included:

- the number of children with a mental disability, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - moderate
 - severe
 - profound

- the number of children with a hearing impairment, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with a visual impairment, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with severe speech impediments, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with physical disabilities, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with multiple defects, indicating how many of them are:
 - deafblind
- the number of children with severe developmental learning disabilities
- the number of children with severe developmental behavioural disorders
- the number of children with autism spectrum disorders

Section IX – Children in mainstream classrooms by type of disability diagnosed by a school counselling facility

Children for whom special educational needs have been identified by a special educational or psychological assessment of a school counselling facility and who receive education in regular classrooms are reported by type of disability:

- the number of children with mental disabilities, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - moderate
 - severe
 - profound
- the number of children with hearing impairments, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with visual impairments, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with severe speech impairments, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe
- the number of children with physical disabilities, indicating how many of them have the following degree:
 - severe

- the number of children with multiple disabilities, indicating how many of them are:
 - deafblind
- the number of children with severe developmental learning disabilities
- the number of children with severe developmental behavioural impairments
- the number of children with autistic spectrum disorders

Section XXI – Children by citizenship, foreigners by residence regime

- the number of children by citizenship and residence regime

Children are broken down by citizenship and by the following categories: foreigners with a permanent residence permit, foreigners with temporary residence – asylum seekers, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection. Children with disabilities are singled out for each state (incl. the Czech Republic) whose citizenship they hold. The child's citizenship is decisive. If the child has dual citizenship, the Czech and EU citizenship will be preferred. The number of children for whom preschool education is compulsory is given.

Section XXIV – Children's ages

- the number of children in ordinary and special classes, indicating how many of them are new entrants, by age (eight categories)

Section XXVII – Applications for admission to kindergarten

- the number of applications for kindergarten enrolment submitted for the school year which were not accepted
- the number of applications for kindergarten enrolment submitted for the kindergarten which were accepted, i.e. a decision on the admission of the child to preschool education was issued
- the number of children newly admitted to preschool education for the 2023/24 school year in the reporting kindergarten, which are newly recorded in the register (school records) by 30 September 2023; children receiving education in the remaining period according to Section 34 (10) and children with individual education according to Section 34b of the Education Act

S 51-01 – Report on enrolment for preschool education in kindergarten as of 31 May**Section I – Number of enrolled pupils by result of application and by age**

- departmental identifier of the school headquarters (RED_IZO)
- school identifier (IZO)
- school/site differentiation: unspecified kindergarten; on-site kindergarten in a company; forest kindergarten
- the number of all children who reported for enrolment in the term announced by the school principal; these children are itemised according to the result of enrolment:
 - the number of children for whom a decision on admission to education has been issued and have been enrolled in the reporting school; the form of education is irrelevant and therefore children who will receive education according to Section 34b of the Education Act (individual education) are also indicated
 - the number of children who have been enrolled in the reporting school and this school is a catchment school for them according to Section 34a (2) of the Education Act, i.e. whose place of permanent residence is located in the school's catchment area (only filled in by schools established by a municipality or an association of municipalities)
 - the number of children who have reported for enrolment but for whom a decision on non-admission has been issued
 - the number of children for whom the reporting school is a catchment school according to Section 34a (2) of the Education Act, i.e. whose place of permanent residence is located in the school's catchment area and yet these children have not been enrolled in the school (only filled in by schools established by a municipality or an association of municipalities)
 - the number of children who have reported for enrolment but the school principal has not yet decided on their enrolment
 - the number of children who have reported for enrolment but their natural guardians subsequently withdrew the application for admission (or subsequently notified the school that the child would receive education at a different school), regardless of whether or not the school principal has already decided on their enrolment
- the total number of children broken down by their date of birth (eight categories)
- the number of children under 2 years as at 1 September of the given year
- the number of 2-year-olds who reach the age of 3 in the period from 1 January 2025 to 31 August 2025
- the number of 2-year-olds who reach the age of 3 in the period from 1 September 2024 to 31 December 2024
- the number of children granted compulsory school deferral
- the number of children with preschool education obligations who reported for enrolment at the reporting school, were enrolled, and whose natural guardians had already announced at enrolment that the child would receive individual education (pursuant to Section 34b of the Education Act)

S 4-01 – Report on a kindergarten at a medical facility

To be completed if the school is out of service (temporarily closed but for a long period of time, cancelled, etc.) and at what kind of medical facility the school is established (school at a hospital, school at a children's hospital (except psychiatric hospitals), school at a children's healthcare facility, school at a children's psychiatric hospital).

Section I – Average numbers of children and pupils for the past school year

- the average number of children and pupils for the past school year per day of the school's operation; the average number is determined as the sum of the number of days spent by each child/pupil receiving education at the reporting school (not the medical facility) divided by the total number of days taught at the school in the past school year

Section III – Classes, children, and pupils as at 30 September

- number of classes, children and pupils as at 30 September

Section XXI – Children/pupils by citizenship, aliens by residence regime as at 30 September

- children are broken down by citizenship; foreigners with permanent residence permits, temporary residents, asylum seekers, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection are reported separately

R 13-01 – Report on school management as of 30 September

Section III – Number of independent sites

- the total number of independent sites – a separate site is recorded as a separate kindergarten / kindergarten building of the reporting legal person, the address of which is recorded in the register as a place where education is provided that is not spatially related to another site, is not connected to it by construction or technology, and is not located on the same or adjacent land, and could be entered in the School Register as a separate legal person in other organisational arrangements; two or more buildings interconnected by a corridor are considered to be a single site; each site of the respective type of school which is declared as a separate site provides a separate report about the school

Section VI – Teaching staff performing specialised or methodological activities

- the number of persons performing the activity of an educational advisor or coordinator in the field of information and communication technologies; in kindergartens established by the MoEYS, a region, a municipality or a union of municipalities, only teachers who perform these activities and have a reduced scope of direct teaching activities in accordance with the government regulation are counted
- the number of teaching staff members providing guidance in schools for the school prevention methodology

- the number of reporting teachers tasked with supporting the professional development of teachers during the adaptation period
- the number of teaching staff members carrying out specialised activities that require additional qualifications who work in kindergartens established by a region, municipality or association of municipalities or a ministry and who receive a specialisation allowance for these activities

Section X – Total number of teachers

All teachers carrying out the activity are included, irrespective of the type of their employment relationship with the reporting school management (employment relationship, agreement to complete a job, etc.) and the sources of funding. Teachers from schools or classes established under Section 16 (9) of the Education Act (for children with SEN), teachers teaching in preparatory classes of a primary school, in preparatory grades of a special primary school and teachers in schools at medical facilities are also included.

- the number of teachers in the reporting school management, incl. school principals and their deputies
- the full-time equivalent (comparing a teacher's work hours with a full-time equivalent for the given category under government regulation), indicating the number of teachers without qualifications
- the number of teachers in the first year of the adaptation period, from the beginning of their first employment as a teacher to the end of their first year of employment
- the number of teachers in the second year of the adaptation period, from the end of the first year of the adaptation period after the beginning of their first employment relationship to the end of the second year of their employment relationship

Section XIII – Managers – natural persons

- the total number of school principals who are appointed to the position of deputy principal (they have been appointed or entrusted with this function); principals of kindergartens are only reported if they are appointed to the position of deputy principal (they do not need to be appointed)

Section XIV – Other school teaching staff

All those carrying out the activity are included, irrespective of their type of employment relationship with the reporting school management (employment relationship, agreement to complete a job, etc.) and the sources of funding. Only teaching staff according to Section 2 (2) of the Act are reported, not school assistants, nannies, social educators, etc., who are not teaching staff. Each worker shall be reported in the natural persons columns according to which of the above professions he/she performs in the reporting entity; in full-time equivalents the corresponding part of his/her time shall be stated.

- the number of other teaching staff members, converted into FTEs, who work in classes established under Section 16 (9) of the Education Act
- the number of teaching assistants, regardless of whether they perform their activities in a regular or a special class
- the number of educators acting as additional teaching staff

- the number of special educators, i.e. workers who provide special educational care for children with special educational needs; these do not include teachers who have a special educational qualification and perform a direct teaching activity,
 - indicating the number of those special educators who provide speech therapy to children, pupils and students
- the number of psychologists and special educators

Section XV – Computer equipment at school

Only computers owned by the reporting entity are listed. Computers are listed either in the category of “desktop computers”, or in the category “laptop, tablet, etc. portable devices”.

- the number of all computers and portable devices, regardless of whether they are available to school staff or children and regardless of whether they are used in the educational process or to ensure the school's operation
 - indicating the number of computers accessible to children of the age of max. 2 years
 - indicating the number accessible only to teachers and of this number indicating the number intended for the teacher's own work needs (not shared)

Section XVI – Other ICT equipment at school

- school wireless network (Wi-Fi) – indicating whether it is available
- the number of classrooms, the number of classrooms with Internet connection
- the number of mobile classrooms
- the school information system, system which is available online to parents – indicating whether it is available

S 4c-01 – Report on the preparatory class of a primary school and the preparatory grade of a special primary school, status as of 30 September

Section II – Children with special educational needs

The report lists all the children with special educational needs who are provided with support measures in accordance with Decree No. 27/2016 Coll., on the education of pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils, as amended. It is irrelevant whether the child has been examined by a school counselling facility or whether support measures in level 1 support are provided by the school itself. The child shall be reported for all the applicable types of causes for their special educational needs.

- the number of children with disabilities referred to in Section 16 (9) of the Education Act
- the number of children whose special educational needs result from a health disadvantage not mentioned in Section 16 (9) of the Education Act and for whom support measures need to be provided

- ↘ the number of children with disadvantages related to different cultural environments or other living conditions of the child that hinder the fulfilment of their educational opportunities on an equal basis with others. The data on these children are broken down further as follows:
- the number of children whose special educational needs result mainly from a different cultural environment in the child's family, lack of knowledge of the Czech society's culture or limited knowledge of the language of instruction, including the use of a language other than the language of instruction in the child's family
 - the number of children whose special educational needs result mainly from other living conditions in the child's family, usually long-standing life circumstances such as social exclusion, severe poverty or others
 - the number of children whose special educational needs result from a combination of several factors (e.g. members of ethnic minorities if the language of instruction is not spoken in the family, different cultural rules apply and the family is socially excluded)
- ↘ the number of children who are provided with support measures with an NFD code in the reporting school (according to the recommendation of the school counselling facility), regardless of whether or not funds are required for these support measures

Section III – Classes and children

- ↘ the number of classes, number of children (indicating the number of girls), indicating the number of newly enrolled (indicating the number of girls) in the preparatory grade or preparatory classes

Section VIII – Children in preparatory classes by type of disability

- ↘ the number of children with moderate, severe or profound mental disability, with concurrent disability of multiple defects or with autism to whom the primary school provides special preparation for preparatory education

Section XXI – Children by citizenship, foreigners by residence regime

- ↘ children in both the preparatory grade and preparatory classes are broken down by citizenship; foreigners with permanent and temporary residence permits, asylum seekers, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, applicants for international protection and beneficiaries of temporary protection are indicated

Section XXIV – Children's ages

- ↘ the number of children from the preparatory grade of a special primary school by age (six categories)
- ↘ the number of children from the preparatory classes of a primary school by age (five categories)

Annex 2

Assessment of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework according to the UNICEF Early Childhood Education and Care Analytical Tool

The UNICEF Analytical Tool for individual areas of Early Childhood Education and Care was developed as a complement to the UNICEF Build to Last Framework for the Promotion of Universal Quality Early Childhood Education and Care. The tool has six modules; module 5 – Quality Assurance – was used to develop this analysis.

Each module sets objectives aimed at building superior early childhood education and care, benchmarks for each objective and supporting monitoring questions.

Module 5 sets out four key objectives and related benchmarks that can lead to progress in strengthening this key function:

- Goal 1:** Establish comprehensive standards for service quality
- Goal 2:** Establish functional quality assurance mechanisms based on the overarching goals
- Goal 3:** Strengthen capacity across the subsector to monitor quality
- Goal 4:** Ensure that quality monitoring facilitates improvements in quality

The situation in the Czech Republic in the area of care provided by kindergartens and children's groups is analysed in detail for each of the goals below. In assessing the individual benchmarks, we have followed the monitoring questions listed in Annex 3. The effort to answer all the monitoring questions honestly and comprehensively has led to some repetition of information.

Goal 1: Establish comprehensive standards for service quality

The Czech Republic has laid down the requirements for a standard quality of early childhood education and care in its legislative standards. For CGs, specific standards are set directly by law. For KGs, a similar type of standards is collected in the School of Good Quality – the Czech School Inspectorate's criteria for evaluating the conditions, course and results

of education (CSI, 2024). It is unclear what can be considered as a standard. When we take as a basis the standards set within the EU and try to compare them with the standards for KGs and CGs (see Table 3), we get only very approximate information, which is given in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of EU, KG and CG standards

European Union	Kindergartens	Children's groups
Provision of services that are accessible and affordable to all families and their children.	Education Act and the related decrees CSI 6.1	Children's Groups Act
Provision of services that promote participation, enhance social inclusion and embrace diversity.	Education Act and the related decrees CSI 6.2	?
Staff with good qualifications and with initial and further training that enables them to fulfil their professional role.	Education Act and the related decrees CSI 3.1, 3.5	Children's Groups Act Criterion 5.6
Friendly working conditions, including professional guidance that creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.	Labour Code, Teaching Staff Act CSI 2.1-2.5, 3.3	Children's Groups Act Criterion 5
An educational programme based on educational goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential and address their social, emotional, cognitive and physical development and well-being.	Education Act and the follow-up decrees CSI 4.1-4.4	Children's Groups Act Criterion 1, 2
An educational programme that requires staff to cooperate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.	Education Act and the follow-up decrees CSI 1.4, 2.2, 3.2	Children's Groups Act Criterion 1,2,4
Monitoring and evaluation provides information at the appropriate local, regional and/or national level that supports continuous improvements in the quality of policy and practice.	Education Act and the follow-up decrees CSI 5.1-5.4	Children's Groups Act
Monitoring and evaluation that are in the child's best interest.	Education Act and the follow-up decrees CSI 5.1-5.3	Children's Groups Act Criterion 3,4
Stakeholders have a clear and common understanding of their role and tasks and know that they are expected to cooperate with partner organisations.	Education Act and the related decrees	Children's Groups Act Criterion 2
Legislation, regulation and/or funding support progress towards universal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.	Education Act and the related decrees	Children's Groups Act

Measure 1 – Standards set forth a country's expectations and goals for the quality of preschool education services.

Mandatory standards for kindergartens are described in detail in Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education (the Education

Act), the Teaching Staff Act, and the related regulations¹⁴. The Act sets out the principles and objectives of education, describes the system of educational programmes, defines the education system, schools, educational establishments and school legal entities and their legal status, long-term plans and annual reports, the system of evaluation of schools, school faculties and the educational system, the language of instruction and education of members of national minorities, the teaching of religion, education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs and gifted children, pupils and students, education of foreigners and persons residing abroad in the long-term, the organisation of education in schools, documentation of schools and school establishments, safety and health protection in schools and school establishments, prohibition of activities and promotion of political parties and movements, and prohibition of advertising. It further defines school establishments and school services, describes the School Register and the financing of schools and school establishments, defines the powers of school principals, the school establishment and the school board, ministries, CSI and local government units and defines administrative offences.

In the field of preschool education, it specifies the objectives of preschool education, the organisation of preschool education, the obligatory preschool education and the ways of its fulfilment, and the possibilities of individual education of a child.

Other types of standards that regulate the activities of schools and school facilities are decrees related to the Education Act. With regard to preschool education, these are in particular Decree No. 14/2005 Coll., on preschool education, Decree No. 64/2005 Coll., on the registration of injuries to children, pupils, and students, Decree No. 15/2005 Coll., laying down the requirements of long-term plans and annual reports, Decree No. 16/2005 Coll., on the organisation of the school year, Decree No. 17/2005 Coll., on the provision of advisory services in schools and school counselling facilities, Decree No. 107/2005 Coll., on school meals, Decree No. 310/2018 Coll., on regional standards, and Decree No. 364/2005 Coll., on the keeping of documentation of schools and school facilities and the school records, and on the transmission of data from documentation of schools and school facilities and from the school records (the Documentation of Schools and School Facilities Decree).

The **Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education**, which describes in detail the individual areas through expected outputs that a child should usually accomplish at the end of the preschool period (MoEYS, 2021), is also an important standard. These rules apply to educational activities taking place in educational institutions included in the network of schools and school facilities. They are obligatory for preschool education in kindergartens, in kindergartens for children with SEN established under Section 16 (9) of the Schools Act, in forest kindergartens and in preparatory classes of primary schools. FEP PE establishes an elementary educational foundation on which primary education builds and as such represents a fundamental starting point for the creation of school educational programmes and their implementation. The FEP PE defines a common framework to be

14 Act No. 383/2005 Coll., Act No. 112/2006 Coll., Act No. 158/2006 Coll., Act No. 161/2006 Coll., Act No. 165/2006 Coll., Act No. 179/2006 Coll., Act No. 342/2006 Coll., Act No. 624/2006 Coll., Act No. 217/2007 Coll., Act No. 296/2007 Coll., Act No. 343/2007 Coll., Act No. 58/2008 Coll., Act No. 126/2008 Coll., Act No. 189/2008 Coll., Act No. 242/2008 Coll., Act No. 243/2008 Coll., Act No. 306/2008 Coll., Act No. 384/2008 Coll., Act No. 49/2009 Coll., Act No. 227/2009 Coll., Act No. 378/2009 Coll., Act No. 427/2010 Coll., Act No. 73/2011 Coll., Act No. 331/2011 Coll., Act No. 375/2011 Coll., Act No. 420/2011 Coll., Act No. 458/2011 Coll., Act No. 472/2011 Coll., Act No. 53/2012 Coll., Act No. 333/2012 Coll., Act No. 370/2012 Coll., Act No. 241/2013 Coll., Senate motion No. 344/2013 Coll., Act No. 64/2014 Coll., Act No. 250/2014 Coll., Act No. 82/2015 Coll., Act No. 178/2016 Coll., Act No. 101/2017 Coll., Act No. 222/2017 Coll., Act No. 167/2018 Coll., Act No. 46/2019 Coll., Act No. 284/2020 Coll., Act No. 349/2020 Coll., Act No. 403/2020 Coll., Act No. 94/2021 Coll., Act No. 261/2021 Coll., Act No. 152/2023 Coll., Act No. 183/2023 Coll.

maintained. It is open to schools, teachers and children, thus creating the conditions for every school or group of teachers, any professional working group, professional association or individual teacher to be able to create and implement their own school education programme so long as the common rules are respected. The FEP PE is a document that is authoritative not only for the administrators of preschool education (for teachers), but also for the providers of educational institutions as well as their professional and social partners.

Another set of standards is set by the CSI, which has issued criteria for the evaluation of the conditions, course and results of education called *School of Good Quality*; the criteria in its current form have been used since the 2015/2016 school year, with small partial modifications reflecting the experience with their application (CSI, 2023a). For inspiration and methodological support provided to schools, the model of a School of Good Quality was supplemented by a database of what is known as examples of inspirational practice and good methodological practices. The criteria have been developed for six areas: Concept and Framework of School, School's Educational Leadership, Teaching Staff, Education, Educational Results and Support of Children in Education (equal opportunities). The criteria are also available in a modified form for KGs: https://csicr.cz/CSICR/media/Prilohy/2023_p%c5%99%c3%adlohy/Dokumenty/Kriteria-hodnoceni_2023_2024_FIN-TISK.pdf.

The standards set by the legislation are set at one target level and therefore do not describe the different levels of achievement. The CSI's standards have four levels: exceptional, expected, needing improvement, unsatisfactory; however, only the exceptional level is published.

Mandatory standards for CGs are described in Act No. 247/2014 Coll., on the provision of childcare services in a children's group and on the amendment of related laws (the Children's Groups Act). The Act defines what is the subject of childcare services in a children's group, further specifies the details of the provision of childcare services in a children's group and the technical requirements for construction and hygiene requirements for premises and operation, describes the creation, change and termination of authorisations and registration of providers, defines the conditions for obtaining a contribution for the operation of a children's group, and describes supervision and administrative offences. A special part of the Act is devoted to quality standards of care. The standards are further elaborated in Decree No. 350/2021 Coll., on the implementation of certain provisions of the Act on the provision of childcare services in a children's group and on the amendment of related laws. The MoLSA has prepared a *Support Methodology for Quality of Care Standards* (MoLSA, 2022c) for practical use. Furthermore, a *Guide for the Fulfilment of Quality of Care Standards*¹⁵ put together by the MoLSA is also available. The service provider has an obligation to prepare in writing the basic risky and emergency situations that may occur in connection with the provision of the service and to make all employees demonstrably familiar with the procedures for dealing with them.

The standards for CGs given by the legislation are set at one target level; therefore they do not describe the different levels of achievement. The standards within the quality of care standards are described at three levels: 0 – not fulfilled, 1 – good fulfilment, 2 – excellent fulfilment.

The standards are thus defined primarily by means of legal standards that set requirements for the individual areas of the quality framework. This means that there is no single

15 https://www.MoLSA.cz/documents/20142/225508/Pr%C5%AFvodce+standardy+DS_jednostrann%C3%BD+tisk.pdf/ee1d34fa-74e1-9515-cab8-159213bfc9d6

place where all the standards are summarised in a clear structure. The standards set by the various departments providing ECEC (MoEYS, MoLSA, MIT and MH) have a completely different structure, scope and level of detail, which also applies to the standards for emergencies and refugees. Therefore, there is no common standard for ECEC in the Czech Republic, which means that children in a given age group can be provided with qualitatively fundamentally different ECEC services depending on the type of provider. Standards at multiple levels are described and publicly available only in the case of children's groups.

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

National quality standards of care, i.e. standards that would apply to all facilities of the ECEC system, are not available.

The standards for both KGs and CGs given by the legislation are quite detailed in the case of KGs, while in the case of CGs they do not cover all the areas to a sufficient degree (e.g. the area of equal opportunities). However, the differences in coverage result, among other things, from the different focuses of the facilities – whereas in the education sector these facilities are primarily focused on education, in the labour and social sectors the main objective is to promote employment. Standards in both sectors have gone through a participatory process to a certain extent only; some have been discussed with a number of actors, but systematic coverage of the actors has not been ensured, especially when it comes to marginalised groups. Parents are among the key actors who are not sufficiently involved in the legislative processes. One of the reasons for this is that in the Czech Republic, unlike in other countries, there are no strong parental organisations which have a significant number of members.

The standards for KGs and CGs given by the legislation are both structural and procedural. However, they are not flexible or adaptive to reflect the differences between the individual regions, care providers or founders. There is no information available for either KGs or CGs as to whether the standards are evidence-based.

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

In the Czech Republic, general teaching and development standards are not available, making it impossible to assess the compliance of standards in individual sectors with a more general standard.

Standards for members of staff are defined by qualification requirements, which consist of a list of educational programmes that a staff member must complete. Educational programmes are created by higher education and higher vocational education institutions and by institutions for the further education of teaching staff. The consideration of standards for process quality is fully within the competence of the individual institutions and is not systematically monitored.

The standards for service quality and for ECEC do not systematically go through a process to assess their consistency.

Measure 4 – Service standards are designed to facilitate monitoring.

The standards set out in laws and the related decrees can be considered coherent and feasible. Nevertheless, the standards in this form are quite voluminous and cannot be subject

to joint assessment. For some of them, monitoring is sophisticated, but requires additional interpretation by the individual institutions in some cases. The standards of inspection criteria are sufficiently detailed, coherent and feasible, but the detail of the CG standards is not quite sufficient in some cases. Their form is designed to allow monitoring. The standards are applicable to all formal ECEC facilities.

Goal 2: Establish functional quality assurance mechanisms based on the overarching goals

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

Monitoring in a KG has two main purposes – at the level of the facility: checking the compliance of the functioning of the facility with the legislation on which it operates; and at the national level: assessing the quality and effectiveness of the education system. The primary function of monitoring is thus answering the question whether the system (or the facility) works as required and how effective it is in achieving the results that are defined by long-term strategies and objectives. The reports by the CSI, which carries out external monitoring of schools and educational facilities, identify the system's strengths and weaknesses, but they do not always include identification of the reasons why these deficiencies occur in the system or describe the barriers that prevent these deficiencies from being overcome.

In the case of CGs, the monitoring of compliance with the valid legal regulations is carried out by the State Office of Labour Inspection on the basis of requests from citizens (generally parents). The external monitoring is also carried out by the MoLSA according to its own methodology based on standards. Because of the insufficient staffing capacity, only a few monitoring events take place per year. Systematic monitoring of all children's groups does not take place for capacity reasons. Internal monitoring of CGs is not obligatory and if a CG does it, the data from it are used for self-evaluation purposes only.

The data collected about the preschool system, even those collected by the CSI or the MoEYS, do not allow a full overview of the current state of supply and demand in the ECEC system to be gained (see Simonová et al., 2024); the same is true of the quality of education and care processes.

The 2023–2027 Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic (MoEYS, 2023) has only one objective among its priorities which is marginally related to preschool education: **Reducing the number of deferrals of compulsory school attendance and improving the preparedness of primary schools for the entry of children from kindergartens.** In the section devoted to preschool education, the long-term plan states: "The main objective of this priority is to increase the quality and accessibility of preschool education and to involve as many children as possible in the Czech Republic, from the age of 3." The evaluation of the fulfilment of the 2018–2022 Long-Term Plan mentions an increase in funding, which allowed a higher overlap of direct teaching activities of teachers, revision of the FEP PE and its enrichment by education of children with a first language other than Czech and support for educational diagnostics in kindergartens through further education of teaching staff and a methodological manual. The Long-Term Plan sets three objectives for the period between 2023 and 2027: 1. ensuring the implementation of the updated FEP PE; 2. the availability of preschool education in accordance with legal

entitlements from the time when a child reaches the age of 3; and 3. a reduction in the number of compulsory school deferrals (see Annex 6 for an elaboration of objectives).

The achievement of the objectives can be partially evaluated from the already-reported data; the Long-Term Plan further provides as additional indicators the numbers of workers in the ECEC sector who have completed further education as teaching staff and the numbers of kindergartens that received training in the new FEP PE, in educational diagnostics and in the further education of teaching staff focused on the education of children from different socio-cultural backgrounds. It also mentions the monitoring of the attendance of children in the kindergarten, regular demographic and capacity analyses on a case-by-case basis to ensure the necessary capacity of the kindergarten for children older than 3 years, and the reduction of deferrals of compulsory primary school attendance (the target is set at a reduction of at least one third compared to 2022).

The 2024–2026 Action Plan of the *2021–2030 Strategy for Social Inclusion* (MoLSA, 2023b) states in the Family Support section the objective of creating sufficient places in preschool care for children up to 3 years of age, as well as expanding the number and capacity of children's groups. No qualitative objectives are set. Monitoring can be carried out on the basis of data in the register.

A unified and standardised monitoring system for all facilities is lacking, while the legal form of some facilities providing non-formal ECEC does not allow monitoring / data collection to be required (e.g. mother centres).

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

External monitoring is carried out in facilities in the Register of Schools and School Facilities by the Czech School Inspectorate, whose activity is defined by No. Act 561/2004 Coll. (Sections 173 to 176). At the national level, the Czech School Inspectorate obtains and analyses information on children's education and the activities of schools and school facilities and monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the education system. Data from inspection activities in a given year are used for this activity, meaning that with the frequency of inspections of once every 3 to 9 years in a given facility, data on approximately one sixth of kindergartens (997 kindergartens in 2023) are used. These results are then generalised to cover the entire education sector. The results of this CSI's activity are published in the CSI's annual reports. Within the annual reports, data on kindergartens are related to the long-term strategies of the Ministry of Education and the Government of the Czech Republic for the field of education (Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic, the Strategy 2030+) – see Chapter 4.

At the level of the individual schools and school establishments, the CSI evaluates the conditions, processes and results of education according to the respective School Education Plan. The SEP itself is also evaluated in order to detect any non-compliance with the FEP PE or other legislation. The CSI also monitors the use of the state funds. Within the inspection, the school documents, results of class sit-ins and interviews with teachers, management and the founder are checked and analysed, and standardised questionnaires are filled out by teachers and the principal. The school receives a report regarding the criteria, material

conditions and any breaches of the law in the CSI's InspIS DATA¹⁶ electronic system once the inspection activity is completed¹⁷.

Anonymised records from visits and answers from questionnaires are available on the CSI website as open data sets.

The inspection activities in one school or school establishment usually take several days and their output at this level is an inspection report, which contains a verbal evaluation of the conditions, processes and results of education, an inventory of the identified strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for improvement, and an inventory of recommendations for improvement of the establishment's activity. Inspection reports are provided by the CSI to the school's founder and management, including any comments from the school's principal; they are publicly available in hard copy in the given facility and at the regional CSI inspectorate and in electronic form on the CSI website.

The inspection activities are carried out on the basis of a long-term strategy (regular visits once every 3 to 9 years), as part of a thematic investigation, or on the basis of a complaint or submission. The inspection visit is generally announced several days in advance, but the inspection team may also access the facility without prior notice, which is generally done when investigating a complaint, where prior notice could influence the present conditions. If the inspection finds serious shortcomings in the school's activity, the school inspection may submit a proposal for the dismissal of the principal or even the de-registration of the establishment from the School Register.

Furthermore, the CSI prepares thematic reports on the inspection activities in a particular thematic area. These thematic areas are defined annually in the Main Task Plan for the school year.

In addition to the Criteria for Evaluation of Conditions, Progress and Outcomes of Education, according to the CSI's School of Good Quality portal, there is a number of internal methodologies which the inspectors follow when visiting schools and school facilities to perform the inspection activities. Thematically focused record forms and evaluation sheets (e.g. reports from class sit-in records), tools for the evaluation of pupil achievement levels in various fields, and questionnaires and surveys for employees, pupils and teachers (<https://www.kvalitniskola.cz/Externi-hodnoceni/Vybrane-nastroje-pro-realizaci-externiho-hodnoceni>) are used for data collection and evaluation. Some of these tools for data collection are available to school principals through the data collection and evaluation system of the CSI InspIS DATA and can be used for internal evaluation (e.g. class sit-ins performed by the principal) (<https://www.kvalitniskola.cz>).

Since not all the tools used by the CSI are publicly available, it is impossible to systematically assess their suitability or compliance with tools such as the European Quality Framework or UNICEF's Build to Last.

The processes for collecting and recording data on the quality of kindergartens during the CSI inspection are standardised; the current criteria have been used since the 2015/16 school year. With the frequency of inspection visits of every 3 to 9 years, all kindergartens should have had at least one inspection visit under these criteria by the end of the 2023/24 school year. Half of the kindergartens should have already had two such visits (assuming

16 InspIS DATA is a system for the electronic collection of data. It is the main information system of the Czech School Inspectorate for collecting and assessing information regarding education and carrying out monitoring and evaluation processes in education. It also functions as an organising system for the CSI's activities.

17 More information can be found at <https://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Publikace-a-ostatni-vystupy/Reporty-pro-reditele-skol-a-skolskych-zarizeni>

the kindergarten existed throughout this period).

According to Decree No. 350/2021 Coll., the assessment of the quality of care and compliance with standards in children's groups is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Checks can be carried out on the basis of a complaint, but also without one, either remotely through the analysis of the requested documents or in person. Within these checks, interviews with employees or parents, inspection of the conditions and observation of direct work with children are also carried out in addition to the analysis of documents. In 2022, five inspections of the quality of care standards in children's groups took place (<https://www.MoLSA.cz/web/cz/informace-o-vysledcich-realizovanych-kontrol>). The 2023 data about the inspections have not yet been published; however, because of the insufficient staffing capacity, the number of inspections is very low. Systematic inspections of all CGs are not carried out for capacity reasons.

The following documents are analysed during the inspection: the plan of education and care; written description of the procedure during the entry process of a child into the CG (adaptation process); internal rules and basic risky and emergency situations, and proof of the fact that all employees have been acquainted with these documents (MoLSA, 2022b). The available MoLSA documents do not suggest the ways in which the data are recorded and analysed as part of the inspection, and how the results of the inspection are passed back to the CG's operator or employees.

In some cases, the CG umbrella organisations carry out their own monitoring. Typically, the organisation 100 Groups regularly administers questionnaires to the parents of children attending the CGs and uses these as a basis for improving the quality of care.

In both cases (KGs and CGs) the main objective of the external monitoring is to check that the facility is functioning in accordance with the relevant laws, decrees, and, in the case of a KG, in accordance with the FEP PE. In the annual reports, the CSI carries out a generalised evaluation of the education system and points out the problems that have been identified; however, the publication of the annual report (and possibly thematic reports) is usually the final step in the use of the data that have been collected.

The tools and methodological materials for external monitoring of the quality of children's groups are not publicly available. The assessment of children's groups is based on the Criteria for the Assessment of Quality of Care (annex to Decree No. 350/2021 Coll.). The methodology for the assessment of quality of work in the CG is the MoLSA's internal material and is used by the staff in the inspections that are carried out.

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

In accordance with the Education Act (Section 12) kindergartens should carry out their own internal assessment, but unlike primary schools, they are not required to draw up an annual report which should be based on their internal assessment. The Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education requires kindergartens to create their own self-evaluation system within the school education programme. Specifically, the following must be specified: the subject of the evaluation (which specific phenomena the kindergarten will focus on); the methods and techniques of the evaluation (forms, method of evaluation); the timetable (specific dates or frequency of the evaluation); the responsibility of teachers and other staff (who will be responsible for what). Self-evaluation can be carried out by the principal, the staff and each individual teacher. On the basis of the findings, the

principal should evaluate educational outcomes, individual employees and the kindergarten as a whole and take concrete measures.

There are no standardised mechanisms or tools for the school's internal evaluation that all schools must use. The only binding directive is the outline of the annual report that schools must process. As part of the 2020 strategy, the CSI developed an evaluation system and the associated School of Good Quality e-portal, which contains, among other things, methodological recommendations and tools for self-assessment. Both are modelled on the CSI tools used for external inspections and allow the individual CSI criteria to be evaluated on a four-point scale, similarly to what external evaluators do during an inspection visit. These tools are presented as a standardised basis for the school's internal assessment, which can be modified if necessary. The school management may or may not use these tools in its internal evaluation.

The methodologies and tools created by the CSI and published at the School of Good Quality portal are presented as universal for all levels of education; however, their applicability to preschool education, especially in areas such as pupils' attitudes, is not entirely clear (the questionnaires are for children who can read and write). Their content relates to the CSI quality criteria rather than the FEP. Again, it should be kept in mind that schools are not bound to use these tools for internal evaluation in any way.

Children's groups are not obliged to carry out any internal evaluations or to issue any annual reports. The MoLSA methodology for setting up and running a children's group mentions internal evaluation as a process that should be part of the CG's day-to-day operation and the basis for the innovation of the Education and Care Plan; however, internal evaluation is not mandatory for providers of children's groups. There are no standardised mechanisms or tools for internal evaluation, even in the methodology that recommends internal evaluation. Thus, internal monitoring takes place only on the initiative of the provider or employees of the children's group or facility.

In summary, there are no standardised internal evaluation mechanisms and tools for any form of preschool education and care that are widely used. The annual reports, which are the only mandatory output of the internal evaluation of kindergartens, should summarise the functioning of the school over the last year, but it is not known whether these findings are used in any way for self-reflection or as incentives for change or improvement in the future.

Goal 3: Strengthen capacity across the subsector to monitor quality

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

The roles and responsibilities for monitoring quality across the individual levels are clearly defined; however, they only apply to formal ECEC facilities and function differently in facilities that are part of the education system and in children's groups. There is no institution that comprehensively monitors quality in different types of preschool facilities. This situation results, among other things, from the fact that the two main types of facilities fall under different ministries and there is no uniform concept of ECEC.

The scheme of the evaluation of kindergartens is set out in Act No. 561/2004 Coll. (Section 12). Schools are to carry out their own internal evaluation according to the methods set out in the FEP PE. The Czech School Inspectorate is the external evaluator. At the level of regions, the system is evaluated by the regional authorities; at the level of the whole Czech Republic by the Ministry of Education (Report on the State and Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic) and by the Czech School Inspectorate (annual reports).

The basic limit of the evaluation scheme used by the Czech School Inspectorate is that the quality is described in a very general way and the items are usually evaluated on a four-point scale, which does not provide much detail. Another limit is that inspections are carried out once every 3 to 9 years and the public, like the founder, have access only to the final inspection report. Although the Czech School Inspectorate publishes its files within the open data, the documentation for them is limited (e.g. the data do not contain a scheme for missing values, so it is not always entirely clear why some items are not filled in). The documentation also lacks the text of the questionnaire. Because of the chosen method for the data anonymisation, some key variables may be missing (e.g. the anonymised identifier of belonging to a specific school in the case of the KG teacher questionnaire). There are also no continuously published aggregated data showing whether the evaluation of schools according to the given methodology is improving, remains the same, or is getting worse. Finally, another limiting fact is that there are no data available to put the outputs from the CSI evaluation into context with other available data (e.g. the composition of the group of children, the composition of the group of teaching and non-teaching staff, and excess demand). Some key points, such as the sustainability of a quality system of pre-school education with regard to salary, the available space and the number of children per carer, also remain outside the monitoring scheme.

The Czech School Inspectorate has developed its School of Good Quality assessment system in accordance with Strategy 2020. The CSI presents this system as a basic standard that, while forming one framework, still allows schools to be autonomous to a certain extent in how they approach the educational process (especially that defined in the FEP). The system defines the criteria for the evaluation of the conditions, processes and results of education. It was used for the first time in the 2015/2016 school year. Since 2017, reports have also been available for the management of schools in the InspIS system, in which the school finds a comparison of its own results based on the inspection with schools in the given region and for the whole country. The algorithm of what is compared with what is not specified, but the system most probably compares and averages the results of recent inspections of schools of a given type, i.e. it is an overview of approximately six years, not a comparison in real time, because such a comparison is unavailable.

The decentralised educational system, as well as the current monitoring settings, limits its use for decision-making support. The limitations of the monitoring itself are that the monitoring only takes place once every 3 to 9 years and the relatively general monitoring system. A significant number of the items in the sit-in record are dichotomous questions (e.g. "The objectives of education were based mainly on the current conditions and situations."). The items in the reports are formulated to describe the desirable features of a school of good quality within the given parameters (especially the criteria for evaluating the conditions, processes and outcomes of education). As mentioned above, there is a four-point scale, which does not allow for a greater differentiation and which uses the same values for both self-evaluation and external evaluation. These are: definitely yes, rather yes, rather not, definitely not. Especially if the items are evaluated by teachers or parents, they may have a greater tendency to agree with the statement (e.g. Krosnick & Presser,

2010). The scale does not contain a mean value or answers “I do not know/do not want to answer”, which can also lead to distorted answers. By analogy, the CSI subsequently lists the parameters that are evaluated on a scale in the annual report as follows: excellent level, expected level, level requiring improvement and unsatisfactory level.

The system is presented by the Czech School Inspectorate as being based on a consensus among various actors, including school principals. The current result is that methodologies and tools are gradually being added to the School of Good Quality portal, both for self-evaluation by the schools themselves and for evaluation by the Czech School Inspectorate. The system is basically built in such a way that the tools for self-evaluation by schools are based on the tools for external evaluation. The implementation of these tools, i.e. sit-in forms, is presented by the CSI on the School of Good Quality portal as an example of good practice. “The quality of sit-in forms is also evidenced by the interest of school principals in [the CSI] providing sit-in forms for their own evaluation of teaching in their school.”¹⁸ Their adoption is presented by the Czech School Inspectorate as a proof of their quality. However, an alternative explanation for the use of the sit-in forms by schools is precisely that the school principal is responsible for the quality and guidance of educators, i.e. it is in their interest to be able to demonstrate that they do monitor and evaluate these parameters even if they are not internally convinced of their quality. The School of Good Quality portal also contains forms developed by the schools themselves for their own needs¹⁹.

The CSI annual report then maps education nationwide in a given year and presents the data collected by the Ministry of Education or the Czech School Inspectorate. In the case of the evaluation of education, the text is based on inspection reports, i.e. only about one sixth of the kindergartens inspected in a given year are part of the analysis. The indicated comparison with the previous year therefore compares two different groups of kindergartens. The annual report contains beneficial recommendations for the KG, the founder and the system, but in most cases the parameters monitored by the CSI within the framework of the inspection activity do not allow the identification and description of the barriers that prevent improvement (e.g. expansion of the capacity of the KGs, reduction of the administrative burden of the KGs, increasing age of the staff in the KGs and the accumulation of disadvantages in some regions).

The CSI’s annual reports have long been pointing out that both teachers and school principals consider the demanding administration to be a significant obstacle to their work. The CSI attributes this to the Education Act (e.g. the requirement to create a school educational programme), but continues to ask teachers this question in the monitoring. It is questionable whether, for example, the list of questions on obstacles to the teaching profession is effective for KG principals and teachers when similar obstacles persist in the system in the long term. An example of a set-up that is not fully balanced and functional is the requirement that has been repeated in unchanged form in the CSI evaluation criteria since 2015:

18 Cited from <https://www.kvalitniskola.cz/Nastroje-dostupne-v-InspIS-DATA/Nastroje-pro-vlastni-hodnoceni-podle-kriterii> (14 February 2024).

19 These forms are sorted into the categories according to the parameters evaluated by the School of Good Quality system. Contents beyond these categories are not categorised according to specific themes. We can see an example of this in the case of the materials from the university kindergarten of Tomas Bata University in Zlín – the potentially beneficial open questions aiming to raise questions or concerns which are not included in the School of Good Quality system are an overlooked dimension of the form: for example the communication with parents about the child’s individual development and needs. Communication with parents is primarily understood as the publication of documents like the school FEP or the School Rules, rather than individual consultation of the child’s development and needs. The school is meant to systematically identify the children’s individual needs within education settings, but in this context cooperation is only expected with expert facilities, not with parents.

“The school shall continuously monitor and collect information that is essential for its future direction (legal changes, trends in education, development of educational policy, socio-economic changes in the school region, demographic data and regional development plans) and shall take it into account in updates of the school strategy and concept” (CSI, 2015: 1-2; CSI, 2017a: 18; CSI, 2022a: 22; CSI, 2023a: 18).

Children’s groups came into existence due to the acute need to provide care for children under 3 years of age; currently, they are set up in such a way that the service provider is primarily responsible to the children’s parents / natural guardians and subsequently to the MoLSA, which provides the care subsidy and is the guarantor of the service. They are not integrated into the Czech education system. The child’s natural guardian signs a Contract on the Provision of the Child Care Service in the CG, the annex of which is the group’s Education and Care Plan (ECP). The MoLSA then checks the compliance with the ECP, practice and Quality of Care Standards. The ECP is supposed to take into account each child’s individual needs and the caregivers are to consult the child’s needs and development with the parents on an ongoing and regular basis.

For children’s groups, brief assessment criteria are available to both evaluators and service providers, along with a clear explanation of what is considered care that does not meet the criteria and what is considered care that meets the criteria (the basis is a safe and respectful environment for children and the staff of the children’s group). Online workshops to work with children in CGs and e-learning courses dedicated to setting up and managing a children’s group are available to care providers. There are no data available about the checks that have been carried out. Some providers (e.g. 100 Groups) carry out questionnaire surveys among the parents of children attending children’s groups as well as among carers, but this is not a standard procedure.

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

Monitoring is set up very robustly in the KGs, which can contribute to the perceived administrative burden on school staff. At the same time, the level of cooperation between the school management and the CSI is usually very low. Inspections are carried out once every 3 to 9 years. In the event of more fundamental deficiencies, the school management is asked to remedy those and inform the CSI in writing what has been done. In some cases, deadlines for remedy are set at 14 days or 30 days. Some data sets are worked on in a limited way in the system (e.g. with a teacher questionnaire).

The CSI inspectors must have a completed university education (preferably with appropriate professional and teaching competence) and a minimum of 5 years of teaching or educational and psychological experience (preferably management practice in education) (Section 174 (9) of the Education Act). Inspection staff must have a university education (preferably majoring in economics or law) and at least 5 years of experience in education or in the state administration, or secondary education with a graduation exam and 20 years of experience) (Section 174 (10) of the Education Act). The Education Act does not differentiate the requirements for inspectors according to the type of facilities that are evaluated. The Czech School Inspectorate pays considerable attention to the training of its inspectors, but focuses primarily on training on the inspection system and the Czech legal system, not on education or child psychology, even though such training is also offered to the inspectors. The capacity building for monitoring facilities that are part of the education system is ensured, and the CSI is able to provide the inspection service fully to the extent

required of it. The CSI updates the School of Good Quality standards annually; these updates must always be approved by the Ministry of Education.

In children's groups there is no systematic inspection or supervision yet. The checks are carried out by inspectors from the State Office of Labour Inspection and MoLSA officials. Their qualifications are guaranteed by their job position. Providers are primarily trained to monitor the needs and progress of the individual children in order to improve the quality of care and communication with parents / natural guardians. The MoLSA is gradually extending its methodological support to providers. Specific information about the inspection system is not publicly available. There is currently not enough capacity at the MoLSA for regular monitoring activities.

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

At the level of the education system, the funds that make up the CSI's budget are provided for external quality monitoring and professional development of the relevant staff. These are also reinforced by support from the European Structural Funds. Most of the limitations that have been detected in the system remain (high numbers of children in a class, insufficient capacity, demanding administration, high percentage of school deferrals).

In the case of a CG, very limited financial and staffing capacities are allocated to both monitoring and professional training.

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

For the KGs, the CSI ensures the transmission of inspection reports to the school management and the founder and publishes both the inspection reports and data in open data format (questionnaires with school management and teachers, records from class sit-ins). The CSI does not publish auxiliary reports (within open data or in any other way), but only the resulting text of the inspection report, which does not contain any indicators from the reports on which it is partly based. School management has access to the InspIS system. The actual provision and continuous improvement of quality lie with the schools themselves, even though the inspection reports include recommendations for improving school quality where they offer steps to eliminate the weaknesses of a particular school. Guidance is always provided by the inspection reports if the kindergarten does not conform to a parameter laid down by an Act or Decree. School management may provide comments in writing on the content of the CSI inspection report, but the process is rather asymmetrical. Parents are largely neglected in the system; schools are primarily accountable to the CSI and the founder. The founder's supporting role is not clearly set. Communication with the promoter is the responsibility of the KG management.

The sharing of quality information with the KG does not include the full range of monitoring targets. Some of the evaluation parameters are not available publicly or to the schools themselves. However, they are based on the School of Good Quality system. Published class sit-in records do not contain verbal comments or notes or the anonymised identifier of the school or even the class or educator. It is impossible to interconnect the observations made in one school or the observations made in one class. Logical units can only be approximated from the data structure. The resulting inspection report does not comment on the specific teachers or situations or substantiate or justify anything specifically. The

premise is that the principal is to ensure a balanced quality in all the sites and classes the principle is responsible for. The general overall picture is provided by the annual CSI reports and thematic reports and the annual reports of the Ministry of Education.

For the children's groups, regular monitoring of standards is not yet ensured; therefore mechanisms that would coordinate monitoring activities and data flows across different levels of management and individual actors are not yet sufficiently coordinated. The system was developed operationally, including by developing the professional qualifications of a nanny, as a result of the need to provide care for children under 3 years of age. The network of children's groups is fragmented into a large number of small providers, some of which founded their children's group out of the need to provide quality care for their own child, or in the case of on-site children's groups in companies out of the need to provide care for their employees' children. Coordination takes place gradually following the amendment of the Children's Groups Act.

Similarly to the KGs, the sharing of quality information does not include the full range of the CG monitoring objectives in the case of a CG. The MoLSA manages a publicly available Register of Children's Groups, in which it is possible to find out whether the provider's authorisation to provide a service has been revoked. The data-sharing system is not linked to statistical data in the case of either a KG, or a CG.

The openness of data related to ECEC is relatively low. There is no public repository of data from the MoEYS, the MoLSA, or universities or other research institutes, even if the research is funded from public resources. The CZSO publishes data within the scope of the State Statistical Service Act and the requirements of Eurostat. The CSI publishes data within open data, but key variables (such as an anonymised school ID or the date of the data collection) are missing. The data are not in a uniform structure and it is impossible to connect the individual rounds, despite the fact that some of the parameters that are monitored are stable over time.

Goal 4: Ensure that quality monitoring facilitates quality improvements

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

The results of the Czech School Inspectorate's assessment of kindergartens are available both at the level of the individual kindergartens in the form of inspection reports and at the level of the system in the form of annual reports, which contain a chapter dedicated to preschool education. The chapter evaluates the conditions, progress and results of education in kindergartens on the basis of the inspections carried out. The annual report for the 2022/23 school year (CSI, 2023b) states that a total of 997 kindergartens were evaluated in that school year and a total of 7,662 class sit-ins were performed. The report on preschool education was prepared in the following structure:

- Preschool education conditions
- Schools, classes, children and educators in preschool education
- Financial conditions in preschool education
- School design and management

- Quality of the teaching staff
- Process of preschool education
- Organisation of education, methods and forms
- Education of children with special educational needs – the process of joint education
- Prevention of risky behaviour in children
- Preschool education results
- Overall educational outcomes of children
- Conclusions and recommendations for preschool education

In the section devoted to educational outcomes, the annual report focuses in particular on the transition to compulsory education and on the methods used for assessing children's outcomes applied by the individual schools.

In the section on Conclusions and Recommendations, the annual report presents a number of very specific findings on the strengths and weaknesses of preschool education and formulates very specific recommendations for kindergartens, for the founders and for the system. The recommendations are aimed in particular at strengthening children's school preparedness and reducing school deferrals. At the kindergarten level, emphasis is placed on working with children's natural guardians, early diagnosis and monitoring of children's progress, developing problem-solving competences, the continuing education of teaching staff and self-evaluation. At the founder level, support for attendance, capacity building and quality care are recommended; at the system level, the recommendations focus in particular on reducing deferrals and caring for the attendance of children with socio-economic disadvantages.

The list of recommendations shows that the annual report is intended as a basis for improvement. Individual inspection reports can and should, of course, be used as a basis for improvement.

Sometimes the findings of inspection activities are also summarised in thematic reports. The last thematic report on kindergarten education was published in May 2020 and was concerned with education in times of emergency.

However, the annual reports show that some of the problems that are identified remain unaddressed in the system. For example, the CSI itself states in its latest annual report [emphasis added by the authors]: *As in previous years, teachers perceive **excessive administration (61%)**, the high number of children in a class (40%), insufficient public perception of the prestige of the teaching profession (30%), the psychological intensity of the profession (23%) and attitude of natural guardians (24%) as the biggest limitations of their work. They also quite often mention salary (17%), disobedient children (16%) and the problems related to the education of children under 3 years of age (16%). Only 7% of educators do not perceive any obstacles. The need of educators to receive more significant support corresponds to the list of obstacles. **It is worth noting that 42% of educators mention the need for more inspiration in the area of teaching methods and forms.*** (CSI, 2023: 26). Administration was already mentioned as the most common barrier (59.4%) in the CSI's Annual Report for the 2014/2015 school year (CSI, 2015).

Preparatory classes are evaluated in the framework of inspections of primary schools. The Annual Report of the CSI does not address them specifically.

The Czech School Inspectorate regularly updates the evaluation criteria on the basis of

which it evaluates kindergartens and primary schools which include preparatory classes. It also regularly updates the tools by which the evaluation is carried out. When assessing the work of a school, the inspectors take into account the local context, i.e. the conditions in which the individual establishments function.

The Annual Report on the State and Development of Education in the Czech Republic published by the Ministry of Education can also serve as a basis for improving quality at the level of the education system. The last published report from 2022 (the Ministry of Education, 2022) highlights in the section devoted to preschool education the creation of methodological material for educational diagnosis and this being made available to educators. It also mentions the revision of the framework education programme and the monitoring and capacity building for Ukrainian children. In the section titled “Education in 2022 in Data”, statistical data are given on the number of applications received and rejected, on the number of children by age and sex in kindergartens, preparatory classes and preparatory grades, and their development over time. Special attention is paid to Ukrainian children. Further, data on the numbers of teachers are given, including information on the proportion of male teachers.

The results of children’s education in kindergartens in the Czech Republic are not systematically and especially uniformly evaluated, i.e. it is impossible to analyse the factors that have a positive influence on them on the basis of the data obtained by the inspection activities.

Aggregation of data that would provide useful data to local providers of primary education and care is possible only to a limited extent, as inspections in kindergartens and primary schools take place roughly once every 6 years, i.e. aggregation to smaller units gives only limited information on the current state in a specific place. Summary information is usually published at the level of regions.

Assessment of children’s groups is not carried out regularly and is not processed at the level of the system. It can therefore serve as feedback only in the facilities where it took place.

Other ECEC facilities are not systematically evaluated; however, in some of them monitoring takes place with the aim of increasing quality. The umbrella organisations of certain providers (for example AFKG, networks of children’s groups) also apply their own standards and their own monitoring methods (e.g. 100 Groups administer feedback questionnaires to parents of the children attending CGs as well as to carers). In the case of AFKG, the standards are used to certify forest kindergartens and forest clubs. The Step by Step association also has its own standards, *Competent Teacher for the 21st Century*, which are used to certify teachers. This association brings together kindergartens and primary schools, which apply the Start Together teaching approach (see Chapter 4 for more details).

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

The results of inspections of kindergartens and primary schools are communicated in an intelligible form on an individual and aggregated level. The individual inspection reports are publicly available on the CSI website, as are annual reports or thematic reports, which focus on detailed analyses of the selected phenomena. Partial data obtained by the individual inspectors in the framework of inspection activities are stored in the inspection system.

Part of the data obtained by the CSI are available for further analyses in the open data system, but without the necessary documentation. For example, 4,875 out of 4,931 kindergarten teachers from all over the Czech Republic responded to a battery of questions focused on support in the 2022/2023 school year, so it is a very robust data set. The CSI itself states in the open data documentation that the answers of the school teachers serve as supplementary information to the inspection findings obtained from class sit-ins, from the analysis of the school documentation, and from other sources²⁰. Such data could be used to describe the situation at the system level (taking into account the fact that the data are collected by the CSI, not by an independent entity). However, a necessary condition is the documentation of the data, which is not part of the open data. Publication of a questionnaire including filters and information on whether the items are rotated within the batteries would be helpful.

When one compares several sets of questionnaires of KG teachers from the open data, it is obvious at first glance that the names of the same variables are not identical over time and the order of the items within the batteries is not identical either. The names of the variables are exclusively numerical, so they do not allow a logical check on the correct assignment of the names of the variables within the given battery of questions. The lack of a school identifier also means the teachers' data cannot be linked with the data on the schools that are evaluated (sit-in forms). At the same time, for example, a battery of barriers to the profession suggests that linking such data with information on how many children attend the given kindergarten and in what structure they do so could yield further useful information.

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

There are no tools for recognising, valuing and rewarding high-quality work in the public sector in the Czech Republic. Some networks (e.g. AFKG, Start Together, Health Promoting School, etc.) offer certifications that can serve as a quality label. If some providers provide certifications, they are not coordinated with each other. State-guaranteed certificates are not provided, and certification is only performed by the non-profit sector to a very limited extent. No financial incentives for these types of processes are provided.

Monitoring is systematically carried out only in the case of facilities that are part of the education system. There is no discernible link between quality monitoring and the objectives set out in the strategic documents and their evaluation. The objectives are based primarily on participation indicators (obtained from statistical reports). The need for educating the teaching staff stems from the efforts to eliminate school deferrals and from the presence of Ukrainian children in kindergartens. Evaluation will be carried out through the Operational Programme Johannes Amos Comenius indicators on the numbers of people trained.

CGs are supervised by the State Office for Labour Inspection and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Thus, the inspection activity is more fragmented compared to kindergartens. The methodology for monitoring the quality of care in the CG is developed at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, but there is not sufficient capacity for regular monitoring. Supervision is thus carried out only on the basis of requests and on rare occasions, and thus cannot be expected to bring major incentives for improving the quality of care.

20 Documentation for the „Questionnaire for kindergarten teachers 2022/23” is available at <https://opendata.csicr.cz/DataSet/Documentation/103>

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

A variety of educational programmes of public and non-public providers are available to ECEC staff; education is available to all types of providers.

The education of employees is embedded in the standards for kindergartens as well as in the standards for children's groups. The degree of use of the educational offer by ECEC staff depends on their personal motivation and the support of managers and is not systematically monitored.

Annex 3

Analytical tool

PRE-PRIMARY SUBSECTOR ANALYSIS TOOL

Module 5: Quality assurance

Goal 1: Establish comprehensive standards for service quality

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

- Q1** Do the pre-primary service standards clearly define their purpose? Does the content provide specific details to match and help fulfil the standards' intentions, e.g. for quality assurance, regulation, accreditation or minimum requirements for operations, staff, curricula, materials, etc.? Are these standards the same or adapted for emergencies and/or refugee settings, and if different, is the purpose clearly defined?
- Q2** If the service quality standards describe *aspirational goals*, do they provide a system of steps or levels that indicate how a pre-primary programme can advance from its current status to the desired, higher-level quality practices? This system might, for example, have three levels or "stars", with one star representing basic levels of teacher training, provision of some opportunities for children's play, etc., and more stars given to programmes that meet higher standards, such as a higher proportion of teachers who have formal training or a fully developed and implemented play-based learning curriculum.

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

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

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

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

Structural quality standards cover health and hygiene, working conditions and safety, programme duration and hours of operation, financial resource management, and levels of education and training for staff, among other physical and organizational elements. In many countries, structural quality standards are established in government policies.

Process quality standards encompass teacher-child interactions, teaching practices, play-based learning, gender responsiveness, curriculum implementation, children's use of materials, parents' involvement, and other indicators of how teaching and learning take place in pre-primary settings.

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

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

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

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

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

Measure 4 – Service standards are designed to facilitate monitoring.

- Q1** Are the quality standards detailed, coherent and feasible, so that they are easy to understand by teachers, trainers, supervisors, inspectors, standards officers and others in the pre-primary subsector? What areas may need further specification or clarification?
- Q2** Are the quality standards designed and written so they can be easily incorporated into and reflected in monitoring tools for assessing and improving quality? What is the current status of such monitoring tools? Are there different sets of monitoring tools based on different standards for different providers (typically private and non-subsidized providers)?
- Q3** Are the quality standards applicable and enforceable across all service providers, responsible authorities and settings (private, community, public, etc.)? If they are not, is there a common, agreed-upon core of quality features applicable to all services?
- Q4** If service quality standards are not applicable or enforceable across all providers:
 - a) Are there different sets of standards for different providers, such as the private and non-subsidized providers that are frequently part of the pre-primary context?
 - b) Are these providers required to provide data on the quality of their services?
 - c) Are regulations in place to cover providers that are not subject to national service quality standards? For the purpose of overseeing the quality of their operations, this could include regulations for financial reporting, market entry requirements, and penalty mechanisms for non-compliance.
 - d) Is there a commonly accepted core of quality features that applies to all services, even when specific standards might apply to only some programme auspices?

Goal 2: Establish functional quality assurance mechanisms, based on the overarching goals

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

- Q1** What purpose, scope and crucial policy questions does the country's pre-primary system need to answer through monitoring? These will include key aspects of the subsector – workforce development, curriculum, access, equity, etc., as described across the other core functions and tool modules.
- Q2** Have decisions been made about what types of data are most essential to collect? Are the types of data to be collected consistent with the scope and goals of the pre-primary system? For example, are data related to teacher practices (ex. play-based pedagogy) being regularly collected and used to inform improvements and policy?
- Q3** Is it clear where data gaps exist? If there are gaps, how would they be resolved?

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

- Q1** Is an external system in place for monitoring service quality through regulations, accreditation, inspection and other external review processes? Such an external monitoring system would be implemented by appropriately qualified personnel and would clearly address:
- the purposes and goals of external monitoring;
 - types of data and information to be gathered;
 - processes/mechanisms for sharing feedback; and
 - frequency and duration of external monitoring.
- Q2** Are there established and appropriate tools/instruments, mechanisms and procedures for monitoring and enforcing service quality standards (checklists, observation tools, inspection tools, etc.)? Consider whether these tools/instruments are:
- user-friendly;
 - culturally appropriate;
 - consistent with ethical standards; and
 - accompanied by appropriate guidance for their use.
- Q3** Are there standardized data collection processes for monitoring/enforcing quality standards? This can happen, for example, through the national EMIS or other established data collection mechanisms. Standardized data collection helps ensure that the information collected across sites is captured in similar ways and will have similar meanings to inform national, regional and local improvements.

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

- Q1** Is there an internal service quality monitoring system in place to measure and facilitate quality improvements in local contexts? Are there inconsistencies in the settings or auspices that implement internal monitoring?
- Q2** Are standardized mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring in effect? These include, for example, guidelines for internal monitoring and self-assessment tools, such as surveys, portfolios, journals and checklists.
- Q3** Are the internal monitoring mechanisms clear and easy to use by programme personnel? Are they well-aligned with the service quality standards and with other related standards as described in the other core functions, such as curriculum standards or teacher competence standards?
- Q4** How do the mechanisms and tools for internal monitoring help staff and administrators document and reflect on their practice and the overall functioning of the setting? Is there evidence that they are used for these purposes?

Goal 3: Strengthen capacity across the subsector to monitor quality

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

- Q1** Have policy directives been issued/developed specific to monitoring, roles, time-lines, etc.? Are gaps or lack of shared knowledge evident within existing policies?
- Q2** Is there a shared understanding among monitoring and quality assurance stakeholders of the broader monitoring plan and how specific data collection efforts – such as preschool inspections or the involvement of standards officers – work to support policy questions and decisions?
- Q3** Is there a single, recognized institution or structure in place to ensure service quality monitoring? Or are separate institutions responsible for regular monitoring/quality assurance at the national and subnational levels?
- Q4** Are the roles and accountability structures for monitoring and regulating pre-primary services and providers clear from national to subnational and local levels? In many countries, there has been considerable decentralization or devolution of responsibilities for various functions – including monitoring – from the central/national level to greater involvement at the provincial, district, zone, school or community levels. The extent of decentralization is therefore an important consideration in monitoring and regulating pre-primary services.
- Q5** Do monitoring tools exist for each level of monitoring? Are there gaps in availability or access to these tools?

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

- Q1** Are there enough inspectors, supervisors and other staff to carry out inspections and assessments of compliance with service quality standards? Are new staff roles required, so that the system can effectively monitor quality and use data? Are inspectors, supervisor and other staff trained in early childhood education?
- Q2** Is there attention to the range of distinctive roles involved in quality assurance – including inspectors, teachers, principals, supervisors as well as regulatory agencies? Are the skills needed specifically for pre-primary education data collection, analysis, use and reflection considered? For example, inspectors need training on understanding early childhood education, play-based learning and pedagogy, pre-primary quality inspection, and teachers need preparation to accurately complete classroom observation records.

- Q3** Are all staff who are involved in monitoring and quality assurance provided with training and supported to carry out their respective roles and responsibilities? What are the current gaps in training and support?
- Q4** Is there guidance for pre-primary providers on what data should be collected, how it should be collected, and the potential uses of data to support quality improvement? Is there evidence that pre-primary providers understand and follow this guidance?
- Q5** Have priority targets and gradual, interim steps been identified to build the capacities of those responsible for monitoring in the country?

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

- Q1** Does the pre-primary plan's financial framework include allocations and projections for quality assurance at all levels? Are there gaps? If so, in what specific areas, e.g. needs for investment at the local level?
- Q2** Are there financial resources for training and professional development of staff involved in monitoring and quality assurance – including on-site inspectors and local administrators?
- Q3** Are financial resources for routine monitoring and supervision activities sufficient across the subsector? This includes, for example, funds to cover staff salaries, materials required for monitoring, e.g. inspection checklists, staff travel to different pre-primary settings, and production of data analysis reports. Are financial resources available for quality assurance staff (such as supervisors and inspectors) to provide support to teachers and other staff (e.g. help them create quality improvement plans)?

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

- Q1** Are mechanisms in place to coordinate monitoring activities and the flow of data across all levels of government and across actors, including national and international humanitarian and refugee coordination entities? Are there aspects that are not currently well coordinated?
- Q2** Do coordination mechanisms include all stakeholders involved in monitoring and quality assurance, so that their feedback and contributions are taken into account? How does coordination take place – in person, online, by written communication?
- Q3** Does the sharing of information about quality include the full scope of monitoring targets to provide a broad, coordinated picture? For example, are data shared about overall service quality, staff performance, child outcomes, etc.?
- Q4** Are the current data systems for pre-primary indicators aligned with school data systems and humanitarian and/or refugee systems, so that data may be shared and collaboratively examined?
- Q5** Is there a clear mapping of existing data collection efforts – such as the EMIS, household surveys, emergency assessments or research studies – across the sub-sector and all indicators being captured?

Goal 4: Ensure that quality monitoring facilitates quality improvements

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

- Q1** Are the results from monitoring – including annual reviews and/or evaluation and humanitarian and/or refugee review processes – used to inform improvement in policy and practice for the subsector (for example, do pre-primary teachers and other staff use the results from monitoring to improve their practice)? If not, where are the barriers?
- Q2** Are the data reviewed regularly across levels of government to ensure their relevance and effectiveness with respect to policy and programme improvements?
- Q3** Can links be made between the collected indicators related to programmes, staff, supply/demand and child outcomes? For example, data on differences in service quality indicators, such as disparities in access to staff training, may be associated with differences in child outcomes, such as school readiness indicators. In this example, the information might suggest a need for greater attention to access to training on specific kinds of teaching competences.
- Q4** Are there methods to aggregate or disaggregate the information in a way that helps local pre-primary providers address deficits in quality teaching practices? For example, is it possible for providers to see patterns of strength and weakness in teachers' implementation of specific aspects of a new curriculum?
- Q5** Are data on the implementation and impact of service quality standards collected and examined to identify need for changes in standards or their implementation? For example, the data may show that standards are not well-implemented in rural areas, which also may lack local capacities to coach or mentor teachers.

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

- Q1** Are the collected data presented and communicated to all stakeholders who are involved in monitoring activities – inspectors, monitoring departments, etc. – in a user-friendly way? Is there a need to build capacities among those people conducting quality reviews, including skills in communicating with a variety of stakeholders?
- Q2** Are the collected data accessible to all stakeholders and the public through various platforms, e.g. an open source website?
- Q3** Are the national data updated and made available regularly?

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

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

- Q2** Are the processes for acknowledgement and reward of quality achievements and improvements applicable to all pre-primary providers, regardless of settings? Is there attention to the importance of recognizing progress by programmes serving vulnerable populations or working under other challenging conditions?
- Q3** Are pre-primary programmes offered structural or financial incentives to follow the standards, such as certification, capitation grants, official accreditation or financial support? Are resources also available to promote improvements in lower-performing programmes, such as funds for additional training or for teaching-learning materials?

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

- Q1** Is there a system-wide approach to continuous quality improvement that integrates training, mentoring and other professional development opportunities? For example:
- Are pre-primary staff trained and supported by teacher training institutions to make improvements in their teaching practices and to implement internal quality assurance mechanisms, such as self-evaluation and peer mentoring?
- Are ministries of education collaborating with teacher training institutions to ensure that pre-primary staff qualifications and competences are addressed?
- Q2** Is practical support available at the provincial/county, district, zone, school and community subnational levels to strengthen quality service delivery for diverse service providers and different auspices, such as private providers, religious institutions, humanitarian field or refugee camp staff, or full-day vs. part-day programmes?

Annex 4

A showcase of standards of quality in the ECEC sector used by professional ECEC networks in the Czech Republic

The standards showcased below do not provide comprehensive information on how quality benchmarks are set and controlled in the ECEC system (especially in its informal segment). In interviews conducted as part of the quality survey, care providers and representatives of provider networks have repeatedly mentioned that they set their own quality standards or that they conduct surveys among children's parents and/or educators in order to get feedback on their own work. Some organisations also provide education for nannies as part of quality care. The chosen examples of standards serve as an illustration of the range of aspects with which there is experience in the system.

a. Competent Teacher of the 21st Century

Perhaps the best-known standards that influence the quality of preschool education are the *Competent Teacher of the 21st Century: the ISSA International Professional Quality Framework* (Step by Step, 2011), which specify the quality of the work of a teacher in pre-school and primary education. The ISSA International Professional Quality Framework is defined by the following areas of educational process:

- Communication
- Family and Community
- Inclusion, Diversity and Democratic Values
- Planning and Evaluation
- Educational Strategies
- Learning Environment
- Professional Development

Each area contains several criteria (a total of 20 criteria) which are further specified by observable indicators (a total of 84 indicators). The indicators are complemented by a framework of their content, which elaborates the meaning and importance of each indicator, as well as practical examples of how the indicators can be fulfilled.

The main purpose of this document is to enable teachers to evaluate their work more easily and continuously according to clearly defined criteria, to obtain specific feedback on the

area of their current interest in their further professional development and to enable them to plan, independently or with support, further steps and procedures that will lead to an increase in the quality of their work.

The Step by Step organisation offers teachers quality certification, which includes repeated conversations with assessors and sit-ins in the classroom. In sit-ins, the fulfilment of the indicators is evaluated on a scale from 0 to 2 (0 – not occurring, 1 – occurring occasionally, 2 – consistently applied).

To illustrate, we present the first criterion and the corresponding indicators:

Criterion 1.1. The teacher communicates with children in a polite and friendly manner, thus promoting the development of positive self-esteem and self-conception in children.

Indicators:

- 1.1.1. The teacher shows friendliness, warmth, interest and respect to each child in contact with them.
- 1.1.2. The teacher adapts to the child's age, traits and individual dispositions in communication with them.
- 1.1.3. During the day, the teacher often communicates with each child, builds on their strengths and supports them in learning and development.
- 1.1.4. The teacher accepts the emotional, social, physical and cognitive needs of each child.
- 1.1.5. The teacher often provides children with a choice. The teacher respects the children's choice and encourages others to respect it.
- 1.1.6. The teacher's approach to children promotes the development of the children's responsibility, autonomy and self-control.

b. Framework of Professional Qualities of Kindergarten Teachers

The framework was established in 2015 as part of the project "Development of the personal and professional competences of kindergarten and primary school teachers for a higher quality of education" (CZ.1.07/1.3.00/48.0022) at the Department of Primary Education of the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University (Syslová, 2015). The *Framework of Professional Qualities of Kindergarten Teachers* is rooted in professional activities. These activities reflect the professional competences of a teacher, understood as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and personality characteristics. The *Framework of Professional Qualifications of Kindergarten Teachers* is expressed in the form of quality criteria in the following eight areas:

1. Planning the educational offer.

The teacher plans the education systematically, i.e. what, how and why children are to learn in relation to the educational objectives set out in the curricular documents and with regard to the children's individual possibilities and needs.

2. Learning environment.

The teacher creates such environment in the classroom in which children feel good and in which they can work with high intensity. The teacher treats each child as a unique human being and without prejudice.

3. Learning processes.

The teacher uses teaching strategies that enable each child to understand the content of education, develop the desired competences and acquire the internal motivation and skills for lifelong learning and cognition.

4. Assessment of children's educational progress.

The teacher evaluates children in a way that allows them to gain enough information for their further learning and learn self-evaluation.

5. Reflection of education.

The teacher assesses the processes and results of the planning and implementation of education in order to improve the quality of their work and thus increase the effectiveness of the child's learning.

6. School development and cooperation with colleagues.

The teacher is an active member of the school community and participates in the development of the school and in the improvement of education. They contribute to creating a positive school climate; they are aware that they are the beacon of the school culture.

7. Cooperation with parents and the wider public.

The teacher searches for and uses opportunities for cooperation with parents and other school partners in order to jointly promote the quality of children's learning.

8. The teacher's professional development.

The teacher solves professional challenges and tasks and accepts responsibility for possible risks and their solutions.

Indicators are developed for each area. Standards are developed into a self-evaluation tool for educators.

c. Health Promoting School

Health Promoting School²¹ is a World Health Organisation programme which systematically addresses issues and problems in the area of physical, mental and social health. The goal of the HPS programme is to promote health at all its levels. The programme in the Czech Republic is sponsored by the State Health Institute. Many public and non-public kindergartens in the country have joined the network of healthy kindergartens. Schools use the Health Promoting School brand as a quality label.

Principles of the Health Promoting School in kindergartens:

- a teacher promoting health,
- age-mixed classes,
- a rhythmic order of life and of the day,
- physical well-being and free movement,
- proper nutrition,
- spontaneous play,
- a stimulating factual environment,
- a safe social environment,
- participatory and team management,
- partnership relations with parents,
- a kindergarten cooperating with a primary school,
- integrating a kindergarten into the life of the community.

d. Quality Standards for Forest Kindergartens and Clubs

The *Quality Standards for Forest Kindergartens and Clubs* (AFKG, 2018) were established to guarantee children, their parents and staff members of forest kindergartens and clubs, as well as state administration bodies, a certain quality of work in the FKG / Forest Club. The fulfilment of the Quality Standards is the goal for each Association of Forest Kindergartens member organisation. They can use them for their own evaluation or they can go through the certification process. On its website, the Association of Forest Kindergartens recommends the certification process for all kindergartens, especially those considering registration in the School Register. It states that the evaluation criteria of the Quality Standards are in many respects identical to the CSI's evaluation criteria, but they affect the quality aspects of working with children and the team to a much greater extent.

The standards are formulated in 11 areas divided into 3 subgroups:

I. Procedural standards

- S1. Educational objectives and conditions
- S2. Documentation on the education and education of children
- S3. Working with children
- S4. Parents' feedback on the quality of activity
- S6. Provision of information on activity

21 <https://www.nzip.cz/clanek/326-program-skola-podporujici-zdravi-spz>

II. Personal standards

S7. Staff provision

S8. Professional development of staff members

III. Operational standards

S9. Environment

S10. Financial sustainability

S11. Emergency and emergency situations

e. 100 Groups Network values

The non-profit organisation 100 Groups, according to the information provided on its website²², establishes and operates respectful kindergartens in the Czech Republic. Its founders aim to take care of preschool children and give their parents a chance to find a job. In addition to increasing their capacities, the organisation aims to improve the quality of care and education of our future generation.

The organisation's work is based on the following values:

We aim for the stars: We know who we are, where we are going and how we want to get there. And we are not afraid to aim for the stars.

We listen to reason and the heart: If we can, we try to help, even if it may not be in our job description.

We help each other: We are partners. We rely on each other, we trust each other and we are open to feedback. Together we grow professionally and as human beings.

We feel responsible: Every day we get up thinking that our work influences future generations. We try to do the best we can.

We engage others: We believe in connecting people with the same values. That's why we are building a community of professionals, educators, nannies, parents and other pre-school enthusiasts and educators.

We learn from mistakes: A mistake is a friend – that's what we teach kids in our kindergartens. Mistakes are an inevitable part of the learning process. And it's good to count on that and not give up.

Annex 5

A selection of findings from the qualitative survey of mothers with preschool children undertaken as part of the project

This annex presents the findings from the qualitative survey carried out among mothers of preschool children concerning the areas which mothers find to be problematic. A total of 44 mothers and foster mothers of preschool children from all over the Czech Republic were interviewed. These findings illustrate some of the shortcomings that persist in the system and should not be left out in the design of a quality monitoring system or should receive more attention than they are getting now.

a. Accessibility

Access to services in the current setting is strongly related to the child's place of residence and date of birth. In the Czech Republic, the continuity of parental leave and guaranteed places in ECEC is not ensured. For children born on or after 1 January 2024, the maximum period of parental leave will be 3 years; however, the entitlement to a place in the kindergarten does not arise on the day when the child reaches the age of 3 and when the parent ends parental leave, but only on the 1 September after the child reaches the age of 3. Other legislative changes, such as the upcoming amendment to the Children's Groups Act, including neighbourhood children's groups, or the reduction of insurance premiums for part-time jobs (valid from 1 February 2024), are intended to help reconcile childcare and work. However, in the interviews and focus groups, it was mentioned that in some positions (e.g. in public administration) in the case of part-time jobs, the volume of work may not change, but the salary may be lowered according to pay scales (e.g. in the case of kindergarten staff members the direct teaching obligation in the kindergarten will remain the same).

The accessibility varies from facility to facility. For example, some kindergartens may accept a child during the school year after his or her third birthday. Only in some kindergartens is there an effort to ensure operation even in the early morning and later afternoon (e.g. by combining children from two classes into one for a limited period of time). The possibility of leaving a child in a kindergarten for longer is used by those who cannot take turns with someone else when picking up their child (as can be the case for single parents). Longer operating hours also allow parents to work full-time.

Additionally, the offer of children's groups is not available across the board and is more expensive than public kindergartens. Some parents who have successfully taken advantage of the offer of children's groups are moving their children into kindergartens when they are entitled to do so, not only because of their lower financial demands, but also because they perceive them as preschool education and preparation for school (e.g. pronunciation exercises, focus on consonants) in contrast to children's groups. In some cases, the desire for the child to become more familiar with peers from the given community with whom they will later go to school also plays a role.

The approach to both children and parents is linked to staffing as well as to the specific educational programme. Interviews with parents who have a child who is somehow outside the norm or who has specific needs indicated that parents perceive a problem arising, among other things, from the lack of professional capacity in preschool facilities.

This is also linked to the segregation tendencies of some kindergartens encountered by some Roma mothers. The kindergartens refused to accept their children into sites which were attended predominantly by children from the majority (white) population and insisted on the child attending sites attended by Roma children, even if they were more distant from the child's place of residence. The services provided in "Roma" kindergartens differed significantly from those provided in mainstream kindergartens. There were no swimming lessons, English lessons and trips offered. Some Roma mothers reported that the kindergarten had demanded advance payments of several thousand CZK from them, which they perceived as discriminatory.

b. Helpful communication and information provision

The large differences in the number of children per caregiver, especially when one compares children's groups and kindergartens, also have an impact on the service settings. Children's groups may in principle be more open and accessible, but for some parents (e.g. some single parents) they are financially inaccessible.

During the interviews and group discussions, mothers reported that regular communication is common in children's groups and private facilities, both in person when dropping off and picking up children and electronically (e.g. groups on social media such as WhatsApp or Facebook). One of the children's groups that was described, for example, uses an entry questionnaire in which the parent / natural guardian states what the child enjoys, what they respond to or if they have any specific words. Nevertheless, barriers are sometimes perceived even in this setting (the adaptation period is not well described or the programme does not seem well adapted to very young children).

In public kindergartens, the level of communication with parents is generally perceived as not quite sufficient, although some mothers have sympathy for this with regard to the number of children per teacher/carer. Some kindergartens still provide information mainly through a bulletin board, but gradually they too are moving to an electronic communication system, especially in recent years.

For example, last year it was worse with the fact that the teachers didn't put very much of the current stuff into the "Our kindergarten" [section]. So it was worse for me to follow the current information and get to it. I wasn't sure that, I don't know, it was a public holiday and then one day, whether the kindergarten was open. (IDI M11, a single mother)

The system of bulletin boards is also perceived by parents as not working when providing information about the spread of childhood diseases.

My child attends the main building, so [there are] four classes and 27 children in each class. They always meet in the locker room, of course. So there's exactly this problem that if there's a more serious disease there, it gradually circulates around the whole kindergarten. We had it now in the autumn with some unpleasant [...] infection. What bothers me is that by the time this gets going and you can already see that there's three children in one class, there's three children in another class, there's no system of communication with those parents. [...] We found out at the end of the second week when this was running in the kindergarten, so my husband found out in the locker room from the teacher: "Well, if you don't have to, don't put X here because there's been a [...] infection in the kindergarten for two weeks." And actually, there's no other way of communication with those parents. Well, then, since we found out this way, they wrote it on the board [...], and it hung there for the next three weeks. (FG M04, R2)

The lack of communication in some cases also concerns basic matters such as the organisation of sleeping or eating, but awareness of the spread of diseases is generally perceived as essential.

It would be nice if I had more information on a normal day, but I don't think that is the point. The point for me is to know about fundamental things like that there is an epidemic in the kindergarten and that we are already technologically all at such a point that the kindergarten could set up one channel where it will have everyone contacted and by the time something like this happens it will be able to send everyone a message in time, I think that should be the whole point. (FG M4, R2)

The lack of communication also manifests itself when the child does not conform to the norm or the idea of how it should behave or how independent it should be at a certain age. In this case, it sometimes happens that the need for a deferral even before the last pre-school year is indicated to the parents or even the child is told that something is "wrong" with him or her.

I think that the kindergarten, as long as everything there is in line with normal, then everything is fine. But as soon as there is quote "a problem", unquote, because we also perceive it at home [the child does not want to dress when he or she is preoccupied with something else], in this case I think they do not know how to work with it. (IDI M21)

Even if there is also an assistant in the class, they often only have a short retraining course; they do not have to have a degree in teaching, special education or psychology. Other parents may perceive them more as an assistant to a particular child. Even the functionality of their involvement can be largely dependent on the experience of the kindergarten and the particular teacher to whose class they are assigned.

Some parents do not perceive the communication of the kindergarten as inappropriate, but rather as insufficient. In the case of kindergartens, parents are usually informed about the general programme of the kindergarten or events, but in some cases there is a lack of communication about the child's progress and needs.

For example, my son has been there [in the kindergarten] for two years, so now I miss the teacher actually finding five minutes and saying, I don't know, he's skilful at this, he's good at drawing, this, but you should improve this, for example. I don't really know how he behaves in the kindergarten at all, that's how I would describe it. I know what they do, I know what their regime is. You can read that, it's really transparent almost everywhere, but then you need to introduce in kindergartens something like parent-teacher conferences in schools or something like that [they subsequently also mentioned the offer of individual consultations], where the parents learn a little more about what the child can do, how they operate, how they behave in the group of other children. This way it's really kind of everything being accelerated. One picks up the child after lunch, so it's just "Hello, goodbye". (FG M3)

Both Ukrainian and Roma mothers complained about the lack of communication. In both cases they complained about the difficulty of orientation in the system of early childhood education and care and the unwillingness of kindergarten staff to advise them on how to proceed when trying to place their child. Ukrainian mothers also complained about the difficulty for them of navigating the Czech traditions and holidays and the requirements of kindergartens associated with these traditions.

Both Roma and Ukrainian mothers reported situations where kindergartens were unable to deal with their children's problems because of their lack of Czech language knowledge or special educational needs and initiated the child's departure process instead of cooperating.

c. Carers

Most respondents who had children in a children's group greatly appreciated the staff of the children's group their child was attending. They especially appreciated the helpful behaviour, individual care and flexibility. However, there were also cases where respondents had doubts as to whether the daily programme was optimally set up for the children's needs and whether the carers had a good estimate of their potential.

Mothers whose children attended public kindergartens more often mentioned the absence of individual care, tensions between the principal and the staff or the teachers in one class, or generally significant differences in the teachers' approach to the children. In some cases, they could not help feeling that not much had changed since they attended the kindergartens themselves. The tensions and questionable approach to children are also discussed on social media and discussion platforms, including by the KG teachers themselves.

One of the mothers, who used to work in a kindergarten and subsequently in her company's children's group, is convinced that becoming even more responsive to parents under the current conditions comes up against both financial and systemic barriers.

The teachers [in public kindergartens] are terrified every year, afraid that there will be too few children, because when there are fewer children, they reduce their hours because the founders will take your money. The Ministry of Education, I sometimes feel, is waiting to see what the kindergartens can take. How much more [work] we can give them and until when they can do it and when they just [...] say "STOP, we cannot do this." They keep giving the kindergartens more [work], more needs, more children, more inclusion and socialisation, everything, and the kindergartens keep trying to fight it [...] I think we should start at the top and go down because the kindergartens at the bottom, no one at the bottom will change anything, the directors won't change the system, the providers won't change it either. The Ministry should especially change the approach and start being a little bit [here] for the families and thinking about the families and thinking about how to help them with the kindergartens. (FG M4, R3)

Similarly, the providers of care in children's groups and forest clubs said that the main weakness of care in kindergartens was the high number of children per teacher, which makes it impossible to provide individual care and to set the same standards of communication as there are in children's groups and informal facilities, where the ratio between the number of children and the carer is more favourable.

However, some respondents said that the conditions were very different in the case of both private kindergartens and children's groups; the teachers may have significantly fewer children in the classroom, but they may have less annual leave and longer working hours.

They offer [in the on-site CGs in companies] terrible money, terrible conditions. And 8.5 hours, sorry, no one from education who has run away from kindergarten will do 8.5 hours in a row when they can do six hours in a place for better money and just have a summer holiday. Here you go all year round. (FG M4, R3)

d. Educational programme and adaptation of a child

Parents appreciate if the facility offers children a respectful and readable environment with a defined order.

Foreign and Roma mothers appreciate the quality of preparation for school, which they themselves cannot help the child with.

In children's groups, it is well appreciated if the facility establishes clear profiles and brings something to the children that the parents consider beneficial (e.g. CGs operating in English or CGs referring to Montessori or Waldorf education or a combination of both).

So the children's group was not in our village, it was [...] in the town, but a perfect group. They were actually alternating the Waldorf and Montessori approaches. So they were developing the children beautifully according to weekly themes. I have to say that he was very happy there. (IDI M09)

In this particular children's group, the mother also appreciated the good setting of the initial adaptation period with regard to the way the child behaves.

In the classic public kindergarten the child cries, they take him from you, yeah, and they go, but here it was like, not that they talked him into it, they also took him, but they amused him, they started talking to him /.../ it was different than it would be a shock to take him away. (IDI M09)

When the mother picked him up, she agreed with the staff on the next day's regime.

"He is very skilful. The way we see it is that he could hold on, he is interested in things, he plays. So try again in those two hours, let him adapt." (IDI M09)

Some parents encountered the fact that the teachers in the kindergarten / carers in the CG failed to adapt to the child and instead of trying to solve the problem, they looked for the fault in the child. Parents usually solve the situation by changing the facility the child goes to or staying at home with the child.

In this context, Roma mothers pointed out that it is extremely painful for Roma mothers when their child is unhappy and complained that the kindergarten is not willing to take this fact into account when preparing the child to stay in the facility. According to their information, this often leads to the child not going to the kindergarten, even if the family initially wanted them to.

Parents themselves note that even a smaller number of children per caregiver in children's groups does not guarantee the child's smooth adaptation to the new environment and regime. In some cases, the CG sets a plan for the child's gradual adaptation to the new environment (increasing the time the child spends in the CG) and explaining to the child what awaits them, while in others it proceeds less systematically and, on the contrary, waits for the child's reaction. In kindergartens, there is usually even less room for the adaptation period. It helps parents if the child has already gained experience with a foreign environment/group elsewhere (e.g. in a children's group or in a short-term programme, e.g. during the summer holidays). In some cases, problems with attending the facility appear later when the child has been there for some time. In this case, parents are sometimes referred for a psychological or psychiatric evaluation of the child.

One of the mothers perceives that a certain amount of inexperience, or on the contrary, burnout combined with a lack of expertise may be an obstacle to an open and inclusive environment in kindergartens and, consequently, primary schools that cannot be overcome even by education and psychological counselling or a psychologist.

I think that the child deserves respect at least in that they are a human being. And there is no need for them [to] say these things about their person in front of them, because they will have traumas that they will have to deal with afterwards. [...]

[It would help] if the approach were more respectful. When I say respectful, I don't mean liberal. And if they understood the child's developmental psychology, simply worked with the person up to six years of age in that preschool education. To know more about what will support the child's personality up to the age of six rather than killing it. And to develop what can be developed up to those six years. But, let's face it, they don't have time to develop on the other hand. (IDI M09)

In some kindergartens the child has to lie in bed even if they don't want to sleep or don't need to. In others the option is offered to move to another part of the classroom or another part of the kindergarten (e.g. to an after-school programme).

Some parents have no idea about what their children eat unless the child tells them themselves, which bothers some mothers because they take great care to prepare healthy food at home.

Some kindergartens, on the other hand, even prepare documents summarising, for example, the half-year period, mapping out where the child has moved on, where its strengths and weaknesses are, and providing recommendations to parents with references to materials with which they can work with the child at home.

Differences in the open approach of facilities and their staff to parents are also reflected in the approach to children. Especially in public kindergartens, pressure to adapt the child to the facility and its rules is sometimes described.

When there are older teachers, or we have a principal who is more vigorous, everyone is saying, for example, that these children are now such that they have a free upbringing. And that in their time, before, it was done differently. They would say: "so the child is crying, so leave them be and go". It really used to be done more vigorously. But we already do this so much, or it seems to me, at least I perceive it in my social bubble, that we as mothers do not want this kind of approach any more. That rather we try to take the child into account, to make them happy and to make the adaptation a calm process, so that it is not too difficult for the child, because it is a big step. (FG M3)

The lack of communication may also concern any other suggestions from parents (e.g. a visit to a speech therapist in the kindergarten in the framework of speech prevention is impossible "because speech therapists are not available").

Annex 6

2023–2027 Long-Term Plan for Education and the Development of the Education System of the Czech Republic

Measure A.1 Ensuring the implementation of the updated FEP PE

Key Activity A.1.1 Supporting the implementation of the FEP PE in schools

- Modified tool (digital environment) for the creation of the FEP PE
- Verifying the work with the innovative curriculum in a minimum of 500 kindergartens

Key Activity A.1.2 Supporting the continuing education of teaching staff in PE

- Offer of further education of teaching staff for PE
- Courses offered (webinars, seminars); a minimum of 500 trained participants by the end of 2027
- Ensuring further education of teaching staff aimed at supporting the implementation of the FEP PE: 500 kindergartens by the end of 2024, all kindergartens by the end of 2025

Measure A.2 Availability of preschool education in accordance with legal entitlement from when the child is 3 years old

Key Activity A.2.1 Monitoring the causes of non-participation in preschool education and implementation of measures

- Report from monitoring the causes of non-participation in PE, including a proposal for relevant measures
- Implementation of proposed measures
- Evaluation of the impacts of the implementation of proposed measures
- Increasing the proportion of children involved in early childhood education

Key activity A.2.2 Ensuring the necessary capacity

- Analysis of the local tax budget with a focus on the extent to which it is used for kindergartens
- Analysis of the system of financing of the capacity of kindergartens

- Regular demographic analysis of changes in the population of children, including demographic prediction of the population of a given age group
- Identification of areas where the capacity of kindergartens might be insufficient, resulting in cooperation with promoters in identified areas

Measure A.3 Reduction of the number of compulsory school deferrals

Key activity A.3.1 Support for educational diagnostics in kindergartens and special educational diagnostics in school counselling facilities

- Updated offer of courses for further education of teaching staff in educational diagnostics – offer in all regions of the Czech Republic
- Minimum of 500 trained teaching staff members of educational and psychological counselling offices and kindergartens in communication with natural guardians
- Model of a uniform procedure for assessing school readiness for all kindergartens
- Reduction of the number of school deferrals by at least one third in 2027 compared to 2023

Key activity A.3.2 Streamlining the conditions and organisation of preschool education

- Analyses carried out in preschool education
- Proposal for further measures based on analyses

Key activity A.3.3 Increasing the competences of teaching staff in kindergartens and other actors to educate children from different socio-cultural backgrounds

- Minimum of 500 teaching staff members trained in further education of teaching staff focused on educating children from different socio-cultural backgrounds

Key activity A.3.4 Tightening the legislative criteria under which deferral of school attendance will be possible

- Amendment to the Education Act (with deferred effect)

In the next part of the document, further measures to support structurally affected regions are devoted to preschool education.

Measure E.2 Maximising the participation of socially disadvantaged children in preschool education

Key activity E.2.1 Creating the conditions for establishing school-family cooperation

- Creating a proposal for systemic funding of kindergartens with a higher share of socio-economically disadvantaged children along the lines of primary school support

Key activity G.2.6 Creating a model of institutionalisation of supportive teaching positions in preschool and secondary education

- Draft legislative modifications and parametrisation of institutionalisation in preschool and secondary education

Key activity G.3.3 Uniform identifier of the beneficiary of education (child, pupil and student)

- Draft legislation for a uniform identifier of the educational subject
- Establishment and use of a uniform identifier of the beneficiary of education allocation tool

Strategy for further development of the network of schools and school facilities

1.1 In the area of preschool education, the Register of Schools and School Facilities will record increases in the capacity of catchment kindergartens, other places for the provision of education or new catchment kindergartens only:

- (a) in places²³ where the capacity of catchment kindergartens is insufficient to accommodate all children between the ages of 3 and 6; or
- (b) in places where, as a result of the demographic trends, it is reasonable to assume that the capacities of catchment kindergartens will be insufficient to accommodate all children between the ages of 3 and 6 in the next 5 years;
- (c) in cases of real interest on the part of the natural guardians of children under the age of 3 which cannot be met because of a lack of capacity.

1.2. Increases in the capacity of non-catchment kindergartens, additional places for the provision of education or new non-catchment kindergartens shall be recorded in the Register of Schools and School Facilities only:

- (a) in the case of real interest in particular on the part of the natural guardians²⁴ of children residing within a reasonable distance (the opinions of other entities, such as local government and local associations dedicated to education, will also be taken into account) and, simultaneously, if the capacity of non-catchment kindergartens entered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities providing education in a similar manner is filled within a reasonable distance; and
- (b) only in those locations²⁵ where the registration of such capacities would not result in a year-on-year increase in the capacity of non-catchment schools by more than 1% of the capacity of catchment schools registered in the School Register as at 30 September in the year which precedes the school year in which the entry of the data in the School Register after the placement of children in the kindergarten is to become effective. At this rate of increase, there may be gradual increases in school facilities, except in locations where there will be a permanent excess of demand for the capacity of non-catchment schools in the coming years, so that the catchment school system is not at risk and there is no year-on-year jump in the capacity of non-catchment schools which would cause a shortage of children in catchment schools and thus significantly reduce the economic efficiency of the catchment school system. At the same time, this increase represents a sufficient volume for the development of non-catchment schools.

²³ The term "place" is a non-specific term, which cannot be further specified due to the factual variety of possible considered cases and will be subject to interpretation in individual proceedings on the inclusion of data in the Register of Schools and School Facilities (it will be decided in relation to the size of the municipality and accessibility by transport).

²⁴ The assessment of real interest only pertains to the inclusion of new kindergartens.

²⁵ The term location will be determined in individual proceedings on the inclusion of data in the Register of Schools and School Facilities based on an adequate commuting time at the level of county (level LAU 1) and the capital city of Prague area, alternatively as the average of all applicable counties (counties within the adequate commuting time).

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